The Skin We're In: A Literary Analysis of Representations Of Mixed Race Identity in Children's Literature

By
AMINA CHAUDHRI
B.A., Oberlin College, 1994
M.A., Michigan State University, 2000

THESIS

Submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum and Instruction
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Chicago, 2012

Chicago, Illinois

Defense Committee:
William Teale, Chair and Advisor
Christine Jenkins, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign
Kevin Kumashiro,
William Schubert
Junko Yokota, National-Louis University, Chicago

For Henry Fukawa.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to my thesis committee – William Teale, Kevin Kumashiro, William Schubert, Christine Jenkins and Junko Yokota for their guidance and mentorship.

I could never have finished this work and enjoyed it so much without the constant love and encouragement of my family – Lourdes Torres, Nadia Chaudhri, and Susan Chaudhri. Thank you.

AC

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

Chapter Page

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE Page

SUMMARY

This study systematically analyzed novels of contemporary and historical fiction with mixed race content intended for readers age 9-14. In the context of an increasingly multiracial and multicultural society, this study was primarily concerned with the question of identity representation: What is contemporary children's literature saying about the experience of being racially mixed? This question was investigated along three strands: 1) How can literature about multiracial identity be usefully described and define? 2) What historical perspectives inform books about multiracial people? and 3) To what degree are contemporary authors maintaining or challenging racial paradigms?

A content analysis of ninety novels with mixed race content was undertaken to determine specific features such as gender, age, racial mix, family situation, socio-economic situation, racial makeup of environment, and setting. Three categories were created based historical paradigms about mixed race identity, and themes that emerged from the novels: 1) Mixed Race In/Visibility, 2) Mixed Race Blending, and 3) Mixed Race Awareness. All ninety novels were evaluated with respect to the criteria of the categories. Thirty-three novels were selected for deep literary analysis, demonstrating the ways historical perspectives about mixed race identity inform contemporary children's literature.

Findings indicated three broad trends in representations of mixed race identity in children's literature with novels falling almost equally between the three categories. Books in the Mixed Race In/Visibility category depicted stereotypically traumatic experiences for mixed race characters and provide little or no opportunity for critique of racism. Books in the Mixed Race Blending category featured characters whose mixed race identity was descriptive but not functional in their lives. Mixed Race Awareness books represented a range of possible life

experiences for biracial characters who respond to social discomfort to their racial identity in complex and credible ways.

This study has implications for research and pedagogy in the fields of education and children's literature as they expand to become more inclusive of diversity.

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

"…for the child was made through texts and tales…"

Seth Lerer (2008)

In August 1990, as I was preparing to leave Pakistan to come to college in the U.S., my mother gave me as a departing gift, a copy of Sara Suleri's recently published memoir *Meatless Days*. I read it on the airplane, racing through page after page of references, anecdotes, characterizations, food, family, and politics that felt like they were my own. Like me, Suleri is half British, half Pakistani, and in reality the similarity between us ends there. But the mere fact of holding a book that documented the life of someone like myself was enough to make me find connections even if I was reaching. *Meatless Days* was my 'mirror' – a mirror I didn't know I was missing until I found it. I became a bit obsessed, reading and rereading, memorizing tasty phrases, even emulating Suleri's hyperbolic writing style. I wrote my English honors thesis on *Meatless Days*, still enamored four years later. I wonder if my response would have been this dramatic if during my childhood I had read stories with mixed race characters in them? I imagine not.

Eventually I forgot about *Meatless Days*. Decades later, while teaching fourth grade in Chicago, I shared with my students the idea that stories can be like windows that show us other worlds, or mirrors that reflect our own. The metaphor resonated; everyone was able to share the name of a character to whom they could relate as girls or boys, as lovers of sports or animals or nature, as children from divorced families, and so forth. A few even mentioned racial connections. Later, three students came to me to say that they had never read a book in which the character resembled them. They spoke specifically of appearance, pointing out their own racially

blended features and names. Memories of *Meatless Days* rushed back, and my students' despondency became the impetus of this study of multiracial identity in children's literature. Surely there were stories about mixed race experiences, I thought. If so, what were such stories saying? Would my students be able to relate to them? What were young readers learning about biracial identity? How would we even find the books to begin with? Was there a label like there is for specific racial groups? Over the years I had given plenty of time and thought to my own mixed identity and come to understand it in terms of the historical, colonial relationship between England and India. Now I wondered what historical circumstances surround biracial identity in the U.S. and directly or indirectly shape the lives of my students? More specifically, if they read about themselves in books, would they feel like I had when I first read *Meatless Days?* Like me, could they grow up never seeing themselves in a book? Where in the multicultural world were the stories of biracial lives? Who was telling them? Surely this was a topic worth investigating.

Background

Western interest in children's literature is as old as the idea of childhood itself. Seth Lerer's (2008) book *Children's Literature: A Readers' History from Aesop to Harry Potter*, and Leonard Marcus' (2008) *Minders of Make Believe: Idealists, Entrepreneurs, and the Shaping of American Children's Literature*, are two recent publications that evidence the scholarly and public awareness of the transactional relationship between reader and text. More so than adult or even young adult literature, children's literature has come under the scrutiny of all manner of "minders" who regulate, prescribe, censor and advocate the content and quality of literature that ends up in the hands of young readers. No matter which end of the ideological spectrum, adults in charge of children agree that stories can have an impact on emerging identities. The literate child, as Lerer (2008) points out, is "made through texts and tales" (p. 1).

This national awareness of the shaping powers of literature and the political, financial and ideological interests of the publishing world are intricately related (Marcus, 2008), so it is not surprising that as in the realms of art, film and music, literature, too, tends to reflect dominant cultural sentiments. Efforts to have literature become more representative of diverse experiences in the United States led to the emergence of multicultural literature in the 1960s with the growing awareness of the deleterious effects on children of school and social segregation. A significant moment occurred in 1965 with the appearance of Nancy Larrick's (1965) review of more than 5,000 children's trade books in the *Saturday Review*. Published in the wake of critical events in the civil rights movement, Larrick's article revealed "an all white world of children's literature."

The scarcity of African American characters but for the few stereotypical ones highlighted an invisibility that underscored the attitudes of the era. Perhaps in response to Larrick's revelation, or perhaps in an effort to move with the changing times, authors and publishers began to step up efforts to be more inclusive of African American characters and issues in particular, and of other people of color in general. The change toward inclusion of writing by, for and about people of color (primarily African Americans during those years) was slow and reluctant—even tokenizing—at first. But today we can look back over the last 50 years and see a significant trajectory of change marking an increase in the diversity of publications in the realm of children's and young adult books.

The results of the first two decades of these efforts were analyzed by Rudine Sims Bishop (1982) in her book *Shadow and Substance*: *Afro-American Experience in Contemporary Children's Fiction,* in which she categorized books to show the patterns of representation that were occurring in the recently increased body of children's literature that included African American characters.

Sims Bishop's (1982) research revealed that there was a dearth of "culturally conscious" (p. 49) books that portrayed African American life in rich, authentic and complex ways rather than in formulaic or stereotypical ones. In the almost thirty years since the publication of that book, there has been a significant increase in the creation of such literature by insightful and highly skilled authors such as Jacqueline Woodson, Christopher Paul Curtis, Virginia Hamilton and Walter Dean Myers (to name a few), whose writing has helped to help fill that shortage of quality literature. In 2007 Sims Bishop revisited her earlier project and published *Free Within Ourselves: The Development of African American Children's Literature*, a comprehensive historical overview documenting a rich tradition of children's literature that harkens back to the Harlem Renaissance. Because of the historical context from which it emerged, this now substantial body of literature is "purposeful, intended to serve functions that have not been expected of the larger body of American children's literature" (p. xii). In other words, Sims Bishop (2007) posits, literature for, by, and about African Americans is suffused with an ideological intentionality that sets it apart from mainstream literature. These stories offer perspectives shaped by the shared and individual experiences of being African American and challenge hegemonic ideas of what it means to be American in a "parallel culture" (p. 274). They offer readers access and affirmation. Sims Bishop's work is foundational in describing thematic connections between books in relation to the historical settings in which they were written. Her work provides a template for exploring how other "parallel cultures" are represented in children's literature.

Multicultural literature involving stories about other people of color, immigrant and queer lives, has moved through a similar continuum: starting with invisibility, proceeding to stereotypical and problematic but visible nonetheless, and eventually becoming more complex

and experientially diverse. In keeping with the multicultural trend the American Library Association awards now include the Pura Belpré Award, designed to recognize high-quality children's literature for, by and about Latinos, the Sophie Brody Award for outstanding Jewish literature, the Stonewall Book Award for literature relating to LGBTQ experiences, and the Schneider Family Book Award for books about characters with disabilities. Awards from other literary organizations and libraries include the Arab American Book Award, the Asian Pacific American Award for Literature, and the American Indian Youth Literature Award. The identity-specific recognition that such awards provides not only validates and promotes the literature, it underscores the "purposeful" nature of these stories, recognizing their unique contributions to the larger canon. The designation of identity-based awards and categories enables readers to find books that describe and affirm their own identities. In addition, readers who do not 'belong' to those groups have an opportunity to learn about diverse experiences. Mixed race topics tend to be swept into the general realm of multiculturalism and have yet to be established in race studies or children's literature. This study responds to that silence.

Rationale

This brief historical context is meant to describe the way children's literature has responded to national events and shifts in cultural attitudes. The existence of identity categories is at once useful and problematic. Although they serve to validate, include and assert a presence, they also replicate the model of otherizing established by ubiquitous whiteness. My interest in children's literature lies on those margins where new identity categories are only just emerging, specifically to shed light on ideological stances reflected by contemporary authors and publishers in regard to mixed race identity in children's literature.

Currently, research in multicultural literature makes only sporadic or tangential mention of mixed race issues (Reynolds, 2009; Yokota, 2003), while certain authors (e.g., Balliett, 2005; Murphy, 2001; Peck, 2005; Taylor, 2003) are slowly but surely including characters of mixed-racial heritage. Novels featuring mixed race characters are generally folded into the larger multicultural category, or classified according to the non-white element in the story. The absence of categories means an absence of language with which to talk about and describe such literature. It may just be a matter of time before the realm guarded by the "minders" of multicultural literature widens to include stories of mixed race experiences.

The 'mark one or more' option in the 2000 U.S. Census was a turning point in American history that permitted individuals to choose multiple racial categories for the first time. As a result, 2.4% of the population, 6.8 million people, identified themselves as multiracial. The 2010 Census results showed that 3%, or 9 million people identified as belonging to two or more races. The symbolism of this emergent shift in self-identification is significant. That millions of people reject the neat and tidy white/non-white categorization that is the legacy of the 'one-drop rule' in recognition of the racial and ethnic mixtures in their heritage, speaks volumes about the changing attitudes about racial identity in North America. How this racial identity manifests itself is at once a matter of individual self-perception and national social construction. The objective of this dissertation is to explore the ways in which multiracial identity is portrayed in children's literature. The study examines a selection of contemporary realistic and historical fiction novels published between 2000 and 2010.

In the ways that the feminist, civil rights, and LGBTQ movements have impacted the creation of bodies of literature, the multiracial movement can been viewed as connected to the emergent body of children's literature being published in the last decade. As issues of civil and

human rights have become more prominent on our cultural landscape, the influence of identity-based movements has been felt in many realms, including literature. As a key factor in identity construction, literature is examined for how it contributes to positive, negative, or complex perceptions of marginalized people. Authors make intentional choices in the characters they create. Readers sometimes look for characters like themselves. Even if they are not actively seeking racial affirmation, representation in books can explicitly or subliminally influence understanding of racial identity. So it stands to reason that we might ask, what can readers learn from books featuring multiracial characters? What might a reader understand about multiracial identity as imagined by the author? These questions have been the focus of scholars interested in representation of monoracial identity. Literary and education research journals such as *Children's Literature Association Quarterly, Children's Literature in Education, The Lion and the Unicorn,* and book series such as *Scarecrow Studies in Young Adult Literature* and *Children's Literature and Culture,* regularly publish work that explores, challenges and analyzes constructions of gender, sexuality, class, and race in children's literature. From early analyses within a black-white racial paradigm, scholarly interest now includes other racial and ethnic groups. Feminist critiques of female gender identity construction have expanded to include examination of masculinity. Queer theory is being used to deconstruct multiple forms of gender and sexual subjectivity. Most of these theoretical perspectives are linked by the notion that by deconstructing the way power operates we can begin the work of reconstructing a more just society (Trites, 2000). As the multiracial movement gains momentum (assuming it does), it will be interesting to see how our perceptions of identity shift. Will multiple racial factors carry equal weight? Will some factors be subsumed by others? Will completely new and unique forms of identity emerge?

The Library of Congress now includes the subject heading 'racially mixed people' and a search on the online database identified 157 children's fiction titles bearing it. Is it coincidental that the descriptor appears on books published close to the turn of the 21st century and the change in Census standards? Children's literature with mixed race characters existed for decades before the 2000 Census, but the books are generally identified as 'multicultural' or not racially marked at all. I contacted a librarian at the Library of Congress to find out when this descriptor was created and what criteria are used to determine whether a book gets so assigned or not. I learned from Paul Weiss in the Policy and Standards Division at the Library of Congress that "the heading was established in 1991 and has been in use since then. There are no specific criteria for its use. It may be assigned to any book that deals with people of mixed race" (P. Weiss, personal communication, August 10, 2010). The apparent arbitrariness is a little disconcerting, and we might give the Library of Congress the benefit of doubt and hope that there is more reason behind such decisions than Weiss's response indicates. A preliminary survey of the literature suggests that mixed race identity must be of *some* importance to the novel to warrant this categorization. Of the 157 titles I found, only 3 were published before 1996. Two of those have self-identifying/topical titles such as *Black is Brown is Tan* by Arnold Adoff (1973) and *Black, White, Just Right* by Marguerite Davol (1993). The third book, *Plain City*, by Virginia Hamilton (1993), suggests the protagonist's mixed race heritage on the front cover and establishes it with a detailed description on the first two pages of the text. An identity crisis is the focus of the novel. All the other books were published since the late 1990s; 89% after 1998. These numbers suggest a growing literary awareness of a change in the racial make-up of the country. This is not to say that racially mixed people and books about racially mixed people did not exist before the mid

1990s; rather, the shift in the binary racial categorization to include those of multiple races has provided a label and a presence for a mixed race identity in literature.

Overview of the Study

This study is a content and literary analysis of children's contemporary realistic and historical fiction that includes characters of multiracial heritage. It is a descriptive study that seeks to understand the nature of racial representation in the literature and the possible implications for readers.

The study involves reading and analyzing texts in order to 1) identify a corpus of novels in which mixed race identity is a factor, followed by 2) a discussion of the literary representations of mixed race characters within their social and historical contexts. For this purpose I adapted the framework created by Rudine Sims Bishop (1982) in her categorization of African-American experiences as represented in children's fiction, published in her book *Shadow and Substance*. The inclusion of African American characters and content has been studied longer and to greater extent than have topics related to other groups of color. Sims Bishop's study is foundational in providing a methodological model that enables diverse kinds of analyses with respect to the fact that every population has unique features and history. Sims Bishop's framework analyzed books from three perspectives. First, books in the category labeled "Social Conscience" (p.17) reflect the social concerns at the time of creation of the books and are concerned with issues of integration and inclusion of African Americans into white society. Social conscience literature is interested in promoting empathy and tolerance between African Americans and whites. These books tend to feature some kind of anomalous interaction between black and white characters that causes initial conflict but results in (perceived) racial harmony. Sims Bishop identifies *Iggie's House* (Blume, 1970); *The Empty Schoolhouse* (Savage, 1965*)*;

and *The Other Side of the Fence* (Cone, 1967), as examples of stories that make use of this motif. Black characters are stereotypical, reflecting unfavorably on the authors' perspectives of African American experiences. White racist villains tend to be social misfits who live on the fringes of society creating the impression that racism is more of a character flaw than an institutional problem (p. 23). Once the villain is removed from the scene, racial harmony prevails.

"Melting Pot" books (p. 33), in the second category, tend to focus on the universal theme of friendship. In some of these stories black and white characters are friends and cultural traits are erased. In others the racial identity of the characters is incidental to the story, and but for superficial indicators could not be associated with African American culture in any way. These books reflect a fully integrated world in which differences are erased, that is non-white traits are erased to describe total, harmonious assimilation. Sims Bishop identifies a few picture books *Sabrina* (Alexander, 1971), *Steffie and Me* (Hoffman, 1970) and *Luke Was There* (Clymer, 1973) as representative of melting pot books. *The Toothpaste Millionaire* (Merrill, 1972) and *Me and Arch and the Pest* (Durham, 1970) are examples of novels in which reference to characters' African American heritage is made through tangential dialog or description.

The third category of books is described as "Culturally Conscious" (p. 49) and the literature seeks to affirm a diverse, rich and complex set of African American experiences as distinctly different (socially, historically, culturally) from hegemonic society. Sims Bishop identifies Virginia Hamilton's (1968) *The House of Dies Drear,* John Steptoe's (1972) *Birthday,* and Lucille Clifton's (1973) *All Us Come Across the Water* as examples of stories that portray positive, affirming characters and believable contexts.

Sims Bishop's framework has subsequently been adapted by several researchers, including Michael Cart and Christine Jenkins (2006) in their analysis of young adult literature

with LGBTQ content; *The Heart Has its Reasons*. They created the categories "Homosexual Visibility", "Gay assimilation", and "Queer Consciousness/Community" using criteria parallel to those of Sims Bishop. Two recent Ph.D. dissertations also based their analytic categories on the framework. *Critical Content Analysis of Postcolonial Texts: Representation of Muslims Within Children's and Adolescent Literature,* by Seemin Raina (2009) at University of Arizona examined titles such as *Shabanu (*Staples, 1989)*; Breadwinner* (Ellis, 2001)*;* and *Broken Moon* (Antieau, 1987) and in *Representations of Transracial Korean Adoption in Children's Literature,* Sarah Park (2009), at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, looked at books such as *Youn Hee and Me* (Adler, 1995), *The Best Older Sister,* (Choi, 1997) and *Understanding Kim* (Doane, 1962). In 1998, Sharon Frost's (1998) dissertation at National-Louis University used Sims Bishop's approach to analyze representations of African American girls in picture books such as *Flower Garden* (Bunting, 1994), *The Patchwork Quilt,* (Flournoy, 1985) and *Sophie* (Fox, 1994). All these authors utilized Sims Bishop's concept of dividing the existing literature into three large categories within which there is room for examination of trends, traits and gaps as they pertain to the particular body of work being analyzed. Sims Bishop's method has been replicated in numerous other studies and the category descriptors are now widely used in discussions of children's literature.

For the purposes of my study, Sims Bishop's categories were conceptually adapted to serve as a backdrop against which emergent themes in the literature can be viewed. This is to say, Sims Bishop's framework served as the starting point for the study. I identified all the novels and historical fiction books published for children between 2000 and 2010 that address the issue of mixed race identity and categorized them as:

- Mixed Race In/Visibility: biracial identity is source of external or internal conflict.
- Mixed Race Blending: biracial identity marked but inconsequential to story.
- Mixed Race Awareness: recognition of biracial heritage, complex negotiation with credible resolutions.

On a very broad level, the categories above almost mirror the ones Sims Bishop created. Theoretical work in mixed race studies, reviews of the books, and an initial reading of all the books in the study enabled me to refine the categories according to issues more salient to mixed race identity. The new categories are described in greater detail in Chapter IV. Rather than coerce each text into a category, I allowed emergent themes to determine the extent to which texts fit or resisted paradigms within each category. Some titles fit more than one category. This categorization provided a broad perspective of the body of work containing mixed race characters and sheds light on recurrent patterns in the representation of mixed race identity in children's literature.

The close literary analysis that follows the in-depth explication of the three categories is framed by a critical race theory lens that highlights the historical construction of mixed race identity and demonstrates how, for example, repetitive depictions of dysfunctional mixed race characters perpetuates racist paradigms established by sociologists in the early 20th century about degenerate multiracial people. The literary analysis separates contemporary fiction from historical fiction to examine how perceptions of mixed race identity have changed (or not) over time.

Multiracial identity is a social construct like all other forms of racial identity. It is shaped by ideology, policy, and circumstance. Much research has been conducted on the ways race, gender and sexuality are constructed and represented in children's and young adult literature and

the implications for readers. Many studies have also shown that children experience literature in deeply aesthetic and personal ways that contribute to the development of personal values (Galda, Ash, & Cullinan, 2000, p. 362). Sims Bishop reminds us that literature has the ability to provide readers with mirrors in which they see themselves, or windows, through which readers can learn about the experiences of others. In the increasingly racially-mixed world of today, it is significant that multiracial identity is being represented in literature, being received by readers, and playing a role in shaping a perception of what it means to be multiracial. It is also possible that a multiracial identity can offer new ways of considering racial identity, breaking away from the "binary caste system" (Reynolds, 2009, xiv).

In her book *Mixed Heritage in Young Adult Literature*, Nancy Thalia Reynolds (2009) provides a chronological exploration of themes and trends in the portrayal of mixed race characters in young adult fiction and non-fiction. She found the perpetuation of static images such the tragic mulatto or the social outcast. Also, the themes of "in search of my missing half" (p. 2) and 'passing' remain strong features of YA literature about multiracial identity. Her work informs the way I organized my reading of children's literature. I recognized, for example, Reynolds's characterization of the mulatto heiress "… a mirror… always object, never subject … less a character in her own right than a clue planted to tell readers something about other characters" (p. 3) in Dephine Duval in *The River Between Us* (Peck, 2003). As such, reading the work of Reynolds and other scholars of mixed race identity in literature prepared me to look for certain traits and probably precluded any surprises. Perhaps this is the drawback of having a rubric, a research instrument that trains the eye to look for certain things: serendipity is lost.

Reynolds maintains that for people of mixed race heritage, "cultural invisibility is still the norm" (p. 220). Authors who create mixed characters are (intentionally or not) involved in the

interruption or maintenance of this invisibility. I would add that while there is an invisibility in that mixed race identity is still finding its own voice and being given a place in the multicultural realm, there is also a paradoxical visibility that shapes the daily lives of mixed race people and calls on them to explain and justify racial group membership (Root, 1996, p. 7).

The dominant thrust of the multicultural movement, especially in children's literature is to have adequate and equal representation of racial and ethnic groups that have historically been marginalized, and to give voice to the stories and experiences of diverse groups of people. It is believed that children need to see their own lives reflected in literature as much as they learn about other lives. With the increase in number of children's books interested in multiracial identity, space needs to be created within the multicultural canon for multiple-race stories. There also needs to be careful evaluation of the kind and quality of the literature being produced. This project is intended to be part of that process.

Research Questions

This study is primarily concerned with the question of identity representation:

- What is contemporary children's literature saying about the experience of being racially mixed?

This question is investigated through three strands:

- How can literature about multiracial identity be usefully described and defined?
- What historical ideological perspectives inform books about multiracial people?
- To what degree are contemporary authors maintaining or challenging racial paradigms?

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This review of literature unites a selection of scholarly writings that provide a theoretical and methodological framework for this study. It also positions the work in the space where multicultural research has set a precedent but left a gap. Since the bulk of the study is a literary analysis examining mixed race identity in children's literature over the last decade, a theoretical framework is needed to situate it within a larger body of research. The review begins by highlighting the relevance and application of literary theory to the field of children's literature. This is followed by an explication of the primary lens through which the analysis takes place: critical race theory (CRT). Examples of the application of CRT in children's literature demonstrate useful pedagogical, theoretic and literary outcomes of foregrounding racial subjectivity. These articles focus on African American issues in children's literature and set a precedent for applying CRT to mixed race literature. There is much scholarly work done about issues of race, gender and sexuality, but at the time of this study, very little could be found that looked specifically at mixed race topics. By default, literature with mixed race content has generally fallen within the realm of multicultural literature. Research in the interdisciplinary field of mixed race studies provides a context for this study, grounding it in historical perspectives and current discourse around multiracial identity. Finally, I discuss the efforts of the few scholars who have reviewed books with mixed race content and agree on the need for more attention and greater diversity both in the children's books and in scholarly examination.

Literary Criticism

Literary analysis in children's literature follows in the tradition established by critics in English literature, with some work being done in library sciences and a little in education. The

bulk of literary analysis scholarship focuses on aesthetic, ideological, structural and critical readings of texts. Scholarly journals in children's literature such as *Children's Literature Association Quarterly, Children's Literature in Education,* and *The Lion and the Unicorn*, as well as children's literature scholars like Kenneth Kidd (2004), Michelle Ann Abate (2008) and Beverly Lyon Clark (2003) tend to emulate the theoretical stances set forth in the field of English literature studies. Such analysis is useful in that it examines texts as cultural artifacts that reflect the ideology of their contexts. It enables us to theorize specific identity-related elements, contextualize them historically, and see the interactions between people, place and power.

At the heart of this study is a post-structuralist, Derridian interest in exposing the constructedness of racial identity. Terry Eagleton (2008) reminds us that this is ultimately a political act, "an attempt to dismantle the logic by which a particular system of thought, and behind that a whole system of political structures and social institutions maintains its force" (p.128). Critical race theory is a more recent derivative of post-structuralism, also with the urge to dismantle constructions of race and the power dynamics that are embedded in them. Eagleton's descriptions of various forms of literary theory illuminate the ways in which theoretical notions are already–and have always been–a part of life and literature (as a reflection of life). Literary theoretical perspectives give us tools with which we can hold life (in the form of text) at arm's length, take it apart and put it back together once we have understood it: "indeed literary theory is less an object of intellectual enquiry in its own right than a particular perspective in which to view the history of our times" (Eagleton, 2008, p. 170).

Literary Criticism in Children's Literature

Jill May (1995) echoes these ideas with a particular focus on how children's literature, like adult literature, can be examined for the ways in which it represents the social and

ideological constructions of life. She reminds us that theoretical frameworks establish ways of reading. They set guidelines and parameters that guide epistemological direction. Her book *Children's Literature and Critical Theory* is written to connect adult mediators, presumably teachers, with the ways literary theory has historically been used to establish the canon of children's literature being used in schools and libraries. May provides structuralist readings of classic texts like *Charlotte's Web* (White, 1952), *Alice in Wonderland* (Carroll, 1946), and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (Lewis, 1950) to reveal the ways in which authors use literary devices to draw readers in and engage them. Fundamentally, May argues, the creators and readers of children's literature feel the effects of critical theory, and it is worthwhile to be cognizant of those influences and their theoretical origins (p. 23). Although this book does not explicitly address issues of racial identity in much depth, it does assert a place for literary criticism of children's literature in the scholarly realm. As a reader of children's literature with a focus on racial identity, I am mindful of the ways authors use language to shape their characters. As I became immersed in the nuances of mixed race identity as it has been constructed for centuries, I was engaged in the process of reading children's literature for the ways authors communicate their understanding of what it means to be mixed race.

At this metacognitive level, Hans-Heino Ewers (1995) describes the role of the literary critic as one of "premediation" (p. 82). The critic of children's literature has no relationship with the child reader, only with other mediators: authors, publishers, teachers, librarians and parents. Independent criticism of children's literature has two tasks, according to Ewers:

> … it ought to challenge the makers and mediators of children's and young adult literature and provoke them to permanent self-reflection; and it has the task of drawing attention to children's and young adults' literature among the general cultural public. (p. 84)

An example of a realm in which literary analysis is involved is the current 'boy crisis' around what boys are reading (or not). Scholars such as Annette Wannamaker (2008), John Stephens (2002) and Kenneth Kidd (2004) have contributed to the attention to this topic that has resulted in the creation of websites, anthologies, library lists and so forth, of literature deemed appealing and appropriate for boys. Similarly, multicultural critics have responded to the task of "drawing attention" to literature about diverse lives although mixed race identity is seldom a part of these discussions. Unless explicitly described by a title, a cover portrait or reviewer's blurb, books with mixed race characters are not easy to identify. Recently, the Cooperative Children's Book Center in Madison, which is instrumental in providing reviews of publishing trends that identify authors and illustrators of color, listed Sundee Tucker Frazier's (2010) *The Other Half of My Heart* as a notable, quality book by and about African Americans. This is interesting since Frazier identifies as biracial and both her novels are specifically about biracial characters. In my role as a literary analyst I examine Frazier's depiction of biracial identity, rich as it is with many issues that apply to both African American and biracial African American and white experiences. This study responds to Ewer's challenge to literary critics to "draw attention" to important topics in children's literature.

A selection of essays in Peter Hunt's (2005) book, *Understanding Children's Literature* is relevant to this study in a variety of ways. Children's literature is burdened with the assumption that the text has tremendous influence on the developing ideology of the child reader. This assumption has led to policing and censoring attempts on one hand, and opportunities for critical analysis on the other. In general, the authors of all the pieces in this anthology emphasize the importance of being mindful of the fact that the notion of 'child', 'childhood' and 'reader' are social constructions. David Rudd's (2005) essay "Theorizing and Theories: How Does

Children's Literature Exist?" uses Foucauldian notions of power to remind us of the adult-child binary that frames the field of children's literature. Rudd provides a range of perspectives from those who view the child as an empty slate waiting to be inscribed with ideology, to those who believe that there is an "underlying 'essential' child whose nature and needs we can know" (p. 16). His conclusion is to keep both stances in mind and consider the space he calls "hybrid" (p. 23). Here children's literature (and all its readers and minders) occurs "in the space between constructed and constructive" (p. 23). Literary critics are advised not to lose sight of the adult tendency to construct a child (reader or character) according to our own needs. In essence, Rudd reminds us to be aware that children's literature is an adult creation and perhaps we should not take ourselves too seriously as we theorize children and their literature. This reminder is pertinent to this study because not only are the authors of the mixed race books adults, only a handful are biracial themselves, and most are white, thus adding another dimension to the imagined rendering of multiracial 'other'. Furthermore, observations that I make about depictions of mixed race identity will not necessarily match observations other readers make.

Charles Sarland's (2005) essay "Critical Tradition and Ideological Positioning" is a historical overview that shows how the question of values has always been at the forefront of debates about children's literature. Eventually the presence of values came to be recognized as ideological and labeled as such. Sarland describes the ways in which different critical traditions such as feminist, Marxist, and queer looked at specific aspects of ideology and have been helpful in demonstrating how hegemonic ideas are perpetuated in children's literature. This essay underscores that importance of critical analysis of specific issues and situates a study of mixed race identity from a critical race theory perspective within a larger context. In the following

section (Critical Race Theory) I discuss several papers that use critical traditions to analyze constructs of race and gender to reveal oppressive elements and opportunities for revising them.

Finally, Perry Nodelman's (2005) chapter "Decoding the Images: How Picture Books Work" is extremely compelling in the issues raised about representation. Though Nodelman targets images in the picture book, and this study focuses on text, I believe the message is very relevant. His point is that in order to understand images (i.e. make meaning) the viewer must be equipped with a pre-existing set of notions about the objects and their relation to each other in order for the whole to make sense. He calls this "culture-bound prejudice" (p. 129). Nodelman gives the example of how even the most rudimentary exposure to perspective in art will enable a viewer to understand that a large figure in a picture is in the foreground and not a giant. Cultures in which art forms have different conventions would read the image differently. Similarly, a reader's understanding of racial identity construction in a text is dependent on "culture bound prejudice." This study is framed by the influences and life experiences I embodied before I began, as well as the particular perspectives I studied during it. As I became familiar with cultural and historical perceptions of mixed race identity in North America, I was aware that I was training myself to recognize those and only those perceptions being reflected in the literature. In other words, as I read both the children's books and the theory, I looked for things I knew to expect.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) places race at the center of analysis. It is based on the notion that racism is ubiquitous and must be revealed as such. Literary analysis that uses critical race theory highlights, analyzes, and describes the myriad ways in which racism operates in the language, character portrayal, and creation of a book. In exposing the overt and subtle ways

racism permeates literature, such analysis has an epistemological function in that it contributes to awareness about ideological manifestations of racism. Most critical race theorists (e.g., Gloria Ladson-Billings, Derrick Bell, Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks) look at issues pertaining to African Americans. Research in children's literature has exposed racial stereotypes and other derogatory representations of people of color, most frequently of African Americans. Other scholars who look at race from a critical perspective in multicultural literature examine racial constructions of Latinos (e.g., Chappell & Faltis, 2007; Meastre & Nieto, 1996; Heller & Maldonado, 1999), Asians (Aoki, 1981; Ching, 2002; Khorana, 1993), and Native Americans (Stewart, 2002; Franklin, 1993). Scholars researching multiracial identity construction have to pay close attention to the ways in which critical race and whiteness studies deconstruct privilege and oppression: key factors in the construction of racial identity. In this section I describe the tenets of CRT followed by examples of its use in research in children's literature.

The language of CRT is focused on a black/white binary power structure, though the concept can be extended to include other racial groups. According to Richard Delgado (1995), CRT is based on three principles. One is that racism is part of the fabric of American society, so much so that it is "normal" (p. xiv). What this means is that while overt forms of racism (violence, hate speech, ridicule) are generally recognized as such and formally addressed by laws and rules, more subtle forms of racism (neglect, isolation) permeate ideology and continue to do harm unchallenged. The second premise is that the habits and practices of daily life and all their underlying attitudes are socially constructed and therefore can be deconstructed. Existing power structures persist because of the discourse that enables and sustains them. Therefore, changing the discourse is a step towards dismantling oppressive power. In literary analysis, CRT makes use of the idea of the counterstory, the story that speaks against the dominant narrative and seeks

to create a diverse and complex (rather than singular and simplistic) story of human experience. The third principle is "interest-convergence" (p. xiv). This principle holds that dominant (white) groups will make room for others only when doing so serves their own interest. Interest-convergence is used to explain the slow pace of change since the civil rights movement. These three basic principles have been used to deconstruct law, literature, art, film, and policy, among other areas in order to reveal the ubiquity of racism.

Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate's (1995) article "Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education" offers a nuanced explication of ideas useful to this study of mixed race identity in children's literature. They highlight Delgado's second premise, that of social reality being a construct of discourse, with storytelling as a way of challenging oppressive discourse, beginning with the "naming" of one's reality (p. 57). Fiction is part of that discourse, and how authors and characters name racial reality contributes to a reader's identity construction. An element in racial identity construction involves the internalization of damaging images and ideas.

> A factor contributing to the demoralization of marginalized groups is self-condemnation. Members of minority groups internalize the stereotypic images that certain elements of society have constructed in order to maintain their power. Historically, storytelling has been a kind of medicine to heal the wounds of pain caused by racial oppression. The story of one's condition leads to the realization of how one came to be oppressed and subjugated and allows one to stop inflicting mental violence on oneself. (p. 57)

Clearly, literature that presents negative images injures the self-concept of the reader for whom text functions as a mirror, as well as damages the outlook of the reader for whom text provides a window to another experience. *What Are You? Voices of Mixed Race Young People*, Pearl Fuyo

Gaskins' (1999) collection of narratives, demonstrates how multiracial identity is something to be grappled with daily because of the expectations of society to conform to singular ways of being. One fourteen-year-old interviewed in the book summed it up quite succinctly: "being biracial isn't hard because we're confused about our racial identity. It's hard because everyone else is confused" (p. 14). Ladson-Billings and Tate's article addresses the need for everyone involved in the area of education to recognize the importance of "naming one's own reality" (p. 57), for the voiceless to speak up. Literature plays a key role in telling the counterstories, adding to the diversity of human experiences. Though still relatively few in number, children's books that include mixed race characters certainly add to the diversity in that they interrupt the focus on (assumed) monoracial identity. However, the extent to which those books can be read as counterstories remains to be seen and is a guiding question in the analysis in this study.

Critical Race Theory in Children's Literature

The four studies described below demonstrate the usefulness of CRT as an analytical took in children's literature and provide a precedent for this study and future publications from it.

Wanda Brooks' (2009) article, "An Author as Counter-Storyteller: Applying Critical Race Theory to a Coretta Scott King Award Book," demonstrates in detail how CRT was used to deconstruct racial identity in Mildred Taylor's (2001) *The Land*. Brooks (2009) matches the three principles of CRT described above, with examples in the literature and analyzes them in light of each other. The focus of her article is on how ideological constructs such as institutionalized racism are maintained over time. Analyses such as this are valuable tools for adults who discuss literature with children. Brooks posits *The Land* as a counterstory that makes an important contribution, adding to the diversity in the narrative of African American experiences. The protagonist, Paul-Edward Logan is the son of an African-Indian American

mother and a white planter. His pursuit of a dream to own land is marked by his negotiation of his racial identity, which involved recognizing the privileges and limitations of being the son of a white man. *The Land*'s brilliance lies in the complex, nuanced characters (white and black) and it is a counterstory for the way it interrupts the one-dimensional, simplistic depictions of black lives during Reconstruction. Counterstories in mixed race literature would need to refute such stereotypes as the tragic mulatta, the conflicted biracial, the go-between straddling cultures, fitting nowhere. The degree to which mixed race characters are presented as pushing back at racism and degrading perceptions is a key element in the literary analyses of texts conducted in this study and reported in Chapter IV.

In "Racial Identification and Audience in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* and *the Watsons Go to Birmingham – 1963"*, Jani Barker (2010) uses CRT to show how the acclaimed authors of these books use strategies that enable readers to align themselves with anti-racist perspectives. Her analysis demonstrates how the ubiquity of racism can be exposed in books such as these that depict positive, affirming black characters, while not alienating white readers. Barker draws on the argument of critical race theorist Richard Delgado, that white participation in dismantling racism is crucial and that counterstories can effectively coerce white readers into identifying with anti-racists rather than withdrawing in denial or defensiveness (qtd. in Barker pg. 122). Similarly, Jonda McNair (2007) writes about the use of humor in *The Watson's Go to Birmingham - 1963* as a form of resistance against racism and a counterstory. I suggest that Barker's and McNair's analyses require the quality of literature produced by authors like Mildred Taylor and Christopher Paul Curtis. The currently available corpus of children's books with mixed race content tends to reveal racism in less nuanced ways, so Barker's and McNair's method of analysis using CRT is not directly applicable. Nevertheless, the aforementioned

articles exemplify the use of CRT in children's literature with direct implications for educators. My hope is that soon quality literature with mixed race characters will appear that contribute to the work of exposing and ending prejudice.

Rudine Sims Bishop (1982) conducted her work on African American fiction in *Shadow and Substance* prior to the development of CRT, but the parallels are evident. The category she describes as "Social Conscience" books aligns with the idea of interest-convergence in that they are mostly written by white authors aiming to raise white social awareness about race and racism. "Melting Pot" books portray dark-skinned characters whose lives are no different than white characters', thus promoting the myth of racial acceptance. Sims Bishop points out that the color-blind, racially integrated societies portrayed in these books are pleasant but problematic:

> … on one level, to project such a social order is a positive act. It permits one to assume a primary audience of both Black and white readers, since presumably any American child can find himself or herself and his or her life experiences mirrored in such books. It also allows for the integration of the all-white world of children's books…On some other level, however, one must ask at what point the ignoring of differences becomes a signal that the recognition of them makes people uncomfortable or unhappy (p. 45)

Here again Sims Bishop shares the critical race theorist's concern about interest-convergence. Finally, culturally conscious books are part of an effort to "name one's own reality" (Delgado, 1995, pg. 57) and tell stories of African American lives with authenticity, complexity and diversity and affirmation.

Mixed Race Perspectives

Discussing mixed race (or any racial) identity is complicated by fact that in doing so we run the risk of imagining race as a stable entity rather than a constantly evolving social construct. Despite some naïve assertions that the election of President Obama is evidence that we now live in a post-racial society, and that race 'doesn't matter', racism has not gone away, so clearly, race does still matter. Toni Morrison (1992) describes how the concept of race persists as a powerful matrix of social forces:

> Race has become metaphorical – a way of referring to and disguising forces, events, classes, and expressions of social decay and economic division far more threatening to the body politic than biological 'race' ever was.
>
> Expensively kept, economically unsound, a spurious and useless political asset in election campaigns, racism is as healthy today as it was during the Enlightenment. It seems that it has a utility far beyond economy, beyond the sequestering of classes from one another, and has assumed a metaphorical life so completely embedded in daily discourse that it is perhaps more necessary and more on display than ever before. (p. 63)

In the United States, race has been an institutionalized concept since it was used as a category on the very first U.S. Census in 1790. The practice of placing Americans in discrete categories started centuries ago and had implications for policy and cultural attitudes that persist today. Silence around certain racial issues (such as white privilege) is as much a part of our cultural discourse as those issues that do get discussed. Until recently, people of mixed race heritage have been rendered invisible by the Census. Initially, the Census counted individuals identified as mulattoes, octoroons and quadroons, for purposes relating to slavery. This ended after 1890 and with it any classification of mixed race people. According to the one-drop rule,

people with any non-white ancestry were to be classified according to their non-white heritage. Thus mixed race people were made to identify singularly as non-white. Kenneth Prewitt's (2005) essay "Racial Classification in America: Where do we go From Here?" details the ways in which whiteness (and therefore non-whiteness) was legally determined so as to preserve the discreteness of the categories (and restrict access to civil and political privileges), which demonstrates how arbitrarily race was conceptually constructed according to the political and historical needs of the time. With time, such practice has become intricately woven into the fabric of North American ideology. As problematic as it was/is for people to have to claim monoraciality, the laws of hypodescent have/had particular significance for people of mixed heritage. Being forced to claim membership in a non-white group and renounce it in a white group reifies the hypocritical constructedness of race while affirming it in practice.

A significant event in the national discourse about multiracial identity is the case of Loving v. Virginia, 1967, in which the Supreme Court overturned the ban on interracial marriage. Interracial unions, legal or not, have existed since the earliest colonial contact, so there is some debate about how the sudden legalizing of interracial marriage impacted the growth in population of mixed race children. Nevertheless, the event served to de-stigmatize interracial couples and their biracial children to some degree and gave rise to what is known as the biracial baby boom. Furthermore, the activism that sprang from a small but influential group of people, including a few biracial people themselves, was instrumental in the change in the U.S. Census standards twenty years later.

In the early 1990s, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) faced pressure from the legislative front as well as from nationwide activist organizations such as the Association for MultiEthnic Americans (AMEA), A Place for Us (APFU) and Project RACE (Reclassify All

Children Equally) as well as many college-based organizations. At the root of the activism was a tangible discomfort for parents of school-aged children who were forced to choose only one racial identity on school paperwork. Kim Williams (2005) found in her fieldwork that the most vocal activists in this multiracial movement were white middle-class women married to African American men. According to Williams, 90% of the movement's members were white-black couples. This concern with multiracial identity propelled *by* adults *for* children is eerily parallel to the sentiments in the world of children's literature that is so carefully managed *by* adults *for* children. While civil rights efforts in the 1960s and 1970s focused on rectifying historical injustice, the advocates of multiracial interests seemed to be more concerned with choice and self-expression (Prewitt, 2005, p. 10). Paul Spickard (2003) makes the point that interest in multiracialism has been motivated more by the "psychological interests" (p. 45) of individuals than the social uplift of a group. A critic of the movement, Rainier Spencer (2011) argues that in particular, this self-expression meant an assertion of white heritage in order to distance it from African American heritage. Other critics worried that creating a multiracial category (and subsequent identity) would diminish the numbers of the 'discrete' minority groups whose civil rights depended on those categories. Anti affirmative action spokespeople (such as Newt Gingrich, Dinesh D'Souza and Ward Connerly) used the movement's rhetoric to advance their own 'post-race' agendas. In the 1990s multiracial advocates pushed for inclusion of a 'multiracial' category on the Census. This idea was rejected in favor of the 'mark one or more' option on the 2000 Census. As a result, 6.8 million people identified as multiracial in that year's Census, followed by 9 million in 2010.

The decision to allow individuals to 'mark one or more' on the 2000 Census radically destabilized century-old ways of thinking about race. According to Prewitt (2005), " … it

allowed for fifty-seven multiple-race combinations that, when added to the six single-race answers (white, the four minority races, and other), generated sixty-three possible racial identifications" (p.11). Even more statistically troublesome is the fact that in follow-up surveys to the 2000 Census, 40% of those who identified as mixed race, changed their answers (Prewitt, 2005, p. 11). Such fluidity of racial identification should not come as a surprise to anyone who recognizes the temporality of human identity; we understand ourselves to be composites of so many historical and cultural features that we embrace, resist, assert and deny depending on preference and need within context. Spickard (2003) claims that categories are the very basis of racism and that people who resist existing categories and claim a racial fluidity described by Root (1996), are resisting racism (p. 49). Significant growth in the number of people who marked "some other race", alone or in combination with the five provided options, also speaks to the difficulty of racial classification.

Theorizing Mixed Race Identity

In order to contextualize mixed race identity in children's literature, I turned to the work of scholars from a variety of disciplines whose research contributes to a theory of mixed race identity. The model established by sociologists Thornton and Wason (1996) is widely accepted by scholars of multiracial issues. In an extensive review of literature on multiracial marriages and individuals, they found that three different approaches were used in studying (and constructing) multiracial identity: the problem approach, the equivalent approach and the variant approach. These approaches bear some resemblance to the categories discusses earlier that Sims Bishop (1982) developed in examining the body of children's literature with African American characters, and I expand on these parallels as they pertain to the analysis of mixed race identity in children's literature in Chapter IV.

Thornton (1996) describes the *problem approach* as being "the most popular strategy" (p. 108) used to explore mixed race issues. This approach originated in the early 1900s with Park and Stonequist's (1937) theory of the Marginal Man and was popular in the Jim Crow era when social scientists were trying to explain the identity development of mixed race individuals. With a focus on black-white biracials, this approach examines the notion that biracial identity is essentially problematic and the subject will inevitably be a social misfit. In literature we see this theory manifest in the figure of the tragic mulatto, the mixed race orphan, and mentally unstable characters. Stonequist (1937) argued that the marginal subject undergoes three distinct phases of life: a) introduction, b) crisis, and c) adjustment. In the introduction phase the subject experiences relative stability within both parents' cultures. In the crisis stage s/he encounters a conflict that results in a long period of instability and emotional turmoil specifically related to a real or perceived dissonance between black and white racial and cultural identity. In the final phase of adjustment, the subject understand and aligns him/herself with one group, which in the case of biracials in a one-drop society, would be black, which lead to two possible life trajectories: a leader in the black community or completely withdrawn and isolated. Many of the children's books in the Mixed Race In/Visibility category include characters that uncritically exhibit these traits.

Around the time of the Civil Rights Movement, theories about mixed race identity development moved toward the *equivalent approach*. In these studies comparisons are made between mixed and monoracial people to determine the extent to which racial background plays a role in identity development. According to this theory, cultural factors leading to assimilation of the mixed race individual into his or her immediate environment take precedence over racial factors and since the same factors influence monoracial identity development, it was established

that given the right environment and tools with which to assimilate, mixed race individuals are as likely or unlikely to be impacted by their racial identity as their monoracial peers. Thornton (1996) found that this approach pertained to Asian-white and Latino-white biracials as well and black-white biracials. As a result, feelings of marginalization or difference are attributed to internalized racism, and reluctance to assimilate culturally. Rockquemore, Brunsma and Delgado (2009) focus on black-white biracial identity development to highlight the importance placed on developing a positive black identity that the era encouraged for people with a range of black racial and/or cultural affiliation. Sims Bishop's Melting Pot books correspond to this framework and the social and temporal context that focused on the erasure of difference and the celebration of similarities across racial groups. Characters in Mixed Race Blending books are often depicted as being securely aligned with their non-white identity.

By the mid 1980s and through the 1990s, researchers (many of whom were mixed race themselves, e.g., Hall, 1992; Kich, 1992, 1996; Nakashima, 1992; Root, 1992, 1996) began to disseminate a third approach to understanding mixed race identity development. Thornton (1996) called this the *variant* approach. This approach challenged the *problem* and *equivalent* approaches by asserting cases of biracial identity that maintained positive, healthy integration into multiple racial and cultural contexts. Breaking from the dominance of hypodescent laws, the variant approach shows how a distinctly biracial or mixed race identity can develop. People who experience conflict or difficulty do so as part of the process of developing a self-concept, rather than as a result of being biracial. Nor is over-identification with one group/parent regarded as the only option for a stable identity. Of course amount of contact with each group is an important factor in developing this balanced biracial sense of self, as is cultural context. Perhaps most importantly, the *variant* approach (and the empirical studies that support it) accepts complex and

nuanced aspects of mixed race identity, and finds there is tremendous variety in the range of racial self-perceptions even among biologically similar individuals. Diversity and complexity of experiences are key factors in Sims Bishop's Culturally Conscious and my Mixed Race Awareness group of children's books.

In much of the types of research described above, multiracial identity and experience have been determined by others. In response, there is now a growing body of art, literature, poetry, music, film and autobiography with accompanying theoretical analysis by multiracial people themselves. Mixed Race Studies recognizes a diverse array of contributions that are in keeping with Thornton and Wason's description of the *variant* approach.

A collection of essays in *The Sum of Our Parts: Mixed Heritage Asian Americans* (Williams-Leon & Nakashima, 2001) provides the historical context and analysis of mixed race Asian American identity from the 1850s to 2000. Chapters such as Paul Spickard's (2001) "Who is an Asian? Who is a Pacific Islander? Monoracialism, Multiracial People, and Asian American Communities" describe immigration patterns and cultural attitudes within specific groups towards racial mixing. There was much more interracial marriage and mixing in Hawaii, for example, than on the mainland. Chinese-Hawaiians were the dominant group with blended cultural customs and lifestyles, thus creating a distinct identity in the form of a "third culture" (p. 15):

> This third-space culture comes from several generations of racial and cultural mixing on a footing of relative equality, which means that among the Chinese in Hawai'i there was widespread acknowledgement of racial mixedness and acceptance of mixed race people into their community from a very early era. (p. 15)

On the mainland, however, children of mixed marriages tended to have to adopt (to whatever extent possible) the identity of the dominant culture in their immediate community. The children of the Punjabi-Mexican unions in the Imperial Valley in California had strong affiliations with India even though their surroundings were more Mexican in nature. These children were identified by the census as 'Hindu', even though that is a religious descriptor and inaccurate as an ethnic or racial marker. Spickard (2001) provides other such historical scenarios to show how the identities of mixed race Asians in America developed within very diverse circumstances with varying levels of confusion, oppression and privilege based on context and time.

Along those lines, Michael Omi (2001) reminds us that today it means something very different to be Asian and white than Asian and black (p. 3). The character of Mai Kim, in Sharon Flake's (2003) novel *Money Hungry*, is Korean and black, and her identity struggle is shaped by a dual anxiety associated with being perceived as a foreigner (a constant reality for Asian Americans) and the one-drop legacy of slavery. The sociological, psychological and cultural factors that go into characterizing racial identity for "minority-minority" and "minority-majority" (p. 81) groups are described by Hall and Turner (2001) in the chapter "The Diversity of Biracial Individuals: Asian-White and Asian-Minority Biracial Identity" as well as in several other chapters. Historical as well as contemporary representation of mixed race identity in children's literature will be better understood in a literary analysis that is grounded in the analytical work of the authors in *The Sum of Our Parts*.

"I would characterize the multiethnic experience as an unmappable space. To inhabit more than one ethnicity is to go against the monoracial cultural logic," (p.143) writes Evelyn Alsultany (2004) in "Toward a Multiethnic Cartography: Multiethnic Identity, Monoracial

Cultural Logic and Popular Culture." This autobiographical essay in *Mixing It Up* (Kwan & Spiers, 2004) illuminates the innate difficulty of racial categorization by instruments like census surveys and laws, due to cultural attitudes that constantly ask 'what are you?' in order to pin down, label and recognize (in that order). Alsultany's essay is especially relevant to this study as it comes from a social psychology perspective and describes modes of behavior and responses that guide human interaction. According to Alsultany's research, race, gender and age are the top three categories that guide interaction. Within each, in-group and out-group members are identified: "categorization is considered functional in preserving cognitive resources and socially useful in helping people interact more easily" (p.146). In order to interact people must form definitions of self and other so as to be able to determine the degree of connectivity. In the corpus of books in this study, mixed race characters are shown negotiating this definition of self and other to different degrees within a monoracial realm. Mixed race readers who can relate to being called on to explain their racial identity will be drawn to characters who do the same. The potential impact of fictitious imagined mixed race identity on readers bears examining.

Mixed Race Research in Children's Literature

As mentioned earlier, research on mixed race themes in children's literature is limited. I found three articles and one book (Smith, 2001; Sands-O'Connor, 2001; Yokota & Frost, 2003; Reynolds, 2009) all of which were published in the last decade. During the same period, two books (Banks, 2004; Temple, Martinez & Yokota, 2006) have highlighted the need for more research in this area.

In "Interracial Themes in Children's and Young Adult Fiction," Cynthia Leitich Smith (2001) draws on her own experience growing up Irish and Native American, recalling the complete absence of children's books about people like herself. In a review of books she found

that themes could be grouped into four main categories: celebrating multiracial identity, identity conflicts, interracial romance, and transracial adoption. The article (and Smith's website, www.cynthialeitichsmith.com) are useful resources for people looking for books on the topic. She provides summaries and very brief critiques, and leaves it up to the reader to evaluate the quality of the literature. In the end Smith concludes that the increase in population demands a greater representation of books about biracial characters, to provide mirrors and windows for readers, adding to multicultural diversity and to more accurately reflect society. Furthermore, she adds that quality literature featuring complex characters and engaging language will enable readers to better appreciate and understand the world. Smith makes a very valid point that I have considered while doing my analysis. She argues that when new themes emerge in children's literature, criticism unfairly casts it as "didactic" (p. 15). Some communities, Smith contends, appreciate and want books that are clear about the ideas they are meant to communicate. It stands to reason then, that if a book is intended to shed light on an unfamiliar or neglected topic, some heavy-handedness might be necessary to attract attention and get the point across. Smith also recognizes that while racial identity is key in identity formation, it is not always the sole focus. Therefore books with multiracial characters in which racial identity is secondary to other issues are also important. This sentiment resonates with Delgado's (1995) point mentioned earlier about the need for anti-racist alliance to be "coerced" through subplots and clever writing.

Also published in the same year is Karen Sands-O'Connor's (2001) article "Why Are People Different?: Multiracial Families in Picture Books and the Dialogue of Difference." This article examines depictions of interracial families in text and illustrations and reveals that there seems to be much anxiety around showing images of close-knit, affectionate interracial couples, even when the focus of the book is on happy, well-adjusted children. She points out that parent-

figures are often cast as being from "opposite sides of the world" (p. 413) and/or different in every way except in loving their child. Pictures tend to present the racially different adults on separate pages, highlighting their differences, or if on the same page, with space or other figures separating them. Sands-O'Connor concludes that the emphasis on difference is all too common in North American pictures books that explicitly address interracial unions and biracial children. She provides examples of British books on the same topic and a few books depicting gay families that successfully represent a balanced coexistence of similarities and differences. Like Smith, Sands-O'Connor concludes that the singular focus on difference means there is much work yet to be done in the realm of picture books about mixed race children.

Junko Yokota and Sharon Frost (2002) also recognize the scarcity of quality literature about multiracial characters. Their article "Multiracial Characters in Children's Literature" is framed by vignettes that illustrate the difficulty that arises for biracial children who cannot find themselves or their families represented in literature, and for children from homogeneous contexts whose world view is limited by their lack of exposure to interracial families. The article reviews a selection of fiction and non-fiction across age-ranges that include "believable representations of multiracial people" (p. 52), highlighting the diversity of racial mixes, experiences and themes in the books.

To date the only book focusing on mixed race identity in non-adult literature is Nancy Thalia Reynolds's (2009) *Mixed Heritage in Young Adult Literature*. Reynolds discusses key texts for young adults in which protagonists or significant secondary characters are of mixed heritage. Chapters represent different white-non-white mixed groups, and each is prefaced with the historical circumstances surrounding contact between the groups.

Reynolds' analysis provides a broad picture of the trajectory of mixed race themes in YA literature with reference to how stereotypes are maintained or challenged. For example, she analyzes the mulatta figure in fiction published in the early 1900s (*Jane Eyre*, Bronte 1847; *Sapphira and the Slave Girl,* Cather, 1975; *Cane,* Toomer, 1975*),* as well as characters in contemporary realistic fiction (*The Opposite of Love,* Benedict, 2007*; Caucasia,* Senna, 1989; *The House You Pass on the Way,* Woodson, 1999*)* to demonstrate how trajectory of the black-white mixed character has changed only recently and the tragic mulatta image is often resurrected in contemporary form. Her analysis of American Indian-white identity in about 14 YA novels reveals a similar recycling of stereotypes of broken families, cultural exoticization and desperate protagonists. Characters of part-Asian, part-Jewish, part-Latino or any other non-white, black or native immigrant heritage are represented as preoccupied with the issues of belonging, other homelands and being foreign. *Mixed Heritage in Young Adult Literature* is model for this project that seeks to identify, name and discuss prevalent themes in books for younger readers.

Setting the Stage

The theoretical grounding of critical analysis of children's literature allows us to view texts as tools in the construction of meaning, identity and power; what Botelho and Rudman (2009) call the "sociopolitical function of texts" (p. 108). Such knowledge comes from reading literature, history and ideology in relation to each other, moving back and forth between the discourses. The theoretical frameworks and analytical methods of the scholars mentioned here will enable an examination of the construction of mixed race identity within both historical and contemporary contexts.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to examine mixed race identity construction in realistic contemporary and historical children's fiction published in the last decade. Within the context of cultural change framed by the 2000 and 2010 U.S. Census that allowed individuals to identify themselves as multiracial, the assumption is that authors who choose to include mixed race characters do so with intention. This study is designed to name and describe a corpus of literature, shed light on emergent patterns, and analyze a selection of representative texts that show how mixed race identity is being constructed in literature.

Scholarly work in the areas of gender, race and sexuality has set a precedent for identity-based analysis of children's literature and has impacted the ways in which teachers, parents, and librarians utilize the body of literature being published. Although there is a robust body of research on mixed race identity in adult literature, there is much less so in the area of children's literature. This need has been documented in "Multiracial Characters in Children's Literature" (Yokota & Frost 2002) in their review of 31 books with mixed race content. Within the realm of multicultural literature, analysis of multiracial identity stands to offer new and interesting ideas about the construction of race and the fluidity and rigidity of these cultural boundaries.

Essentially, this is a descriptive and interpretive study using theoretical lenses to examine the mixed race issues that the literature offers. Content analysis provides a method for systematically identifying and coding specific traits in a body of work. Literary analysis enables a close look at the elements such as theme, symbolism, character, stylistic devices, language, etc. According to Galda, Ash and Cullinan (2000) these analyses "may be historical accounts of changes in the field, may focus on one text or many, within or across genres, or may focus on the

work of individual authors" (p. 362). Critical race theory places race at the center of analysis and provides a lens through which racial construction can be examined and critiqued. Historical and literary research pertaining specifically to mixed race issues put a finer point on the racial analysis.

Text Identification

The first step in conducting this study was to consolidate a list of titles with relevant content. The difficulty in identifying literature with mixed race characters reflects the difficulty around understanding the very concept of mixed race identity. Reynolds (2009) referred to the "slipperiness of language" (p. xi), the misunderstanding of terminology, in her own search for titles for her study focused on texts for adolescent readers. Many in-print and online bibliographies, listservs and book lists exist for multicultural children's literature and for titles specific to groups such as African American, Asian American, Latino, Middle Eastern, Jewish American, etc. Some of these include books with mixed race content, but most sources do not identify books focused on mixed race content as such. Librarians and proprietors of independent books stores responded to my search queries with suggestions of books about friendships, relationships and conflicts between characters of different races. The terms 'mixed race', 'multiracial' and 'biracial' were frequently misunderstood as 'inter-racial'. This lack of terminology reflects the need to bring these books together and promote future research and discussion.

Search Parameters

Books selected for analysis in this study were constrained within three parameters: publication date, genre, and age of intended readership.

Publication Date

First, I focused on texts published between 2000 and 2010. As noted earlier, this decade is significant because it marks the beginning of an official national recognition of mixed race identity with the 'mark one or more' option on the 2000 U.S. Census. Art and literature often reflect shifts in cultural attitudes; and if the change in the census standards is at all indicative of a change in how race is starting to be viewed, it was interesting to see how children's literature reflected this change. The Library of Congress now uses "racially mixed people" as a cataloging subject heading. An online search guided by the librarian I consulted who works as a cataloger at the Library of Congress resulted in a list of 157 titles published between 1973 and 2010. These were grouped under the heading "Racially-mixed people–fiction" and identified by the heading type "LC subject headings for children". The list included picture books. (The Library of Congress uses a separate heading for non-fiction books. These were not used in this study). Twenty-five of the titles were published before 2000, and 111 appeared during the focal time period of this research. This list of books featuring mixed race characters was then cross-checked against lists obtained though searches in the Chicago Public Library catalog, bibliographies of published articles and dissertations, blogs and individual author and scholar websites (e.g., Sarah Park, Cynthia Leitich Smith, Debbie Reese, Pooja Makhijani), the listserv child_lit.com (that includes a large number of children's literature researchers from library and information science, education, and literature departments on it as well as authors and illustrators), Amazon.com, World Cat, *Novelist*, *Horn Book Guide*, and, at the suggestion of Kathleen Horning, director of the Cooperative Children's Book Center in Madison, I subscribed to The Children's Literature Comprehensive Database. All searches were conducted using a variety of descriptors such as 'mixed race', 'multiracial', 'bi-racial', 'racially-mixed', 'multicultural', 'mestizo/a' and even

'interracial' (the CCBC has used this term to generate a list of picture books about mixed race topics). This process revealed 12 more titles that were not identified in LC subject headings.

Genre

The second parameter was genre. I chose to focus the study on realistic contemporary and historical fiction. With an emphasis on realism, these narrative genres function to recreate realistic situations and characters which readers can view as windows or mirrors in relation to their own lives. Fictional realism, according to David Russell (1997) is "governed by the laws of the natural world as we understand them, and intended to provide a believable verisimilitude to life as we experience it" (p. 190). Botelho and Rudman (2009) write of the significance of literature as a vehicle of "cultural meaning…established through representation…imbedded with discourses" (p. 2). In general, fiction writers tend to pay close attention to features such as complexity of character, description and language. These three features in particular allow for theoretical analysis because of the personal connections readers can make. Furthermore the theoretical lens, embedded in literary and sociological theories of mixed race identity is best suited to realistic fiction. In doing critical analysis, Botelho and Rudman (2009) assert that the very word " 'critical' implores us to pay attention to the social work of language because how we use language shapes perceptions and social processes" (p. 5). The way an author uses language can influence a reader's understanding of an issue. In Rita Murphy's (2001) *Black Angels*, for example, we can look at the moment when the protagonist Celli learns that her father's disappearance was very likely due to his discomfort with himself as a mixed race person. Celli's grandmother tells her:

> He passed for white, but he knew he was also black and that was too much for him to bear at times, so he did some drinking to forget his pain… he's still running from the

pain…it would be better if he could turn around and face it, feel that pain through and through and be free from it instead of letting it eat him up inside. (p. 126)

By presenting this picture of a man who was a victim of external and internalized racism, the grandmother hopes to evoke understanding or empathy in Celli (and the reader). However, the negative language supports a belief that the mixed race person is inevitably abject and lost. Being able to pass for white was fine, "*but* he knew he was also black": a painful problem that caused him to become and alcoholic and abandon his family. Realistic and historical fiction relies on descriptive text to convey emotional impact and message and in this way is ideal for literary analysis.

Picture books, fantasy, and science-fiction novels were excluded from this study. Titles, reviews, library labels or other themed lists, published or online, provided enough information to reliably omit books that were not contemporary realistic or historical fiction. I asked several school and public librarians to look at my list and identify any fantasy or sci-fi books. In most cases, however, I read reviews in *Horn Book Magazine, The Bulletin of The Center For Children's Books, Booklist*, *Kirkus Reviews* and editorial reviews found on Amazon.com. These resources reliably named the genres or provided enough information about the books that I could be certain that they were not pertinent to my project. When the books were available in stores or at the library, I read book jacket blurbs and summaries, and the opening pages of the books to determine genre.

Age of Intended Readership

The third parameter was age range of the target audience for the literature. I focused on realistic contemporary and historical fiction novels suitable for readers aged 9-14. Again, reviewers, libraries and online lists such as Debbie Reese's blog on American Indians provided

recommended age ranges. In the interest of consistency I relied on the rubric used by the reviewers of *Horn Book Magazine* who classify books by grade level. Intermediate level: grades 3-6, Middle School; grades 6-8. Titles are marked YA if they are determined to be suitable for high school-age readers. The ages of the protagonists did not necessarily correspond with the grade-level ages so that some YA books had 12 or 13 year old protagonists. Typically, readers choose books in which characters are close to their own age or slightly older. Thus, if the content and mixed race elements were interesting and likely to appeal to younger teens I included the books.

I specify this range because of the conspicuous silence around mixed race identity for this age group. Research indicates that racial self-perception occurs very early in children, as does the internalization of stereotypes and prejudice. There is an abundance of scholarship examining the representation of monoracial identity in literature for very young children, yet Yokota and Frost's (2002) represents the only review of books with mixed race characters that includes novels for middle-grade readers. The corresponding analytical scholarship is lacking, too. There is a significant amount of critical analysis of mixed race issues in adult literature, which has recently extended to cross-over and young adult literature and it is likely that there is work being done on the growing body of picture books for very young children. As mentioned earlier, this corpus has been identified by the Cooperative Children's Book Center in Madison.

Using these three parameters to focus the identification of texts, I compiled a list that I sent to experts in the field of children's literature, librarians, reviewers, professors, teachers and authors. I asked the experts to look for any omissions and to recommend ways to expand the search. I also consulted with librarians at the Center for Children's Books at Urbana-Champaign and the Cooperative Children's Book Center in Madison about additional ways to search for

titles. Although I continued to search for novels even while I was writing the analysis, only three titles were added to the original list. Additional books (5 titles) were published in 2011 while the analyses described here were being conducted, but they were not included in the sample for this project.

Text Selection for Literary Analysis

The content analysis illuminated structural and thematic patterns in the corpus of texts identified. These patterns were maintained in the texts selected for literary analysis. The Literary Analysis Texts were also selected to meet the following criteria: 1) realistic contemporary or historical fiction published between 2000 and 2010, 2) feature a mixed race protagonist or important secondary character aged 9-16, 3) set entirely or partly in the US and authored by a North American writer, 4) currently in print/circulation.

Also, I sought expert opinions (from scholarship on children's literature [e.g., *The Lion and the Unicorn, Children's Literature Association Quarterly, Children's Literature in Education,* various book chapters] and from review journals [e.g., *Horn Book Magazine, Book Links, The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books. Booklist, School Library Journal, Kirkus Reviews*]) to determine (a) which books had attracted critical attention and awards and (b) any books that have become best (or at least 'high') sellers to insure that these are represented in the corpus, since in many respects they will tend to serve as the 'face' of literature with mixed race content.

Text Analysis – Content Analysis

Content analysis examines essential textual units of analysis, coding and statistically analyzing them, and presenting the analysis as concisely and succinctly as possible (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). As per Klaus Krippendorff's (2004) definition, this study is a "text-

driven analysis" (p. 341). The stages described below follow the steps Krippendorff outlines: a) accumulation of texts, b) identifying textual and intertextual features, and c) reading texts "for what they denote, connote, or suggest" (p. 341).

The first phase of content analysis involved reading all the books and identifying specific elements and recurring features worth examining to describe the overall corpus of 90 books. In addition, I examined reviews and *Horn Book Guide* summaries and ratings when available. This information also served to flag certain books as being popular, positively reviewed or of interest to this study. Popularity matters because popular books get public attention and are likely to be picked up by or given to children to read. In order to broaden the scope of data being collected, I also added new indices to the database, such as narrative perspective, author's racial identity if it could be determined, and whether the character existed in a racially homogeneous or heterogeneous context. Table III–1 reports the final category system that was arrived at for performing this phase of the content analysis:

Table III–1. Categories for Content Analysis

1. Author Gender
2. Author Racial Identity
3. Author Name
4. Novel Title
5. Publication Date
6. Genre
    - Contemporary Realistic Fiction
    - Historical Fiction
7. Name of Protagonist
8. Context
    - Homogeneous
    - Heterogeneous
9. Setting
    - Urban
    - Rural
    - Small Town
    - Unknowable
10. Socioeconomic Status
    - Struggling
    - Managing
    - Comfortable
    - Unclear
11. Narrator
    - First person
    - Third person
12. Gender of Character
13. Age of Character
14. Character Awareness of Being Mixed Race
    - Knows
    - Revealed/Surprised
15. Family Structure
    - Number of biological/adoptive/foster parents/grandparents in character's home
    - Degree of involvement
        - Involved
        - Peripheral
        - Uninvolved
16. Race of biological parents
    - Mother
    - Father
17. Category
    - Mixed Race In/Visibility
    - Mixed Race Blending
    - Mixed Race Awareness

This information was entered into a spreadsheet to enable sorting the data by a variety of combinations of features so as to facilitate a partial answer to the main research question: what is contemporary children's literature saying about the experience of being mixed race? The spreadsheet was also instrumental in the process of text selection for analysis.

During the process of data collection in the spreadsheet I was also extracting other information about the books and making notes for the literary analysis. The instrument used is provided in Appendix E. I was able to pick out recurrent themes that I used in refining the Sims Bishop categories. Within the Mixed Race In/Visibility category, the themes of internal conflict and mental illness in combination with mixed race identity soon became apparent. The theme of surprise, in which a character 'discovers' his or her mixed identity and must then consider the implications, occurred quite frequently and it made sense to include it in the category of Mixed Race Blending. Books in the Mixed Race Awareness category often featured grandparents or older characters who contributed to the awareness biracial characters have about their racial identities.

Text Analysis – Literary Analysis

Literary analysis takes its lead from literary criticism in the field of English and is not typically recognized as a research methodology in the social sciences. Scholarship in children's and young adult literature mimics the trends in criticism of adult literature, examining literary elements such as theme, symbolism, character, stylistic devices, language, etc. Journals such as *Children's Literature Association Quarterly, The Lion and the Unicorn*, and *Children's Literature* publish work that explores an enormous range of textual, literary interests in intricate ways. There is, of course, an amount of subjectivity in the identification of trends or patterns. Literary analysis itself is a process in which inferences, connections, arguments and observations

are filtered through the experience and intentional and subconscious lenses of the reader. Hermeneutical inquiry recognizes that readers are active agents in the creation of knowledge and as such literary analysis can be viewed as the product of transaction between reader and text, rather than a statement of Truth. Nevertheless, this study was designed to be as systematic as possible. Interest in the potential impact on readers of literary constructions helps to bridge the gap between the fields of education and English. Botelho and Rudman's (2009) recent book *Critical Multicultural Analysis of Children's Literature* is a recent example of this effort that includes analysis and teaching applications.

In the interest of maintaining cohesion in the ultimate analysis, I describe my version of the Bishop rubric this way:

- Mixed Race In/Visibility: biracial identity is source of external or internal conflict.
- Mixed Race Blending: biracial identity marked but inconsequential to story.
- Mixed Race Awareness: recognition of biracial heritage, complex negotiation with credible resolutions.

As mentioned in the introduction, the purpose of this rubric is not to define texts according to the categories, but to see how issues of mixed race representation in children's literature can be viewed in relation to this already established paradigm. Two additional research questions are concerned with the historical and ideological perspectives that filter through authors' imaginations into their creations, and the extent to which stereotypes are maintained or challenged. Literary analysis, grounded in research in race and theory can frame responses to these questions.

Thirty-three novels were selected for the deep literary analysis that examined mixed race identity with respect to the historical and ideological paradigms that inform perspectives about

racial identity. The selection included novels from all the white/non-white racial mixes represented in the corpus of ninety texts. This racial mix represented 87% of the entire corpus and were best suited for literary analysis grounded in research on white/non-white racial identity. The selected texts had all attracted critical attention from reviewers and appeared repeatedly in searches for books with mixed race content. Novels were also selected if their authors were well-known in the realm of children's literature (e.g. Jaime Adoff, Walter Dean Myers, Karen Hesse, Jacqueline Woodson, Pam Muñoz Ryan, Joseph Bruchac, Richard Peck, and Lawrence Yep) since the acclaim of these writers assured a degree of accessibility to the novels. Furthermore, these novels exemplified trends in mixed race identity construction across the three categories.

Terminology

Novels of 'historical fiction' refer to those books that are set in the past and in which the historical era is of particular significance to the story. In 'contemporary realistic fiction', the context is also significant in determining a book to be a cultural artifact. The difference is one of perspective since historical fiction tells a story that happened in the past, and contemporary fiction tells a story that happens in the present, with all the material and ideological trappings pertinent to the time.

A plethora of terms have been and continue to be used to describe people of mixed race. These terms (such as mulatto/a, mestizo/a, métis, half-blood, mixed-blood, half-caste) are often context-specific and encumbered with racist ideology. In some cases terms have been reclaimed by groups or individuals, and for example, the Chippewa Indian-German-American author Louise Erdrich refers to herself as 'mixed blood'. Similarly, 'hapa' was a derogatory term used to describe someone of white and Native Hawaiian ancestry that has become increasingly acceptable. As Ian López (1995) and other race scholars remind us, race must be understood as a

social construct, "a social phenomenon in which contested systems of meanings serve as the connections between physical features, faces, and personal characteristics. In other words, social meanings connect our faces to our souls" (p. 193). Boundaries and distinctions between these racial constructs are unstable, changing with time and political need. Yet people's lived experiences are marked by race as if it is an immutable fact, and so people whose parents might be defined by these constructs as racially different from each other are presumed to be 'mixed race'. Understanding that there is no biological basis for race, or such a thing as racial purity (implied by the idea of 'mixed'), I use the terms 'mixed race', 'biracial', and 'multiracial' interchangeably in this dissertation. Furthermore, I draw on Jayne Ifekwunigwe's (2004) use of these terms as a "necessary, deliberate and discursive political intervention" (p. xxi) that does not shy away from racialized discourse. The mixed race characters in the books in this study are marked by socially determined ideas about their parents belonging to separate races, thereby casting them in racially indeterminate spaces. To varying degrees their identities are shaped by ideas about race held by the real and fictional people in their lives. It is my intention that the paradoxical essence of racial demarcation in the world around us will be revealed through the analysis of the construction and reconstruction of racial identity as represented in this corpus of books for young readers.

'Black' and 'African American' are used interchangeably. In the text analyses in Chapter IV, I use terms that the authors use, especially since the language is specific to historical and geographical context of the novels. Some novels are set at a time when 'colored' was the typical descriptor and the setting required authors to use that term. For me to do otherwise would be anachronistic, and I made every effort to be sensitive and sparse in my use of labels associated with racism.

'White' refers to people of European descent. Some authors specify 'Irish', 'German', and 'Jewish' as markers of racial or ethnic difference. Sometimes authors use 'American' to refer to white people.

'American Indian' is used in general reference to indigenous people in North America. Tribal names are used when provided by authors.

'Asian American' is used in general references to Americans of Asian descent. Some authors specify Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese and Indian heritage and I follow their lead.

'Latino/a' is used to refer to people of Latin American descent unless specified otherwise by authors.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS OF REPRESENTATIVE TEXTS

The purpose of this study was to examine children's and young adult novels with mixed race protagonists or significant secondary characters in order to identify the way biracial life experiences have been depicted in realistic contemporary and historical fiction. After a process of text identification and selection described in Chapter III), the final list of books comprised of 90 titles. It is worth noting that these 90 books were published over the course of a decade. According to the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC), approximately 5,000 books are published every year. That makes these 90 books about 0.2% of the books published in the last decade. Clearly there is a dearth of mixed race voices and stories in the realm of children's literature. A complete list of the 90 titles is provided in Appendix A.

This chapter describes the findings of the content analysis. First I provide an overview of relevant features of the overall corpus of 90 books and their authors. Then I focus on the books as they were classified into the Sims Bishop categories. The final section of the chapter provides close literary analyses of texts representative of the categories, organized by genre (contemporary realistic fiction and historical fiction).

The Big Picture

The first phase of the analysis examined the authorship of the books by race in order to know who is writing about mixed race identity in children's literature. Results are summarized in Table IV–1.

Table IV–1. Author Race

Feature	N= 78*	% of Sample
Race of Author		
Mixed/Biracial	12	15%
White	48	61%
African American	7	9%
Asian American	7	9%
Latino	2	3%
Unknown	2	3%

***** There were 78 different authors of the 90 books.

The race of the author was examined because of work in the field of children's literature that links the background of the author to the issue of cultural authenticity (Reynolds, 2009; Sims Bishop, 2007). The majority of authors writing about mixed race identity were white – and thus were writing about experiences other than their own. In this sample of books relevant to mixed race identity, white authors did not address whiteness: racial construction, power, or the privilege of whiteness were not examined. Cultural authenticity does not require cultural membership and many skilled authors write convincingly about experiences outside of their own. Nor does cultural membership guarantee authentic representation. However, the predominance of white authors writing about non-white racial issues, combined with the shortage of books by multiracial authors (15%) found in this study highlights the need for more mixed race voices to add their stories to this body of literature – to create what Sims Bishop (2007) calls the "recognizable fabric" (p. 245) of their lives.

The second phase of the analysis of the overall corpus of 90 titles examined eight different features of the content of the books:

1) genre

2) racial mix of protagonist

3) gender of protagonist

4) age of protagonist

5) family situation for protagonist

6) socio-economics of protagonists' environment

7) racial makeup of protagonists' environment

8) setting of the book

This group of features represents potential influences on characters' lives that may or may not influence their racial identity. As such they serve as lenses on the picture contained in the entire corpus of books addressing mixed race identity currently available to readers age 9-14.

This phase of the analysis entailed reading reviews of the books where available (using The *Horn Book Guide* online database, *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* and the *Booklist* online database) as well as conducting initial readings of the books. Appendix D provides a summary of specific titles broken down by racial mix. Table IV–2 summarizes the quantitative results of this phase of the analysis.

Table IV–2. Features of Books with Mixed Race Characters

Feature	Number (Total = 90)	Percentage of Sample
Genre:		
Contemporary fiction	59	66%
Historical fiction	31	34%
Racial Mix of Protagonist:		
Black and white	32	36%
American Indian and white	19	21%
Asian and white	16	18%
Latino and white	11	12%
Non-white mix	12	13%
Gender of Protagonist:		
Female	57*	63%
Male	37*	41%
Age of Protagonist:		
8-12	36	40%
13-16	54	60%
Family Situation for Protagonist:		
Biological Parents Absent	45	50%
Biological Parents and Grandparent(s) Play Significant Role	31	34%
Foster Parents Play Significant Role	2	2%
Biological Parents Play Peripheral Role	12	13%
Socioeconomics of Protagonists' Environment:		
Struggling	23	26%
Managing	22	24%
Comfortable	17	18%
Unable to determine	28	31%
Racial Makeup of Protagonists' Environment:		
Racially Homogeneous	36	40%
Racially Diverse	16	18%
Lacking Community	38	42%
Setting of Book:		
Urban	46	51%
Rural	23	26%
Small Town	11	12%
Suburban	5	5%
Unable to Determine	5	5%

* Some books had both male and female mixed-race characters. Percentages are rounded.

Examination of these results provides many insights into the nature of contemporary realistic fiction and historical fiction featuring racially mixed characters published in the past

decade. First, overall patterns in the racial mix of protagonists in the corpus of books were of particular interest. Seventy-eight (87%) of the books in this study feature characters who were part white and part non-white. In the remaining 12 (13%), characters were some combination of non-white races (black and Asian, Latino and Arab, American Indian and Latino). These findings correspond to work in mixed race studies (Brunsma, 2005; Williams, 2005; Spencer, 2011) that argues that mixed race issues tend to attract scholarly and/or political attention when one of the races is white. This same trend can also be seen in children's literature with mixed-race protagonists.

Information about characters' environments was also interesting. Approximately half the books were set in urban contexts and approximately one quarter in rural settings. By the same token, 41 of the 59 (69%) contemporary realistic fiction books were in urban settings and only 5 of the 31 (16%) historical fiction books were in urban settings. This suggests that when contemporary authors address racial mixing, they tend to associate it historically with rural areas, and currently with urban environments. Furthermore, nearly all the novels set in rural areas had American Indian and white or black and white biracial characters, while there was more diversity of mixing in books set in urban areas.

Additional information about context included characters' socioeconomic circumstances, family structures and the racial and ethnic makeup of their environments. These features were studied because race and class are intricately connected factors in American society and tend to have significant bearing on identity construction. Family and community influences are integral to how children understand their identities. A salient finding about family situations was that in almost half of the books the biological parents were absent, dead, or basically uninvolved in the lives of their children. Solitary protagonists are common in children's literature and support an

individualistic ideology, so this finding was perhaps not surprising. However, interracial relationships described as failing because of 'racial incompatibility' echo and sustain segregationist notions. Perhaps it also suggests authors' discomfort with the topic.

Finally, it was interesting to examine the racial/ethnic makeup of the community in which authors placed their mixed race protagonists. Racial environment has tremendous bearing on the racial self-concept of a person (Brunsma, 2005; Rockquemore, 2009). Less than one-quarter of the books' protagonists operated in racially diverse contexts. In 40% of the books, biracial characters lived in racially homogeneous contexts. That is to say, these protagonists were the only biracials in monoracial environments. Of these 36 books, 29 had biracial characters in white communities and 7 had biracial protagonists in black communities. Interestingly, in almost half of the sample of 90 books, protagonists were alone or disconnected from people around them. In other words, there were no adults or peers with whom racial identity could be compared or contrasted, and characters' understanding of who they were developed in relative isolation. This was particularly true of American Indian characters who were depicted as being on journeys that removed them from populated environments. With the exception of two books, all the racially-diverse and homogeneous African American contexts were urban.

The general socioeconomic situation of the child protagonists was able to be determined for 70% of the books. Of these 63 books, situations were varied across struggling, managing and comfortable. When examined by genre half of the historical fiction economic situations could not be determined and the other half indicated mostly struggling and a few managing. Contemporary realistic fiction novels provided more information and represented more economic diversity. Overall, 50% of the characters were in struggling or managing situations. These texts suggest an association of mixed-race lives with economically precarious urban environments.

Mixed Race Identity in the Categories

The next phase of the analysis examined general patterns in how authors addressed mixed race identity in the group of 90 books. The system used for this analysis (and the subsequent third phase of the analysis, the deeper look through literary analyses of 30 selected books from the corpus) was developed using the Sims Bishop (1982) categories as a starting point. Grouping the literature in the way captured in the following categories provided a means of talking about the salient issues in the corpus of 90 books with reference to current discourse about mixed race identity. As mentioned earlier, racial identity experiences are unique to different communities, indeed to different individuals. Nevertheless, the review of books in this study revealed several features that were similar enough across groups and genre, that enabled them to be grouped into one or more of the following categories:

- Mixed Race In/Visibility: biracial identity is a source of external or internal conflict.
- Mixed Race Blending: biracial identity marked but inconsequential to story.
- Mixed Race Awareness: recognition of biracial heritage, complex negotiation with credible resolutions.

<u>Mixed Race In/Visibility (MRI/V)</u>

One of the distinguishing features of books in Sims Bishop's "Social Conscience" category was that they presented the fact of being black as a problem rather than the existence of racism as the problem. This was also the case in many of the books that fell into the MRI/V category in this study: being mixed was depicted as problematic for the characters and those around them. I label this category In/Visibility (rather than Invisibility of Visibility) because it captures the concurrent state of being both highly visible because of racially ambiguous appearance and at the same time marginalized because of it. Often, physical appearance was the

only marker of racial assignment in MRI/V books In such books mixed race identity was the central focus of the story and negotiation of racial identity was a source of external or internal conflict. Similar to Sims Bishop's Social Conscience books, MRI/V books typically presented biracial characters in seemingly monoracial settings with monoracial characters who did not suffer identity crises because of their monoracial heritage. Such a depiction reinscribes false notions of racial homogeneity and further locates the 'problem' of being mixed within the character rather than in society.

In MRI/V books characters experienced isolation from multiple groups, usually both groups to which they were racially affiliated. Thus for the mixed race character, racial visibility was constant because outward markers such appearance and/or a name, were called into question. These books highlighted the element of being mixed either by itself, or conflated with other identity questions. In many, if not all cases, being mixed race was viewed as one more problem in a string of problems facing a character, as if adding salt to the wound. Characters in these books underwent some kind of transformation in order to resolve the conflict of identity. Visibility for an a priori invisible group often means recalling typical elements that enable cultural recognition – in other words: stereotypes. Sims Bishop found that many books portrayed African Americans in ways that conformed to racist notions: lacking dignity or intelligence, coming from fatherless homes, behaving in passive or ridiculous ways for the benefit of the white protagonist. MRI/V books about mixed race characters also relied on all-too familiar references that served to reinforce ideas about one or both racial groups. These books reflect stereotypic master-narratives about dysfunction and trauma as inevitable in the lives of biracial people.

Mixed Race Blending (MRB)

These books were similar to Sims Bishop's Melting Pot books. This category contained a range of mixed race experiences. At one end were books in which mixed characters were no different from the other supposedly monoracial ones: they 'blended' into their environments. Racial identity was of little consequence to the story as plot and character development relied on other elements. In the lives of some of these characters, being mixed was insignificant in the sense that they were not marked as different from others in their (monoracial) environments. These characters blended into white contexts or they identified with their non-white heritage. Another iteration of mixed race blending depicted mixed heritage as tangential to the plot, though it provided an instrumental narrative detail such as serving to mark the character as atypical in a variety of ways, one of which was racial. In these books being mixed race put the protagonists on the margins of their context and either highlighted isolation created by separate issues, or provided alliances with other marginalized characters. At the furthest end of this range of MRB books were the ones in which a character's mixedness (i.e. non-whiteness) was revealed by accident or through necessity. In these cases the biracial character lived as white prior to the revelation.

Mixed Race Awareness (MRA)

Based on Sims Bishop's "Culturally Conscious" category, these novels included characters who recognized and were recognizable for their cultural/racial differences, and who knew something of their ancestral heritages. The characters had community, people who participated in the development of their identities in a variety of ways. Biracial characters in MRA books were represented as being aware that their mixed race identity afforded access to different groups even as they may have been marginalized because of it. Some MRA books

focused on mixed race identity but not in the problematic way represented in MRI/V books. Characters grappled with racism and/or racial group membership, often linked to other social factors and resolved problems without tragedy or trauma. Protagonists responded to prejudice with believable self-confidence indicating that the foundations of their racial identity were secure. They emerged from their experiences intact. Sims Bishop describes culturally conscious books as coming from within the culture (p. 73). An insider perspective presumably lends authenticity and complexity of experience since it is not the telling of the story of the 'other'. Table IV–3 summarizes the categorization of the 90 books, by genre, into the three categories just described.

Table IV–3. Mixed Race Representation Across Genre and Category

Racial Mix	Mixed Race Category Frequency					
	In/Visibility		Blending		Awareness	
	CRF	HF	CRF	HF	CRF	HF
Black & white	7	3	7	4	6	6
Black & Latino	1	-	2	-	-	-
Black & Asian	-	-	-	-	2	-
Asian & white	2	2	10	-	5	-
Latino & Arab	-	-	1	-	-	-
Latino & white	3	1	4	-	3	-
American Indian & Latino	-	-	1	-	1	-
American Indian & white	2	10	-	2	2	3
Total by Genre	15	16	25	6	19	9
Total for Both Genres	31		31		28	

Several findings emerged by examining patterns across the 90 books when both Mixed Race Category and Genre were considered. First, the books were fairly evenly distributed among the three categories: 31 books (34%), fell into the Mixed Race In/Visibility category; 31 books (34%) in Mixed Race Blending, and 28 (31%) were identified as Mixed Race Awareness books. Separated by genre, it was found that 25% (15) contemporary realistic fiction books were in the MRI/V category, 42% (25) in MRB, and 33% (19) in the MRA category. By comparison, 51%

(16) historical fiction books were in the MRI/V category, 19% (6) in MRB, and 30% (9) in MRA. Thus:

- In/Visibility books were the largest proportion of historical fiction and the smallest proportion of contemporary fiction.
- MRB books represented the largest proportion of contemporary fiction and the smallest proportion of historical fiction books.
- The proportion of MRA books was roughly equal for contemporary fiction and historical fiction.

Table IV–3 also reaffirms a finding noted earlier: mixed race identity tends to be thought of in terms of a white and non-white binary – 91% (82) books in this study featured characters who were part white, and part non-white. In the remaining 9% (8), characters were some combination of non-white races. This finding stands in contrast to findings in a recent *New York Times* report (2011) of census data indicating considerably higher rates of intermarriage among black, Hispanic and American Indian populations than between people of color and whites. By far the largest number of white/non-white books focused on mixed black and white heritage (n=33, 35%). Yet, according to the same *New York Times* report, black and white intermarriages are the fewest of all groups. Hispanics and Asians have the highest rate of intermarriage with whites and Hispanic blacks, yet these stories are virtually absent in the books represented in this study.

Several other interesting features stand out among the findings. First, 66% (59) of the entire corpus are contemporary realistic fiction, supporting the myth that racial mixing is a recent phenomenon (though the expression of biracial identity *is* fairly recent). Contemporary realistic fiction novels were fairly equally distributed between the In/Visibility (48%) and Awareness

(67%) categories, with the largest proportion (81%) falling into the Blending category. This suggests that more books represent 'generic' forms of biracial identity than problematic or affirming forms. There were 17 CRF books with Asian and white characters. Ten of those 17 (59%) books fell into the Mixed Race Blending category suggesting that readers looking for Asian-white experiences are most likely to find books in which biracial identity is inconsequential. Only half as many CRF Asian-white books (29%) were classified as Mixed Race Awareness, books with significant, positive representation. Black and white mixed race stories were fairly evenly distributed across the categories within contemporary realistic fiction, but other mixes were rarely represented (1-4 books).

Of the 19 books about American Indian and white biracials, 15 were historical fiction, 10 of which fell into the In/Visibility category, suggesting that these stories belong only in the past. Yet according to census data, during the past decade more American Indian and whites intermarried than any other group in the last decade. Readers looking for novels that speak to these changing demographics are not likely to find any contemporary representation, only problematic historical representations full of stereotypes.

The lack of representation of Latinos in this corpus of books is also striking. According to the U.S. Census, Latinos are the largest racial minority in the U.S. and intermarriages between Hispanics and other groups is common. These stories are the least represented in children's literature in any genre. One explanation for the scarcity of any mixed race representation in historical fiction might be that multiracial identity as a separate kind of racial identity has only recently entered the national discourse, making it anachronistic to mark stories in the past with the label. In other words, there may be more books with mixed race characters than can be found through systematic searches.

Trends in Contemporary Realistic Fiction

In the 59 novels of contemporary fiction, mixed race identity is negotiated in a range of ways. In the 15 MRI/V books (25% of the CRF), many of the characters experienced racism that targeted their mixed or non-white racial identity. For these characters, being mixed was depicted as a source of pain and confusion. Often other factors combined to undermine their sense of self-worth. In these books mixed race identity was represented as an unfortunate accident with which characters grappled inwardly for the rest of their lives. Adults contributed to their isolation through abuse or neglect, never allowing characters to talk or ask about their racial identities. There was little or no critique of unfair social systems that preserve limited perceptions of race, and as a result the 'problem' of being mixed race ended up being located within the subject.

About the same number of CRF books represented a more complex or nuanced experience of being a mixed race person in contemporary America. Nineteen of the books were MRA books, and in them characters often had parents or other adults who provide supportive environments in which to explore racial identity. Adults of white and non-white races served as role models and guides, providing context, stories, advice, and strength to counter racism experienced by the protagonists. In many instances these culturally-informative adults were grandparents, often immigrants from 'the homeland.' This was especially true for the Asian and Latino biracial characters, reaffirming the 'newcomer' status usually associated with both groups. American Indian biracials learn from elders who live/d on reservations, and African American biracials know grandparents who either remembered or still lived in the south and could educate them about that history. Parents tended to avoid speaking directly about race but assured children that they were unique and special.

The 25 MRB books represented biracial characters as living the same experiences as other, presumably monoracial characters in the books, with the added detail of being partially non-white. In most of these books, the biracial detail was only descriptive, or it provided a "multi-culti" (Reynolds, 2009, p. 21) element that had little or no bearing on the events or character development.

Some stereotypical features were common to contemporary fiction across groups: food, festivals, and language differences were the most common. Most stories affirmed the American Dream, but a few represented issues of power and the complexity of race dynamics in the U.S.

Trends in Historical Fiction

In the 31 historical fiction novels, mixed race characters were depicted as identifying solely with their black, Latino or American Indian heritage, or negotiating the issue of passing for white. Racism was the most prominent theme in novels of this genre.

Novels of historical fiction attempt to "recreate the aura of a time past, reconstructing characters, events, movements, ways of life and the spirit of a bygone day" (Russell, 1997, p. 198). Authors of historical fiction are charged with the task of reflecting the ideology and discourse of the era they are recreating. Thus books that deal with racial issues are expected to represent ideas about race in a time past, albeit through the author's contemporary lens. Periods of time are often defined by the events that impacted them, and authors tend to frame their work through one or two defining events. In the novels of historical fiction in this study, war or other large-scale social conflicts typically contextualized the historical period in which the novels were set. Only two novels of historical fiction represented Asian and white mixed characters. *All the Broken Pieces* takes place just after the Vietnam War and includes flashbacks to events during the war. The other book, *The Likes of Me* takes place in the early 1900s and the protagonists'

mother is a Chinese indentured worker (p. 9). Novels with black and white mixed race characters tended to be set during slavery, the civil war, or in the Jim Crow south. One third of the historical books about black-white biracials shared this feature. An exception is Ellen Schwartz's *Stealing Home,* which is set in Brooklyn in 1947 (WWII is never mentioned). *Valley of the Moon: the Diary of Maria Rosalia de Milagros* was the only novel of historical fiction with a Mexican (*mestiza*), character and it was set at the time of Mexican-American war in 1845. The scarcity of *mestiza* characters in historical fiction was striking, and I looked beyond the search parameters of this study to see if there were any historical fiction novels with Latino mixed characters and could not find any. This may be because *mestiza* identity is so closely linked with Mexican identity that the two are not separated or recognized as different by the 'sorters' of literature.

Over three-quarters of the historical fiction books with American Indian and white biracial characters (also called mixed-bloods) were set during periods of war between white settlers and native peoples. The eugenics and sterilization movements were recurrent themes within them. In all of these situations the mixed race subject was posited as representative of the conflicting groups, and to varying degrees served as a bridge, a mediator, or the 'enemy's face' depending on the plot. The theme of passing as white recurred in books about American Indian-white and black-white characters. The laws of hypodescent determined that these biracial subjects were aligned with the racial group with least social status. The one exception is in Richard Peck's *The River Between Us,* in which Delphine from New Orleans, firmly grounded her knowledge of her ancestry, identifies as French Creole, recognizing her European and Afro-Caribbean roots.

Literary Analysis of Representative Books in Each Category

The final phase of the analysis involved conducting deep literary analyses of selected novels chosen because they best represented many of the traits identified in the three categories and because authors' acclaim lends visibility and credibility to these books. After completing a first reading of the 59 contemporary realistic fiction novels and 31 historical fiction novels. These 33 novels were chosen for deep literary analysis because they best represented many of the traits identified in the three categories. Within the categories, literary analyses are organized chronologically by date of publication. The process for selecting these representative titles was described in Chapter III. A complete list of titles organized by category can be found in Appendix C. The titles marked with an asterisk in Appendix C were those chosen for the literary analysis.

MRI/V in Contemporary Realistic Fiction

Sims Bishop identified books as belonging in "Social Conscience" category if they focused on creating a social conscience about black and white race relations with the goal of building tolerance and acceptance. A recurring motif in the books she reviewed placed African American characters in white contexts, creating the conflict. Resolutions involved "learning to get along" (p. 21). Social conscience books were primarily written by white authors and aimed at white readers, with African American characters being one-dimensional and stereotypical. In this study the MRI/V category were similar to social conscience books in that they shared several features. First is the way in which mixed race identity created the conflict in the plot. The mixed race characters were simultaneously visible as targets of racism because of being mixed, and invisible, being marginalized by their social groups. Many of the contemporary realistic fiction books in this section presented isolated, emotionally troubled mixed race characters who were

rejected by adults and peers. They often came from broken homes, or were orphans. Parents, if present, were dysfunctional and/or abusive. Many were alcoholics or drug addicts. Families tended to be poor or struggling. Often the parent of color was dead or absent. The remaining parent made significant mention of the inadequacy of the absent parent, presenting a grim picture of interracial relationships especially with respect to their effect on children. Struggling biracial characters in MRI/V novels were reminiscent of the master-narrative about mulatto identity being fraught with self-doubt, insecurity, and various degrees of trauma.

The following section provides a close analysis of mixed race identity as represented in 7 contemporary novels. Jaime Adoff's three novels in verse were powerful testimonies of the deep pain that scars some teenagers' lives. All three protagonists identified as biracial (black and white) even though they were alienated from their peers because of it. Death, abuse drugs and bullying caused the characters to withdraw from society and any potential for community membership was precluded by the fact of their being biracial and therefore rejected by both white and black groups. Adoff's depiction of racism targeting biracial identity reminds readers not to be swept up in discourse about post-racial society and racial prejudice being a thing of the past. Unfortunately, the social critique is not strong enough to counter the shame, stigma and isolation that were presented as an inevitable part of being biracial. E. R. Frank's *America*, Jessica Anderson's *Border Crossing*, and Matt de la Peña's *Mexican WhiteBoy* included mental illness in the list of problems facing biracials, again ascribing to the paradigm that racial mixing leads to degeneracy of the mind and body. In *Black Mirror,* Nancy Werlin's protagonist, Frances' isolation was compounded by self-hatred rooted in her racially ambiguous appearance (she is Japanese and white). Mixed race identity was not the focus of this novel, but the author gave significant space to establishing it as the reason Frances was marginalized by her peers and

unloved by her family. More disturbing was the fact that she was depicted as being responsible for her own isolation, as if she took the racist taunts too personally and should have toughened up and not let them hurt her. *Black Mirror* ascribes to the notion that individuals, not society, determine a person's place in the world.

Black Mirror, Nancy Werlin (2001)

Mixed race identity is not the focus of *Black Mirror* but our attention is drawn to it at three intervals: the beginning, the middle and the end. The novel opens with nine-year-old Frances, newly motherless, being told by her paternal grandmother that no matter what her appearance indicates, she will not grow up into a "dainty Japanese woman" (p. 3) like her mother, but a "voluptuous Leventhal" (p. 3) taking after the Jewish side of the family. This pronouncement precedes Frances' unhappy reflection on the unending comments and questions about her racially ambiguous appearance, most significantly the question "Where are you *from?*" (p. 4) that marks her as a perpetual outsider. A series of other comments including "dwarf, freak, mix, some kind of Asian" (p. 4) lead Frances to want to hide away from anyone's attention, hate her face and body, and avoid mirrors. Within the first two pages, the reader understands that it is an unlucky stroke of fate that a person ends up being biracial and there is nothing to be done about it. As if to compound the misfortune of appearing racially ambiguous, we learn that her brother, Daniel, escaped looking mixed or Asian and was wildly popular at school. By the end of the first chapter we know that Frances is sad, angry and lonely because she is mixed and introverted, that Daniel died of a drug overdose, and his death is the other reason for Frances' unhappiness.

Subsequently Frances's self hatred is combined with confusion about the issues surrounding Daniel's death and her role in preventing it. She assumes that people who talk to her or offer her friendship are being condescending and she pushes them away. In this way she is depicted as creating her own isolation. When she does allow herself to connect to other people, she aligns herself with other marginalized characters: Andy, the school landscaper who is believed to be slightly mentally retarded, and Ms. Wiles, an unconventional art teacher occasionally provide companionship. Frances has no friends her own age. Having established her protagonist as conflicted, bitter and alone, the author drops the mixed race theme and focuses the novel on unraveling the mystery of Daniel's death and a complicated drug-ring on campus.

With the exception of Andy and Ms. Wiles, Frances has very little interaction with other people. Her mother left the family to live in a monastery in Osaka, her father is withdrawn and unavailable, and her grandmother belittles her all the time. Scenes in which we see her among other characters are fraught with anxiety about Daniel's death and Frances' suspicion about their involvement. For the most part she is alone with her thoughts. Following the Jewish tradition after a death, Frances covers all mirrors in her house to remind her of her "failure" (p. 28) to prevent Daniel's death and to avoid seeing herself. No mention is made of racial identity until half way through the novel, when Frances decides to uncover a mirror and see if, like the ugly duckling, she has changed in to a swan. We are provided a three-page critique of her hair and facial features. She decides that her ears are like those of an "alien" (p. 154), her nose is "haughty" (p. 154), her eyes "ordinary Asian eyes" (p. 155), and concludes that she is, at best, "interesting-looking" (p. 155). More significantly, Frances decides that she feels no connection at all with the reflection in the mirror and she covers it up again with the refrain "Frances the mongrel. Frances the dwarf" (p. 154).

The mystery of Daniel's death and the drug selling at school are unraveled because of Frances' persistence. Her efforts are solitary, though Andy comes through for her at the end. Finally, having set the truth free, and earned the romantic attention of another character, Frances can look in the mirror again. The lengthy self-hatred we witnessed earlier is replaced with a brief resolution that she had been unable to see herself for who she really is "Intriguing. Attractive. Unique." (p. 248) Ultimately it is troubling that the author felt that Frances needed to be a biracial character especially when her racial identity is presented as the source of her self-deprecation and social withdrawal and something that she needs to 'overcome'. Furthermore, racial identity is depicted as purely phenotypical. Before she falls asleep at the very end of the novel, Frances thinks she might "dare" (p. 249) to paint a self-portrait. We are meant to believe that her metamorphosis from "freak" to "unique" is spurred by internal motivation, while people around her remain unchanged. This representation is very directly aligned with the Marginal Man theory and other pathologizing notions disseminated by the *problem approach* identified by Thornton (1996). As a window and a mirror, *Black Mirror* does not provide an affirming picture of biracial identity.

America, E. R. Frank (2002)

Racial identity is the least of America's concerns in E. R. Frank's eponymous novel, yet it appears to be the reason for his traumatic life. Born to a crack addict mother, America was placed in foster care with a wealthy white family as an infant. When he started "turning his color" (p. 15), the family rejected him and their nanny, Mrs. Harper, took him in. She genuinely cared for him, but was unaware that her half-brother, Browning, was sexually abusing America for years. America sets fire to Browning's blanket, kills him and runs away. The instability in his

life only increases as he is shuttled between mental health facilities and homes. Depression, isolation, PTSD, and suicide shape his young life. In each new place, other people identify America racially. They tell him that he isn't black, or white, that he's Cambodian, Chinese, Hispanic, Arab and Indian. America never responds but it is clear that his mixed heritage and indefinable appearance set him apart from people around him who regard him with suspicion. Thus although shared experience with trauma could be a reason for human connection, in this novel the message is that this possibility is prevented by his being mixed race. In one particularly poignant scene his own brothers find it difficult to relate to him racially:

> There's only one towel. Brooklyn colored it green, so sometimes even though we get clean from dirt, we get green on us after we dry off. Lyle and Brooklyn say if I scrub hard enough, I'll uncover the black, but it never happens.
>
> 'You white,' Lyle says.
>
> 'No, I'm not,' I say.
>
> 'He white,' Lyle says to Brooklyn.
>
> 'He not black,' Brooklyn says.
>
> 'He mixed,' Brooklyn says.
>
> 'He not our brother,' Lyle says.
>
> 'I like his eyes,' Brooklyn says, and then he knocks me on the floor. (p. 36)

If there was any chance of a connection forming, it is precluded by this exchange. For America, being racially mixed equals being rejected.

> When he gets older America reflects on what he imagines is written about him in his file: *America's mother was a real easy woman. Plus, America's mother was proud she had sex with so many different kinds of people. By the time American's mother gave birth to*

> *America, she knew his father could be just about any man in the entire country. She knew America might look like just about any kind of man she ever met. That's how America's mother thought up the name America.* (p. 131)

Thus, his mother's promiscuity is associated with his undetermined racial heritage, adding to his self-hatred. Unfortunately this is a familiar trope in the body of titles found in this study. Its disproportionate recurrence perpetuates the idea that mixed race subjects are born because of rape or accidental conception by irresponsible adults.

America is a painful story that probably rings true for too many children who suffer at the hands of troubled adults and an overburdened, inadequate social services system. The name 'America' is cryptically symbolic of an imagined "Everychild' for whom racial identity is one part of many other aspects that make one American. Though mixed race identity is of secondary importance to the protagonist himself, it serves to underscore his troubles, and compounds his unhappiness.

In the end, America's life begins to improve and for the first time he thinks of himself without hatred:

> Sometimes from somewhere over my bed at night, I look down and I see me. I'm not that little kid anymore, I'm not all lazy and warm and bad. I'm this bigger kid, this almost-man type, and I've got big hands and a big face, and my feet hang off the end of the little bed, and I'm not white and I'm not black, and I'm not anything, but I'm a little bit of everything, and it's just like that. I look down and it's just me. (p. 204)

When it comes to a racial identity, America is unable to determine one for himself – not surprisingly, given the lack of information in his life. He rejects a racial identity (and the associated experiences), and embraces a racial 'invisibility'.

Names Will Never Hurt Me, Jaime Adoff (2004)

Names Will Never Hurt Me, as the title indicates, is about bullying. There are several first person narrators. Tisha is the mixed race character and new to the school in which the story is set. She identifies as biracial, listing and rejecting many derogatory labels, even 'mixed' which she says applies to pancake batter, not people (p. 40). Tisha is bullied relentlessly for being mixed by Cheryl, an African American girl, and is not accepted by the other African American students in the school for the same reason. Tisha has one friend, Tiny, who is also bullied by the same girl for being overweight. Unless she is with Tiny, Tisha is alone and afraid. She notices and identifies with another marginalized character, Kurt and eventually develops a crush on him. But in keeping with the tragic mulatta trope, romance seems to be out of Tisha's reach. We learn that an ex-boyfriend only wanted to be able to say he had gone out with a black girl, and when she reminded him that she was "a half-black girl" (p. 72) he did not understand, and broke up with her. When a white girl catches Tisha looking at the star football player, she warns her off, " 'you people are always trying to take our men' " (p. 92). Despite a two-page monologue in which Tisha reflects on her biracial pride, it seems that there is no room for people like her in a 'typical' American high school such as the one Adoff portrays. Only with her parents and with one friend is Tisha accepted and appreciated. At the end there is the slightest hint that the catastrophe they both witness might bring Kurt and Tisha together, but it is quickly abandoned and Tisha is as alone at the end as at the start of the narrative.

Jimi & Me, Jaime Adoff (2005)

Thirteen-year old Keith James, the protagonist and narrator of Adoff's second novel, *Jimi & Me* also identifies as biracial although he realizes that the world reads him as black. His father

(African American) is accidentally shot and killed at a corner store one night and Keith and his mother (white) have to move to his aunt's home in a small town in Ohio. His mother is depressed and unavailable, and though his aunt reaches out, Keith is essentially alone in dealing with his father's death and being new to town. In addition to being one of the only brown-skinned kids at school, Keith stands out because he dresses in 60s style psychedelic outfits inspired by his love for Jimi Hendrix. Predictably, he is picked on by other students and spends most of his time alone, lost in thought and sadness. When people yell, "Hey freak, what are you supposed to be?" (p.108), it is not clear if they are referring to his outfits or his racial ambiguity. Keith thinks it is both. He has no desire to associate with his peers, holding himself aloof and watching with amusement and cynicism:

> Sometimes it's cool being in the middle like me.
>
> I get to see both sides.
>
> Sometimes it's clearer in the middle.
>
> Sometimes it's not.
>
> Right now there's not a cloud in the sky.
>
> Only a few black kids in this school,
>
> But even they act like
>
> the white kids
>
> tryin' to act like
>
> black kids
>
> who grew up in 'the hood.'
>
> Now that's just wrong. (p. 167)

Ultimately being biracial is significant only in that it adds to Keith's in/visibility. The revelation that his father had a secret wife and son all along in another town adds to the paradigm of failed interracial relationships. The fact that this wife and son are black seems to underscore monoracial unions in favor of interracial ones. When Keith falls for a white girl in his class who reciprocates his friendship but no more, he thinks it is because he is biracial. *Jimi & Me* is about dealing with loss and grief but being biracial seems to preclude the possibility of finding community that could be supportive during this process. The conclusion shows Keith on the road to emotional recovery six months after his father's death. He is hopeful and optimistic, has a girlfriend, and his mother seems to be getting stronger. The final verse, titled *together,* has Keith imagining being in a band with Jimi, his new brother, with their father's musical legacy continuing "together for the first time on this stage. Together for the first time. Together …" (p. 329). The lingering effect of powerful conclusions notwithstanding, the hardship of Keith's young life, compounded so deeply in being biracial is too firmly established to be forgotten.

The Death of Jayson Porter, Jaime Adoff (2008)

This is by far the grimmest of Adoff's books. The narrator/protagonist, Jayson, is the son of a black drug-addict father and a white abusive, alcoholic mother. Jayson lives in the projects in Florida, but attends a private school in the suburbs paid for by his mother's friend Trina. Jayson, one of two black students at the school is isolated and miserable. He identifies as biracial and has a keen awareness of the fact that most of the world doesn't understand that and reads him as black. This awareness makes him project how he thinks other black youth perceive him:

> Probably thinks I'm a little *too* light. He's got that skeptical look. I see that look on the bus all the time. Out here, in the 'hood, they don't know biracial exists. All they know is

> that I'm a little too light to be black… and I don't speak Spanish neither. So they check off that "other" box in their head. 'Other' means you *ain't* a brutha. So you ain't down. (p. 21)

Jayson's experiences with both blacks and whites in having to explain his racial identity over and over again frustrate him to the point that he gives up, "And they always think whatever I am, it's not as good as what *they* are. I know I'll never belong, so now I don't even try" (p. 83). Since neither people nor environment offer an alternative way of thinking about his racial identity, Jayson's isolation is at once imposed and self-inflicted.

Jayson's self-hatred is rooted in knowledge that he was conceived by accident during a one-night stand. Contempt for his promiscuous mother who "loves the bruthas" (p.13) is evident and explicitly value-laden throughout the book. A series of traumatic events shape Jayson's downward spiral that leads to a suicide attempt. His mother physically and emotionally abuses him, and his father, who lives somewhere else, is unavailable because of his own drug addiction. Then Jayson learns that these people are not his biological parents after all. Trina is his biological mother and no one knows who his father was. Once again, interracial drug-induced one-night stands seem to be the norm, while healthy relationships are not. Stunned and disgusted, Jayson is on the brink of jumping off his building, but a text message from his girlfriend saves his life. He spends the next few days in a deep depression, barely cognizant of anything but a plan in his head to run away. A few days later he returns home to learn that his only friend was killed in a meth lab explosion. In the days that follow it dawns on Jayson that running away is not enough, only death can save him and he jumps from the seventh floor "knowing that in seconds the pain will be gone forever and I'll be free" (p. 168). He doesn't die, but is badly injured physically, and of course mentally. The rest of the book shows Jayson in various stages

of treatment and counseling. This tragedy brings Trina back into the picture and at the end we see Jayson going to live with her; alive, but still very much damaged. *The Death of Jayson Porter* reifies the image of the abject biracial, and resurrects the tragic mulatto figure with only the slimmest chance of leading a happy life.

Mexican WhiteBoy, Matt de la Peña (2008)

Mexican WhiteBoy is a classic Missing Half story. The protagonist, sixteen-year-old Danny Lopez is too brown for his hometown and too white for the *barrio*. He is deeply hurt by his father's departure and daydreams constantly about him, composing imaginary letters full of idealized father-son closeness. In response to the racism of his hometown and school, and anger at his mother who he blames for his father's absence, he stops speaking, nurses his depression and inflicts physical pain by digging his nails into his arm to remind himself that he is real (p. 41).

The story takes place over the summer when Danny chooses to live with his father's Mexican family in the *barrio,* rather than with his white mother and her boyfriend in San Francisco. Danny's discomfort with his mixed race identity is established right from the start of the novel. He hates the racism of his high school peers and his isolation in his hometown where the only other Latinos are undocumented landscapers. Being with his Mexican relatives, distancing himself from his white mother, Danny feels, brings him closer to his father, even though he feels like he doesn't entirely belong there either. Danny is sure that the failure of his parents' marriage was due to their being an interracial couple. In one imaginary letter to his father, he says he can relate:

> I know why you said that to me now….You were telling me you were going to Mexico. You were sick of living in a city with so many white people, with a white wife, with two kids who were half white. You wanted to be around more Mexicans. You're [sic] real family. But what I've wanted to tell you, Dad, is how much I've changed since that day. How much better I am. How much stronger and darker and more Mexican I am." (p. 28)

This sounds like wishful thinking because Danny is constantly self-conscious about his light skin and lack of Spanish. He doesn't 'feel' Mexican at all, but occasionally being left out of jokes is preferable to being the target of racism. In National City Danny is the focus of a different kind of attention, which he dislikes almost as much. Girls think he is attractive, while older relatives turn to him to explain unfamiliar English language concepts and put him on an intellectual pedestal that reminds him of his privilege and magnifies the gap between him and his Mexican family. In *Mexican WhiteBoy* straddling cultures means negotiating power and privilege as well as language and culture. The difficulty of this is made abundantly clear through Danny's self-image.

While the racism at his high school is real, Danny's isolation in National City is self-imposed. Gradually, he comes to realize this. His cousin, Sofia and her friends include him in their social life with all the teasing and ribbing that goes with the territory. Girls find him attractive while the boys admire his baseball skills. Danny is withdrawn and silent, but very much accepted: "Barely ever talking. Mexican as anybody else in the 'hood but dressed like some kind of skater dude" (p. 140). The unexpected friendship of another mixed race boy, Uno helps draw Danny out of his shell.

Uno is Mexican and African American, and like Danny, yearns for a relationship with his father who lives with a new family in another town. Uno's is a parallel Missing Half story that

seems to underscore the concept that identity is still guided by the law of hypodescent that determines an individual's racial identity according to the darker-skinned ancestry. Uno's absent father is African American, and though his community, his mother, stepfather and step-brother in the *barrio* are Mexican, his appearance marks him as black and he is set apart in his community because of it. His stepfather is abusive and cruel, and his mother's hatred of her ex-husband is loaded with racial slurs. Like Danny, Uno locates his loneliness in his mixed race identity and wishes he could distance himself from his mother and live with his father. Meanwhile, a mutually beneficial business arrangement between Uno and Danny enables a friendship that neither had before.

A more minor character is Danny's love interest: Liberty. Like Danny, she is a newcomer to National City, and light-skinned. She doesn't speak English, having recently arrived from Mexico. Danny learns that her father is white, living in the U.S., and that she managed to persuade him to send for her. She does not live with him though, as he has another family somewhere else. Danny notes all this with wonder "It's almost like she's his exact opposite" (p. 69). We learn little else about Liberty: her only function seems to be to be symbolic. She represents a different kind of mixed race person. During a moment together Danny realizes this, and the irony of it "Liberty's come to National City to be more American. And he's come to be more Mexican" (p. 187).

In their separate ways these three characters are seeking acceptance, belonging in places and with people with whom they currently have unreliable connections. Danny, Uno and Liberty feel alone and incomplete: their wholeness rests on uniting with their missing racial and cultural heritage. For most of the novel, mixed race identity is the source of unhappiness. We can understand this as a perpetuation of the master-narrative of the problem of interracial unions, or

as a critique of the ways accepted attitudes about race have no place for multiraciality and make people unhappy.

Danny's eyes are opened to the fact that more than skin color separates whites and Mexicans and that he has to own his privilege rather than reject it. As Danny grows surer of himself through baseball and his friends, he is less concerned about his mixed race identity being the cause of his unhappiness. This development is subtle, however and given the preponderance of the crisis in the beginning of the book, readers may not be entirely convinced that being mixed is not such a traumatic problem after all. In a clever sleight of hand the author provides three resolutions to the biracial identity issue. Danny's baseball skills will secure him a place in his white, privileged world, while culturally he feels more connected to his Mexican family; Liberty's limited English will restrict her access to the dominant culture while her Mexican upbringing assures her a place in National City; and Uno will leave and live with his African American family, and given his father's strong black identification, will likely do the same to the extent that he can.

Mexican WhiteBoy ends on a positive note with close friendships and budding romances providing assurance and security. Danny's identity struggle gradually fades away with the recognition that his cousins and family accept him for who he is, because of and not in spite of. He gradually realizes that his identity is separate from his father's and that he needs to let go of his romanticized image of his father. This realization happens in stages. Danny learns that his father was violent and beat his mother. This triggers a memory of being scared while his father got high on drugs. Later he learns that his father is not in Mexico after all, he is in jail for beating up a man on the beach. All this information comes as a rude awakening, but a necessary one that frees Danny from trying to emulate a man he does not even know. He now appreciates that he

has had the support and love of his family and friends all along and can say with confidence "I'm like *me*…I'm just myself. That's it" (p. 241).

Border Crossing, Jessica Lee Anderson (2009)

In this YA novel racially mixed identity is depicted as one of many sources of instability for the protagonist, Isaiah, nicknamed, Manz. He is the son of Delores (white) who gave birth to him when she was 16 years old, and Andres "Loco" Martinez (Mexican). Delores' father disowned her "not when he found out she was pregnant, but when he found out she was pregnant by a Mexican" (p. 4), so she ran away with Loco to try and start a life of their own. Manz is born into this poor and rootless family and isolation turns to trauma as Delores becomes an alcoholic, Loco's mental illness surfaces and he is killed, either in a car accident or suicide. Delores gives birth to another child, stillborn because of severe fetal alcohol syndrome. At age 16, when the novel begins, Manz is tormented by the death of his stillborn brother, the inexplicable death of his father, the possibility of a relationship with Vanessa Ortiz, and mysterious voices in his head that turn out to be early signs of schizophrenia.

Manz identifies as Mexican but others remind him that he is "only half Mexican" (p. 28), and his maternal grandmother calls him "the half-breed" (p. 28). The story is set in a small town in Texas where racial tensions run high. Manz's best friend, Jed, is white, as is Delores' boyfriend, Tom. Both are fond of making sexist, racist and homophobic jokes, which irritate Manz who reminds them that he is part Mexican and that their sisters and mothers are as likely to be offended. The homophobia is unchallenged. Other than in self-defense, Manz has no way to express his racial identity. When he meets Vanessa Ortiz, he is attracted not only to her beauty but also to her secure sense of Mexican identity. She symbolizes a connection with his father and

a part of himself that he lacks. As their friendship develops, *Border Crossing* takes on the trope of the Missing Half narrative in a most disturbing way. During a party at Vanessa's house Manz is surrounded by Mexican art, food, a bustling bilingual family – all of which are conspicuously absent in his own life – and he feels distinctly uncomfortable even while he yearns for it. A lecture by Vanessa's father about Operation Wetback and the repatriation of his family, even those who were citizens, triggers the paranoia and voices in Manz's head more insistently than they have ever been before. From that point his schizophrenic fears are around being identified as a Mexican and deported. He is terrified of being 'discovered' as if he had been living in hiding as a white boy all his life and it is only a matter of time before his crime is known, and the solution, he thinks, is in running away to Mexico where he can live in anonymity.

Manz's paranoia escalates and his life spirals into chaos even while it seems no one around him notices any change in him. A series of dramatic and near fatal events unfold, including one in which Manz drives his car into the river in an ominous echo of his father's accident. As a result Delores seems to recognize that Manz is suffering from paranoid schizophrenia the way Loco had. At the end Manz is receiving treatment in a mental institution and there are signs of recovery although he is still plagued by the voices. When his mother comes to visit him, she too seems to be more stable and it is hard not to associate her improvement with Manz's being out of the house. Manz's racial identity crisis, at first so explicitly depicted in association with is mental illness is never mentioned again. *Border Crossing* is a contemporary novel that raises the issue of mental illness (an important and valid reality) but it is problematic that schizophrenia had to be so closely linked with biracial identity. It almost serves as a testament to the racist scientific theories that promoted connections between mental illness and degeneracy and interracial breeding. If the author's intention had been to shed

light on the trauma of schizophrenia, she could have done so without conflating the 'problem' with mixed race identity. If her intention was to write about people who live in fear of border patrol round ups, she could have done so without a mentally ill protagonist. Nancy Reynolds reminds us that white authors seem inclined to create biracial characters because they don't want to create white ones, and the responsibility of authenticity in a character of color is too precarious. This certainly seems to be the unfortunate case in *Border Crossing*.

MRI/V in Historical Fiction

In/visibility in novels of historical fiction is more closely connected to hypodescent than it is in contemporary fiction. The books are set well before Loving vs. Virginia (1967), so the illegality of interracial relationships and the deep stigma of being mixed race weigh heavily on the characters. Readers are reminded of historical attitudes towards race issues and the impact on mixed race individuals. Characters are rejected by communities, and even by their own families, because of their racial identity: being mixed represents serious transgression of boundaries. Loneliness and isolation contribute to a steely resolve to forge ahead at all costs, usually alone or with one ally. Shame and self-hatred shape perceptions of self. The next section looks at how these themes are presented in 5 novels.

The Likes of Me, Randall Beth Platt (2000)

If a contemporary author can be accused of directly molding Everett Stonequist's Marginal Man theory into a novel, Platt has succeeded in *The Likes of Me*. This novel, one of only two historical fiction books representing Asian and white biracials is chilling in its

adherence to ideas about "the peculiarities the mixed blood presents [as] a special problem for the community: what is to be his place in the social organization?" (Stonequist, 1937, p. 10).

The novel is set in a lumber camp near Seattle in 1918. Cordelia (Cordy) Lu Hankins is the fourteen-year-old daughter of a white logger named Red Hankins, and a nameless Chinese woman who Red bought as an indentured servant and then married. As if to preclude the problem of having to represent a Chinese character, Platt conveniently disposes of her in a drowning accident before the novel takes place, when Cordy was seven. Furthermore, Red forbade the mother from teaching Cordy anything about her Chinese heritage, further freeing the author from responsibility of representing Chinese influence. Perhaps the context and interracial parentage were not enough to make Cordy a marginalized character, so Platt makes her albino as well. From the mouth of young Cordy, the reader learns this reason for her unusual appearance:

> I used to wonder if it was because my mother was yellow with black hair, and my father was white with red hair, that I came out albino - without any color at all, as though all the color in my family had been used up. My hair is white and much of my face looks Oriental. Except my eyes are … well, they look pink, but that's because they have no color… I've been called Pinkie, Chinkie, Whitey, Bunny, Rare Bit, and Pale Face. (p. 10)

This description is as matter-of-fact as the rest of this bizarre narrative. If Cordy is upset by the nicknames, we never see it. She grows up without the company of other children – "I seemed to repel them," (p. 31) – spending all her time in the woods. At one point she reflects that snakes are luckier than she is because they can shed their skin and "become someone new" (p. 31). Meanwhile her father has remarried, a giant of a woman nearly seven feet tall with no capacity to love a little mixed race albino child.

Having established Cordy as a social misfit with low-self esteem and hardly any chance at happiness, Platt introduces the enigmatic Squirl, a new hire at the lumber camp. Squirl is handsome and charming, and off-limits. Predictably, they meet. Squirl is fascinated by Cordy and she is flattered by his admiration: "You're so … strange, you're beautiful. Your eyes … they're dancing a jig. You're really amazing. You're almost ugly. But you're so beautiful" (p. 48). Cordy's father spots them frolicking in the woods and warns her to stay away from the "no good half-breed" (p. 68). Cordy takes the epithet personally and fires back with a rude retort of her own. The extreme reaction of her parents to her interaction with Squirl leads her to think she must be pregnant. Squirl has been fired, but she knows where to find him and she runs away to Seattle disguised as a widow.

Incredibly, Cordy finds Cousin Sally, Squirl's sister, who runs a brothel in the city. Sally takes Cordy in, disabuses her of the imaginary pregnancy, and gives her a place to stay. In the meantime she introduces Cordy to a Dr. Rideneour who runs what was known as a 'freak show'. Cordy resists becoming an exhibit at first, but it doesn't take long for her to be won over by Squirl's charms. She goes along with the performances and makes lots of money from in her role as "Cordelia - Daughter of the Orient, Mystic Child of the Ancients - who, by the power of her innocence and colorless eyes and the strength of her white hair, sees all, knows all and tells all" (p. 158).

Cordy makes friends with other members of the show: a dwarf, a transvestite and several of Sally's prostitutes. Events take dramatic twists and turns involving greed, murder and corruption. Ultimately the humanity of these social misfits trumps evil capitalism, the bad guys die or are punished and the good guys are free. At no time are readers invited to criticize the systems that marginalize and exploit people. In fact, the characters' complicity in exploiting

themselves reifies the idea that the 'problem' of mixed race (or other unconventional) identity is inevitable and located in the subject herself. Furthermore, the novel suggests that mixed race people can only find companionship with other marginalized people and can never live in larger society, a state Stonequist (1937) calls "a problem of incomplete social assimilation as well as of incomplete biological amalgamation" (p. 10). The attitudes of the early 20th century can be excused as part of the ideological context. The perpetuation of such derogatory notions by 21st century authors, editors and publishers cannot.

Adaline Falling Star, Mary Pope Osborne (2000)

In the imagination of Mary Pope Osborne, being born mixed-blood was a child's worst fate. This is made clear on the very first page, when, at Adaline's birth, wolves howl, falling stars race across the sky and Arapaho warriors "put on red paint and did a death dance" (p. v). Had it not been for the presence of her father, Kit Carson, Adaline would have been put to death by her Arapaho grandfather. Her heroic father brings in the white doctor to explain to the furious grandfather that the falling stars are not the fire arrows of angry gods, but can be explained by a "special knowledge called Science" (p. vi), and the baby is allowed to live. This is the first of many instances in which Native knowledge is corrected by wise white men.

In the Author's Note, Osborne writes that she had read that the explorer Kit Carson had married an Arapaho woman with whom he had a daughter named Adaline, described by a historian as being a "wild girl" (p. iii). Feeling that the girl had been misrepresented, Osborne took it upon herself to set the record straight. Admitting that hardly anything is known about the real Adaline and that this story is entirely fictional, Osborne distances herself from her own creation with these words: "Soon a fictional Adaline was born and she provoked this imagined

story" (p. iii). Reviewers describe the novel as being about self-discovery and realization of 'true' identity that sheds light on the racist attitudes towards American Indians at the time, but I found it hard to separate the racism of the white characters from the racist choices of the author.

The novel is told in the first person, inviting the reader to identify with Adaline. The story opens with her birth and then skips eleven years. Carson returns from an expedition one day to find Adaline guarding her mother's dying body from wolves surrounding the teepee while her grandfather beats his tom-toms in the distance. As in the birth scene, the Arapaho are depicted as ignorant and foolish while the white man comes to the rescue. Carson takes Adaline to St. Louis to leave her in the care of his cousin Silas. It is immediately apparent that he has never mentioned his Arapaho wife to his family, and their shock is apparent on their faces when they see Adaline. She too is horrified, but only momentarily, and rather than critique Carson for this negligence, the reader is guided to view him through Adaline, as absent-minded, preoccupied with important missions, aloof from social mores and expectations – and almost noble for it.

Adaline is forced to work as a servant at Silas' house. She decides to pretend she is mute in order to minimize interaction and because she fears her sassy talk will get her into trouble. Meanwhile she lingers in doorways, eavesdropping on conversations in which adults speak of "dirty Injuns", scalping, fleas, savages, and other racist fears. Osborne clearly intends to reveal the family's racist cruelty, but in imagining Adaline's responses she reinforces racist notions about American Indians. Adaline never speaks a word, nor does she show resistance in her behavior, and in this she comes off as a passive, powerless captive. Furthermore, when she can bear the taunting no more, she lets out "bloodcurdling whoops" (p. 17), leaps and chases, bares her teeth, snaps like a wolf, narrows her eyes and curls her lip, and dances "on the grass like a goat" (p. 48), and in a moment of intense grief, slashes her body with a knife and slices off her

hair. She has nightmares of a scalping she saw in the woods, and dreams of flying like a crow. These images combine to reinforce all possible stereotypes of 'savage Indians'. Since the narrative does not provide any other images of American Indians, readers might agree with Silas and his family in their belief that Adaline "has the devilish mixture of white and Indian blood … show her your Christian love. But always keep an eye out for her, because she is and always will be part savage" (p. 5).

Eventually, Adaline runs away, finds an abandoned canoe and makes her way down the Mississippi, determined to find her father. The story is replete with other stereotypical images including catching fish with sharpened tree branches and knowing how to navigate using the stars. Given that Adaline was eleven when she left her Arapaho village, it is unlikely that she would be as trained in survival skills as she is. Depictions of American Indians as inherently in tune with nature is a stereotypical trope that undermines sophisticated systems of teaching and learning that exist in native communities. Adaline imagines that the spirit of her mother is watching over her. In her memories of living with her Arapaho family, people are always dancing around fires to the beat of drums. This seems to be enough to keep her going.

In another familiar mixed race fiction trope, Adaline befriends a stray dog. He is described as an "ugly mongrel" (p. 81), no wonder he is alone. Heavy-handed parallels are drawn and before long girl and dog – "we two mongrels" (p. 116) – are inseparable. A few more adventures follow and Adaline escapes death when her father appears out of nowhere and rescues her. His abandonment is explained away with more heroism, and Adaline and the dog are assured of a happy life with him on a ranch in New Mexico. The novel ends with Adaline reflecting on her newfound happiness, resolved to spend her life talking about her mother and father, grandfather and dog, and all their adventures to anyone who will listen. Her alignment

with a mongrel enables self-confidence and pride, "we're a match; we're both mongrels … I love him for his mix and he loves me for mine" (p. 168), and so readers are left dubiously optimistic that mixed race people can find companionship with stray animals.

The Valley of the Moon: the Diary of Maria Rosalia de Milagros, Sherry Garland (2001)

Maria Rosalia de Milagros, Rosa, is the 13 year-old protagonist of this novel, written as a diary, and part of the *Dear America* series. Rosa is a servant in the home of a wealthy Mexican *ranchero* in the Sonoma Valley in 1845, when California was part of Mexico. The story she tells is one of historical events, friendship, family, traditions and customs, and for this study, a commentary on one manifestation of *mestizo* identity as represented in children's fiction.

The Author's Note at the end of the book establishes Garland's conscious intention to create a character who embodied the Spanish and Indian elements that came to be identified with Mexican identity in the way that is commonly celebrated as *mestizaje*. Garland describes Mexican culture as "one of contrast and compromise, one of both love and hatred for the Spanish conquerors and missionaries" (p. 216), thus setting herself an ambitious task of representing all of that in one character. But her intention seems to be at odds with what her story actually depicts. Far from reflecting this idealized cultural and racial blending, *Valley of the Moon* reflects a social reality that kept darker skinned people at the bottom, and lighter skinned people at the top of the social hierarchy. Rosa's *mestiza* heritage gives her access to some of the privileges of the people she serves, but her light brown skin and orphan status relegate her to the role of servant. A dramatic and far-fetched sequence of events at the end radically changes her life, but the facts remain.

Rosa understands but does not question her subservient position. She accepts that she cannot let anyone know that she is literate, "I must not let anyone see me writing, for I am a servant, a half-Indian orphan, a girl. I am supposed to know nothing but work and obedience" (p. 4). She does not connect the fact that she is a servant with the fact that she is half-Indian, and thinks it is more due to the bad luck of being an orphan, and so there is no reason for a reader to think otherwise either. After their Indian mother died of smallpox, a priest at a mission orphanage cared for Rosa and her younger brother. He taught Rosa to read and write. Eventually the overseer and his wife, the cook at the Medina ranch, adopted and raised the children as their own. Rosa claims it is "obvious that our father had been a white man" – a claim she bases on their skin color "the light brown of *mestizos*" (p. 5). The plot focuses on events in the lives of the Medina family, especially the three daughters who are close to Rosa in age. Their relationship is complicated by unclear boundaries: at times there is sisterly affection, but for the most part it is clear that Rosa's role is to serve them and the charade of closeness cannot withstand the pressure of class differences.

The social hierarchy is very evident in Rosa's diary entries. A few of the other servants are named and described and have small but significant roles in the story. Names, language, customs, appearance and occupation establish them as Mexican of Indian descent, though, as Rosa reflects, more Spanish than Indian in their daily lives and outlook. Class and color set further apart the white-skinned, Spanish-descended Medina family. Clear distinction is also made between the Spanish-speaking, darker-skinned Mexicans, and the non-Spanish speaking Indians. Rosa makes frequent mention of "Indian laborers" and it is clear that the Medina's wealth depends on their cheap (or free) labor. "Hostile Indians" (p. 16) who resisted conversion, assimilation and colonization, appear on the outskirts of the towns and represent yet another

difference in the population of the valley. Readers are not invited to understand their resistance to the settlers and the stereotype of the vicious Indian is maintained. As often happens with people and characters of mixed heritage, Rosa is prompted to think about her racial identity when her American friend Nelly, expresses surprise when Rosa tells her she is half-Indian. Nelly says she thought Rosa was Mexican (p. 20). Rosa's response reflects her naïveté:

> Her words got me to thinking. Just when did I stop being and Indian and start becoming a Mexican? Was it when I learned to speak Spanish? Or when I became a Christian and celebrated Christian holidays? Or when I dressed in Spanish clothes and ate Spanish foods? Did all those outer trappings change who I was on the inside? I couldn't figure it out myself, so I dropped the subject. (p. 20-21)

But the thoughts linger, and she begins to take note of the cultural and racial influences that surround her. Rosa is raised with Spanish Catholic traditions but wonders if her mother knew Indian ones. Although the people who raised her, Lupita and Gregorio, are Indian, they speak Spanish, not tribal languages like the Indians in Lupita's home village. A description of Lupita's people might be intended to point out the ravaging effect of colonialism, but is too stereotypical to be effective:

> We found Lupita's people at the small *racheria* that consisted of about a dozen huts made of sticks covered with tree bark and animal skins. … it [the hut] smelled of animal skins, smoke and dried herbs and roots … he [the shaman] chanted and shook a stick over the bag of medicine. … These miserable-looking people are all who are left of Lupita's once numerous nation. Most died of diseases. Others slaved at the missions or years until the missions closed down and they had no place to go. They dispersed to work on *ranchos* or returned to the hills to eke out a living in terrible poverty. (p. 70)

These are not the people with whom Rosa wants to or can identify. Rather than find her mother's people, she unravels the mystery of who her father was. Uncannily, it turns out that he was the younger brother of Señor Medina who married the daughter of an Indian shaman in a native ceremony and was subsequently shunned by his family. When Rosa tells Señor Medina this news he weeps for joy, begs forgiveness and welcomes Rosa and her brother into the house as family and everyone lives happily ever after.

Rosa's connection to the Medina family comes with land and wealth. Suddenly she is no longer curious about her heritage, content, it seems, to accept that her mother, like other Indians, was fated to die passively at the mercy of colonial invasion while her father was a noble and tragic figure who died of heartbreak when he lost his wife and children.

Riot, Walter Dean Myer's (2009)

For Claire Johnson, the protagonist of this screenplay *Riot,* the problem of mixed race identity is the catalyst for inner turmoil. The Draft Riots in 1863 prompt 16 year-old Claire to suddenly have to think about her racial identity. The daughter of an Irish mother and black father, Claire identifies as black, much to the surprise and disbelief of anyone who does not know her: there is nothing in her appearance to mark her as such. We might assume that her self-identification is due to the prevalence of the laws of hypodescent. Claire is passionate about her black identity and frequently 'outs' herself even when the situation does not require it. It is unclear what this means to Claire as there is nothing in the script other than her parents' skin colors to connect her to her Irish and black heritage. When Claire voices indignation against whites for racism, her mother is quick to comment that *she* is white too and does not want to be included with racists. Claire's father plays a minimal role in the story and avoids answering

questions about her racial identity. So it is not surprising that Claire's understanding of race is quite naïve. She seems to think that the end of slavery will bring an end to racial identity, declaring, "In two months, this war will be over. Then there won't be any more slavery and then it won't matter if any of us are white or black" (p. 13).

Negotiating her identity within the context of violence between Irish and African American people becomes Claire's focus. Whereas before the riots she might have announced her black heritage with relative safety, now it is dangerous and she encounters racism, apparently for the first time. People respond to her in disbelief and horror, and later with violence. The first time she reveals that she is half black; she is shocked by Maeve's reaction:

> You'd never know it! And you'd be a fool to let anyone in on it, wouldn't you? ... I'm not saying it's wrong to be a Colored. But I don't want to be one, and I don't like them. You're not really Colored no matter what your father is about. You're as white as me from the looks of you and you'd be a fool to be anything else. (p. 29)

Later Claire is defensive in claiming her black heritage when she asserts, "I look black to me, Mr. Farley. I know what I am and who I am and that's all that matters" (p. 57). 'Looking black' to herself falls flat as an assertion of connection to a rich and complicated history, yet skin color is still the focus of her racial understanding, even when completely misplaced. Claire starts to believe that people dislike her because of her skin color, forgetting that people who don't know her family read her as white.

As the violence escalates, Claire considers the reality of the situation in the privacy of her room. Her confusion now is more convincing than her defensive black pride earlier:

> Maybe it's me who should be out there trying to find myself. Trying to discover who I am instead of hiding behind this door wondering who will find me and wondering what

> they will call me…When they tell me that they are chasing black people in the street, I don't know what to feel. I am angry that anyone is being chased, but do I know what it means to be black? When that girl looked at me, it was with such contempt. A week ago she couldn't have hurt me. Now just the thought of her coming back fills me with terror. It's as if she has found who she is and can look right through me and know that I am lost. (p. 66)

Claire finds community in a gospel church. The energy from the music and warmth of the people provide a welcome that she has not felt before. Furthermore, this is a tangible connection, one that goes beyond skin color. Claire's ignorance is succinctly articulated, "she realizes that this is a side of black life she knows nothing about" (p. 119), and she vows to return. Having suddenly resolved her inner conflict, Claire returns home to announce her identity with confidence, "It's me looking at myself and finding a black woman where there was only a girl before" (p. 130). There is, however, nothing in the script to suggest that the African American church members welcome her as member of the black community; this seems to be a product of Claire's over-stimulated imagination. Claire imagined she was being recognized as black, perhaps misunderstanding a welcome that might have been extended to any visitor, and especially to a white visitor in that climate of tension. The trope of a phenotypically white multiracial finding community in a black church appears in several mixed race books.

Perhaps Claire never before had to consider that being mixed race meant more than having parents with different skin colors. Her naïveté suggests that the riots forced her to think about her racial identity for the first time. Perhaps her appearance and sheltered life enabled her to move among strangers as a white girl, and among friends as a black one. At most, the violence that all but destroyed the city, serves to alert this teenager that racism is part of life, and she

emerges only a little more aware than she was before the riots. Her ability to think only of what it all means for her is disturbingly self-centered. The only thing that has changed in her is that she is more 'visible' to herself as a person of color with much to learn about that aspect of her heritage.

Take Me With You, Carolyn Marsden (2010)

Take Me With You, is set in Naples, Italy, just after World War II. The mixed race character is Susana who lives in a home for unwanted girls. It is explained to her that she is part *nero*, her father likely being an American GI. She is the only dark skinned, dark haired girl in the home and Sunday visitors (potential parents) make it clear that they prefer the pretty blue-eyed blond girls like her friend Pina. Susana is acutely aware of this and of how her appearance sets her apart: "When the girls were being nice, they said she was the color of *cappuccino*. When they were mean, they said her skin was the color of unwashed brown potatoes" (p. 4). To make matters worse, Susana has never seen another *nero,* only read about them as cannibals in Robinson Crusoe (p. 6). Her self-hatred and loneliness run deep. She realizes that only dark-skinned parents will adopt someone like her and the likelihood of that happening is small:

> She wanted someone to love her for who she was. She wanted a parent to come looking for a dark child. Only a dark parent would want her. The people of Naples were browner than those of the north, but no Italian had skin as dark as hers. (p. 16)

Miraculously, Susana's father appears. He is indeed an African American soldier and she is shocked at how dark his skin is. They spend some time together while he is stationed in Naples and as Susana grows to like him, and looks for resemblance, is surprised to find she likes her own reflection for the very first time. She is also pleased to learn from him that her mother was

pretty, with olive skin and dark curly hair. This validation in appearance shared with both parents is more than Susana could have hoped for. Unfortunately, in keeping with the stereotype of interracial relationships, Susana is the result of a one-night stand. This might not be surprising given the context, but in conjunction with all the other accidental mixed race births in this body of literature, works to normalize the anomaly of long-term interracial relationships and inevitable abandonment of mixed race children.

At the end Susana's future is unclear. Her father shows her pictures of his parents and siblings, but not one word is said about him taking her home. It is implied that his work in the U.S. Navy will keep him in Naples for a while and that they will continue to develop their relationship, but nothing more. Given that America in the 1950s was a hostile place for African Americans and mixed race people, we might wonder how Susana would fare if he brought her home. Furthermore, how would his family react to him bringing home a 'mulatta' from a one-night stand? Ultimately *Take Me With You* attempts to give voice to the stories of girls in that state of abandonment – one of the many sad consequences of war. Being an orphan is terrible. For a mixed race orphan the odds are seriously stacked against future happiness.

MRB in Contemporary Realistic Fiction

In describing the experiences of biracial characters, I use the term 'blending' in a way similar to Sims Bishop's (1982) melting pot analogy. Drawing upon the concept that American experiences have become such a multicultural mish-mash that there is very little difference between populations, melting pot books "ignore all differences except physical ones: skin color and other racially related physical features" (p. 33). In these books the lives of African American children are depicted as no different from those of white children. Details in illustrations or

passing references indicate that the character is African American, but there are no distinguishing features or markers of experience.

Mixed race blended characters do not struggle with their racial identity, nor do they exhibit specific racial or cultural affiliations. Narratives may include brief descriptions of appearance or racial heritage if only to preclude readers assumptions that characters are mono-racial or white. The contexts in which protagonists functioned directly influence self-identification. Black-white biracial characters in predominantly black environments identify as African American. For the most part, the white element is a descriptive detail having no bearing on the identity of the character or the direction of the plot. *Stringz, After Tupac and D Foster* and *Cashay,* the three representative texts analyzed below demonstrate this trope. An African American and Korean biracial character in Sharon Flake's *Money Hungry* and *Begging For Change* also insists that she is black. Biracial characters in predominantly white settings tend to identify as biracial or align with non-white heritage, although identification does not go beyond skin color. Thus, mixed race identity is either inconsequential or tangential in these texts. Protagonists in the contemporary realistic fiction books are aware that they are mixed race and might be called upon to reveal or share this information with other characters, but usually only by way of explaining phenotype. Despite the relative insignificance of mixed race identity to the stories as a whole, more titles were classified as "mixed race" by the Library of Congress than were not. This section provides analyses of six contemporary realistic fiction MRB books.

Becoming Naomi León, Pam Muñoz Ryan (2004)

Becoming Naomi Leon was not identified by the Library of Congress as being about racially mixed people even though the protagonist clearly is – attesting, perhaps to the arbitrary

application of the label. Nevertheless, this novel is less heavy-handed or pedantic than many others, attempting to treat the complexity of racial identity with some subtlety.

The protagonist, Naomi Soledad Leon Outlaw lives with her great grandmother and younger brother in a trailer park in Southern California. She is an insightful, compassionate character whose biggest problem is dealing with bullies at school who make fun of her last name 'Outlaw'. She knows nothing of her birth parents other than that her father was a Mexican fisherman, "sweet and handsome… like one of those Latin singers you see in magazines" (p. 28). Naomi's white mother took the children away from their father, left them with her grandmother, and disappeared when Naomi was only 3 years old. Early in the book we are given this description of the two children:

> Gram had taken to calling me 'brown shaggy dog' because of my wild mop and my predisposition to brown-ness (eyes, hair and skin). I took after the Mexican side of the family, or so I'd been told, and even though Owen was my full-blooded brother, he took after the Oklahoma lot. He did have brown eyes like me, but with fair skin and blond hair in a bowl haircut that Gram called a Dutch boy. Due to my coloring, Owen called me the center of a peanut butter sandwich between two pieces of white bread, meaning him and Gram. (p. 11)

Seven years later, Naomi and Owen's mother shows up with a sketchy boyfriend and intentions of reuniting the family. It soon becomes clear that Skyla (the mother) and her boyfriend have ulterior financial motives for bringing the children to live with them, so Gram hitches the trailer to a truck and in the middle of the night they drive off to Oaxaca in search of Naomi's father, who they hope will give Gram permission to legally adopt the children. Predictably, being immersed in Mexican culture awakens questions about identity in Naomi.

Prior to their arrival in Mexico, Naomi was given to making lists of ideas, observations and worries, none of which pertained to her mixed race identity. However, once faced with the reality of Mexican family and connections, she turns to her notebook of lists to begin to make sense of her new world. She reads an entry written a few days into their journey, entitled "regular and everyday worries about Mexico" (p. 140). In a clever sleight of hand the author seems to directly address the reader with this preface: "this was based on everything I'd heard on the playground" (p. 140). In this moment the reader is invited to participate in questioning such playground talk. The list is full of stereotypical and negative images:

> Stories about college kids who went to Tijuana, got thrown in jail for absolutely no reason, and were ransomed back to their parents for thousands of dollars; reports about people who went camping on the beach and were murdered, warnings about drinking the water or eating the meat because it gave people horrible sicknesses; rumors that everyone peed on the side of the road so the whole country smelled. (pp. 140-141)

In stark and immediate contrast, Naomi then writes about what she really sees: images of natural, tropical beauty and friendly people. By placing these contrasting descriptions side by side, the author forces the reader to confront and hopefully replace stereotypical ideas about Mexico.

The rest of the story builds on this slightly exoticized representation of Oaxaca and its residents, and in this way *Becoming Naomi Leon* is very much in the vein of Muñoz Ryan's other books – giving life to Latin American/Latino experiences in the North American canon of multicultural children's literature. Fully aware of a predominantly Anglo readership, Muñoz Ryan's choice of a mixed race protagonist is significant. Because Naomi is part Mexican, she is only partially an outsider to this new environment. For readers outside the culture, now aligned

with Naomi through the first person narrative, any alienation around the literary experience of 'living' in Oaxaca is mitigated by the curiosity and humor with which Naomi learns about her Mexican heritage. Her familiarity and comfort with language, people, customs and daily life develop remarkably quickly. Naomi and her brother form strong bonds with relatives and neighbors who all help in the search for her father. In the process, the reader is invited to participate in all manner of linguistic and cultural moments described in intricate, yet plausible detail. This, it seems, is what the author wanted to write about, and creating a mixed race character who starts off as a 'regular American kid', thus establishing affinity with the mainstream reader before the transformation, was the way to do it. Needless to say, it is a happy ending with good characters being rewarded and the bad ones contrite and punished. Naomi's new awareness of her mixed race heritage involves a connection with her father, from whom it appears she inherited her artistic talent, and the addition of an extended Mexican family. Unlike in many children's books with mixed race characters, Naomi's story is not one of struggle, isolation, confusion or having to choose one heritage over another. Nor are there heavy-handed statements about accepting or erasing multiple racial identities. She concludes with a belief that like a beautiful carving, learning about one's identity is about patience and serendipity, "you must carve so that what is inside can become what it is meant to be. When you are finished, the magic will show itself for what it really is" (p. 220).

A Clear Spring, Barbara Sjoholm (2002)

A Clear Spring is a well-intentioned novel with lots of young-reader appeal that tries to encompass all manner of diversity in the most quotidian way. Eleven-year-old Willa Cather Lopez goes to spend the summer in Seattle with her lesbian aunts. Along with her cousins Tabby

and Phylis, she embarks on a mission to expose a nearby industry that is dumping chemicals in a stream. Meanwhile she is supposed to be dealing with her parents' recent divorce and the reason she is sent to Seattle in the first place is to connect with family. These connections are formed immediately and without effort because this is a family that is accepting of everyone and everything. The aunts are lesbians, Aunt Carmen is Panamanian, cousin Tabby is biracial with black and white parents, and wayward fathers (like Willa's) are an accepted entity.

The purpose of the book seems to be to depict an all-American family composed of Blacks, Whites, Latinos, straights, gays, carnivores and vegetarians, corporate employees and environmentalists, all living happily together. In blending so much diversity, *A Clear Spring* fulfills Sims Bishop's fear that such melting pot books "make a point of recognizing our universality" (p. 33) at the expense of real cultural differences, casting a somewhat generic tone to the characters. Willa and Tammy's mixed race identity is commented on when both of them bond over the shared experience of having other people question their identity:

> Sometimes people asked her why her name was Lopez since she didn't look Latina. Willa's hair was brown and straight, and her eyes were blue like her mother's. Tabby didn't look Latina either. She looked African American. But the two of them were partly Latina. Half! (p. 102)

Beyond this there are no culturally specific references. Aunt Carmen says only one word in Spanish, and nobody knows anything about Panama other than that there is a canal there. At one point, in an effort to teach the girls about their Panamanian heritage, Aunt Ceci pulls out a family photo album and shares stories too complicated and irrelevant for either characters or readers to follow. The upshot is that the entire family is now completely assimilated and happy and immigrant relatives are distant memories: dead or dissociated. Like other MRB books, *A*

Clear Spring is spared some of the effects of negative stereotypes that live in so many MRI/V and even MRA books and as such presents the possibility of a happy, healthy multicultural and non-heteronormative American family that all readers will benefit from reading about.

Hiroshima Dreams, Kelly Easton (2007)

In this subtle and lyrical contemporary novel, readers get to know Lin O'Neil as she changes from a shy five year old to a thoughtful, observant teenager. This is a gentle *bildungsroman* that does not need calamity to spur self-realization. Instead, Lin's journey from child to teen is guided by the wisdom and patience of her grandmother. Issues of race and culture are depicted as part of many elements of the family's life, neither more nor less important than school, work, or relationships. Lin's mother, Mayumi's marriage to an Irish-American man is posited as an act of rebellion and escape from her life in Japan, and the cause of friction between her and her mother, Obaachan. The novel begins with Obaachan's arrival from Japan and the adjustment for her and the rest of the family as she settles in for what we know is the last chapter of her life.

At age 5, Lin is small, shy and thoughtful. She feels different from her peers because she has no interest in trying to fit in or be conventional. At school she notices the other children who, like her, prefer to be alone, or children who seem to be hiding pain. Lin is not lonely or unhappy except when she is called on to speak in front of everyone. Her teacher understands and does not push her. Through Lin's observations we see that her passive behavior belies a very active mind, and she is to be admired rather than pitied. Being mixed race does not factor into her developing sense of self at this point. It is not even mentioned. Perhaps this is because Mayumi seems to have made an effort to distance herself and her family from anything Japanese. Obaachan's

presence changes this, and the family members respond differently to her. Mayumi is irritated when her mother speaks to her in Japanese or prompts her to remember people, places and traditions she has blocked out. This is a familiar trope among the stories of immigrants who feel that in order to make a new life in a new place one must erase and avoid the past: "'I don't remember much about the past.' Mom says it like an accusation. 'I tend to focus on the future'" (p. 23). Her husband is kind and welcoming, eager to smooth the tension between his wife and her mother. Pre-teen Sally is embarrassed by everyone in her family, and a little more so by her foreign grandmother. Obaachan and Lin are drawn to each other through their appreciation of silence, nature and riddles. They form a special bond when it is clear that they share the gift of seeing into the future. Far from being magical or mystical, their visionary abilities are the result of cultivated meditation and mindfulness. Obaachan tells Lin that it is her strength that she is different "you will always swim in your own direction" (p. 47). While Sally and Mayumi push Lin to fit in, her father and grandmother accept and appreciate her the way she is. Their patience enables her to find her voice and speak up when necessary, especially when she senses pain or injustice.

As she grows up, Lin is more aware of herself in relation to her peers. She thinks she is invisible (p. 44) though there is nothing to suggest that it is because she is mixed that she feels apart from the other children. In fact, her sister Sally is outgoing and popular and her biracial identity is not an issue for her or anyone else. At one point Lin equates her shyness with the Japanese part of her heritage: "I try to picture myself with curly red hair and blue eyes. If I looked like that, I would not be me. I would be a girl who talks loudly, like my dad does, whose eyes laugh, like his, who everyone likes" (p. 53). But then she remembers that her sister's appearance is more Japanese and her personality is outgoing and bold. This juxtaposition feels

like an interruption of a stereotype, and it is effective in reminding readers not to ascribe Lin's personality to her racial identity.

Time passes and Obaachan is diagnosed with cancer. Lin has learned that she was in Hiroshima when the bomb was dropped, and there is a strong suggestion that the cancer was connected to the radiation. Meanwhile, the years they spent together taught Lin to cultivate her qualities of mindfulness and observation. She has a small, racially diverse group of friends, all of whom would be considered 'misfits' by conventional standards of the rest of their peer group. They are smart and compassionate – in strong contrast to Sally and some of her wayward peers. Obaachan's role in Lin's development is clear; less obvious but just as significant is her role in strengthening Mayumi and Dad's relationship. Mayumi sees her husband's respect and love for her mother and the wisdom of her experiences, and she is less wary of her own Japanese identity as a result. At one point the author allows him to make an endearing joke about theirs being a family of interracial harmony. It is a brief but powerful moment that even Sally can appreciate. The subtlety with which mixed race identity is handled in *Hiroshima Dreams* places it in the Mixed Race Blending category. But that very subtlety could just as easily fit it with the Mixed Race Awareness books. Ultimately it is hard to determine how different the story or characters would have been if Lin's father had not been white. Given that he is, however, and that he is a positive and credible secondary character, it is refreshing to see a happy interracial family represented in this corpus of books.

After Tupac and D Foster, Jacqueline Woodson (2008)

The idea of claiming a racial identity that fits best depending on context is reflected in *After Tupac and D Foster*. D is a foster child who forms a close friendship with two African

American girls, Neeka, and the unnamed narrator, when she appears on their block in Brooklyn. Her light skin and green eyes arouse curiosity that she hates and fends off with a snappy "I'm half black and half your mama!" (p. 13). For most of the novel, D's racial identity is insignificant. She seems to identify as black and connects with the other girls through shared historical and cultural references. Mostly they relate to each other over the music of rapper Tupac Shakur. The story is centered on family, friendship and music and is narrated in retrospect after Tupac's death and D's departure as Neeka and the narrator wonder about the meaning of such short and intense relationships. D is an enigmatic character who shares very little about her life with her friends, though it is clear that she has experienced sadness and loss. D roams around New York City with a freedom that the girls envy. She 'blends' in and out of foster homes and neighborhoods and seems to have a transient quality about her for which her racially indeterminate appearance is well suited. Her arrival brings the outside world to the tightly protected lives of the other two who are not allowed to leave their block. In order to strike an immediate rapport with the girls, yet be inaccessible, her character had to be set apart somehow, and in this being mixed race serves that purpose. We don't know for sure that she is mixed, until the end, when her white mother comes to take her away. No one is more shocked than Neeka and the narrator.

When D reveals that her name is Desiree Johnson, not D Foster, and that her mother is white, the bonds are too strong to be broken by news that could establish her as too different to belong to the community of friends and families. The girls are stunned in their realization that they never really knew their friend, and D's mysteriousness is amplified by her whiteness, and her access to experiences far removed from their block in Queens. Subsequent to this 'discovery' the narrator cannot help but think of D in terms of her biracial heritage. She refers to her "green

eyes that were her white mama's green eyes" (p. 131) and recalls how when they first met her, she and Neeka were struck by her appearance:

> She was tall and skinny and looked like she thought she was cute with her green eyes and pretty sort of half way of smiling at us. Her hair was in a bunch of braids … were long, coming down over her shoulders and across her back…and her hair was this strange dark coppery color I'd never seen on a black girl - not *naturally*… She had on white-girl clogs like you saw on the girls on TV…Everything about her was screaming *I'm not from around this way*. (p. 24)

Unlike other mixed race novels in which characters struggle to fit in with one or both their racial groups, *After Tupac and D Foster* does not locate D's isolation in her racial identity. Instead, it is because she is the product of a heartless foster care system and a mother who cannot take care of her. Her yearning to belong is not to a particular racial or cultural group, but to a caring family. Unfortunately, given the disproportionately high number of children's and YA novels in which biracial characters are orphans or fatherless, *After Tupac and D Foster* also subscribes to that paradigm.

Cashay, Margaret McMullen (2009)

Cashay is identified by the Library of Congress as being about racially mixed people. None of the reviews mention mixed race identity, which is not surprising because the protagonist, Cashay, is preoccupied with much more pressing worries than her racial identity. Yet in moments of self-reflection, she does consider how her life has and will be shaped by the racialized society in which she lives. The novel is set in Chicago, in the Cabrini Green housing projects. Cashay is the fourteen-year-old narrator/protagonist whose life turns completely upside

down when her sister is killed by a stray bullet during a gang shooting. Overcome by grief, her mother resumes a drug habit, her father, a "light brown man with a little head" (p. 42) is nothing but a vague memory, and Cashay is left to fend for herself. Her sister was her best and only friend, and in her absence Cashay begins to fall apart. Although she is incredibly bright, she deliberately failed a class so that she would be able to remain in elementary school another year and graduate with her sister instead of a year ahead of her. Frustrated and/or caring teachers refer her to a counselor who signs her up for an afterschool program where she meets a volunteer named Allison, who becomes her buoy.

Told in first person, this story is prevented from falling into the 'rich white lady saves ghetto kid' motif by the complex dynamic between Cashay and Allison marked by an absence of hierarchy and their mutual need for what the other can provide. Instrumental in maintaining this dynamic are the dry wit, intelligence and complete absence of self-pity of the narrator who is drawn to Allison because she is brittle, businesslike and a little aloof. Cashay is acutely aware of racial and class dynamics and comments on them all the time in her observations of people and politics in the city. There are subtle references to the fact that being smart has set her apart from her peers. She also expresses disdain for their rough and rowdy behavior, preoccupation with appearance and proclivity towards gangster life. Even before her sister was killed, Cashay knew she was different in that she imagined a different life for the two of them: where she saw her peers caught up with gangs and unplanned pregnancies, she believed there was an alternative for them. Perhaps she adds being mixed race to the ways she is different. Rather than identifying as black, she says, "I'm not black and I'm not white either. I'm some shade of colored my mama calls *café au lait* …" (p. 4). This reference is given more as a description of her appearance than an element of her identity, but it might be read as a suggestion that she doesn't align herself with

the ‘monoracial’ African Americans around her of whom she is skeptical. She makes other references to race as she gets to know Allison better and reflects on discrepancies in their lives, which she attributes to their racial positions:

> I look at this lady, this Allison with her legs and her nails and her smile and her cell phone. *If I were white, all white, really white* [emphasis added] with blue eyes and hair the color they call corn silk, then maybe I could make something of myself. Maybe I’d be pretty, get a good job answering phones, wear skirts, and drink coffee from a white cup with a saucer after lunches in sit-down, tablecloth restaurants with the rest of my white girlfriends. We’d laugh and talk about our biggest problems—lipstick colors, boys, where to eat next—and we wouldn’t ever worry about money, bullets, drugs, or our mamas. (p. 62)

In this moment Cashay seems to believe that being *part black* has kept her from a life of affluence and ease. It is an intriguing comment on her perception of her racial self but is not developed further in the novel. If not being *all white, really white* is a factor in her social position, she does not dwell on it. Instead she absorbs everything Allison has to teach her about economics, which she understands on several complex levels. Cashay begins to think of life in the rhetoric of economics. She feels the power of this growing knowledge and the possibilities inherent in using it to move on. In the end she goes to live with her aunt, works at a burger joint, gets accepted into a good high school and all signs point towards a hopeful future. In a final comment about herself to Allison, Cashay says “ ‘I’m not black and I’m not white. I’m brownish.’ ‘You’re gold.’ Allison says this like it’s a fact, not like she’s trying to be nice.” (p. 78). Allison’s validation is sincere and respectful. A few more events result in her sister’s killer

being arrested, and with her aunt's support and Allison's friendship, Cashay is satisfactorily on the mend.

Stringz, Michael Wenberg (2010)

Music, friendship and family are the dominant thematic elements in this novel. Fourteen-year-old Jace is a talented cello player with a spunky attitude and a sad heart. He is the son of an African American mother and an Irish American father who left before Jace was born. This recurring single-family motif is slightly different in that for once it is the white parent who has left. Nevertheless it adds to the trope of impossible interracial families. Jace's mother is a very minor character and all we know is that she moves constantly: for jobs and/or boyfriends. She is emotionally unavailable to Jace, which adds to his loneliness. Mixed race identity has no significant function in *Stringz*. Jace identifies as black, and others read him as black. He has a realistic understanding of how the world perceives black youth and knows that fear and ignorance enable certain reactions: white people move away from him on a bus, and before she gets to know him, his aunt warns him about bringing drugs and girls into her home. A racist teacher makes a comment that targets his being black, not mixed. Jace has strong connections to black heritage through his love for music and is inspired by hip-hop, jazz, blues and classical artists.

In an email exchange with the author, I learned that making Jace biracial was a marketing decision by the publishers with which Wenberg did not entirely agree but was unable to change (M. Wenberg, personal communication, May 16, 2011). Nevertheless, *Stringz* has the LC classification heading and comes up in many searches for books with mixed race content. Perhaps one way to understand this aspect of the book is that it is an example of how sometimes

mixed race people identify monoracially, especially when appearance is a strong marker and the absence of family of the other racial group make it 'easier' or more logical to identify with those who are present than those who are not. *Stringz* is entertaining and well crafted with a credible plot and interesting cast of characters. Jace is lonely, but also resourceful, witty, talented and compassionate. Should a young biracial reader pick up on the mixed race detail, he or she will be pleased to align with this positive character.

MRB in Historical Fiction

In Mixed Race Blending novels of historical fiction, mixed race identity is characterized in three ways: 1) Characters know that they are mixed and that laws of hypodescent require that they identify as black, 2) Characters choose to pass as white in order to survive, 3) Characters who think they are white suddenly learn that they have black heritage. In novels of historical fiction, the theme of passing for white in order to survive, and discovering black ancestry by surprise came up with equal frequency.

Say You Are My Sister, Laurel Brady (2000)

This novel puts an interesting twist on the themes of passing and 'discovering' mixed race heritage. The novel is set in a small town in Georgia in 1944. The narrator, 12-year-old Ramona (Mony) Louise Keddrington lives with her older half-sister, Georgie, baby sister Keely Faye, and initially, their father. The novel opens with Mony's description of the tornado that ripped through their town and flattened the church, killing their mother. On his own, the father can barely take care of the children and the farm and almost succumbs to his grief until the wealthy wife of the local banker offers (threatens) to take Keely Faye and raise her as her own.

The prospect of his family being splintered even more shakes him out of his slump and with home, farm and child care responsibilities delegated to Georgie and Mony, they start to recover. Mony forces her father to share stories of her ancestors that eventually teach her some valuable lessons about family, race, and biology. Then a rampaging bull kills him. The girls continue to survive one catastrophe after another with the final one being the revelation that Georgie is part black and the implications this can have for them living among racists.

In this novel, it is not the protagonist, but a secondary character who is multiracial. The Library of Congress does not label the book as such: I found it in a search of the Children's Literature Comprehensive Database (CLCD) and it also appears in a search on the Horn Book Guide Online. Since I was focusing on mixed race identity and knew from the Horn Book review that Georgie's mixed race identity was to come as a surprise to the narrator, I was looking for clues as I read. Several common clues presented themselves.

Among the many intricate ways scientists, anthropologists and other researchers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries tried to establish a biological determination of race was to measure, describe and catalog physical features. (Samuel Morton's craniometrical studies are well known efforts to use cranium size to create a racial hierarchy with whites on top.) Also common were descriptions of dark outlines around irises and thickness and/or curliness of hair. These two particular 'traits' recur frequently in descriptions of mixed race subjects. The majority of black-white mixed race literature that I read made some reference to hair and/or eyes. Given that I was familiar with the trope, I recognized it as foreshadowing in those novels in which mixed race identity was 'revealed' to the reader. So the surprise was spoiled for me when I read this description on the third page of *Say You Are My Sister:*

> Me and Georgie, we was half sisters, but you couldn't told we was related at all. Georgie's got these big, soft eyes that, once you've seen 'm, you could not forget. Dark and mysterious, folks say she is. Like a gypsy or some kind of foreigner. The sight of her thick and curly hair stops boys dead in their tracks. (p. 3)

Halfway through the book Mony and the reader learn that Georgie is part black (her mother was half black, half white). The town doctor knows too, and at his insistence, Georgie's identity becomes a shared secret between him and Mony. Dr. Fellowes explains the danger of the townspeople's reactions if it got out, but Mony argues that people who know and like Georgie would never hurt her. Fellowes reminds her of the barber who was thrown out of his own window for allowing a colored man into his shop. Mony's insistent denial is consistent with the fact of her being young and white and never having to think about race. Of all the hardships that have befallen the family, this one is the hardest for her to contemplate. Mony is shaken from a 'this could never happen to me' attitude and forced to realize the far-reaching effects of racism. It is from this point that the reader, through Mony, views Georgie through a racial lens, as someone who is passing, unknowingly.

Georgie, Mony and the baby live alone and fend for themselves against bitter odds. They are penniless and starving, and have to prove to the authorities that Georgie is a fit guardian. Their biggest fear is that they will be separated. The racism of some powerful people in town has already been established so it is clear that if word gets out that Georgie is colored (as per Jim Crow), that fear would surely be realized. At this point the complexity of the one-drop rule and its effects on families is painfully evident: for all intents and purposes Georgie has lived as a white girl, part of a white family. Public knowledge of her black ancestry could ruin her life.

Georgie is a strong, creative, responsible sixteen-year-old with the maturity and resolve to take on the role of both parents in caring for her sisters. That she is passing for white is nothing more than a factor of her innocence/ignorance. She dreams of going to Europe to become a fashion designer and when the impossibility of this is precluded by her new role as caretaker, she determines to put her dress-making skills to use by buying the shop and serving the wealthy women of the town. There is mutual respect and a lot of affection between the sisters. Eventually the strain of their life and having to keep the secret from her sister is too much for Mony and in an impassioned outburst, tells Georgie that they are not biologically related and that her mother was "half a Negro" (p. 189). The shock is Mony's when Georgie replies that she knew, and had known for years.

In its last twenty pages the story starts to crumble. Georgie has known about her biological parents since she was very young (4-5 years old). She knew that her white father was murdered for marrying a colored woman. Though she lived secure in the love and protection of her adoptive parents, she also knew first hand, the sting of racism. The young man she loved proposed to her, and in the interest of full disclosure, she told him about her racial heritage. His response was one of disgust, and he spit in her face. She also witnessed racism in the town towards blacks and their white allies. So it seems somewhat incredible then, that her outrage is directed at the doctor for "stealing" (p. 196) her opportunity to be open about her identity. She is surrounded by heinous racism and she knows full well that it would ruin her family if the town knew her secret, so her determination to be honest feels shaky even if it is admirable. She tells Mony,

> When Adam took off, I was glad. I wanted folks to know the reason. Wanted folks to see how foolish all this was. I wanted to be proud of who I was, wanted people to see it

didn't make no difference. I may be part colored, but I'm still Georgie, still can run a dress shop, still can make up dresses fit for queens. I could have faced them all, like Pa did at the barbershop. I wanted to. I was ready to, finally, after what Adam did. (p. 196)

Georgie's idealism here is uncharacteristic and feels anachronistic in the way she is citing a modern kind of mixed race identity unlikely to have been part of the discourse of the Jim Crow South. By this point in the novel, enough has been established about the town to ensure that Georgie would not have been accepted.

Since this is Mony's story, it is she who is transformed by the events in their family. She has learned many hard lessons about human nature and power, but with the love of her dead parents and living sisters, she can face any challenge. She learns how being white can literally save your life in a town like theirs. She now regards her sister "as something more than what I always thought she was" (p. 206). Couched in this positive language, we can appreciate Ramona's perception of her sister as "more" rather than less or half. In this aspect *Say You Are My Sister* is similar to Sims Bishop's social conscience books in which white children learn about acceptance and tolerance via a black catalyst. Georgie has passed for 16 years and can continue to do so, if she chooses, but she and Mony now live in fear of this secret being discovered. The racist context in which they live strips them of any agency and renders them helpless in the face of it. The Keddrington family is a microcosm in which values are based on humanity and love, not biology, social conventions, religion or law. Mony's momentary regard of Georgie as being vastly different, with the blood "of another whole people" (p. 125) rather than part of *her* family is replaced by the reminder that she had other ancestors who were not biologically related to her either. Thus, she realized family does not have to be constrained by

biology. Readers might recall that her father tried to instill this point but it was only when it really hit home that it made sense.

Say You Are My Sister could be an MRI/V book in that Georgie's mixed race identity is a problem that complicates other matters. But ultimately it is better suited in the MRB category because Georgie herself is unfazed by the ramifications of being mixed in Jim Crow Georgia, and will 'blend' into her newly-public identity with pride. It is unclear, however, how she plans to do this. Love trumps all else in their little home, but outside is a different reality. At the end, when all the secrets and lies are cleared up, Georgie expresses her guilt at having lived a lie, and while she and Mony resolve to "change the world, one barber shop at a time" (p. 205), we are given the impression that Georgie does not intend to be too public about her identity:

> 'It isn't fair: I went to a white folks' school. I can sit wherever I want on a bus or the trolley. I can buy my lunch at the white's only place. And when I die, my picture will be in the front part of the newspaper, not the back where the colored folks are. It isn't right. It isn't fair.' (204)

Her indignation is sincere even though it reveals her intention to continue to pass.

Black Angels, Rita Murphy (2001)

In this book also, the 'discovery' of black ancestry for a protagonist who thought she was white places it in the MRB category. The novel seems to hinge on one central question: What does it mean for a young girl who thinks she is white to suddenly learn that she has a black grandmother, which would, according to the law of the times, make her black too? Celli Jenkins, the protagonist of Rita Murphy's *Black Angels* is not immediately recognizable as a mixed race character. She presents as white and her life is marked by the privileges of whiteness in the stark

ways that characterized the social context in Georgia in the early 1960s. Half way through the book Celli meets her African American grandmother and learns that her father was mixed. She has a mini-crisis about it, and then throws herself into heroic efforts to help the black residents in town when a riot breaks out upon the arrival of the Freedom Riders. In effect, the story suggests that a white girl can only really care about racism towards blacks when it affects her personally.

In *Black Angels* it seems necessary for protagonist and reader to be prepared for the information about Celli's racial identity. In other words, although she thinks of herself and lives as a white girl, she is different from her peers. Celli calls herself "a freak of nature" (p. 15) because she is the only girl on the paternal side of her family. Her closest friend is the housekeeper, Sophie, and the angels in her garden, "three naked black girls with creamy white wings" (p. 1). She is lonely for the father she never knew and spends most of her time alone. Celli and her brother often go to church with Sophie and afterwards play with their black, secret, "Sunday friends" (p. 13). Celli is aware of the fact that her love for Sophie and occasional friendships with black children would not be approved of by people in her white world. She thinks of herself as different, as non-racist. In this way perhaps the news of being mixed race will only add to the ways she is set apart already.

The novel focuses on the racial tension that is building in anticipation of the arrival of the Freedom Riders. The town of Mystic is described as fairly typical for a small town in the Jim Crow south. For most of the novel Celli does not care a bit about the growing excitement. She is bored when Sophie takes her to church to listen to speeches and resentful that Sophie is more caught up in the movement than in spending time with her. The point of the story is that Celli has to grow out of this self-centeredness and start to care about the world in which she lives.

As the focal point of the novel, Celli's mixed race subjectivity is handled rather clumsily. She meets her African American grandmother half way through the story, and everything builds to this moment. The first half of the novel is laden with problematic language and images. Told in first person, Celli's description of Sophie is replete with degrading stereotypes. Very much a traditional 'mammy' figure, Sophie is described as large, "sassy", "shiny" (p. 15), smelling of food and unrelentingly loyal to her white family, in Celli's words:

> ... a big, black, bossy woman with sturdy arms that could wrap around me twice. A woman who will wipe the dirt from my face with her own spit, scold me for forgetting my manners and then gather me in her lap and sing me gospel songs until I fall asleep. (p. 14)

Giving the author the benefit of the doubt, this problematic description might be read as being in keeping with the character who later has to confront her own racism. References to Celli's dark and wavy hair and her brother's frizzy hair are now-familiar clues of hidden mixed race identity. Several references to Ellery's frizzy hair dot the narrative – giving it undue significance – and when Celli learns that their father was half black, the boy's hair suddenly makes sense to her. It is an ineffective epiphany. Other comments about appearance feel like authorial afterthoughts: "I'm lucky. Mama says I have enough pigment in my skin so I'll probably never burn" (p. 56), and an odd remark for a mother to make to her children about why she fell in love with their father, because "he had a fine set of lips" (p. 20) feels like an awkward attempt at foreshadowing.

As if to prolong and prepare for the news Celli is to receive upon meeting her grandmother, we are given a long description of a young man named Fergus who greets Celli as she waits for Pearl at the hotel. Fergus is half black and half (white) Jewish. His mother worked as a maid for a wealthy family whose son "took a liking" (p. 66) to her. According to Sophie

Fergus represents an unforgivable transgression for the racists and some blacks in Mystic "hard enough being of mixed blood and mixed faith without being illegitimate on top of it" (p. 66). (It is hard to ignore that "took a liking" is a euphemism that dismisses the sexual abuse suffered by countless black domestic workers in white homes. To put the words in the mouth of a black character is even more problematic). Fortunately, Fergus' good looks and sweet nature endear him to both black and white women who love to spoil him while he does their chores. Celli is acutely aware (through Sophie) of the fact that Fergus is most threatening to white men specifically because he is mixed. Fergus is a minor character with a small but significant role later on, but his purpose seems primarily to get Celli thinking about mixed race identity. A few moments later she meets Pearl and learns that she is "no longer vanilla" (p. 69).

Celli is physically ill at the discovery. She throws up in the bathroom, sickened at what it means to have her "world turned upside down" (p. 70). Her reaction is believable. She thought that loving Sophie, attending her church and being friends with Rosa and Tilly marked her as non-racist. Yet she is surrounded by racism of the deepest kind so how can she have escaped internalizing it? In this emotional moment what seems to hit the hardest is the fact of her grandmother sitting on back porch of the hotel, in the part reserved for African Americans "like she doesn't matter. Like I don't matter. Like neither of us is good enough" (p. 70). The systemic devaluing of African Americans becomes clearer to Celli in this moment than ever before (even as she described racism, the segregated town, diner, church). It pertains to her and that's why it suddenly matters.

As the knowledge of her ancestry sinks in, Celli is gripped by the fear of how her life will change if word gets out. Suddenly the racism of her environment, the reality lived by Sophie and the other black residents of Mystic means something because she might have to live it too. Celli

even wonders, with dread, if the warmth and welcome she experienced at the church was because people there somehow knew "and (think) I'm just like them now. But I don't want to be like them, I want to be me. Like I've always been" (p. 79). Given the context in which she was raised, this is a believable reaction, as it reveals her own prejudice and confusion. It is interesting that like Claire in *Riot,* and Eve in *Last Dance on Holladay Street*, Celli is moved by some inner conviction that the black church members welcome her as one of their own. The frequent recurrence of this motif in this group of books is uncanny and seems to echo the ignorant assumption that people from minority populations have radar with which to identify each other. Her next reaction is one of denial. Celli decides that the activism around civil rights has nothing to do with her, and that is more important to uphold her identity as a white girl,

> I've decided it's not my battle. Just because Pearl may be my grandmother doesn't mean I have to be part of this. There is no need for me to get involved with any Freedom Riders. Sophie can go off and get herself in trouble if she wants to, but I don't have to stand around and watch. My skin is white and that's all that matters in Mystic. I can just go on living like I've always done and no one will ever find out about Daddy. (p. 89)

Again, this is a believable reaction in that she has been given to think this way by everything and everyone around her. But she can't stay away and follows Sophie to the rally in front of the courthouse and later finds herself involved in helping Fergus escape a racist mob that thinks he is a symbol of everything that is wrong in Mystic.

Celli's bike ride to the church to get help for Fergus can be read metaphorically. The irony of her situation becomes clear and helps her in the upcoming reconciliation about her identity. While on the east side of town, the white side, she is terrified of being seen by the racists she knows live there. Once she crosses the geographical divide, her relief is tangible:

> Every muscle in my body relaxes. There is no one on this side of town who would hurt me. I've never thought of it like that before, but it's true. On the east side there are plenty of folks ready to do you harm if you think different than they do, but not here. It strikes me funny all of a sudden that Katie Blanchard is afraid of walking down Sophie's road at night 'cause she thinks she'll turn black and I can hardly wait to get there. (p. 113)

This sudden switch in racial allegiances is a bit romanticized. Celli assumes that if known, her mixed race heritage will automatically grant her a place in the black community. This realization brings some peace to her inner turmoil and she shifts her attention to the idea that what she is really afraid of is losing the people she loves, like she lost her father. A little later Pearl explains that the reason for Celli's father's disappearance is that he was never at ease with himself as a mixed race person:

> He passed for white, but he knew he was also black and that was too much for him to bear at times, so he did some drinking to forget his pain… he's still running from the pain…it would be better if he could turn around and face it, feel that pain through and through and be free from it instead of letting it eat him up inside. (p. 126)

These words may be intended to ease Celli's anxiety and curiosity about him, but they also play into the familiar narrative of the abject and socially maladjusted mixed race subject. Celli feels she can relate to him, having been lonely before and lonelier now that she is *truly* different.

At the end, Celli and Ellery's new knowledge of their father's identity, and their own, seems insignificant. Celli's angels vanish since she no longer needs them. There is nothing to suggest that Pearl will figure any more prominently than as the sender of letters from Cleveland. Fergus is safe, living with Pearl in the supposedly racially accepting north and life seems to go back to normal in Mystic but for an undercurrent of racial tension. Celli's understanding of the

racial dynamics in the town are a little altered and she is understands Sophie's desire to be an agent of change rather than a bystander. She admits that she "feels different on the inside" (p. 158) in that she is less afraid of losing loved ones and her father and grandmother's racial identity doesn't seem unusual. She says this from the safety of a life she continues to live as a white girl although likely with the anxiety of the reality of her racial identity becoming known.

Ultimately, Celli's discovery of her black heritage might be read as a reminder that things are not always as they appear, in the same way in which D Foster's white heritage was in *After Tupac and D Foster*.

Aleutian Sparrow, Karen Hesse (2003)

Nancy Reynolds (2009) suggests two reasons for Vera, the narrator and protagonist of *Aleutian Sparrow* being cast as biracial. The first is that it gives white readers a way to relate, and the second is that it might protect Hesse from criticism about writing entirely from an outsider's perspective (p. 86). Reynolds makes this assertion about other white writers choosing to create biracial characters, and provides much evidence to support the claim in other novels. Indeed, in *Aleutian Sparrow*, there seems to be no other explanation for this choice. Vera identifies as Aleut, distancing herself from other whites, to whom she refers as "they". Her mother is Aleut; her father was a white fisherman who died at sea. Vera has no memories of him, nor does she wonder about him or his family. Perhaps another reason Hesse made him white was to omit him from the story with impunity – as a man who was minimally involved with his children, had little influence and was ultimately dispensable. His absence leaves the family a little more vulnerable during this time of war.

The novel is set in the Aleutian Islands just after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Due to the Japanese occupation of nearby islands, the Aleut residents were relocated to camps close to mainland Alaska. Through Vera we learn of the racist attitudes of whites towards Aleuts and the horrible conditions in the camps. Readers learn something about the lifestyle of the Aleut people before their homes and environment were ruined by military occupation. The historical context would demand that Vera and her friend Pari (also mixed) would identify as Aleut according to laws of hypodescent. At one point she describes Pari as "only part Aleut" (p. 12) – language that implies deficiency. But there is nothing else to suggest that that the girls feel anything less than completely Aleut, knowledgeable in history, lore and customs, sharing the experiences of everyone else in their threatened community.

As a Mixed Race Blending book, *Aleutian Sparrow* does nothing more than mention biracial heritage, although the connection with war is a frequent trope in this corpus of books. It also demonstrates the seemingly arbitrary decisions by authors to intentionally create mixed race characters with little or no follow-through.

Last Dance on Holladay Street, Elisa Carbone (2005)

Last Dance on Holladay Street is set in Denver, Colorado in 1878. Thirteen-year-old Eva Wilkins is raised by loving adoptive black parents in a small town outside of Denver. When they die suddenly, Eva is left alone with nothing but an old letter from her birth mother, bearing an address on Holladay Street. Alone and homeless, Eva sets off to find her only kin.

Familiar descriptions of dark wavy hair and dark eyes mark Eva as racially mixed. She assumes that her birth mother must have been light-skinned and notes that her own skin is lighter than their Italian neighbor's. These details suggest that Eva is phenotypically white and predict

possibilities of passing. Later on she does not dispute the assumption that she is Italian when her survival depends on it. When she arrives at the address on Holladay Street, two shocks await her: her mother is white, and she is a prostitute.

Eva is allowed to live and work at the 'house' with her mother, a half-sister, and the other women, all of whom are white. Her mother rejects her and her half-sister treats her with contempt because she is colored. Eva learns that she was conceived by accident when her mother worked "on the side" (p. 34), the women not being allowed to have colored clients. It is the fact of her being the product of interracial sex that causes her mother's friend Lucille to find "colored folks" (p. 52) to take her. Otherwise her mother would have been thrown out of the brothel. This point is underscored by the fact that she kept her other, white child. Eva is allowed to stay because she is beautiful and potentially good for business. The rest of the story focuses on the horrific experiences of the women and girls who were essentially sex-slaves, and Eva's racial identity is not mentioned again. Given that the brothel – women and clients – were all white, the ease with which Eva is incorporated into the daily business suggests that she is passing for white.

Midway through the book Eva meets Carlos, who like her, is half white (his mother is Mexican). Even though he comes to the brothel to dance with the girls, he is unlike other men and Eva finds herself aligning their experiences enough to imagine a friendship. But this theme is dropped as suddenly as it is introduced. Shortly afterwards Eva runs away from the brothel, gets attacked in the hills by a mountain lion and finds herself being taken care of by the Flanagans. They think she is Italian, though Mrs. Flanagan suspects she is colored. Eva is blithely unaware of the danger of passing for white, and thinks of it as no more serious than telling "a small lie – just enough to make it so they'll let me stay" (p. 154). If this was meant to build suspense, it is an ineffective strategy that falls flat. Italian, or colored, the Flanagans cannot afford to feed and

keep her so they make arrangements for her to go to an orphanage in Denver. Eva escapes this horror too and in a dramatic sequence of events ends up rescuing her mother and sister and opening a food stand with them, serving home cooked meals to the miners.

In all her travels by train and on foot, in towns and in the city Eva is assumed to be white as frequently as it is assumed she is colored. Her appearance makes her racially visible and invisible depending on whether the narrative needs drama or respite respectively. Furthermore, Eva's ability to blend in both black and white environments is not convincing. Black characters 'recognize' and welcome her unquestioningly, yet she moves through white parts of the segregated city with no trouble. Like Claire in *Riot*, and Celli in *Black* Angels, Eva feels safe and wanted in a black church where it is suggested, she is being read as colored. In a rare moment of reflection on the racist context in which she exists, Eva recalls memories of being at church with her adoptive parents,

> Inside, the church has the same feeling of peaceful stillness she remembered from church back home. She and Mama Kate and Daddy Walter had always sat in the back, not wanting to ruffle the feathers of any townspeople who thought that's where they belonged. But here, Mrs. Boyd led her right up front. (p. 70)

She is a thirteen-year-old girl from a sheltered small-town upbringing, fending for herself alone in Denver: she would be in danger no matter what race she was. If making her colored was intended to increase the peril-factor, it fails because of inauthentic representation of the racial dynamics in dangerous a frontier town.

Despite some research (cited in the Author's Note) race and race relations are handled very clumsily in *Last Dance on Holladay Street*. The author wanted to critique the oppressive conditions for women in frontier cities and inspired by a photograph of a girl in a book about the

"fallen women of the Old West" (p. 193) wrote the book wanting "desperately, to save her" (p. 193) and give modern young readers a tale of courage and the ability to chose another destiny. (p. 194). At best, including a mixed race character seems to be an effort to reach a wider audience and prevent the book from becoming another story of the hardships of white women in the Old West that renders invisible the lives of women of color. That the owner of the brothel forbids her women from having non-white clients reminds us that a racial hierarchy persisted even among the socially oppressed. Unfortunately it also feeds the master narrative of mixed race individuals being unwanted accidental pregnancies. The story would be no different if Eva had been white, and it would have been completely different if her appearance rendered her more definitely black. Eva lived for 13 years with a black couple and was raised as their child, yet there is nothing about her that reflects them. Sims Bishop writes that on the one hand the absence of culturally-specific references permits a wider audience of readers to relate to the experiences of the characters. On the other hand, "the ignoring of differences becomes a signal that the recognition of them makes people uncomfortable or unhappy" (p. 45). Eva's racial identity is given enough attention that it is not inconsequential to the story, but ultimately it is a confusing depiction of a colored girl's life in Denver in 1878.

All the Broken Pieces, Ann E. Burg (2009)

Matt Pin was born to a Vietnamese woman and white American soldier during the war, and adopted by white American parents at the age of 10. This sparse novel in verse deftly weaves together the stories of several characters affected by the war with Matt as the thread that connects them. As such his biracial identity is pivotal in a symbolic role as an outcome of the Vietnam War.

Matt identifies and is marked as Vietnamese rather than biracial. He is bitter about his white father who he believes abandoned him and his mother. His anger is expressed right at the start:

> His name
>
> I will never say,
>
> Though forever I carry his blood
>
> In my blood,
>
> Forever his bones
>
> Stretch in my bones.
>
> To me,
>
> He is nothing.
>
> If he stumbled on me now,
>
> I wonder,
>
> Would he see himself in my eyes?
>
> And I?
>
> Would I recognize the dragon
>
> Who went beyond the mountain
>
> And never came back? (p. 1)

He has memories of his biological mother and a half-brother who was badly injured by a land mine. Matt was taking care of his little brother when the accident occurred and he blames himself. He has nightmares about the war and will not speak about it. His adoptive parents make an effort for him to stay connected to his Vietnamese heritage by taking him to cultural classes at the adoption agency where he makes dragons and lanterns and feels disconnected from

everything he is taught there about Vietnam. Here again, he feels tainted by the legacy of his father that renders him different from other Vietnamese children: “Still, I am different. My face is part American” (p. 24).

Matt’s identity is shaped by his memories of the war, the family he left behind, and learning what it means to be Vietnamese in America in the 1980s. He is literally between worlds. Memories of the mother and brother he left behind are fresh in his mind. Rob, a boy at school taunts him with racial epithets and blames Matt for the death of his own brother. He cannot connect with people at the Vietnamese cultural classes. He is wracked by the guilt he feels for his injured brother, pain caused by his mother’s ‘betrayal’ in sending him away, and wanting to reciprocate but not trusting the love of his new family.

Recognizing Matt’s inner turmoil, his parents and their friend Jeff, a war veteran, suggest that he attend Veteran Voices meetings where they hope he will be able to talk about his unspoken fears with people who are familiar with war. It is here that his biracial identity becomes instrumental in bridging past and present. Matt’s Vietnamese features remind the veterans of the friendships and relationships they formed during the war, and his whiteness reminds them of children some of them (possibly) fathered. In an effort to assuage the complex guilt that the veterans feel, Jeff makes a speech about how if Matt’s mother and other Vietnamese mothers could beg soldiers to take their children and trusted them, they must have done something good. This is a little farfetched, but it serves the purpose, which is to redirect the men’s thoughts away from the horror in their heads towards something positive. It also casts Matt as the embodiment of that hope and humanity.

In turn, being around the veterans and hearing their stories helps Matt develop some compassion for his biological father. One of the veterans tells him

Don't think too badly

Of your birth father.

It's hard to come home,

But it's harder to go back.

It doesn't mean he didn't care. (p. 161)

The story is a critique of war, but for once this mixed race child is not cast as the unfortunate, accidental victim, but as opportunity that can come from tragedy. At school Matt and Rob have to face their demons together. Having spend time with the veterans and knowing how the war damaged their lives, Matt has empathy for Rob. He tells Rob the story of his bother's mine accident, articulating details he has never spoken of before. The realization that they share pain caused by the same war puts an end to Rob's racist taunts and we sense that they may become friends. Once again the mixed race subject's body is the sight of emotional baggage for other people, but readers may recognize that he is not alone in this conflict. The primary characters are all complicated. Rob's anger is understandable even if his racist attitude is not. Matt's father feels guilty that he went to medical school instead of Vietnam, causing Matt to wonder if his adoption is an effort to assuage that guilt – which it may well be. His mother is sad because she knows he misses his biological mother and feels she can't reach him. And while Matt is tortured by guilt about his brother in Vietnam, he adores his new adoptive brother with a fierceness that surprises them both. Eventually Matt talks to his parents about his nightmares and his fear that they won't love him completely. Everyone's emotional cards are on the table and the ending is an optimistic one. Biracial identity is never mentioned again, but we are left with the sense that when Matt will always view himself as Vietnamese, and when encounters racism again, he will be able to draw on the love of his friends and family to respond appropriately, rather than

withdraw in self-hatred. None of the issues are completely resolved - instead they are handled with the suggestion of being worked through eventually. Sparse language and the verse-format stop the story from being melodramatic, and it still delivers an emotional punch.

MRA in Contemporary Realistic Fiction

The books in this category are akin to the ones Sims Bishop classified as culturally conscious books. For Sims Bishop, these books meet the criteria of "consciously" (p. 49) depicting (fictional) African American experiences. They appreciate and celebrate uniquely African American experiences while maintaining universal elements that make them accessible to all children. Content and literary elements combine to create quality literature that contributes to the creation of an important body of work. In this study I use the term 'awareness' instead of 'conscious' because it is a less loaded term. In MRA books, an effort has been made to present experiences of characters who are not conflicted or surprised, but aware of their multiracial heritage. Protagonists understand or come to understand the nuances of their racial identity through cultural, historical, linguistic connections. Usually this means that there are adult characters and/or contexts that contribute to the mixed race character's awareness about his or her racial heritage. In none of the books do characters learn anything about what it means to be white. Culturally conscious books would need to include at least some discussion of both white and non-white aspects of a character's life experience. My research did not reveal any such texts though they may very well be out there.

MRA books are different from MRI/V books in that being mixed is neither a source of conflict nor laden with trauma. Protagonists may experience some confusion or curiosity, even racism, but not in a debilitating way. MRA books differ from MRB books in that racial identity

is more than a descriptive detail. They reflect the modern concept of a mixed race identity in various degrees. Usually this means an appreciation of both white and non-white racial, historical, cultural connections, though the focus tends to be on the non-white element.

The six books analyzed in this section have protagonists who, to some extent, negotiate the power granted by their 'whiter' appearance and the associated privileges and guilt. They also feel the cultural pride and social oppression of people of color. The general theme of MRA books is along the lines of the 'I am who I am' cliché – MRA characters are who they are *because of,* not *despite,* their mixed race heritage. There is affirmation of being mixed that does not require rejection of one half. Characters function in communities, sometimes even transforming them as they transform themselves. Furthermore, they emerge from conflict intact and improved, rather than broken or unaffected. Seven representative texts are analyzed here.

Angelfish, Lawrence Yep (2001)

Angelfish is a rare novel that depicts a biracial character who can negotiate her racial identity within a community of caring people. The protagonist, Robin Lee, is an avid ballet dancer. After practice one day, she and some friends are playing around and Robin accidentally breaks the front window of a fish and aquarium shop. Having no other recourse, Robin offers to work off the cost of the broken window. Reluctantly, the owner, Mr. Tsow agrees and Robin begins right away. While she does, she has to endure his taunts. He calls her a "spoiled white girl" (p. 8) and when she tells him her mother is Chinese and speaks in Cantonese, he calls her a liar and makes fun of her Chinese. He insists that Cantonese language and people are not 'really' Chinese and asserts the superiority of Mandarin. His arrogance is cruel and reflective of the way in which racial purist immigrants look down on second and third generation and racially mixed

Asians. Robin is familiar with Tsow's misunderstanding her racial identity. She says she often fools people with her "pale skin, brown hair and green eyes" – like her father's.

Robin is resilient at first, but when Tsow calls her a "spoiled half person" (p. 11) she is deeply hurt and self-doubt sets in. At this point, another older character, Robin's grandmother begins to play an instrumental role in Robin's sense of self. As in many of the books in this study, parents play a minimal role in their child's racial identity development. In *Angelfish* we only know that Robin's mother is second generation Chinese and a busy bookkeeper, and her father is "American" (white) and makes documentary films. Since her parents are busy, Robin and her siblings and cousins are left in Grandmother's care. It is here that she learns about her Chinese heritage. Robin reflects:

> Before Grandmother had joined us in America, I didn't pay much attention to Chinese things. Back in those days, China has been the Great Wall and nothing else. Since she has been with us, though, I had begun to realize just how little I knew. There were so many small, everyday things that made up her Chinese world that I didn't know anything about. Her apartment was like a window into another universe—one that I was just beginning to explore with her help. (p. 61)

Readers from inside and outside the culture can relate to Robin's admitted lack of knowledge about China. Yep gently but clearly points out that there is so much more about Grandmother's Chinese heritage that we can learn along with Robin. They share a close relationship and Robin tells her how Mr. Tsow said she was "half a person". Grandmother is incensed and wants to set him straight. Robin is moved to ask if other Chinese people think of her that way too. We get the sense that this is the first time she has been made to question her racial identity. Grandmother's frank response – that some ignorant people might, but most do not – satisfies Robin for the

moment, but something has been wakened by Tsow's prejudice. Grandmother reflects briefly that hurtful people have often experienced cruelty themselves and she and Robin even speculate on a way to get Tsow to feel better about himself. With Grandmother's wisdom and support Robin is able to turn feelings of self-doubt into empathy and compassion.

Triggered by Mr. Tsow's refusal to accept her as Chinese, Robin becomes self-conscious and a little defensive. Though racial identity is not the focus of the novel, it is a significant part of her development. In addition to Mr. Tsow, other older Chinese people look at her askance, making Robin think they are questioning her presence at community events. Often, though, they are more concerned that she is too thin, and Robin's anxiety is allayed. Predictably, Mr. Tsow's personal tragedy is revealed, explaining his gruff and offensive manner. He teaches Robin tai chi to help her with her dancing, and between him and Grandmother, Robin and the reader are treated to a buffet of historical and cultural information about the Cultural Revolution, Chinese immigration to San Francisco, and the myriad differences between northern and southern Chinese. Robin seems to be newly awakened to the details of her Chinese heritage. She notices the variety of Asian neighborhoods in the city and makes more of an effort to speak in Chinese, especially with older people. She comes to learn that Mr. Tsow, a northerner, might feel superior to southern Chinese and she takes his criticism of her mixed heritage less personally. Through interactions with people and being around Grandmother, Robin feels like she is part of a community, to the extent that she is less uncomfortable when people question her identity, "Auntie Ruby studied me curiously. By now I was used to that because of my American looks, so I greeted her politely in Chinese. Auntie Ruby nodded approvingly" (p.110). She is even secure enough to make a feeble attempt to assert her 'American' (i.e.: white) heritage. Feeling a little protective of her spaghetti-eating father, she pipes up a defense that is not just of diverse

types of noodles, "Since my father wasn't Chinese, I felt I ought to defend not only other cuisines, but other relationships. 'Well, at least it's noodles,' I said" (p. 114).

Gradually, Mr. Tsow and Robin develop a mutually respectful relationship and he stops commenting on her biraciality. Their friendship is solidified towards the end of the novel when his brother, an even more bitter and angry man, meets Robin in the store. He attacks her verbally, saying she is "no more Chinese than a fire hydrant" (p. 183). Tsow comes to her defense, comparing her to his prized fish, the angelfish "'Would you call those fish mongrels? No, they have the best features and that's what makes them beautiful and unique'" (p. 183). We get to see a different side of Tsow, a more compassionate side that has been uncovered by Robin.

In every other novel in this study, it is the biracial protagonist who has to experience transformation. In *Angelfish*, Robin is made aware of her ignorance of her Chinese heritage and makes an effort to be more connected. But her transformation becomes secondary to Tsow's. His hateful attitude towards her at the start was based on nothing more than her appearance. Rather than shy away, she forced him to engage with her as she worked off her debt. In getting to know her, he could no longer hold on to old prejudices. In the end we see Robin secure in the knowledge that she has an additional ally and friend to add to her world of Russian ballerinas, Chinese aunties and myriad friends. This is a rare book in the way it demonstrates that prejudice is part of a social system and hurtful to those who maintain it as well those who are victims of it. Furthermore, it depicts a biracial character who is accepted and appreciated by people who choose not to hold on to ideas of racial purity. Robin is an endearing, well-balanced and interesting character who relies on and is responsible to her community.

Rain is Not My Indian Name, Cynthia Leitich Smith (2001)

All the reviewers say this is a story about Cassidy coming to understand her American Indian heritage. Perhaps the title sets readers up to expect multiracial identity negotiation, but it is not as significant a part of the plot or the protagonist's interests as readers might expect. For a relatively short book there is quite a large cast of characters, motivations and attitudes among an array of residents in the small Kansas town in which the story is set.

This book is about challenging assumptions and how someone like Cassidy Rain Berghoff, who admittedly lives her life upsetting the assumptions of people when they first meet her, has plenty of her own that need to righted. Since the death of her best friend Galen, she has withdrawn from all social life, interacting only with her family members and avoiding all mention of Galen. Her Aunt Georgia initiates a summer program for the American Indian youth in town. Cassidy dubs it 'Indian Camp' and has many preconceptions about it being a hokey bonding-club or an attempt to counter the stereotypical Native themes that are taught in school around Thanksgiving Day. Cassidy's skepticism gives the author an opportunity to point out the flawed and harmful ways American Indians are perceived and talked about,

> … cardboard cutouts of the Pilgrims and the pumpkins and the squash taped to the windows at McDonald's. And the so-called Indians always look like bogeymen on the prairie, windblown cover boys selling paperback romances, or baby-faced refugees from the world of Precious Moments. (p. 13)

Cassidy has no interest in any of it. Nor does she feel it is her job to counter it. She has no interest in Indian Camp, or much else at the moment. Another reason she avoids joining Indian Camp is that her mother, who died six years earlier, had been involved in the Indian community. Painful memories associated with her mother prevent Cassidy from renewing those connections.

Nevertheless, Cassidy ends up being the photographer for a journalist (The Flash) who is covering the Indian Camp, especially as it comes under attack as a special interest group by Galen's mother. The title of this book seems to influence readers and reviewers to assume it is an identity-crisis story in which the protagonist has to explain her identity/name over and over again. Cassidy identifies as Indian, acknowledging her blend of Muscogee Creek-Cherokee, Scots-Irish, German-Ojibway ancestry as well. She harbors a little envy for her brother Fynn's striking (dark) good looks, nicknaming him the "Native American Fabio" (p. 23) while her own coloring is lighter. For once we do not see mixed race characters being asked to explain their racial appearance, but Smith seems to feel it necessary that readers are made aware of the questions mixed-blood people have to endure. While dark-haired Fynn is asked "what are you?" (p. 48), fairer-haired Cassidy is asked "How much Indian are you?" (p. 48). In a page-long explanation, readers learn through Cassidy about comments and assumptions non-Native people make, and how when Native people ask about heritage there is more "respect for tribal affiliation" (p. 48). All of this is in response to The Flash asking her how many Native American families there are in the town. This reminds Cassidy of how Indians are often part of counting rhymes and songs, a point also made by Doris Seale and Beverly Slapin (2005) in *A Broken Flute: The Native Experience in Books for Children,* describing ways American Indians are stereotyped.

Through Cassidy, Smith tries hard to debunk many stereotypes. At one point Cassidy thinks sadly of her Uncle Ed, a Vietnam veteran who drank "to forget" (p. 50), thus countering the image of the senselessly alcoholic Indian with a more patriotic one. The Flash's pointed questions are another way information about the diversity of America Indian experiences is conveyed. In an interview he asks each of the campers why they joined. When it is Queenie's

turn, she (somewhat defensively) turns the question back on him, daring him to ask why an African American girl is in the camp (p. 69). Nonplussed, he asks exactly that and Queenie explains her African and Native American ancestry. This explanation is for Cassidy's as well as the reader's benefit. She had her doubts about Queenie's membership, assuming it was a hippie-phase. Having heard the reason, Cassidy is no happier, thinking rather that "now Queenie was barging in on my cultural territory" (p. 70). Brief scenes like these dot the narrative, intertwining the various plots and conflicts.

Underlying Cassidy's unease about The Flash's assumptions about her American Indian heritage are her own assumptions about him being a clueless outsider. His frankness disarms her. When he asks what the campers' bridge-building project has to do with a Native American youth program, Cassidy, tired of being the spokesperson burst out "'Do you have any idea… how weird it is to be an Indian in Hannesburg, Kansas?'" to which he retorts "'Do you have any idea how weird it is to be Jewish in Hannesburg, Kansas?'" (p. 113) Cassidy had no idea and only just stops herself from making the same comment that she has often heard "but you don't look…" (p. 113). What becomes most clear from this exchange is that in a place like Hannesburg, Kansas, one can either stand out as completely different, or blend into invisibility – there is no middle ground. Cassidy and The Flash have both experienced it and expected it of others. Both of them confess to knowing nothing about each other's history or heritage, which again, is a sad reflection of society's inability to include diversity. All the characters are strong and vulnerable. They are secure in their racial identities even as they have much to learn about themselves and each other.

Border Crossing, Maria Colleen Cruz (2003)

In the Author's Note, Cruz explains that the impetus behind *Border Crossing* lay in desire to fill a gap in children's literature in which multiracial readers like her were not represented. Cruz directly addresses the need for mirrors and windows that affirm and expand children's understanding of racial identity when she writes

> I knew that kids like me, with mixed heritages would probably love to read a book where the main character dealt with some of the same problems or questions they had. I also knew that kids who did not come from mixed heritages might want to read a book about someone different, just like I loved reading books about people who were different from me. I wished there was a book like that so that I could share it with my students. (p. 120)

Cruz's protagonist, Cecelia (Cesi) Álvarez, shares her Mexican/Irish/Cherokee heritage, and the questions for which she seeks answers are believably vague and pressing for a twelve-year-old. She says repeatedly that she wants to know more about her Mexican heritage but does not know what to ask. In a trope quite typical of the books in this study, education about racial or cultural heritage comes from a grandparent.

Both Cesi's grandmothers are described in considerable detail (from Cesi's perspective), and established as cultural representatives. Her feelings for each grandmother are revealed in descriptions of their appearances and homes. Both their homes are filled with culturally significant artifacts, photographs of ancestors, and are painted in bold colors. But where Maryann's cowboy boots, gruff voice, unconventional manners, turquoise jewelry and Navajo art are described with admiration, Nana's Mexican *ofrenda*, flowery dresses and Catholic statues are described as dusty and ancient. Maryann has played an important role in Cesi's life, especially as a storyteller. Cesi knows the stories behind all the photographs and art, of her mother's

childhood and grandmother's work on the reservation. Nana's house, on the other hand is foreign and unfamiliar. Cesi is more wary than curious about the people in the photos and the clusters of clay figurines. Nana does not speak much English and Cesi does not speak Spanish so the stories are untold. The obvious conduit between them, Cesi's father, John, becomes silent and aloof when his mother and wife suggest that he is rejecting his Mexican identity. So the gap in Cesi's developing self-awareness is her scant knowledge of this aspect of her heritage.

What follows is a rather farfetched plot in which Cesi runs away from home for a day, thinking that a little time in Tijuana, Mexico, will teach her something about herself. On the train she meets a boy named Tony who invites her to his aunt's house for a meal. Upon hearing the surname Álvarez, Tony's aunt Delfina realizes that Cesi is her cousin John's daughter. Over the course of the evening Cesi is able to ask all the questions about her father that she didn't think she could before, and Delfina remembers vivid details about John's childhood that perfectly explain his internalized shame and desire to distance himself from his Mexican heritage.

Cesi's queries around her own racial identity emerge from a quirky urge to find out who she is now so that she will not have to resort to self-help books and yoga when she is an adult. But more significantly, her interest is aroused by the animosity she witnesses between her father and Nana around his reluctance in teaching his children about his own life. Despite her lack of information, Cesi identifies as biracial. But it is an uneasy identification that she does not quite understand. On the one hand she thinks that speaking Spanish or having darker skin would enable her to identify more tangibly with her Mexican heritage:

> Sometimes I felt that if my skin were darker, my hair browner, then I would be more Mexican. Maybe if I could dance like that—twirl my skirts and spin—I would look more Mexican, be more Mexican. (p. 47)

This suggests that if her appearance enabled it, she would identify only as Mexican. On the other hand, when people comment that her name sounds foreign and ask where her parents are from, she is bothered that people can't think of her as "more than one thing… more than one color" (p. 47). Having to encounter this kind of discomfort with difference is not uncommon in the lives of many biracial people. Ultimately, Cesi has to confront her own preconceptions about Mexican people and culture before she can embrace a Latina identity of her own.

Stereotypically, learning about Latino culture means learning about food and festivals. In *Border Crossing,* important elements about Mexican American identity involve understanding some of the difficulties of immigration, assimilation, and making hard choices. Cesi's father, John, is vague about his experiences, saying only that his mother misunderstood his reasons for not teaching his children Spanish. When his wife challenges him on this, arguing that their children know all about her side of the family, but nothing about his, John's response reflects that of many immigrants for whom invisibility through assimilation (real or perceived) is preferable to cultural conspicuousness, "'… your family stories are all about America. Most of mine are about Mexico, and we're not Mexicans, we're Americans. We didn't come here so that we could look back and wish we were there'" (p. 32). During her visit to Tijuana, Cesi learns from Delfina that her father had some very painful experiences with racist teachers and schoolmates. He was smacked for speaking Spanish and wrongly accused of theft by a teacher who called him a "filthy thief" (p. 98). Delfina speaks of the shame of poverty and lack of English that kept their parents from standing up to such people, how they were just grateful that their children were being educated. Later John confirms that the urgency with which he felt the need to learn English, to erase anything that might prompt racism, trumped his parents' efforts to maintain his Mexican heritage.

In Tijuana, Cesi's view of Mexico, gleaned from television and the news is confirmed. She leaves her backpack in the square while she goes to play in a fountain, and returns to find all her money has been stolen. Her immediate response is to blame herself for being foolish for trusting "these people .... they were the Mexicans I had always been warned about on television" (p. 82). A confirmed stereotype is hard to disrupt, and it falls on Tony to remind her that she, and he and John are also "these people" and that she was wrong to make sweeping judgments that conflated thievery with being Mexican. When Cesi feels guilty for being part white, like the racist teacher, Delfina reminds her that she must not think that all white people are racist, just as she must not think of all Mexicans as lazy or dishonest. The juxtaposition is blatant and the point well made.

The parallel between Delfina's story about John being the victim of a racist assumption, and Cesi's own reaction to being robbed demonstrates that she has much to learn about the complexity of racial identity construction. In another parallel, Cesi learns to change her opinion about Nana (her paternal grandmother). Delfina's home is decorated much like Nana's, with photographs, bright colors and an *ofrenda*. Once Delfina explains the significance of the altar and stories of the people in the photographs, Cesi reflects on how she has misjudged her grandmother.

Before her adventure comes to an end, Cesi has more to learn about her father's life. When John comes to pick Cesi up from Delfina's house in Tijuana, he is angry (from worry) and chastened. Cesi's running to Mexico is a clear signal to him that he has to face his own demons for his daughter's sake and start talking about his past so she can know him, and by extension, herself better. Before they return home he drives her to his hometown in Nogales so that she can see where he spent some of his childhood. As a result she gets to see a peaceful, scenic part of

Mexico to contrast with the gritty image of Tijuana. In the end Cesi says she understands more not only about the physical place, Mexico, but about the variety of positive and negative experiences that comprise her father's Mexican American identity. She has a lot more to learn but has emerged from this experience wiser and more self-aware. "I know I have more than one home now. I always had. I just hadn't known it" (p. 118).

Border Crossing comes closer than most books in the group of Latino-white themed books in addressing a positive biracial identity; one in which subjects can claim membership in multiple groups without having to renounce one or the other. With her father being more proactive, more meaningful and frequent communication with Nana, new relatives in Mexico, and a supportive mother, all signs point towards an interesting journey ahead for Cesi as she explores familiar and unfamiliar aspects of her Irish/Cherokee/Mexican heritage.

What the Moon Saw, Laura Resau (2006)

Sixteen-year-old Clara's voyage of self-discovery is prompted by an occurrence that surprises herself more than anyone else. One afternoon at a spring fair, she spies a model of her neighborhood, complete with representative model people. As she gazes down at her little plastic self, she gets goose bumps and in an uncharacteristic gesture, yanks the doll off the model and runs away. From that moment she begins to wonder about herself, her origins, her family, becoming suddenly restless.

A few days later she receives a postcard from grandparents in Mexico whom she has never met, inviting her to spend the summer with them. Clara has many questions about her paternal grandparents. She knows little about her father, only that he came to the U.S. illegally, married his English tutor and started his own landscaping business in suburban Maryland. His

reticence to talk about his family and his emotional reaction to the postcard indicate painful, unresolved feelings that Clara forces him to face later in the novel. At this point all he can tell her is that leaving his parents when he was a teenager was extremely hard and that thinking about them, "looking back" (p. 12) would have prevented him from working hard, learning English and taking care of his wife and children. Clara has difficulty with the fact that her father came to the U.S. illegally and prefers not to think about it even though she knows it is part of who they are as a family.

Clara is artistic, levelheaded, and insightful. She is set apart from conventional teenagers by a restlessness that she can't explain and that can't be settled by a trip to the mall or interest in the popular boys. She is fluent in Spanish and only mildly discomfited by people's comments about her racial identity. Her family is loving, stable and respectful of her vacillating about the trip to Mexico.

Clara decides to go and finds herself in a remote village far from any of the material familiarities of the industrialized world. Fortunately her interest in plants and nature (which she shares with her father) precludes boredom – in fact she affirms her love for plants and creatures that later turns out to be part of her 'destiny' as a healer like her grandmother. In some ways this is a 'return-to-my-roots' story in which Clara has to come to Mexico to learn about a part of her heritage. She realizes that her father's silence about his family is because he could not reconcile homesickness with forging ahead with his new life in the U.S. She is also forced to confront her own shame about the fact that came illegally. Like him, she had chosen to avoid thinking or talking about those difficult experiences. Clara and her grandparents become close. She learns their stories as well as gets to know people in their village, understanding histories, experiences and attitudes that deeply challenge her (and the reader's) stereotypes of rural Mexican life. Clara

realizes that she has not thought of her mixed race identity much in the past because of a lack of information about it. At school, she was identified by teachers and peers as Mexican and called on to be a spokesperson when needed. Half-hearted attempts to associate with other Latinos failed because she was more fluent in Spanish than they were. A friendship with an Argentinean girl fell through when the girl's father, a surgeon, asked how Clara's father came to be in the U.S. Clara was too ashamed to reply, and that friendship went no further.

In Mexico she is surprised when her new friend, Pedro refers to her as the "American girl" (p. 95). It feels strange to be called American having lived her whole life with people assuming she is Mexican or asking the inevitable "What *are* you?" (p. 95). Pedro asks what she thinks she is, and she replies that she is "a person who likes to draw maps … and who likes chocolate and birds" (p. 95). In the manner of a true indigenous stereotype, Pedro nods wisely and suggests that perhaps she is yet to figure out who she is, leaving Clara bemused and intrigued.

What the Moon Saw ends with Clara's return to the U.S. and a hiking trip with her father. We can infer from their gestures and a few words in Spanish that Clara's new understanding of her father's early life has broken some barriers. He resumes contact with his parents and reunion trips are planned. The issue of mixed race identity is not a focal point of the story in the recognizable way it is in most novels, so this could almost be a MRB book. There are moments when plot twists are overly dramatic and filled with magic, smoke, healing poultices, animal spirits and visions – all painfully stereotypical. Clara's new identity as a healer, learned and 'inherited' from her grandmother gives her a strong sense of pride and purpose, and validate earlier feelings of detachment from her peers in a positive way. The final paragraph shows her pulling on imaginary spider webs that connect her to the earth and plants in the woods in

Maryland even as they connect her with the waterfall and people in the village. It is a connection "as real as the moon's force on the oceans" (p. 252), and one in which identity is rooted in human connections over centuries. Clara's experience brings her closer to appreciating her father's life and knowing that his experiences shape who she is. In this manner, *What the Moon Saw* demonstrates how biracial identity is more than skin tone and language facility – it is history and people and connections over centuries.

Off-Color, Janet McDonald (2007)

The negative connotations of the title belie the diversity and complexity of racial experiences this book depicts. From start to finish, the story presents a plethora of attitudes and ideas about race embodied in a large and diverse cast of characters. Fifteen-year-old Cameron Storm is the protagonist. Her striking appearance is described on the second page – " blue eyes and olive skin" and dark curly hair – familiar clues for the reader though not for the mixed race subject herself. Cameron is bold and independent, undaunted by adult authority at home or at school, indifferent about her grades and surrounded by loyal friends. The narrative is in the third person and is packed with details about people and places in Brooklyn told with convincing authority by an author who spent most of her life there. *Off-Color* is about family and friendship, adjusting to change, and coming to understand what it means when racial identity is not what it was thought to be. More than half way into the novel Cameron discovers a photograph of her father and learns that he was not Italian, as she had assumed, but African American. This news comes on the heels of the fact that her mother (Patricia) has just lost her job and they have moved into a public housing project to be closer to the new nail salon where her mother will work. Acutely aware of being the only white people in the area, far from her friends, and now

faced with a new reality about her identity, Cameron's heretofore happy-go-lucky life is considerably shaken up.

Unfortunately, Cameron's origins play into the all-too-familiar story of an accidental pregnancy and a failed relationship. Her parents never married. Her father lied about his name and being a college student so when he left one day, Patricia was unable to trace him or his family. Shattered by his deceit, she blocked him out of her memory and never spoke of him again. For Cameron, her father's being black makes her own appearance make sense. She exclaims:

> *That's* why my hair's like this! *That's* why I tan darker than everybody else! *That's* why I'm always reminding black people of some family member! I'm supposed to be white but I'm really black! Is that why you didn't say anything, because you were ashamed of him … of me? (pp. 92-93)

Patricia is certain that his color has nothing to do with her hiding him from Cameron – again a familiar response for a white character challenged with being racist (like Swamper in *Gray Baby* and Zeyde in *Stealing Home*). Patricia's easy adjustment to people and life in the projects might lead us to believe her, and McDonald paints her in a sympathetic light as she reflects on her motives sixteen years earlier. Patricia is conflicted. She considers the fact that it was easier for her to let Cameron think she was white, like herself, especially since that was the way she was read in their environment. Yet the reality is that *he* left *them* and never made contact again. On further reflection she admits that her daughter does share features with her father and that she could have tried harder to find him, to find his family, and to provide Cameron with an honest sense of who she is. Patricia's dilemma is not quickly resolved, though perhaps her effort at

being part of the African American community at work and in their building reflects her desire to provide Cameron with influences and experiences she has not had yet.

Cameron's reaction is realistic. First she is upset: remembering the racist mockery she and her friends indulged in, realizing that the racism her teacher explained in *Othello* means more to her than it did before. As she calms down, she seeks the guidance of her mother and teachers, all of whom validate her confusion and provide a variety of perspectives in response to her dilemma, "So, like am I black now?" (p. 100) Patricia explains the one-drop rule but points out that Tiger Woods is the modern-day challenger to that practice. She assures Cameron that she can identify as biracial since she's "black *too,* not black *period*" (p.100). Patricia's insistence here echoes that of many of the white mothers of mixed race children as in *Riot* and *Gray Baby*. Rainier Spencer and other critics of the multiracial movement ascribe this to a racist desire for white mothers to distance their children from a black identity. Cameron then starts to research multiracial people on the Internet, and the reader is bombarded with lists of biracial celebrity names, current and historical. Armed with the comforting knowledge that she is not an anomaly or a freak, she is prepared to come out to her friends.

It is in the reactions of Cameron's peers that the complexity of how people view mixed race identity is established. They are refreshingly free of judgment and amusingly candid. Crystal believes that people cannot be biracial; they are either black or white and appearance determines racial identity. Amanda thinks she should "just be black, it's cool" (p. 105), to which Prudence points out that appearance determines how people get treated and references a case of racial profiling in which the police gave her black friend a warning but not her. She agrees that appearance is the determining factor. The girls do not arrive at a definite answer, but assure Cameron that they still love her just as much as they ever did. The fact that they have never

visited her at the public housing project gives Cameron good reason to be a little skeptical of their unwavering loyalty. At school she is acutely aware of awkward silences and sideways glances when the word 'black' is mentioned around her. People are guarded in their humor, bringing to light the ubiquity of racist jokes.

Erratic grades land Cameron in the counselor's office where she is stunned to learn that Mr. Siciliano is also biracial and grew up in the projects in the 60s. He explains that the racial discourse of that time did not include a mixed or biracial identity and that both whites and blacks rejected him. People read him as Puerto Rican, so he claimed that ethnicity though it left him feeling "erased and untethered" (p. 112). With age he was able to "accept all of himself" (p. 112) though we are not told what this means. Mr. Siciliano's empathy is encouraging, and Cameron lets loose all her feelings of confusion and fear about not knowing who she is anymore and knowing the things her friends say about black people. Siciliano advises patience and assures her that with time, she will figure things out, that she should be wary of getting caught up in aligning herself with biracial celebrities at the expense of learning about herself, and that she can call him to talk any time. Although her specific questions are unanswered (like if she dates a white boy will they be an interracial couple?), she is somewhat comforted.

This conversation is followed by a pedantic but relevant and believable class discussion about race in America led by their cool and progressive Harvard Ph.D. teacher, Sage Brown. She introduces the concept of race being a social construct, using Malcolm X as an example. The students' comments reflect their own lives and experiences with being categorized, and span a range of views on skin color, ethnicity, religion, immigration, and humanity. *Off-Color* is the only book in this study in which authentic teenage voices share contemporary perspectives on race with equal weight. Readers will find both mirrors and windows, and come away with much

to think about. Cameron is emboldened by this opportunity and speaks up about her own mixed race identity. Sage silences mocking laughter and validates Cameron's description of herself as both black and white rather than one or the other: "The way I see it, 1 and 1 is 2, not 1. So that makes me two things, not one" (p. 118). Her embrace of a biracial identity with the support of adult role models is unusual in the group of books in this study.

Cameron's biggest challenge is reconciling her black and white peer groups. When summer comes and she no longer sees her white school friends regularly, Cameron decides that she has to find some friends in the community or face being lonely – for once this is not a welcome option for a mixed race character. Patricia is instrumental in bringing the women and girls she knows from adjacent housing projects into their home for a nail-care demonstration. Cameron meets a girl her own age with a baby, an Irish-Korean woman, a part-time law student named Kali, and one of the girls Cameron and her white friends had mocked at the mall once. Their banter is a mixture of insider-jokes, teasing, mini-lessons on politically correct lingo about race and ethnicity and Cameron gets called to task for the time she and her white friends were "black frontin' " (p. 124). Like the classroom discussion, this part of the story illuminates the diversity of attitudes, opinions, values and appearances within this mostly black community. Juxtaposed with the classroom discussion earlier, this provides a nicely balanced variety of perspectives for Cameron and for the reader. In an ironic twist, she hits it off well with Asia, the "project girl" from the mall, and is warmly welcomed into Asia's group of friends. They braid her hair and tease her for looking good for a white girl with cornrows (p.138) and fall apart laughing when she protests that she's black too. Compared with the description of the cagey humor and nervous conversation with her white school friends, the affectionate teasing and

laugher with these new black friends suggests that the latter are far more accepting of Cameron's biracialism than the former.

The novel ends happily with Cameron's Sweet Sixteen birthday party that includes friends from school and the neighborhood. The white girls are terrified at first, but the music gets everyone dancing. There is more teasing and harmless racial humor, but the message is that everyone can get along and Cameron is responsible for being a bridge between white and black worlds. Furthermore, she meets a neighbor's grandson, who is also mixed race like her, and a romance begins. At the end we see them together at an African performing arts festival in Manhattan surrounded by "folks of every hue, color, and complexion having a great time" (p. 163).

Gray Baby, Scott Loring Sanders (2009)

Gray Baby is set in the town of Crocket's Mill, Virginia, in 1988. The protagonist is sixteen-year-old Clifton Carlson, whose wit, intelligence and compassion make him an engaging character that young readers are likely to find very appealing. The story is primarily about the friendship that develops between Clifton and an old white man named Swamper, but events in the town force him to reckon with some demons from his past. The racial dynamics of Crocket's Mill are very much a part of the story, and Clifton's life.

The novel opens with the Carlson family going for a drive. Descriptions of each parent, spaced between happy family banter, let us know that Mr. Carlson is black, and Mrs. Carlson is white. Told from Clifton's perspective in the back seat of the car, the descriptions are lovingly drawn. Moments later the car is pulled over by the police and Mr. Carlson is beaten to death by a racist cop who is angered at his being with a white woman. The title 'Gray Baby' comes from an

expression one of the policemen uses, "You better get your whore-ass the hell out of here and get that little half-breed home. These swamp monsters out here eat gray babies for supper" (p. 12). Six-year-old Clifton and his mother's lives are shattered.

Ten years later Clifton has emerged from his depression. Meanwhile his peers have formed their social groups and because he rebuffed their attempts at sympathy and friendship earlier, he is now alone. In school a boy named Colt picks on him specifically for being mixed race. Other students call him names like "Oreo", "Salt and Pepper" and "Skunk" (p. 15). Clifton claims to like the latter name because he *is* both black and white and people tend to leave him alone – though we learn soon that he is not as glad to be left alone as he says he is. This is the first time he comments on his racial identity, claiming to be both, not one or the other. Later he repeats this identification. Even though her depression led to alcoholism and neglect, Clifton clearly loves his mother and is tender towards her at all times. Unlike other mixed race characters in this group of books, a parent has not inexplicably abandoned Clifton, and his love for both parents underscores his racial identification with them both. Furthermore, we learn that Mr. Carlson made an effort to educate his son about the racial dynamics of their environment. He took Clifton into the woods to show him the Killing Pit and explained how white slaver owners would compete by sending a slave each into the pit and watching them fight to death. He explained that though times had changed since then, life was always going to be tough for Clifton as the son of black and white parents and the sooner he learned that the better. He told Clifton "'See, it was tough for me, but it'll be even tougher for you … because you got a white mama and a black daddy – that's why … Ain't nothing gonna come easy for you'" (p. 40).

There is only one description of Clifton's appearance and it is his only positive memory associated with his skin color. At the age of nine, a classmate saves him from some bullies and

remarks that he has lovely skin "like melted caramel" (p. 17). Perhaps it counterbalances the racist comment about gray babies made by the policeman and shifts his earliest memories of how people perceive him racially from being entirely traumatic. He remembers her comment for years, and not surprisingly, Julie later becomes his romantic interest. We are given to believe that the townspeople read him as black. While walking through an affluent part of town, white residents look at him askance, gather their children inside and hurry out of his way. These reactions remind Clifton of his father's words and also underscore the persistence of racism that can breed people like the cop who killed his father. Clifton has to walk through that neighborhood regularly on his way to meet Swamper. He understands that he cannot avoid racists any more than they can avoid him. Stories and experiences of racism shape his understanding of his own identity as a person of color. Clifton also learns that his maternal grandfather disowned his mother when she married Mr. Carlson. She thinks it was racial but later we learn that it was more complicated.

Gray Baby challenges depictions of mixed race characters in many ways. To begin with, despite his traumatic childhood and lonely teenage-hood, Clifton is spunky and smart and always outwits Colt, the bully, with intellect rather than pain. Thus he interrupts the image of the silent, victimized mixed race subject so common in the MRI/V books. Furthermore, Clifton does not wallow in self-pity about his father's death. He is angry, hurt and haunted by the presence of the cop who was never implicated in the murder and as a result hates all cops. Other events force him to confront this hatred and recognize that he cannot be distrustful of all police officers. Unlike other novels, in which the mixed race character is often the only person of color, *Gray Baby* includes a balanced cast of both black and white characters that touch Clifton's life. In small ways, Old Henry the storekeeper, Charlie the ice-cream man, and Tricky Bob the fish

buyer and Swamper's friend are positive black male figures in Clifton's life. His friends Julie and Swamper are white, and so is the good policeman. Of course his mother is too. The kidnapping and probable murder of Julie's little sister by an escaped convict (white), teaches Clifton that evil acts in many ways; making his black father and a little white girl equally vulnerable. Swamper's tales about Crocket Mill enable Clifton to see his hometown in a different light, a place where a romance with Julie is not out of the realm of possibility. Furthermore, it turns out that Swamper is his maternal grandfather. Toward the end of the novel Clifton and Swamper share their views on race in a candid exchange and Clifton learns that Swamper's rejection of his daughter wasn't *entirely* because of her marriage to a black man. Swamper admits that he is a product of his circumstances and he did find the interracial relationship difficult to accept, but that his real objection was to the fact that his daughter was pregnant before she was married, and that coincidentally, Mr. Carlson was involved in an accident that killed Swamper's best friend. He was angry with her because "I felt like she was marrying him just to defy me. Just to make me mad because we didn't always see things eye to eye. But it wasn't about your daddy being black. Mostly it wasn't anyway" (p. 249). Clifton isn't quite convinced by his grandfather on this point and asks if his being half black is a problem for the old man. Swamper's response is uncharacteristically emotional and a little contrived. But it is a satisfying, loving assurance to a boy who really needs to be told he is loved, admired and respected *because of* who he is, not despite it. Swamper admits that knowing Clifton has transformed his way of thinking because part of "acting according to how I was raised" (p. 250) included not forming close relationships with people of color:

> Life is about change, and I've changed. And you've helped me with that, so I thank you. I've realized that no matter what color a person's skin is on the outside, everyone's blood

is the same color on the inside. You and me have the same blood. Same blood, same color. You're my grandson and I couldn't be prouder. (p. 251)

A little later, Swamper makes a racist comment about the "Nips" bombing Pearl Harbor that puts a realistic touch to this otherwise radical transformation.

Clifton's transformation involves overcoming fears of people and places connected with his father's murder, understanding his mother's decline and helping her out of it, and undertaking acts of bravery and selflessness that have less to do with himself and more to do with helping others. He learns that people need each other and close relationships can exist even in the face of social disapproval.

The Other Half of My Heart, Sundee Tucker Frazier (2010)

Like many stories in this genre, *The Other Half of My Heart* focuses on physical appearance as the source of conflict for mixed race characters. Maria P.P. Root (1996) reminds us that having to explain or defend racial group membership is part of the reality of mixed race individuals (p. 4) in life and in literature. Kiera and Minni King are twins with an African American mother and German-Irish father. Kiera resembles her mother in that she has darker skin and dark curly hair; Minni's features are closer to her father's. Minni's blue eyes, pale skin and red hair cause her to feel less connected to her mother and sister and when they are together outside their home, causes people to question or stare. The story focuses on Minni's negotiation of her racial identity. The twins spend ten days with their maternal grandmother in Raleigh, North Carolina at her insistence that they participate in the Miss Black Pearl Preteen Program "not just a pageant ... it's a *scholarship* program" (p. 16). Minni's stage fright is coupled with anxiety over the fact that people might not believe she is African American. This in itself is a

shift from the more common theme of the mixed race subject trying to be accepted in a white context. She asks her mother, "Am I black or white or what?" (p. 55) and is not convinced when her mother points out the variety of features she and Kiera share with both sides of their family. She also tells Minni about her own upbringing in Raleigh where she was surrounded by African Americans "who were as dark as licorice and as light as cream" (p. 59). Most important, she points out, was that despite physical differences, their community was "united by a common struggle" (p. 59). It is this "common struggle" Minni learns, that matters more than skin color, even while individual experiences are shaped by it.

Periodically we see that the girls have been raised with a strong sense of their African American heritage. The book hits all the hot-button issues from famous people, historical struggles and triumphs, to hair care. Meanwhile, the complete lack of similar anecdotes of their German-Irish heritage renders their whiteness ubiquitous. Minni envies her sister's dark skin and curly hair, but she is blind to the racism that Kiera experiences. Part of Minni's development includes learning about her own privilege and the many ways in which her appearance allows her to fit in to her home and school environment. An incident in a store in which a sales person treats Minni and Kiera very differently shakes Minni to the core, particularly because her silence made her complicit in the racism. At the competition, she feels alone and different, which Kiera reminds her, is how she feels all the time at home.

Kiera's racial identity is uncontested. Her appearance in their white hometown marks her as African American. When she is a target of racism, it is because of her blackness, not her mixedness. In Raleigh, surrounded by other African Americans, she revels in all aspects of the competition with confidence and skill, makes friends, and ultimately wins the Miss Black Pearl Preteen crown. Meanwhile, her grandmother treats her with undue harshness, with explicit racial

overtones. She criticizes her hair and skin and constantly puts her down. Kiera is hurt, but she is secure in her racial and cultural identity and does not wish to be any different. It seems her prior experience with racism has toughened her to be able to handle judgment when it comes from within her own family. The lack of attention to Kiera's understanding of her mixed race identity is a missed opportunity that could have presented an interesting juxtaposition of the twins' experiences.

Ultimately, *The Other Half of My Heart* spotlights the arbitrariness of racial identity as a social construct. People who appear white can have proud and close connections to black culture, while some, like the grandmother, who look black might internalize the shame bred by a racist society. The characters embody their cultural connections, traditions, appearance, and self-worth in a variety of ways so that Minni's mother's assertion "there are many ways to be black" (p. 59) rings true in this context. For Kiera and Minni, being mixed race means drawing on the support of a loving family to fight racism, recognize privilege, and maintain a sense of social responsibility rooted in centuries of struggle. Frazier's other novel, *Brendan Buckley's Universe and Everything In It* (2007) also has a strong, likeable and engaging biracial protagonist (discussed in Chapter V).

MRA in Historical Fiction

Given the way that attitudes and beliefs about race have been constructed in the U.S., it is not surprising that more of the MRA books are contemporary realistic fiction rather than historical fiction. Discourse around mixed race identity as a unique form of racial identity is a fairly contemporary phenomenon associated with the biracial baby boom that followed the Supreme Court ruling on the ban on interracial marriage in 1967. It would not be realistic to

expect that mixed characters could imagine racial identity that defied the laws of hypodescent with racial lines being as discretely drawn as they were. The three texts analyzed below demonstrate how a few protagonists did not or could not deny their white heritage and as such they accepted a biracial identity out of choice or necessity and usually with great difficulty.

The River Between Us, Richard Peck (2003)

The River Between Us comes at the issue of mixed race identity from an oblique angle that at once is and is not the focus of the novel. The story begins in 1916 with the young narrator, Howard Hutchings setting off with his father and brothers to visit his paternal grandparents in Grand Tower, southern Illinois. Upon their arrival, the narrative shifts to the voice of Howards' grandmother, Tilly Pruitt, telling the story of the appearance of Calinda and Delphine Duval, two young women from New Orleans. This part of the story takes place in Grand Tower, Illinois, in 1861, as the civil war looms closer.

Many important and interesting historical elements make this a rich and engaging novel. As a commentary on mixed race identity, *The River Between Us* depicts perhaps the only possibility for a multiracial identity at a time when laws of hypodescent reigned supreme. Delphine Duval describes her French Creole heritage in language often used to describe this community: "…we free people of color live on a kind of island, lapped by a sea of slavery" (p. 129). Through Delphine, readers get a good idea of the paradoxical system of *Le Code Noir,* the Black Code established by the French in New Orleans that granted the black population all the rights of other citizens but for three: they couldn't vote, hold public office, or marry a white person (p. 162). The civil war threatened this system and many Creole people fled New Orleans. Removed from this glamorous, oppressive island, the Duval sisters find refuge in the home of the

Pruitts in Grand Tower. Though the narrative voice is Tilly's, Delphine is easily the most significant character. She is anything but a lost refugee in this small and dingy town. She sweeps in with her gowns and spicy food, French-tinged accent and forthright manners, and opens up Tilly's circumscribed life in ways she could never have imagined.

The family lives on the outskirts of the town. There is no mention of neighbors or community. Mrs. Pruitt is quiet, guarded, and keeps her family and business to herself. Mr. Pruitt is dead. Cass is a strange child who sees visions and feels things with tremendous sensitivity. Mrs. Pruitt protects the family from social gossip about Cass by remaining aloof. Set up thus as an unconventional household, it is appropriate that she would invite the two strangers from New Orleans to live when them.

Tilly Pruitt has never laid eyes on anyone like Delphine before. The description includes familiar references to dark curly hair, "eyes large and darkly fringed" and "a mouth too dark to be as nature intended" (p. 35). Tilly has no knowledge of Creole people or even the possibility of mixed race people and it is credible that she does not racially name or identify Delphine. To her she is exotic and foreign as New Orleans sounds. Calinda is darker skinned and Tilly assumes she is Delphine's slave although their relationship is not as Tilly imagined a slave and owner's would be. For the months that Delphine and Calinda live with the Pruitts, nothing is said about them being colored or black or Creole. With characteristic terseness, no one asks and nothing is offered. Tilly's only awareness of prevalent racial issues is that there was a law in effect that forbade black people from living in Illinois, but it was widely ignored and the black people who were there were free (p. 41). Association with Calinda puts Delphine 'at risk' for being recognized, but it does not faze her or the Pruitts.

When the town women come to the Pruitt house to express their disapproval it is because they think Delphine is a spy from the south. They call her "the white one" (p. 77) and their objection is to her being Southern and attracting the attention of the men in the town. Mrs. Pruitt defends her decision to host the sisters and gets rid of the town women. She and Tilly are surprised at her boldness and Mrs. Pruitt acknowledges that it is because of Delphine's own outspokenness and confidence that she spoke up. Delphine, she decides, has "put some starch in my spine" (p. 80). Delphine has this effect on Tilly and Dr. Hutchings too. Her uninhibited worldview and mild disdain for social mores slowly and subtly wears off on these otherwise provincial characters. Delphine and Calinda's presence in the Pruitt's home brings more excitement in the way of food, stories, attention to personal appearance, music and dance, and Calinda and Cass share powers of prophecy and prediction. When Noah has to be rescued from the army camp Delphine rises beyond anyone's expectations. She and Tilly travel to the army camp in Cairo to find Noah. Having shared snippets of her New Orleans life with Tilly on the journey, she seems to have laid the groundwork to tell all. When Dr. Hutchings tries to prevent the girls from going into the soldiers' tent which is under quarantine, Delphine is unafraid and asserts her heritage as a source of strength: "Me, I am a Creole from New Orleans…If yellow fever can't kill me, what can?" (p. 113).

Delphine keeps a picture of her father, a white man named Jules Duval over her bed. Perhaps the picture of this "yellow-haired" man (p. 119) is strategically placed to signify her connection to a white man. In New Orleans this would be commonplace, but in Southern Illinois it is a strategic necessity of which Delphine is fully aware.

Yet she is not coy about her heritage. Her elaborate clothing and French accent mark her as foreign enough, exotic to those who cannot place her. While nursing Yankee soldiers she

makes bold comments about the strength of the Confederate army (which ironically would protect her and her people's way of life). No one asks about her, so she does not tell. Eventually, their landlady, who has been to New Orleans, recognizes Delphine. Mrs. Hanrahan confronts her, speaking with derision of her mother and the fact that Jules Duval has another, white family, which renders Delphine and her mother and sister part of an illicit, immoral arrangement. Mrs. Hanrahan does not evict Delphine because she wants her rent money; as long as she stays in the back of the building "where you belong" (p. 127), she can stay. Her racist outburst is impetus for Delphine to explain the race and class dynamics between the Irish and the *gens de couleur*, the free people of color, in New Orleans. Delphine is very knowledgeable about the history of her people and their position in that city, which is simultaneously accepted and abhorred. Mrs. Hanrahan's attitude, she understands, is typical of the Irish immigrants who arrived in Louisiana poor and hungry and were exploited by wealthier residents even though they were white. Delphine is part of an old and established population responsible for the vibrancy of New Orleans. She sums up the fragility of the system very effectively:

> 'We were there before them. Our roots are in New Orleans mud. We people of color make the city work. It is like no other place because of us. We were there from the earliest times. They despise us for our ease, for our silken lives. They don't understand how people of color can be free … almost free … we free people of color live on a kind of island, lapped by a sea of slavery. Beyond that sea is this territory up here.' (pp. 127-128)

Later Delphine explains what it was like to live under the system of *placage*, replete with wealth and luxury, but always aware of being inferior to the white families of their male protectors. Delphine grew up knowing that her survival lay in being the mistress of a white man,

as her mother and grandmother were. She indicates that this was preferable even to marrying a quadroon like herself. Her brother was sent to France where "he will become a Frenchman where people do not ask questions" (p. 139). Between Delphine's description and the Author's Note, Peck provides a vivid picture of an intensely patriarchal system that was closely bound up in race and class interests. The civil war left the free women of color in limbo, and many, like Delphine, were compelled to flee north and pass for white if necessary. Others, like Calinda, who were darker skinned, moved to California where they could live in relative anonymity in a more multicultural environment.

Delphine stays in Grand Tower with Tilly, Noah and Dr. Hutchings. The narrative switches back to 1916 and the second narrator, Howard, learns that she is in fact, his grandmother. Adhering to tradition, she refused to marry Noah, though they lived as man and wife. Tilly and Dr. Hutchings raised their son. Howard is momentarily surprised by this news. His admiration and respect for his father having been established, and his own racial identity being completely secure, it is easy for Howard to claim to be proud of his heritage, of being Delphine and Noah's grandson, of passing on the legacy one day to his own child "with enormous violet eyes" (p. 158).

Bold, charismatic and beautiful, Delphine cuts a striking figure who brings life and courage to the dull lives of the Pruitts. At the same time, her personal losses are tremendous. The war forces her to leave her mother and home in New Orleans, and at age 15, invent a new identity in unfamiliar territory. Her sister Calinda, "too dark to pass" (p. 152) left for California because of the risk her presence posed to Delphine. She had to pretend her child was not her own, and never knew her grandsons until that single summer visit when she was at the end of her life. Howard's mother's aloofness towards her husbands' family now makes sense; her racism

kept the family apart. Like many people who had to pass as white in order to survive, Delphine had to give up everything to keep anything. In this she is reminiscent of the tragic mulatta figure. But tragedy is part of her life, not the entirety of it. Tilly, Dr. Hutchings, Noah and Delphine lived together as a family – a very unconventional family bound by the secrets and loyalty and shared convictions about humanity. *The River Between Us* adds to the body of literature that tells the stories of people who resisted convention, social mores, religion and law, in the face of great danger. It shows how at a time when race relations were so deeply fraught with distrust and hostility, there were people like the Pruitts and Duvals, from completely disparate worlds, who could create family relationships when genetic ones were severed.

Hidden Roots, Joseph Bruchac (2004)

Eleven-year-old Howard (Sonny) has always lived in fear – fear of his father's temper, fear of being noticed in school, and fear of "being crept up on" (p. 9). He does not understand who or what will creep up on him, just that his mother is serious about them needing to be alert – just in case. *Hidden Roots* is set in a town called Sparta in the Adirondack hills outside Vermont in 1954. Howard recalls several factors that set him apart from his peers. One is that his refusal to fight another boy in third grade earned him the nickname Howard the Coward and the derision of his peers. He determines that the other kids must not like him and keeps to himself. The other is that there are so many secrets in his family that he thinks it is best he avoid friendships lest anyone ask questions. Howard's parents teach him to "watch my back and keep quiet" (p. 8) but do not say why. There are suggestions of domestic violence and topics Howard learns he must never ask about: World War II, his mother's bruises, Uncle Louis' past.

Thus secrecy is normal in his world. The novel builds up to the revelation of a secret that he could not have guessed – that he and his parents are Abenaki Indians and Uncle Louis is his grandfather. They fled the eugenics efforts in Vermont before Howard was born, and shed all markers of their tribal heritage so that they could blend into their small rural community. But before he learns his, Howard begins to relearn what he knows about Indians through Uncle Louis.

Howard's mild curiosity about Indians dots the first half of the novel and reveals the ubiquity of stereotypes. Despite his distance from peers and adults – sources of conventional knowledge, Howard has absorbed paradigmatic notions about Indians. When his mother tells him he must watch his back, his immediate thought is that she means he must protect himself from Indians. Bruchac makes clear that Howard has learned this fear from a movie in which sleeping cowboys are attacked (p. 8). Later when he asks his mother about Uncle Louis' family, she snaps at him, telling him never to ask again. He understands that something tragic had happened and assumes "it had something to do with Indians" (p. 31). Howard reflects that he doesn't know much about Indians, only what he has learned from school and the movies, and about the "dirt-poor half-Indians on the other side of the mountain, but they weren't real Indians from what I heard. They lived in shacks, not teepees, and they didn't ride horses; they rode about in old jalopies. They didn't even wear feathers" (p. 32). Thus, his perceptions are clouded by stereotypical perceptions that most readers would probably recognize.

Howard spends more and more time with Uncle Louis, impressed with the older man's knowledge about trees, soil, animals and the connectivity of all living things. Louis' view of the world makes sense to Howard, and incites his curiosity about the Indians on the other side of the mountain. He is confused when Uncle Louis tells him that they "used to be" (p. 57) Indians, and

proceeds to explains racism and how the Indians had no way to survive but by blending in to the white community and shedding all traditions and markers of who they really were. Survival, Louis explains, sometimes means hiding "even if we have to do it in plain sight" (p. 39).

When school resumes in the fall, Howard's world is opened up even further by an unexpected mentor, the school librarian, Edith Rosen. Rosen gives him books to read, including *The Last of the Mohicans.* Uncle Louis knows Rosen and Bruchac describes a poignant scene in which the two acknowledge each other's tragic histories: "it was as if the two of them were talking a language that only they knew" (p. 106). Louis explains the Holocaust to Howard, telling him how Ms. Rosen's parents were not able to escape. Talking about prejudice in the context of anti-Semitism provides an opening for him to tell Howard the truth about his own family. He shows Howard the medical form that authorized his wife's sterilization, drawing the parallel between Nazi and U.S. eugenics: "they done what they done because it was the law and because she was Indian. Just like me" (p. 114). He also tells Howard that he is his grandfather.

The novel ends with Louis and Jake (Howard's father) explaining the 1931 Vermont law that established forced sterilizations of Indians and the devastating effects that had on tribes and families. Without mitigating the horror of the eugenics practices of the U.S. government, Bruchac provides readers with a succinct explanation for his young readers. Howard learns that both his parents are of Abenaki, Mohawk and perhaps some French ancestry, and that their secrecy about it was meant to protect him, and themselves. Louis explains that Jake felt that hiding their Indian roots would mean Howard would have "more of a chance in life" (p. 117), that racism and injustice would otherwise destroy their family. He, on the other hand, believes ancestry provides the foundation, strength even in the face of terrible adversity: "... roots is what helps a tree to stand up against the wind. Your family is always your family" (p. 118).

Perhaps more than for other populations, racial mixing and racial identity for American Indian populations are complicated by time and nuance that are beyond the scope of this project to explore. *Hidden Roots* provides one picture of how American Indians with white ancestry used phenotype (when possible) to assimilate in order to survive. Bruchac is not only deeply knowledgeable about this complex negotiation, he is also a skilled writer who makes clear the devastating effects of legally sanctioned racism on American Indian populations, families and individuals. Furthermore, *Hidden Roots* provides a critique of assimilation and its underlying fallacy within the rhetoric of the American melting pot. As a counterstory, it exposes stereotypes and replaces them with a more authentic picture of an American Indian life. Although *Hidden Roots* is one of the many novels of historical fiction identified for this study, it is vastly different from many novels rooted in the 'settler-meets-Indian genre'. Furthermore it is a refreshing example of a story in which author and characters "name [their own] reality" (Delgado, 1995).

Stealing Home, Ellen Schwartz (2006)

Set in the Bronx and Brooklyn in 1947, *Stealing Home* puts an unusual spin on the Missing Half motif. Nine-year-old Joey Sexton's life plummets when his (white) mother dies of a drug overdose, and the social worker finds out that the (black) father he never knew died a year earlier and had been living not far away in New Jersey. Furthermore, Joey's mother was Jewish, changed her name from Greenberg to Green, and has an estranged family who is prepared to take Joey in. Having been tormented by the neighborhood boys in the Bronx for being mixed race, Joey feels his only hope lies in the possibility of starting his new life over, as white. This idea is introduced by a mixed race friend and an adult who tell him he could easily pass. The rejection of his black peers and his black father and grandparents who never made contact are reasons for

him to have negative associations with his black heritage. Upon arriving in Brooklyn he is pleased to discover that his appearance is very similar to his cousin's, his aunt's and even his grandfather's. It seems that he might fit in after all. Some people in the neighborhood, however, are not willing to let him forget that he is part black. They remember the scandal caused by this mother when she left with a black man and then had a baby. In the community, Joey is received with warmth as well as hatred. He can defend himself against the meanest racists, but what hurts him the most is that his grandfather does not stand up for him. Joey takes this silence to mean his grandfather is also disgusted by him and considers his mother a disgrace. The option of passing precluded, Joey has to come to understand what it means to be part black and part Jewish in ways that he never had to consider before.

In his new home in a Jewish neighborhood, Joey realizes he knows nothing about his Jewish heritage. He has vague memories of his mother lighting candles, but knows nothing of the customs and traditions that are part of daily life now. His cousin and Aunt teach him, and he is eager to learn. Meanwhile, he finds himself also interested in Jackie Robinson, feeling he can relate to the racism the ballplayer experiences. Thus Joey's identity is being shaped by his family at home and by Robinson in the ball park. There are no other African American influences in his life and the shared experience of racism and Robinson's strength in the face of it inspires Joey. Interestingly, despite the time period, when a mixed race identity was not part of the cultural discourse, Joey identifies as mixed rather than just black. Also, the most virulent racism he experiences comes from a storeowner who hates that Joey is mixed, reflecting cultural attitudes towards interracial relationships.

There are a few elements about *Stealing Home* that might have prevented it from being a Mixed Race Awareness book and made it a MRI/V one instead. Occasionally it seems as if it is

more about Joey's development of his Jewish identity, than his black or mixed race identity. What saves it from joining the realm of books about conflicted mixed race characters is that Joey ultimately turns out to be surprisingly self-assured of being both black and Jewish and identifies as mixed even though that would have been somewhat radical (or unusual) in the mid nineteen hundreds. Though he is faced with heart-breaking racist cruelty from adults around him, Joey stands up for himself bravely and with convincing self-confidence. His grandfather, Zeyde's rejection matters more than the attitudes of strangers, and it is his approval that Joey seeks.

Ultimately, Joey yearns for his grandfather's affection. He is convinced that it is his black heritage that is the reason the old man is nasty to him. But gradually he learns that it is more complicated. Joey's mother was a rebellious teenager and her relationship with her father was always fraught after her own mother died. She became more and more adversarial and the last straw was running away with Joey's father and then becoming a drug addict. Joey's pranks remind Zeyde of his disobedient daughter and make it hard for him to love his grandson. Here again, a white character is relieved of having racist motivations by the insistence of 'other complications'.

The narrative effectively complicates Joey's understanding of people's attitudes towards him. The racist character is one-dimensionally nasty – even Zeyde says so. But the old man does not defend his grandson from her spite. Most of the time Zeyde is curmudgeonly, but his affection for his granddaughter shows that he is capable of kindness. Joey goes back and forth trying to hate and love his grandfather, wanting to understand him and remaining fiercely defensive of his mother. Slowly Joey lets his guard down and allows himself to like his aunt and cousin and several neighbors, and to accept his new home. Ultimately it is his Aunt Frieda who is instrumental in letting Joey know he is loved and has a home. One day Zeyde spanks Joey and

his cousin after they break into a ball game illegally. Frieda defends the children, especially Joey, when Zeyde threatens to send him away saying he is as troublesome as his mother had been. Frieda reminds her father that his aggressive behavior was very much a part of Becky's rebellious behavior. She holds him accountable. Joey is overwhelmed at his aunt's bold defense, though the fragility of his situation is made all the more evident. She also tells him stories about his mother and her relationship with Zeyde so that he starts to understand that things were complicated even before he was born. In this way Joey is learning that being biracial is *not* the reason his life has been difficult. In a final show of loyalty and love, Frieda confronts the bigoted shopkeeper when she insults Joey in the store, " 'That boy, Mrs. Yanofsky, is my nephew. My sister's son. My flesh and blood … there is nothing shameful about him … nor about my sister … nor about my family' " (p. 191).

Emboldened by his aunt and a few tiny moments of kindness by Zeyde, Joey is prompted to give his grandfather a photograph of his mother thinking that he would be impressed that Joey was giving him something so cherished. But the plan backfires. Zeyde is furious and tells Joey to get out. The boy runs away to his old home in the Bronx. Zeyde comes after him and admits that Joey's departure scared him the same way Becky's had and he didn't want to lose his grandson after all. The conclusion of *Stealing Home* is a happy one. The penultimate chapter shows Zeyde taking Joey to the synagogue with him and proudly introducing him as his grandson " 'Becky's boy. Isn't he the image of her?' " (p. 209). In the final chapter we see the family going to the 1947 World Series game at Ebbet's Field wearing Dodgers caps and loudly rooting for Jackie Robinson. New-found security in a family that will love him for who he is leaves us with the hope that Joey will grow up with a healthy sense of self rather than inner turmoil.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Through content and literary analysis this study sought to describe experiences of being racially mixed in contemporary children's literature. This question was investigated along three lines:

- What historical/ideological perspectives inform books about multiracial characters?
- To what degree are contemporary authors maintaining or challenging racial paradigms?
- How can literature about multiracial identity be usefully described and defined?

Overall, this study found that there are currently too few books easily available to readers interested in mixed-race windows or mirrors. Nine million Americans indicated in the 2010 Census that they identified as multiracial, and the range of mixes is vast. The findings of this study indicate that only a small section of mixed race America is represented in contemporary realistic and historical fiction. It seems unlikely that many multiracial American children are seeing themselves in the stories they read. The most frequently occurring image in children's books of the past decade that feature mixed race characters is that of a teenage, female, black-white biracial protagonist (56/90 female, 21/56 B/W female). Most characters are shown to be economically struggling or just managing; and it is likely that one or both biological parents are dead, absent, uninvolved or peripheral. Stories are equally likely to be set in urban areas or small towns and the characters' immediate surroundings are homogeneously white or somewhat racially diverse, meaning that the characters had friends of different races. Daniel in *Mexican WhiteBoy* was the only character with biracial friends. Fifteen protagonists had siblings, but it was made clear that their appearance was racially 'distinct' so they did not experience the same anxiety that the main characters did. The focus on racially ambiguous appearance as a defining

element of biracial identity is discussed later in the section "Talking About Mixed Race Identity" on page 186.

Themes In the Categories

Separating the books into the Sims Bishop categories was useful to narrow the focus and allow specific themes to emerge. Many of these themes were explicated in the literary analyses of representative texts in Chapter IV. In this section I tie the themes to paradigmatic notions of mixed race identity disseminated in the early twentieth century when mixed race identity was a focus of scientific and sociological study. A theoretical lens grounded in critical race theory reveals the extent to which contemporary authors' perceptions are rooted in those notions. Some stories may be read as counterstories that push back at stereotypes and assert alternative versions of mixed race experiences.

Mixed Race In/Visibility

All thirty-one books in the MRI/V category depict biracial characters as damaged by their biracial heritage. There is a strong suggestion that if they were monoracial, their lives would have been better. Based on themes reflected in this set of books, three variations of mixed race experiences can be described: 1) Wounded by Words, 2) Inferior Vitality, and 3) Incomplete Amalgamation

Wounded by Words. This descriptor is borrowed from Richard Delgado's (1995) essay "Words That Wound: A Tort Action for Racial Insults, Epithets, and Name-Calling". Biracial characters in these stories were subjected to racial slurs targeting their mixed identity. From the start characters had already internalized racism and exhibited the effects in the form of low self-esteem and self-hatred (Delgado, p. 163). The process leading up to this point is not shown and as a result, being biracial seems to be the *reason* characters are isolated and unhappy. Depictions

of racism are filtered through the targets' memories, dreams, diary entries, even as imagined moments. In all three of Jaime Adoff's books, protagonists are deeply emotionally wounded, lack supportive peers or adults, and are withdrawn from society. Their plight invokes our sympathy, but isolation comes across as a choice. In *The Road to Paris* and *America*, protagonists are introduced believing that their biological parents abandoned them because they are biracial. There is nothing else to explain the adults' absence. In *The Likes of Me,* Cordy yearns to shed her skin like a snake, believing that if she emerged differently, people would like her. Similarly, the nameless narrator in *Letters To My Mother* dislikes her dark skin because of the negative attention it brings. The singular focus on already-internalized feelings upholds the 'problem' of multiracial identity as inherent. The external causes of those feelings are vague at best, and often completely absent.

In these books, characters' responses to racism are valid. What is problematic is the presentation in which readers see only lonely, wounded characters figuring out how to survive on their own. Such stories are silent on the matter of systemic racism. Some authors seem loath to write directly about racism, even while they choose to include it as part of their characters' realities. Readers may well come away from books like these believing that it is indeed an unfortunate twist of fate to be born biracial and that isolation is a natural consequence – just as Everett Stonequist asserted in 1937.

Inferior Vitality. In 1871, when Charles Darwin wrote about the "inferior vitality of mulattoes … as a well-known phenomenon" (as cited in Ifekwunigwe, 2004, p. 45), he was one of a few scientists who challenged ideas about the infertility of mixed race people. He did so by providing many examples of "crosses" (p. 49) described by their "peculiarities", "sudden variations or monstrosities" (p. 48). Mental illness was named as an inevitable consequence of

interracial breeding. The character of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* is a well-known literary example. It is disturbing then, to find that over a century later, the same ideas are repeated in books for children and young adults. Of the thirty-one books in the MRI/V category, only three depict biracial characters with two living, biological parents. Most of the adult interracial relationships in these books are presented as brief, even anonymous, accidental encounters. Mixed race offspring are reminiscent of scientific "crosses" who display socially and biologically anomalous proclivities. In *America, Take Me With You, All the Broken Pieces,* and *Zane's Trace,* war, drugs and/or alcohol are given as reasons for interracial contact. Furthermore, the biracial children of these unions know it. As if living with racism is not tragic enough, depression, schizophrenia and attempted suicide underscore the hopelessness. Manz, the protagonist of *Border Crossing* has schizophrenic episodes in which he imagines the Border Patrol is coming to deport him. Jayson, in *The Death of Jayson Porter* is disgusted by his white mother's sexual preference for black men: "I feel sick, knowing that I am just the product of a hooker and some john. The son of some nameless, faceless brutha who had enough money to buy my mom" (p. 149). His emotional spiral culminates in an attempt at suicide. Zane Guesswind, in *Zane's Trace* suffers seizures. His mother was schizophrenic and killed herself, his father left when he was four, and Zane's only respite is to control his life like Harold in *Harold and the Purple Crayon* – drawing and erasing pictures on a wall. Susanna and Matt, the protagonists of *Take Me With You* and *All the Broken Pieces* were born because war brought American soldiers to Italy and Vietnam long enough to father children and then leave. Nuns and therapists counsel Susanna and Matt to help make sense of their lives. The recurrence of the theme of mental illness in conjunction with mixed race identity is significant in this small corpus of books.

Incomplete Amalgamation. "… There is something universal in the problem of racial hybrids … Theirs is a problem of incomplete social assimilation as well as of incomplete biological amalgamation" (Stonequist, 1937, p. 10). Nancy Reynolds (2009) calls this the "Missing Half" (p. 32) status of the mixed race subject. Characters feel incomplete because they lack connections with an absent parent who they imagine would fill a racial/cultural gap. Those connections are described in terms of complexion, language and/or traditions. Since most of the characters feel the absent parent left because they could not accept their children, the implication is that the biracial subject is the cause of his or her own isolation and doomed to a hopeless lifelong quest to seek acceptance.

The trope of seeking acceptance is particularly apparent in books with American Indian and white biracials. Characters are depicted as intermediaries between natives and whites because language and/or appearance make them useful as such. In all but one of these books, characters had American Indian mothers and white (Irish or French) fathers who were no longer present – reinforcing the impossibility of long-term interracial unions. Furthermore, as go-betweens these characters have to prove themselves worthy to both sides by undertaking dangerous feats. Adaline, in *Adaline Falling Star,* journeys down the Mississippi on a rickety raft, on her way to New Mexico to find the father who abandoned her. Fifteen-year-old Madolen, in *Call Me the Canyon* strikes out on her own to become an archeologist's apprentice, living in the canyons of Utah. In *Trouble at Fort La Pointe,* Suzette is on a mission alone in the woods, to prove the innocence of her fur-trapper father. In *The Valley of the Moon: the Diary of Maria Rosalia de Milagros,* Rosa seems to believe that it was only natural that her white father abandoned his indigenous family. Although she was raised and surrounded by indigenous people

with the same history and culture as her (dead) mother, she is unsatisfied and yearns to know about her father.

This theme of being socially and biologically incomplete as an essential feature of mixed race identity, rather than the construct of a racist ideological paradigm is present in far too many books and perpetuates problematic depictions of biracial identity. This study seeks to expose the myth of the 'inevitability' of mixed race dysfunction by linking contemporary literature with century-old science. The longevity of the ideas says something about how much still needs to be done to change them.

Conclusion: *Mixed Race In/Visibility.* Books in the Mixed Race In/Visibility category bring attention to the fact that the long arm of racism extends even to people who are part white. They show us that prejudice operates in subtle ways, like neglect, isolation and invisibility. Many stories depict dark and traumatic experiences that nevertheless have optimistic endings. Jayson is reunited with his biological mother, America finds stability in a group home, Matt is able to love his adoptive family while he clings to memories of his biological one. Even Adaline and Cordy learn that when family members disappoint, allies can be found in unexpected places (stray dogs and circus comrades). Gritty endings about learning to cope with life's struggles replace the happily-ever-after myth. They reinforce the notion that an individual can overcome all obstacles no matter how precarious one's situation may be.

On the other hand, social critique is completely lacking. Biracials are cast as the unfortunate result of adult folly, rejected by everyone. Even readers who can relate to these stories of despair will come away feeling that the only drastic events, total emotional independence, and sheer force of will can effect change. If anything, the appeal to teenage angst goes too far in these books. Kim Williams (2005) points out that protecting children's self-

esteem was key for the advocates of the multiracial movement (p. 59). The damage to self-esteem is evident and critically important, but to describe it as inherent to the biracial experience is dangerous.

Mixed Race Blending

As mentioned earlier, biracial characters in the thirty-one books in this category were not overly concerned with the matter of racial identity. Three variations of blending stories emerged: 1) One Drop Still Rules, 2) Revelations, and 3) All-American Biracials.

One Drop Still Rules: These books are about biracial characters who are aligned with their non-white heritage. In come cases, like *Cashay,* mixed race identity is barely significant, but the books are identified by the Library of Congress and/or reviewers. Cashay has some questions about her racial identity, but other matters are more important. Nancy Reynolds (2009) suggests that white authors might create biracial characters when they want to write about experiences of people of color, and that including half of their own racial heritage gives them 'permission' to write about experiences outside their own racial group (p. 86). Questions of authenticity might be avoided this way. The predominance of white authors paying superficial attention to racial identity in this study upholds that suggestion. Vera in *Aleutian Sparrow* also identifies exclusively as Aleut. The racial identities of Mikey (hapa) in *Lord of the Deep,* and Emily in *Dog Whisperer: The Rescue,* are little more than descriptive. Other characters identify solely with their non-white heritage. Jace in *Stringz* has no interest in his absent white father and identifies as black. For the most part Lafayette and his brothers in *Miracle's Boys* appreciate the food and language they can access via their (dead) Puerto Rican mother, but identify as African American. D Foster is completely aligned with her African American friends, history and pop-culture, and the appearance of her white mother only momentarily jolts how her friends read her.

Miguel, the protagonist of *We Were Here* is briefly curious about his absent Mexican father and in the context of a Latino community, identifies as Latino. In all these examples the racial makeup of the context seems to be a determining factor in the racial identity of the characters. This small corpus of books demonstrates the literary continuation of the long-held one-drop rule.

Revelations: In four of the MRB books characters assume or are assumed to be monoracial until they discover otherwise. In *Say You Are My Sister,* Mony learns that her half-sister's mother was mixed, making Georgie black according to the norms of the time. Set in Jim Crow Georgia, this news serves only to endanger an already-vulnerable family. In *Black Angels,* Celli meets her African American grandmother and learns that her (absent) father was biracial. Prior to these discoveries the characters lived as white girls, and in fact continued to do so afterwards as if nothing had changed. Given that both stories are set in the Jim Crow south, where passing for white was extremely dangerous, if not illegal and fatal, the lack of real impact is questionable.

Similarly, in *Last Dance on Holladay Street,* when Eva, raised by African American adoptive parents, learns that her biological mother is white, she suddenly has an explanation for her appearance. She also has an explanation for her origins – an illicit arrangement between her prostitute mother and a black man – but is not noticeably affected. Eva passes for white without fear or danger (in 19th century Denver), and feels equally comfortable and included in a black church. This portrayal is anachronistic and superficial.

In *Minn and Jake's Almost Terrible Summer,* Minn is surprised to find out that her best friend Jake is part Korean. She is shocked and hurt, as if he had been keeping a secret from her. Jake does not care for the accusation and retorts "*But you don't care/ that I never told you/ I'm part Norwegian/ And part French and part German!"* (p. 48). He has a point; in the absence of

naming European identity, naming non-white heritage serves to 'other' it. In another detail, three blond girls (one in a wheelchair) and an Asian girl try to cut in line at Disney World. The attendant lets the blond girls in, but not the Asian. "Disabled and family only, she says" (p. 78). Jake assumes she might be a step or adopted sister, but the attendant doesn't. Perhaps this is a suggestion that as a mixed race person he has the capacity to imagine non-homogenous families, but the attendant does not. Janet Wong is Chinese and Korean and has written extensively about being Asian and bicultural, so she, like Jake would have this awareness.

All-American Biracials: The books in this set feature characters for whom biracial identity begins and ends with appearance. Bobby Chan in *Bobby v. Girls* and *Bobby the Brave* is a funny adventurous, all-American boy who just happens to have an Asian American father. He has a diverse group of friends but worries that his friend Holly is 'becoming a girl' and losing interest in fun things like lizards. There is only one reference to racial identity and it underscores the multicultural feel of the book. Bobby and his friend Chess are talking about dogs. They agree "mutts are good" (p. 48). Bobby recalls that his teacher had said that Americans came from all over the world and he himself was a mutt. Bobby writes his racial/ethnic identity in the form of an equation:

½ Chinese
+ 1/8 English
+ 1/8 French
+ 1/8 German
+ 1/8 Not Sure
100% Bobby (p. 49)

The array of classmates' names and a few sketches depict a racially diverse context in which Bobby does not stand out. Lisa Yee captures a variety of refreshingly unconventional characters with skill and humor. The use of the word "mutt" might be considered problematic, but on the whole the complete lack of stereotypes and playful appreciation of diversity saves this book from being racially generic.

Yumi in *I Wanna Be Your Shoebox,* and Willa in *A Clear Spring* are also part of multicultural, multiracial families that lack any historical, cultural, linguistic tropes particular to their Japanese-Cuban (Yumi) or Panamanian (Willa) backgrounds. References to facial features or skin tone mark these girls as 'different' from their peers, but have no bearing on how they move in the world.

Blue Balliett includes three multiracial protagonists in her *Chasing Vermeer* trilogy. Petra Andalee's mother is "from the Middle East" (p. 20) and her father "had relatives from North Africa and northern Europe" (p. 20). A few references to her dark curly hair and baba ghanoush in her lunch box mark Petra as slightly different from her peers. Calder Pillay's mother is white and father is Indian, and Tommy Segovia's mother is white and father is Columbian. These details are easy to miss and are little more than a nod to diversity but do not contribute to characterization or plot.

Conclusion: *Mixed Race Blending.* The books in this group certainly depict being mixed race more positively than the books in the MRI/V set in that they are free from harmful stereotypes, have interesting plots, and engaging characters. The books in the *One Drop Still Rules* set reflect the reality of many mixed race people who transform hypodescent into pride. Rockquemore (2009) describes research on mixed race issues in which the "development of a Black identity was considered the healthy ideal for mixed race individuals" (p. 17). Since a large

number of African Americans believe themselves to have multiracial heritage, it was not considered necessary to think of people with one black and one white parent any differently. Like the Black Power movement in the 1960s, La Raza and the American Indian Movement encouraged members of the community to assert racial identity and claim group membership. (DaCosta, 2007, p. 43). Racial pride, knowledge of history, culture and languages, and group loyalty in order to increase visibility and power created an environment that made the inclusion of mixed people desirable and necessary.

The first three books described in the *Revelations* set are written by white authors. The off-hand manner which they create characters who live for years thinking (or not) that they are monoracial, then finding out that they have black or white ancestors, and carrying on as if nothing had happened is simply historically inaccurate. Sharon Frost (1998) suggests that this racially generic tone is due to authors' lack of experience with the culture (p. 164), and such a situation may well be the case with this set of stories. Furthermore the need or desire to pass for white is deeply important in the discourse of African American identity and would not be treated so casually by an author who was sensitive to that.

The *All-American Biracials* books are relatively unproblematic, if to be free of negative stereotypes is enough to be unproblematic. Their universal appeal is attractive, but as Sims Bishop points out, the problem with such books is that they "not only make a point of recognizing our universality, but that they also make a point of ignoring our differences (p. 33). They subscribe to the notion that we are now in a 'post-race' era in which race is no longer noticed. As mirrors, the books provide affirmation of culture-free biracial identity that is no different from any other kind of American identity. In other words, these characters are part of an assimilated population assumed to be culturally and historically neutral. It is also significant that

the characters in the latter two groups belong to middle-class families living in comfortable residential neighborhoods. The influence of context on racial self-identity is discussed in the section Taking About Mixed Race. The insight these books offer is that mixed race experiences are no different than mono-racial ones – which is in fact the case for many people. When the realm of books with mixed race content has expanded to include much more diversity than currently exists, these books will represent one of several ways of 'being mixed'.

Mixed Race Awareness

Storytelling is an important part of critical race scholarship, primarily, as Ladson-Billings (2004) reminds us, because narratives "add the necessary contextual contours to the seeming 'objectivity' of positivist perspectives" (p. 53), so it is pertinent to regard the works of mixed race authors as part of the effort to tell the stories of race. A few mixed race authors (Smith, Cruz, Frazier) have commented on the absence of books reflecting their childhoods and consider their work an effort to interrupt that silence. The books in this category shared the theme of mixed race characters negotiating their racial identities as well as other aspects of themselves. Plots, characters and settings were varied and as such themes did not emerge in the ways that they did with the books in the other two categories. The range and variety is reflective of some of the diversity of people's experiences and self-perceptions. A personal anecdote is also relevant here.

Recall the delight I described in the Introduction about when I read *Meatless Days*. I was still enjoying that sense of affirmation when a comment by a classmate completely threw me off. Shortly after I had settled into my new life on an American college campus, the matter of my racial identity came up. I was fully aware that I was 'foreign' – my accent drew attention, I had to repeat and spell out my name frequently, and I was on the mailing list for every student

organization that was in any way Asian, Muslim or internationally-themed. Upon arriving in the U.S., I also became 'South Asian' – an identification I had never even heard of in Pakistan. One day a classmate asked me what it was like to have a white mother. I was taken aback. I had never thought of my mother as *white*. She was *English*; there were many English people in Karachi. There were also many other 'international' families. I had friends who were Pakistani-English, Pakistani-Danish, Pakistani-Swiss, Pakistani-Iranian, and Pakistani-Arab – we were not anomalous at our school. I didn't know what my classmate meant by 'white' but the way he said it did not sound complimentary. I don't remember how I replied, but I remember feeling awkward, as if I was guilty of something. I was still learning about oppressive white people in America's history. His comment aligned my mother and me with *those* white people. I believe it was at that moment that I became a mixed race person in America. It isn't an accurate classification though. The history of racial mixing on the Indian sub-continent is vastly different from the history on the North American continent. When I'm asked the obligatory iterations of the 'what are you?' question, I reply that I am Pakistani and English. It is an unsatisfactory response for most Americans who really want to classify me racially, not nationally. Nevertheless, just the asking is reminder enough of being 'other'. The mixed race writers of the twenty-eight books in this section are fully aware of that constant reminder, and their stories are an effort to reach readers who share the experience.

In *The Other Half of My Heart,* people are wary of Minni's fair skin and red hair and question her eligibility in the Miss Black Pearl Teen Program. The author, herself a winner of such a program, describes Minni's feelings of self doubt as she turns to adults to help her understand this apparent disparity between her physical appearance and the people to whom she feels connected. Ultimately Minni aligns herself with civil rights activists and prominent African

Americans like W.E. B. du Bois, Wilma Rudolph and Martin Luther King Jr. Frazier (2010) makes sure readers are exposed to a range of topics: the Great Migration, soul food, voodoo, passing, the one-drop rule, upward mobility for Southern African Americans, the problem of marking racial boxes on forms, hair perms and Madame C.J. Walker, Queen Latifah, brown Barbie dolls and more. This information is communicated through adults educating Minni about the richness and diversity in the black community. The lecture-style delivery feels pedantic, but believable characters and moments of comic relief ease the weight.

The most significant thing about *The Other Half of My Heart* is that it is a counterstory. Frazier (2010) begins with a quirky romantic story about Kiera and Minni's parents. Their relationship is depicted as affectionate and respectful and it is clear that Frazier is making sure readers see that an interracial couple can have a good marriage. This is contrary to most of the couples represented in the corpus of books in this study. Next, she effectively raises the conundrum of choosing one of six racial categories on application forms to show how mixed race people are so often forced to take on labels they do not accept. Rather than locate the problem in Minni's inability to choose, Frazier turns the tables. The woman reading the form dismisses the single racial identification requirement on the form, telling Minni "It doesn't really matter. It's just government stuff" (p. 30). Later on, when the president of the Miss Black Pearl Teen Program asks if Minni and Kiera are "biological" twins, their grandmother's response points out the absurdity of the question; "as opposed to zoological?" (p. 113), she retorts. Other such moments revealing people's difficulty with biraciality dot the narrative. Frazier demonstrates how limited social perceptions of race marginalize multiracial people. By the end of the book three secondary characters who held problematic attitudes about biracialism are forced to recognize the effects of their prejudice and change their opinions.

Another way in which this is a counterstory is that the focus is on the phenotypically white character feeling disconnected from her community of color. Every other biracial character in this study is portrayed as a racially ambiguous person of color. This is not the case with Minni who is phenotypically white. Rare is the novel in which a white character has a racial identity crisis! *The Other Half of My Heart* is free of all the negative stereotypes about biracial people. Perhaps it is necessary that there are many heavy-handed iterations of "You're your own strong *human* self. Not a color. Got it?" (p. 60) since the ideas being challenged are far from subtle for the biracial subject.

Similarly, in Frazier's other novel, *Brendan Buckley's Universe and Everything In It*, racism is depicted as a social evil that hurts everyone. A scene at the beginning draws attention to Brendan's emerging awareness of his racial identity. Frazier provides a situation in which a little boy asks his mother why Brendan and his mother "don't match" (p. 36). His grandmother comes to his defense telling the little boy's mother that she should teach her child "that black people come in all shades" (p. 36). The incident causes Brendan to reflect on how he never thinks about race unless other people bring it up. When they do, he feels odd and wishes his mother was black too so there would be no doubt about them belonging together (p. 37). It is clear that biracial identity becomes a problem when other people, not the subject himself, cast it as such.

The plot focuses on Brendan's accidentally recognizing his estranged maternal grandfather (Ed) and then taking it upon himself to forge a relationship with him before revealing the truth. They bond over a shared love of rock collecting. Belabored metaphors about igneous rocks blending to make rare and beautiful new varieties underscore the lesson Ed will soon learn. When he eventually learns that Brendan is his grandson, Ed is furious. But Brendan

forces him to confront his racism and explain why he shunned his daughter for marrying an African American man. Ed explains his attitude as an inevitable factor of the time and context in which he was raised. Now that he knows Brendan, however, he has to question his values. His apology comes by way of a rock metaphor: "'I think the mix of black moss agate and white quartz with the blue makes it even more special.' He winked at me. 'What do you think?'" (p. 185). Ed is a gruff but endearing character, very different from the vile white racists often depicted in film and literature. Frazier might be reminding us that even nice people in our own families can harbor hateful values. By interrupting typical depictions of racists, and removing the burden of transformation from the mixed race protagonist, *Brendan Buckley's Universe* pushes back against the traditional narratives in the realm.

Mildred Taylor's *The Land* can be read as a counterstory in which a character "names [his] own reality" (Delgado, 1995, p. 36) which means using the privileges afforded to him for being half white to better his black community. Paul-Edward Logan, is the son of a white planter and an African American-Indian mother. While he is very young he is treated more or less the same as his white half-brothers. He is educated and taught how to manage the plantation. But as he gets older he is no longer allowed to eat at the same table, nor does his father recognize him as his son in public. As the color line is drawn, Paul-Edward realizes that the world in which he lives will not accept him as anything other than a black man. At first he resents being denied privileges he once took for granted. He is incensed that he will not inherit part of his father's land as his brothers will. As he matures he learns that to accept that society marks him as a black man, and that he must learn to succeed within the system.

The Land is based on people and events in Taylor's own family. The Author's Note briefly describes her great-grandfather's life as the son of the white plantation owner and African

American-Indian woman, raised, recognized and educated by both parents. In the novel, Paul-Edward has to combine his white appearance with his black heritage as he tries to buy the piece of land he desires. He introduces himself as "a man of color" in every interaction with white people – effectively naming himself and revealing the constructedness of race. He could pass as white and he does once, when his survival depends on it. But the danger surrounding that moment follows him for years. This is a far more credible treatment of passing than in the stories mentioned earlier. Racism during Reconstruction years took many forms: brutal, subtle, ever-present. Taylor includes anti-racist white characters who resist social norms at their own peril, indicating that racism was a sustained and deliberate choice rather than a 'natural' feature of the era.

Conclusion: Mixed Race Awareness. The books in the MRA category share the single theme of characters who negotiate awareness of biracial identity along with the other trials and tribulations of growing up. They are not consumed by their racial identity, nor are they oblivious to it. Characters respond to racism or prejudice in believable ways. They are hurt and confused, and also confident and resilient. They emerge intact from painful experiences, with healthy self-images and strong connections to people around them. Not surprisingly, this set features the largest number of self-identified biracial authors and the fewest white authors. Some authors are heavy-handed in their positive representation of biracial identity, while others are more nuanced. This small corpus of books includes counterstories – voices of biracial characters who "name their own reality" (Delgado, 1995, p. 36) and tell stories that reject the paradigm of the dysfunctional, introverted biracial. A few of the characters in this set of books not only successfully negotiate social expectations; they occasionally change their environments. The

hope is that more voices are added to this group so that mixed race identity is represented through a variety of responsible creative imaginings.

Talking About Mixed Race Identity

What does it mean to talk about mixed race identity? The variety of labels such as mixed race, biracial, multiracial, *mestizo,* multiple heritage, *hapa* (to name a few) attests to the indeterminacy of the classification. Labels and perceptions emerge from different cultural contexts and have different meanings for people accordingly. Furthermore, there is much disagreement about the use and implications of the labels. Critical race scholar, Patricia Williams (2011) rejects the term 'biracial' because of its association with recently-married interracial couples that renders invisible all cross-racial unions since colonial contact. In *Reproducing Race: The Paradox of Generation Mix,* Rainier Spencer (2011) reclaims the term 'mulatto/a' and distances it from the inevitable prefix 'tragic' demonstrating the racist need to maintain such an image of the tragic mulatta. He also decries as false any effort to establish multiracial identity as redefining perceptions of race in general. Originally used to describe people of indigenous Hawaiian and white descent, the term *hapa* is now more widely claimed by people of a variety of backgrounds and popularized by contemporary artist, Kip Fulbeck and his Hapa Project. According to a *New York Times* report (Susan Saulny, February 11, 2011), census data indicate that people of American Indian, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander descent are most likely to pick multiple racial categories in identifying themselves, suggesting a rise in the number of Americans who identify as multiracial. Education and children's literature scholar, Debbie Reese (2011) responded in her blog challenging Saulny's suggestion. Reese argues that for her, identifying as American Indian is about actively living a life reflective of tribal values, customs and histories. Checking a box on a form, no matter how well-intentioned, she feels, is as

meaningless as when Americans claim Native descent by "putting it on in the form of a bone choker" (np) without knowing what it means to "live a specific Native Nation identity" (np). Teresa Kay Williams (1997) writes that multiracial self-identification means one thing when a parent is from an Asian country, and something else when a parent is Asian American. For the former, aligning with the white parent might be motivated by the upward social mobility it affords. Asian American multiracials who already know a hyphenated existence might actively choose to locate themselves in the margins, in "critical spaces of resistance and empowerment" (p. 63), similar to Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) concept of a "new *mestiza* consciousness" (p. 77) for mixed Latinos and anyone else interested in resisting hegemonic boundaries.

Given the range of definitions, expressions, and theories of multiracial subjectivity, it seems impossible even to speak of mixed race identity without essentializing. Using the labels 'mixed race' and 'biracial' implies an acceptance of static, biological racial classification, and even the possibility of racial 'purity' in defining monoracial and poly-racial groups. It is paradoxical that the notion that everyone is mixed is widely accepted; yet when it comes to identification or group membership, the discourse reverts to discrete categories. There is also the sense that racial mixing is a recent social phenomenon when in fact that is not true. Repeated reference to the 1967 Loving v. Virginia resolution, the biracial baby boom since then, and the change in the census standards in 2000 underscore this 'newness'. Indeed this study is complicit in that practice. The premise for talking about mixed race identity seems to begin with the identification of biological parents who identify or are identified as racially distinct from each other, using the categories established by the census. Furthermore, the discussion is mostly about white and non-white interracial couplings (Brunsma, 2005, p. 1131) with slightly less scholarship on other mixes, and even less on minority-minority mixes.

According to sociologist David Brunsma (2005) racial identity is impacted by a number of factors such as social class, racial composition of environment, family structures and phenotype. For the writers of the books in this study, and for many scholars in mixed race studies (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Fuyo-Gaskins, 1999; Rockquemore, Brunsma & Delgado, 2009; Root, 1992, 1996), mixed race identity begins with phenotype – with appearance that defies certain racial classification. Consequently biracials are called upon to explain their origins, choose and defend membership in one racial group over another, or defend a lonely position on the margins. Kim Williams (2005) writes that the multiracial advocacy groups instrumental in the change in the census were concerned with the social consequences for their biracial children who were forced to identify with one parent's heritage and forfeit the other. Again, the issue seems to be about what a person looks like, begging the question – is mixed race identity defined only by how closely a person resembles conventional perceptions of a racial appearance?

Perhaps phenotype is the starting point. The findings from this study suggest that it would certainly appear to be the case that characters' lives are defined by how their racially marked bodies allow them to move in the world. Some characters like Cashay, Jace, and D Foster blended into their African American contexts afforded by an accepted range of phenotypes. Others like Celli and Eva passed for white. Matt, Frances, Robin and Yumi, whose bodies marked them as Asian, identified as Asian through various degrees of association with language, history, traditions, memories and bonds with people. Danny Lopez, Willa Lopez, Cesi Alvarez, Naomi Soledad de León, and other characters with Latino heritage were marked by their names and sometimes by their light brown skin. When phenotype belied non-white heritage as it did for characters like Cassidy, Harold, Armie and Minni, identity depended on racial pride learned through people who taught them the values and struggles specific to American Indian and

African American populations. With very few exceptions, the books in this study represent mixed race identity as concerned with learning a little or a lot about one's non-white heritage, with that non-white heritage being a source of pain or pride. There was a conspicuous lack of consideration of what it meant to be part white unless it was described by physical markers such red hair and freckles (Irish) or immigrant experience (Jewish or Scottish).

David Brunsma (2005) distinguishes between the concepts of identity and identification. He says that *identity* is defined by the subject and involves a process impacted by the "micro/interpersonal" (p. 1133) and environmental factors. By this definition identity is a fluid and ever-changing process. *Identification* refers to the ways a person is made to identify by instruments such as surveys and censuses. The distinction is significant if we consider that this study examines mixed race *identity* as represented in literature created by writers who comply with notions of racial *identification* – classification systems that are part of the dominant discourse on race. The 'problem' of biracial experience was frequently apparent in the language of reviews and blurbs. Whether it was the case or not, mixed race identification was described by words such as 'grappling', 'split-between', 'straddling cultures', 'torn', and 'conflicted', assuming a fraught and tense existence. Several studies have shown that responding to forms and surveys that limit the options for racial identification do create difficulty for multiracial people (e.g., Bratter, 2007; Brunsma, 2005) but whether that manifests as a lifelong experience, as suggested by many books is another matter. Taken as a group the books written by mixed race authors represent a range of experiences and voices that speak to the fluidity of identity rather than the 'problem' it appears to be for outsider authors. As it stands today, the corpus of children's and young adult literature representing mixed race life experiences is severely limited in quantity, and diversity.

Contributions

This dissertation makes several significant research contributions. At the time of writing, it was the only study with a focus on fiction for young readers depicting mixed race identity. Nancy Reynolds' (2009) book *Mixed Heritage In Young Adult Literature* examines books for older teen readers and some crossover (YA and adult) books and sixteen of the titles in this study are included in her analysis. The remaining seventy-four books are geared towards younger readers, for whom I argue, racial identity is as salient as it is for very young and adolescent readers. Scholarly focus on mixed race representation for these 74 books did not exist at the time of writing this dissertation. In her review of picture books depicting interracial families, Karen Sands-O'Connor (2001) found that both illustrations and text represented happy, confident, positive biracial children (p. 418). Reynolds' asserts that both fiction and non-fiction for young adults is scarce, "substandard, or dated, or irrelevant" (p. 220) and that much of it tells a bleak story. What happens in between these age groups? This study finds that when sorted by age, younger biracial characters have more optimistic experiences than older ones.

Librarians, teachers and parents can make use of the complete bibliography provided in Appendix A to find books with significant biracial content. Furthermore, titles are listed by category in Appendix C and by racial mix in Appendix D for readers with more specific interests. The analysis and discussion of representations of mixed race experiences explicates historical and current perceptions of biracial identity as represented in the books that could influence choices adults might make in introducing or discussing mixed race content with young readers. On a more technical level, this study identifies as many books with mixed race content as possible from all over the print and cyber world, and unites them here for anyone who needs them.

Currently the field of Mixed Race Studies (MRS) is relatively silent on the topic of representation of mixed race experiences in children's literature. Many resource books and manuals are available for parents of biracial children, and some contain brief lists of books in which biracial children might find themselves represented. The Mavin Foundation's *Multiracial Child Resource Book* published in 2003 includes a list of twenty-five children's books and twelve YA titles. As a resource, the list is outdated and brief. Most books are about black and white biracials or East Asian adoptees. This study could be instrumental for creators of future resource manuals as it provides a more complete and diverse list of titles.

Mixed Race Studies is an interdisciplinary field with a wealth of scholarly and non-scholarly possibilities. Mixed race authors such as Jaime Adoff, Sundee Tucker Frazier, Cynthia Leitich Smith, Nora Pierce and Matt de la Peña are adding their voices to multicultural literature. This study unites these voices and pinpoints the variety of mixed race experiences being created.

Exploration of the nature of knowledge and its construction, dissemination and perpetuation is a topic of interest to scholars in the field of curriculum studies. As products of and participants in the field of Western education, knowing about racial paradigms that once framed and continue to frame ideology enables us to situate ourselves historically and identify our own cultural practices. Exploring and responding to these questions enables us to look beyond what Maxine Greene (1995) calls "the cloud of givenness" (p. 47), to debunk notions of inevitability and naturalness in the social order, to create scholarship that is more inclusive, which will hopefully translate to education practices that are also more creative, empathetic and encompassing of difference. This study pushes forward the topic of mixed race identity in children's literature and asks readers to examine their own alignment with theoretical and philosophical paradigms about the construction of multiracial identity.

In *Teaching Toward Freedom*, William Ayers (2004) urges teachers to ask students "who in the world am I, or who am I in the world?" (p. 30) and argues that as teachers, part of our moral and ethical commitment should be participate with our students in the process of learning to view ourselves as part and product of a larger whole. Maxine Greene (1971) suggests that one approach to understanding ourselves is through literature and the imagination, forcing ourselves to examine our assumptions and "break with the common sense world [we] normally take for granted." (in Flinders & Thornton, 1997, p. 139). Curiosity and a desire to learn about systems of racial identity construction in the U.S. were the impetus for this research project. Literature provides a context, a medium that can be held at arm's length and examined at from different perspectives in way we might not be able to look at 'real life – in the way that we often miss the forest for the trees. When we understand how hegemonic power structures are at play in literature, we can see them at work in life. Revealing the constructedness of power (especially oppressive power) opens up possibilities for dismantling it. This project is embedded in such an epistemological impulse.

Finally, this study contributes to the field of children's literature. Many scholars interested in racial, gender and sexual identity pay attention to how children's literature contributes to or challenges hegemonic constructions of these identities. This study brings the matter of mixed race identity forward as a worthy and increasingly relevant sphere of inquiry.

Limitations

This study is limited in several ways. First, I recognize that although I have tried to identify all the recent books with mixed race content, it is likely that there are some that I did not find. Books not identified by the Library of Congress, reviewers, scholars and librarians tended to be 'lost' amidst other multicultural books. I knew of a few simply from being a teacher, and

by asking colleagues to be proactive in recognizing mixed race characters when they appeared in reviews and listings. *Becoming Naomi León, The Road to Paris,* and *After Tupac and D Foster* were identified this way. Identity labels can sometimes be problematic, but in a situation like this, the significance is clear.

The parameters I used in selecting this set of books to analyze places a limitation on the conclusions that can be drawn from the study. The trends and patterns I found pertain to a particular selection of books of certain genre, publication date, and age group. There are books that fall outside of these parameters that may or may not include mixed race content in the same ways and for which these conclusions may not hold true.

Another limitation pertains to the methodology. Rudine Sims Bishop's system of categories is well recognized in children's and young adult literature; yet, in using an established tool I may have precluded the possibility of looking at the corpus of books from different angles. For instance, this study could have focused on the representation of whiteness as part of biracial identity.

A third limitation is that while I am biracial, I did not grow up in the U.S. and am outside the experience of being an American biracial. I share the experience of having being racialized *as an adult,* not as a child. There are likely to be subtleties that I did not recognize. Furthermore, I am outside all of the racial groups represented in the books. I do not claim to speak for black, Asian, American Indian and Latino biracials, rather to ground the fictional representation of mixed race experiences within an ideological paradigm about mixed race people in general.

Future Research

Several future research projects emerge from this study. Now that the texts are identified it would be interesting to dig deeper into sets of books by mix and explore representations of

biracial identity in particular groups. Work on Latino, American Indian, and Asian biracial identity is sorely lacking in both mixed race studies and children's literature fields. Furthermore, work on minority-minority multiracials would shed light on the persistence of hypodescent conventions.

A reader-response study would provide insight into how young readers receive messages in literature about mixed race identity. The study found negative, neutral and positive representations of a few groups of biracials. It would be interesting to gather data on how mixed race readers connect to these representations. A project that invites mixed race readers to comment on the representations in some of the books in this study would provide a much-needed dimension to the discourse about representations of mixed race identity in children's literature.

Practical applications for discussions of mixed race identity in classrooms might be possible based on the close readings of the representative texts in Chapter IV. In his book *Should We Burn Babar?*, Herbert Kohl (1995) advocates using texts with problematic content to teach students to read critically. Classroom teachers could use groups of books analyzed in this study to demonstrate construction of racial identity construction.

Books with mixed race content could be used in classrooms to promote discussions about whiteness as a racial construct. Multicultural literature is frequently as a way to increase understanding about non-white racial experiences, while an understanding of whiteness is often lacking. Books about characters who are part white almost raise whiteness out of the realm of invisibility to beg the question: what does it meant to be part white? Research along these lines would open up avenues of discourse about race in children's literature, education, and cultural studies.

Conclusion

Since I began this study the Library of Congress has listed 17 new fiction titles for children and young adults published in 2011 and forthcoming in 2012 with the subject heading "racially-mixed people – fiction". This is almost twice as many as came out in a single year since 1973. Clearly the topic is garnering interest. Unfortunately a preliminary review of these books reveals the perpetuation of familiar depictions, such the isolated and traumatized protagonist of *Camo Girl* who has vitiligo that creates unevenly colored patches of skin on her face – like camouflage. Fortunately, a sequel to *Brendan Buckley's Universe,* and *Dogtag Summer,* a sensitive novel about a Vietnamese-white adoptee's memories of the war, add much needed complexity to the depiction of experiences. If books about multiracial characters follow the trajectory taken by books with a focus on racial, gender and/or sexual identity, then the future is optimistic. Voices of multiracial authors are needed to offset the dominance of white authors representing experiences outside their own.

In the end this study is a call to writers of children's fiction to move away from stereotypes, to represent greater variety of experiences, to consider the power of children's literature to shape lives and do the work needed to create authentic, respectful, transformative narratives.

APPENDIX A

Books Identified For This Study

Author	Title	Publication date
Adams, Jewel	*Elise's Heart*	2001
Adoff, Jaime	*Names Will Never Hurt Me*	2004
Adoff, Jaime	*Jimi & Me*	2005
Adoff, Jaime	*The Death of Jayson Porter*	2008
Alder, Elizabeth	*Crossing the Panther's Path*	2002
Anderson, Jessica Lee	*Border Crossing*	2009
Balliet, Blue	*Chasing Vermeer*	2004
Balliet, Blue	*The Wright 3*	2006
Balliet, Blue	*The Calder Game*	2008
Brady, Laurel S	*Say You Are My Sister*	2000
Bruchac, Joseph	*Hidden Roots*	2004
Bruchac, Joseph	*The Dark Pond*	2004
Burg, Ann E.	*All the Broken Pieces*	2009
Carbone, Elisa	*Last Dance on Holladay Street*	2005
Cardenas, Teresa, and David Unger	*Letters to My Mother*	2006
Chang, Margaret Scrogin	*Celia's Robot*	2009
Creel, Ann Howard	*Call Me the Canyon*	2006
Cruz, Maria Colleen	*Border Crossing*	2003
Curry, Jane Louise	*The Black Canary*	2005
Easton, Kelly	*Hiroshima Dreams*	2007
Edwards, Nicholas	*Dog Whisperer: The Rescue*	2009
Ernst, Kathleen	*Trouble at Fort La Pointe*	2000
Finotti, M	*The Treasure of Amelia Island*	2008
Flake, Sharon	*Money Hungry*	2001
Flake, Sharon	*Begging For Change*	2004
Frank, E. R.	*America*	2002
Frank, Lucy	*Just Ask Iris*	2001
Frazier, Sundee Tucker	*The Other Half of My Heart*	2010
Frazier, Sundee Tucker	*Brendan Buckley's Universe and Everything in it*	2007
Garcia, Cristina	*I Wanna Be Your Shoebox*	2008
Garland, Sherry	*Valley of the Moon: the Diary of Maria Rosalia De Milagros*	2001
Grimes, Nikki	*The Road to Paris*	2006
Haslam, Gerald & Janice	*Manuel and the Madman*	2000
Headley, Justina Chen	*Nothing but the Truth: (and a Few White Lies)*	2006
Hesse, Karen	*Aleutian Sparrow*	2003
Huff, Barb	*The Backup Singer: What Is the Color of Friendship?*	2003
Hughes, Dean	*Missing in Action*	2010

Kadohata, Cynthia	*Outside Beauty*	2008
Kanell, Beth	*The Darkness Under the Water*	2008
Ketchum, Liza	*Where the Great Hawk Flies*	2005
Lamba, Marie	*What I Meant*	2007
Little, Kimberley Griffiths	*The Last Snake Runner*	2002
Lynch, Janet Nichols	*Messed up*	2009
Maldonado, Torrey	*Secret Saturdays*	2010
Marsden, Carolyn	*Take Me with You*	2010
McDonald, Janet	*Off-color*	2007
McMullen, Margaret	*Cashay*	2009
Murphy, Rita	*Black Angels*	2001
Myers, Walter Dean	*Riot*	2009
Namioka, Lensey	*Half and Half*	2003
Nye, Naomi Shihab	*Going Going*	2005
Orenstein, Denise	*Unseen Companion*	2003
Osa, Nancy	*Cuba 15*	2003
Osborne, Mary Pope	*Adaline Falling Star*	2000
Peck, Richard	*The River Between Us*	2003
Peña, Matt De la	*Mexican WhiteBoy*	2008
Peña, Matt De la	*We Were Here*	2009
Pierce, Nora	*The Insufficiency of Maps: a Novel*	2007
Platt, Randall Beth	*The Likes of Me*	2000
Raffa, Edwina, and Annelle Rigsby	*Escape to the Everglades*	2006
Resau, Laura	*What the Moon Saw: a Novel*	2006
Rinaldi, Ann	*Numbering All the Bones*	2002
Rinaldi, Ann	*The Education of Mary: a Little Miss of Color, 1832*	2000
Rodowsky, Colby F	*That Fernhill Summer*	2006
Ryan, Muñoz Pam	*Becoming Naomi Leon*	2004
Salisbury, Graham	*Lord of the Deep*	2001
Sanders, Scott Loring	*Gray Baby: a Novel*	2009
Sarkar, Dona	*How to Salsa in a Sari*	2008
Schultz, Jan Neubert	*Battle Cry*	2006
Schwartz, Ellen	*Stealing Home*	2006
Schwartz, Virginia Frances	*Send One Angel Down*	2000
Sjoholm, Barbara	*A Clear Spring*	2002
Smith, Cynthia Leitich	*Rain Is Not My Indian Name*	2001
Smith, Sherri L	*Lucy the Giant*	2002
Sommerdorf, Norma	*Red River Girl*	2006
Spooner, Michael	*Last Child*	2005
Taylor, Mildred D	*The Land*	2001
Vanasse, Deb	*A Distant Enemy*	2004
Wenberg, Michael	*Stringz*	2010
Werlin, Nancy	*Black Mirror: a Novel*	2001
Willis, Meredith Sue	*Billie of Fish House Lane*	2006

Wilson, Diane L	*Black Storm Comin'*	2005
Wolf, Allan	*Zane's Trace*	2007
Wong, Janet	*Minn and Jake's Almost Terrible Summer*	2008
Woodson, Jacqueline	*After Tupac & D Foster*	2008
Woodson, Jacqueline	*Behind You*	2004
Woodson, Jacqueline	*Miracle's Boys*	2000
Yee, Lisa	*Bobby the Brave*	2010
Yee, Lisa	*Bobby v. Girls*	2010
Yep, Laurence	*Angelfish*	2001

APPENDIX B

Books Listed by Genre

Historical Fiction

Author	Title	Publication date
Alder, Elizabeth	*Crossing the Panther's Path*	2002
Brady, Laurel S	*Say You Are My Sister*	2000
Bruchac, Joseph	*Hidden Roots*	2004
Burg, Ann E.	*All the Broken Pieces*	2009
Carbone, Elisa	*Last Dance on Holladay Street*	2005
Creel, Ann Howard	*Call Me the Canyon*	2006
Ernst, Kathleen	*Trouble at Fort La Pointe*	2000
Finotti, M	*The Treasure of Amelia Island*	2008
Garland, Sherry	*Valley of the Moon: the Diary of Maria Rosalia De Milagros*	2001
Hesse, Karen	*Aleutian Sparrow*	2003
Hughes, Dean	*Missing in Action*	2010
Kanell, Beth	*The Darkness Under the Water*	2008
Ketchum, Liza	*Where the Great Hawk Flies*	2005
Little, Kimberley Griffiths	*The Last Snake Runner*	2002
Marsden, Carolyn	*Take Me with You*	2010
Murphy, Rita	*Black Angels*	2001
Myers, Walter Dean	*Riot*	2009
Orenstein, Denise	*Unseen Companion*	2003
Osborne, Mary Pope	*Adaline Falling Star*	2000
Peck, Richard	*The River Between Us*	2003
Platt, Randall Beth	*The Likes of Me*	2000
Raffa, Edwina & Annelle Rigsby	*Escape to the Everglades*	2006
Rinaldi, Ann	*The Education of Mary: a Little Miss of Color, 1832*	2000
Rinaldi, Ann	*Numbering All the Bones*	2002
Schultz, Jan Neubert	*Battle Cry*	2006
Schwartz, Ellen	*Stealing Home*	2006
Schwartz, Virginia Frances	*Send One Angel Down*	2000
Sommerdorf, Norma	*Red River Girl*	2006
Spooner, Michael	*Last Child*	2005
Taylor, Mildred D	*The Land*	2001
Wilson, Diane L	*Black Storm Comin'*	2005

Contemporary Realistic Fiction

Author	Title	Publication date
Adams, Jewel	*Elise's Heart*	2001
Adoff, Jaime	*Names Will Never Hurt Me*	2004
Adoff, Jaime	*Jimi & Me*	2005
Adoff, Jaime	*The Death of Jayson Porter*	2008
Anderson, Jessica Lee	*Border Crossing*	2009
Balliet, Blue	*Chasing Vermeer*	2004
Balliet, Blue	*The Wright 3*	2006
Balliet, Blue	*The Calder Game*	2008
Bruchac, Joseph	*The Dark Pond*	2004
Cardenas, Teresa, & David Unger	*Letters to My Mother*	2006
Chang, Margaret Scrogin	*Celia's Robot*	2009
Cruz, Maria Colleen	*Border Crossing*	2003
Curry, Jane Louise	*The Black Canary*	2005
Easton, Kelly	*Hiroshima Dreams*	2007
Edwards, Nicholas	*Dog Whisperer: The Rescue*	2009
Flake, Sharon	*Begging For Change*	2004
Flake, Sharon	*Money Hungry*	2001
Frank, E. R.	*America*	2002
Frank, Lucy	*Just Ask Iris*	2001
Frazier, Sundee Tucker	*The Other Half of My Heart*	2010
Frazier, Sundee Tucker	*Brendan Buckley's Universe and Everything in It*	2007
Garcia, Cristina	*I Wanna Be Your Shoebox*	2008
Grimes, Nikki	*The Road to Paris*	2006
Haslam, Gerald & Janice	*Manuel and the Madman*	2000
Headley, Justina Chen	*Nothing but the Truth: (and a Few White Lies)*	2006
Huff, Barb	*The Backup Singer: What Is the Color of Friendship?*	2003
Kadohata, Cynthia	*Outside Beauty*	2008
Lamba, Marie	*What I Meant*	2007
Lynch, Janet Nichols	*Messed up*	2009
Maldonado, Torrey	*Secret Saturdays*	2010
McDonald, Janet	*Off-color*	2007
McMullen, Margaret	*Cashay*	2009
Namioka, Lensey	*Half and Half*	2003
Nye, Naomi Shihab	*Going Going*	2005
Osa, Nancy	*Cuba 15*	2003
Peña, Matt De la	*Mexican WhiteBoy*	2008
Peña, Matt De la	*We Were Here*	2009
Pierce, Nora	*The Insufficiency of Maps: a Novel*	2007
Resau, Laura	*What the Moon Saw: a Novel*	2006

Rodowsky, Colby F	*That Fernhill Summer*	2006
Ryan, Muñoz Pam	*Becoming Naomi Leon*	2004
Salisbury, Graham	*Lord of the Deep*	2001
Sanders, Scott Loring	*Gray Baby: a Novel*	2009
Sarkar, Dona	*How to Salsa in a Sari*	2008
Sjoholm, Barbara	*A Clear Spring*	2002
Smith, Cynthia Leitich	*Rain Is Not My Indian Name*	2001
Smith, Sherri L	*Lucy the Giant*	2002
Vanasse, Deb	*A Distant Enemy*	2004
Wenberg, Michael	*Stringz*	2010
Werlin, Nancy	*Black Mirror: a Novel*	2001
Willis, Meredith Sue	*Billie of Fish House Lane*	2006
Wolf, Allan	*Zane's Trace*	2007
Wong, Janet	*Minn and Jake's Almost Terrible Summer*	2008
Woodson, Jacqueline	*Miracle's Boys*	2000
Woodson, Jacqueline	*After Tupac & D Foster*	2008
Woodson, Jacqueline	*Behind You*	2004
Yee, Lisa	*Bobby v. Girls*	2010
Yee, Lisa	*Bobby the Brave*	2010
Yep, Laurence	*Angelfish*	2001

APPENDIX C

Books Listed by Category

***indicates novels included in literary analysis**

Mixed Race Invisibility

Author	Title	Publication date	Genre
Burg, Ann E.	**All the Broken Pieces*	2009	HF
Grimes, Nikki	*The Road to Paris*	2006	CRF
Ketchum, Liza	*Where the Great Hawk Flies*	2005	HF
Adoff, Jaime	**Names Will Never Hurt Me*	2004	CRF
Adoff, Jaime	**Jimi & Me*	2005	CRF
Adoff, Jaime	**The Death of Jayson Porter*	2008	CRF
Alder, Elizabeth	*Crossing the Panther's Path*	2002	HF
Anderson, Jessica Lee	**Border Crossing*	2009	CRF
Cardenas, Teresa, and David Unger	*Letters to My Mother*	2006	CRF
Creel, Ann Howard	*Call Me the Canyon*	2006	HF
Ernst, Kathleen	*Trouble at Fort La Pointe*	2000	HF
Frank, E. R.	**America*	2002	CRF
Garland, Sherry	**Valley of the Moon: the Diary of Maria Rosalia De Milagros*	2001	HF
Huff, Barb	*The Backup Singer: What Is the Color of Friendship?*	2003	CRF
Kanell, Beth	*The Darkness Under the Water*	2008	HF
Little, Kimberley Griffiths	*The Last Snake Runner*	2002	HF
Marsden, Carolyn	**Take Me with You*	2010	HF
Myers, Walter Dean	**Riot*	2009	HF
Orenstein, Denise	*Unseen Companion*	2003	HF
Osa, Nancy	*Cuba 15*	2003	CRF
Osborne, Mary Pope	**Adaline Falling Star*	2000	HF
Peña, Matt De la	**Mexican WhiteBoy*	2008	CRF
Platt, Randall Beth	**The Likes of Me*	2000	HF
Raffa, Edwina, and Annelle Rigsby	*Escape to the Everglades*	2006	HF
Sarkar, Dona	*How to Salsa in a Sari*	2008	CRF
Schultz, Jan Neubert	*Battle Cry*	2006	HF
Schwartz, Virginia Frances	*Send One Angel Down*	2000	HF
Smith, Sherri L	*Lucy the Giant*	2002	CRF
Vanasse, Deb	*A Distant Enemy*	2004	CRF
Werlin, Nancy	**Black Mirror: a Novel*	2001	CRF
Wolf, Allan	*Zane's Trace*	2007	CRF

Mixed Race Blending

Author	Title	Publication date	Genre
Adams, Jewel	*Elise's Heart*	2001	CRF
Balliet, Blue	*Chasing Vermeer*	2004	CRF
Balliet, Blue	*The Wright 3*	2006	CRF
Balliet, Blue	*The Calder Game*	2008	CRF
Brady, Laurel S	**Say You Are My Sister*	2000	HF
Carbone, Elisa	**Last Dance on Holladay Street*	2005	HF
Chang, Margaret Scrogin	*Celia's Robot*	2009	CRF
Curry, Jane Louise	*The Black Canary*	2005	CRF
Easton, Kelly	**Hiroshima Dreams*	2007	CRF
Edwards, Nicholas	*Dog Whisperer: The Rescue*	2009	CRF
Finotti, M	*The Treasure of Amelia Island*	2008	HF
Frank, Lucy	*Just Ask Iris*	2001	CRF
Garcia, Cristina	*I Wanna Be Your Shoebox*	2008	CRF
Hesse, Karen	**Aleutian Sparrow*	2003	HF
Maldonado, Torrey	*Secret Saturdays*	2010	CRF
McMullen, Margaret	**Cashay*	2009	CRF
Murphy, Rita	**Black Angels*	2001	HF
Nye, Naomi Shihab	*Going Going*	2005	CRF
Peña, Matt De la	*We Were Here*	2009	CRF
Pierce, Nora	*The Insufficiency of Maps: a Novel*	2007	CRF
Rodowsky, Colby F	*That Fernhill Summer*	2006	CRF
Ryan, Muñoz Pam	**Becoming Naomi Leon*	2004	CRF
Salisbury, Graham	*Lord of the Deep*	2001	CRF
Sjoholm, Barbara	**A Clear Spring*	2002	CRF
Sommerdorf, Norma	*Red River Girl*	2006	HF
Wenberg, Michael	**Stringz*	2010	CRF
Wong, Janet	*Minn and Jake's Almost Terrible Summer*	2008	CRF
Woodson, Jacqueline	**After Tupac & D Foster*	2008	CRF
Woodson, Jacqueline	*Miracle's Boys*	2000	CRF
Yee, Lisa	*Bobby v. Girls*	2010	CRF
Yee, Lisa	*Bobby the Brave*	2010	CRF

Mixed Race Awareness

Author	Title	Publication date	Genre
Bruchac, Joseph	**Hidden Roots*	2004	HF
Bruchac, Joseph	*The Dark Pond*	2004	CRF
Cruz, Maria Colleen	**Border Crossing*	2003	CRF
Flake, Sharon	*Money Hungry*	2001	CRF
Flake, Sharon	*Begging For Change*	2004	CRF
Frazier, Sundee Tucker	**The Other Half of My Heart*	2010	CRF
Frazier, Sundee Tucker	*Brendan Buckley's Universe & Everything In It*	2007	CRF
Haslam, Gerald & Janice	*Manuel and the Madman*	2000	CRF
Headley, Justina Chen	*Nothing but the Truth: (and a Few White Lies)*	2006	CRF
Hughes, Dean	*Missing in Action*	2010	HF
Kadohata, Cynthia	*Outside Beauty*	2008	CRF
Lamba, Marie	*What I Meant*	2007	CRF
Lynch, Janet Nichols	*Messed up*	2009	CRF
McDonald, Janet	**Off-color*	2007	CRF
Namioka, Lensey	*Half and Half*	2003	CRF
Peck, Richard	**The River Between Us*	2003	HF
Resau, Laura	**What the Moon Saw: a Novel*	2006	CRF
Rinaldi, Ann	*Numbering All the Bones*	2002	HF
Rinaldi, Ann	*The Education of Mary: a Little Miss of Color, 1832*	2000	HF
Sanders, Scott Loring	**Gray Baby: a Novel*	2009	CRF
Schwartz, Ellen	**Stealing Home*	2006	HF
Smith, Cynthia Leitich	**Rain Is Not My Indian Name*	2001	CRF
Spooner, Michael	*Last Child*	2005	HF
Taylor, Mildred D	*The Land*	2001	HF
Willis, Meredith Sue	*Billie of Fish House Lane*	2006	CRF
Wilson, Diane L	*Black Storm Comin'*	2005	HF
Woodson, Jacqueline	*Behind You*	2004	CRF
Yep, Laurence	**Angelfish*	2001	CRF

APPENDIX D

Books listed by Racial Mix

Black and White

Author	Title	Publication date	Genre
Brady, Laurel S	*Say You Are My Sister*	2000	HF
Carbone, Elisa	*Last Dance on Holladay Street*	2005	HF
Finotti, M	*The Treasure of Amelia Island*	2008	HF
Marsden, Carolyn	*Take Me with You*	2010	HF
Murphy, Rita	*Black Angels*	2001	HF
Myers, Walter Dean	*Riot*	2009	HF
Peck, Richard	*The River Between Us*	2003	HF
Rinaldi, Ann	*The Education of Mary: a Little Miss of Color, 1832*	2000	HF
Rinaldi, Ann	*Numbering All the Bones*	2002	HF
Schwartz, Ellen	*Stealing Home*		HF
Schwartz, Virginia Frances	*Send One Angel Down*	2000	HF
Taylor, Mildred D	*The Land*	2001	HF
Wilson, Diane L	*Black Storm Comin'*	2005	HF
Adams, Jewel	*Elise's Heart*	2001	CRF
Adoff, Jaime	*Names Will Never Hurt Me*	2004	CRF
Adoff, Jaime	*Jimi & Me*	2005	CRF
Adoff, Jaime	*The Death of Jayson Porter*	2008	CRF
Curry, Jane Louise	*The Black Canary*	2005	CRF
Edwards, Nicholas	*Dog Whisperer: The Rescue*	2009	CRF
Frank, E. R.	*America*	2002	CRF
Frazier, Sundee Tucker	*The Other Half of My Heart*	2010	CRF
Frazier, Sundee Tucker	*Brendan Buckley's Universe & Everything in It*	2007	CRF
Grimes, Nikki	*The Road to Paris*	2006	CRF
Huff, Barb	*The Backup Singer: What Is the Color of Friendship?*	2003	CRF
McDonald, Janet	*Off-color*	2007	CRF
McMullen, Margaret	*Cashay*	2009	CRF
Rodowsky, Colby F	*That Fernhill Summer*	2006	CRF
Sanders, Scott Loring	*Gray Baby: a Novel*	2009	CRF
Wenberg, Michael	*Stringz*	2010	CRF
Werlin, Nancy	*Black Mirror: a Novel*	2001	CRF
Willis, Meredith Sue	*Billie of Fish House Lane*	2006	CRF
Woodson, Jacqueline	*After Tupac & D Foster*	2008	CRF
Woodson, Jacqueline	*Behind You*	2004	CRF
Wolf, Allan	*Zane's Trace*	2007	CRF

Asian and White

Author	Title	Publication date	Genre
Burg, Ann E.	*All the Broken Pieces*	2009	HF
Platt, Randall Beth	*The Likes of Me*	2000	HF
Chang, Margaret Scrogin	*Celia's Robot*	2009	CRF
Easton, Kelly	*Hiroshima Dreams*	2007	CRF
Headley, Justina Chen	*Nothing but the Truth: (and a Few White Lies)*	2006	CRF
Kadohata, Cynthia	*Outside Beauty*	2008	CRF
Namioka, Lensey	*Half and Half*	2003	CRF
Wong, Janet	*Minn and Jake's Almost Terrible Summer*	2008	CRF
Yee, Lisa	*Bobby v. Girls*	2010	CRF
Yee, Lisa	*Bobby the Brave*	2010	CRF
Yep, Laurence	*Angelfish*	2001	CRF
Salisbury, Graham	*Lord of the Deep*	2001	CRF
Balliet, Blue	*Chasing Vermeer*	2004	CRF
Balliet, Blue	*The Wright 3*	2006	CRF
Balliet, Blue	*The Calder Game*	2008	CRF
Lamba, Marie	*What I Meant*	2007	CRF

Latino and White

Author	Title	Publication date	Genre
Garland, Sherry	*Valley of the Moon: the Diary of Maria Rosalia De Milagros*	2001	HF
Anderson, Jessica Lee	*Border Crossing*	2009	CRF
Cruz, Maria Colleen	*Border Crossing*	2003	CRF
Frank, Lucy	*Just Ask Iris*	2001	CRF
Haslam, Gerald & Janice	*Manuel and the Madman*	2000	CRF
Osa, Nancy	*Cuba 15*	2003	CRF
Peña, Matt de la	*Mexican WhiteBoy*	2008	CRF
Peña, Matt de la	*We Were Here*	2009	CRF
Resau, Laura	*What the Moon Saw: a Novel*	2006	CRF
Ryan, Muñoz Pam	*Becoming Naomi Leon*	2004	CRF
Sjoholm, Barbara	*A Clear Spring*	2002	CRF

American Indian and White

Author	Title	Publication date	Genre
Alder, Elizabeth	*Crossing the Panther's Path*	2002	HF
Bruchac, Joseph	*Hidden Roots*	2004	HF
Creel, Ann Howard	*Call Me the Canyon*	2006	HF
Ernst, Kathleen	*Trouble at Fort La Pointe*	2000	HF
Hesse, Karen	*Aleutian Sparrow*	2003	HF
Hughes, Dean	*Missing in Action*	2010	HF
Kanell, Beth	*The Darkness Under the Water*	2008	HF
Ketchum, Liza	*Where the Great Hawk Flies*	2005	HF
Little, Kimberley Griffiths	*The Last Snake Runner*	2002	HF
Orenstein, Denise	*Unseen Companion*	2003	HF
Osborne, Mary Pope	*Adaline Falling Star*	2000	HF
Raffa, Edwina, and Annelle Rigsby	*Escape to the Everglades*	2006	HF
Schultz, Jan Neubert	*Battle Cry*	2006	HF
Sommerdorf, Norma	*Red River Girl*	2006	HF
Spooner, Michael	*Last Child*	2005	HF
Bruchac, Joseph	*The Dark Pond*	2004	CRF
Smith, Cynthia Leitich	*Rain Is Not My Indian Name*	2001	CRF
Smith, Sherri L	*Lucy the Giant*	2002	CRF
Vanasse, Deb	*A Distant Enemy*	2004	CRF

Non-White

Author	Title	Publication date	Genre
Flake, Sharon	*Money Hungry*	2001	CRF
Flake, Sharon	*Begging For Change*	2004	CRF
Cardenas, Teresa, and David Unger	*Letters to My Mother*	2006	CRF
Maldonado, Torrey	*Secret Saturdays*	2010	CRF
Woodson, Jacqueline	*Miracle's Boys*	2000	CRF
Sarkar, Dona	*How to Salsa in a Sari*	2008	CRF
Wolf, Allan	*Zane's Trace*	2007	CRF
Garcia, Cristina	*I Wanna Be Your Shoebox*	2008	CRF
Salisbury, Graham	*Lord of the Deep*	2001	CRF
Nye, Naomi Shihab	*Going Going*	2005	CRF
Lynch, Janet Nichols	*Messed up*	2009	CRF
Pierce, Nora	*The Insufficiency of Maps: a Novel*	2007	CRF

APPENDIX E

Instrument for Collecting Individual Text Data

Title:

Author:

- Author gender:

Author race:

Publication date:

Genre:

Protagonist:

- Age:
- Gender:
- Racial mix:
- Family:

SES: Struggling: Managing: Comfortable:

Primary characters:

Secondary characters:

Narrator:

Setting: Time: Urban: Suburban: Rural: Small town:

Category:

Plot summary:

REFERENCES

Abate, M. A. (2008). *Tomboys: A literary and cultural history*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Alsultany, E. (2004). Toward a multiethnic cartography: Multiethnic identity, monoracial cultural logic, and popular culture. In S. Kwan & K. Speirs (Eds.), *Mixing it up: Multiracial subjects* (pp. 141-162). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Anzaldúa, G. (1987). *Borderlands – La frontera*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.

Aoki, E. (1981). Are you Chinese? Are you Japanese? Or are you just a mixed-up kid? Using Asian American children's literature. *The Reading Teacher*, *34*(4), 382-385.

Ayers, W. (2004). *Teaching toward freedom: Moral commitment and ethical action in the classroom*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Banks, J. A. (2004). *Handbook of research on multicultural education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Barker, J. L. (2010). Racial identification and audience in *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry* and *The Watsons Go to Birmingham-1963*. *Children's Literature in Education*, *41*, 118-145.

Bishop, R. S. (1982). *Shadow and substance: Afro-American experience in contemporary children's fiction*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Bishop, R. S. (2007). *Free within ourselves: The development of African American children's literature*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Bonilla-Silva, E. (2003). *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in the United States*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Botelho, M. J., & Rudman, M. K. (2009). *Critical multicultural analysis of children's literature: Mirrors, windows, and doors*. New York: Routledge.

Bratter, J. (2007). Will "multiracial" survive the next generation?: The racial classification of children of multiracial parents. *Social Forces*, *86*(2), 821-849.

Brooks, W. (2009). An author as a counter-storyteller: Applying critical race theory to a Coretta Scott King Award book. *Children's Literature in Education*, *40*, 33-45.

Brunsma, D. L. (2005). Interracial families and the racial identification of mixed-race children: evidence from the early childhood longitudinal study. *Social Forces*, *84*(2), 1131-1157.

Cart, M., & Jenkins, C. (2006). *The heart has its reasons: Young adult literature with gay/lesbian/queer content, 1969-2004*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.

Chappell, S., & Faltis, C. (2007). Spanglish, bilingualism, culture and identity in Latino children's literature. *Children's Literature in Education*, *38*(4), 253-262.

Ching, S. (2002). Memory as travel in Asian American children's literature: Bridging home and school. *The New Advocate*, *15*(1), 23-34.

Clark, B. L. (2003). *Kiddie lit: The cultural construction of children's literature in America*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Clark, R., & Kulkin, H. (1996). Toward a multicultural feminist perspective on fiction for young adults. *Youth & Society*, *27*, 291-312.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education* (6th ed.). New York: Routledge.

DaCosta, K. M. (2007). *Making multiracials: State, family, and market in the redrawing of the color line*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Darwin, C. (2004). On the races of men: the effects of crossing. In J. O. Ifekwunigwe (Ed.), *'Mixed race' studies: A reader* (pp. 47-51). New York: Routledge.

Delgado, R. (Ed.) (1995). *Critical race theory: The cutting edge*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Eagleton, T. (2008). *Literary theory: An introduction*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Ewers, H. (1995). The limits of literary criticism of children's and young adult literature. *The Lion and the Unicorn*, *19*(1), 77-94.

Franklin, M. R. (1993). Beyond feathers and tomahawk: Lessons from literature. *Social Studies and the Young Learner*, *6*(2), 13-17.

Frost, S. J. (1998). *Images of African American girls in picture books* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). National-Louis University.

Fulbeck, K. (n.d.). The Hapa Project - seaweedproductions.com. - *Seaweedproductions.com*. Retrieved November 15, 2011, from http://seaweedproductions.com/the-hapa-project/.

Galda, L., Ash, G., & Cullinan, B. E. (2000). Children's literature. In M. L. Kamil (Ed.), *Handbook of reading research*. (pp. 361-379). Mahwah, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates.

Gaskins, P. F. (1999). *What are you?: Voices of mixed-race young people*. New York: Henry Holt.

Greene, M. (1995). *Releasing the imagination: Essays on education, the arts, and social change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Greene, M. (1997). Curriculum and consciousness. In D. J. Flinders & S. T. Thornton (Eds.), *The curriculum studies reader* (pp. 137-158). New York: Routledge.

Hall, C. I. (1992). Please choose one: Ethnic identity choices for biracial individuals. In M. P. Root (Ed.), *Racially mixed people in America* (pp. 239-249). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Hall, C. I., & Turner, T. I. (2001). The diversity of biracial individuals: Asian-white and Asian-minority biracial. In T. Williams-León & C. L. Nakashima (Eds.), *The sum of our parts: Mixed-heritage Asian Americans* (pp. 81-91). Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Heller, C., Maldonado, N., & Heller, H. (1999). Mi Papi: A Look at Latino fathers and father figures in children's picture books. *MultiCultural Review*, *8*(2), 18-32.

Hunt, P. (2005). *Understanding children's literature*. New York: Routledge.

Ifekwunigwe, J. O. (2004). *'Mixed race' studies: A reader*. London, UK: Routledge

Khorana, M. (1993). Break your silence: A call to Asian Indian children's writers. *Library Trends*, *41*(3), 393-413.

Kich, G. K. (1992). The developmental process of asserting a biracial, bicultural identity. In M. P. Root (Ed.), *Racially mixed people in America* (pp. 304-320). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Kich, G. K. (1996). In the margins of sex and race: Difference, marginality, and flexibility. In M. P. Root (Ed.), *The multiracial experience: Racial borders as the New Frontier* (pp. 263-276). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Kidd, K. B. (2004). *Making American boys: Boyology and the feral tale*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Kohl, H. R. (1995). *Should we burn Babar?: Essays on children's literature and the power of stories*. New York: New Press.

Krippendorff, K. (2004). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kwan, S., & Speirs, K. (2004). *Mixing it up: Multiracial subjects*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2004). Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education? In G. Ladson-Billings & D. Gillborn (Eds.), *The RoutledgeFalmer reader in multicultural education* (pp. 49-67). New York: RoutledgeFalmer.

Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate IV, W. F. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record*, *97*(1), 46-62.

Larrick, N. (1965). The all white world of children's books. *Saturday Review*, *11*, 63-85.

Lerer, S. (2008). *Children's literature: A reader's history, from Aesop to Harry Potter*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

López, I. H. (1995). The social construction of race. In R. Delgado (Ed.), *Critical race theory: The cutting edge* (pp. 163-175). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Marcus, L. S. (2008). *Minders of make-believe: Idealists, entrepreneurs, and the shaping of American children's literature*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

May, J. P. (1995). *Children's literature and critical theory: reading and writing for understanding*. New York: Oxford University Press.

McNair, J. C. (2008). "I may be crackin', but um fackin'": Racial humor in The Watsons Go To Birmingham—1963. *Children's Literature in Education*, *39*(3).

Meastre, L., & Nieto, S. (1996). Puerto Rican children's literature and culture in the public library. *MultiCultural Review*, *5*(2), 26-38.

Morrison, T. (1992). *Playing in the dark: Whiteness and the literary imagination*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Nakashima, C. L. (1992). An invisible monster: The creation and denial of mixed-race people in America. In M. P. Root (Ed.), *Racially mixed people in America* (pp. 162-180). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Nakashima, C. L. (2001). Servants of culture: the symbolic role of mixed-race Asians in American discourse. In T. K. Williams-León & C. L. Nakashima (Eds.), *The sum of our parts: Mixed-heritage Asian Americans* (pp. 35-48). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Nodelman, P. (2005). Decoding the images: how picture books work. In P. Hunt (Ed.), *Understanding children's literature* (pp. 128-139). New York: Routledge.

Omi, M. (2001). Foreword. In T. Williams-León & C. L. Nakashima (Eds.), *The sum of our parts: Mixed-heritage Asian Americans* (pp. ix-xiii). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Park, S. (2009). *Representations of transracial Korean adoption in children's literature* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

Prewitt, K. (2005). Racial classification in America: Where do we go from here? *Daedalus*, (Winter), 5-17.

Raina, S. (2009). *Critical content analysis of postcolonial texts: Representation of Muslims within children's and adolescent literature* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Arizona.

Reese, D. (2011, March 30). "Multiracial" identity and American Indians [Web log post]. Retrieved from http://americanindiansinchildrensliterature.blogspot.com/2011/03/multiracial-identity-and-american.html.

Reynolds, N. T. (2009). *Mixed heritage in young adult literature*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.

Rockquemore, K. A., Brunsma, D. L., & Delgado, D. J. (2009). Racing to theory or retheorizing race? Understanding the struggle to build a multiracial identity theory. *Journal of Social Issues*, *65*(1), 13-34.

Root, M. P. (1992). *Racially mixed people in America*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Root, M. P. (1996). *The multiracial experience: Racial borders as the new frontier*. London, UK: Sage.

Root, M. P., & Kelley, M. (2003). *Multiracial child resource book: Living complex identities*. Seattle, WA: Mavin Foundation.

Root, M. P. (2004). Multiracial families and children: Implications for educational research and practice. In J. A. Banks (Ed.), *Handbook of research on multicultural education* (2nd ed) (pp. 110-124). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Rudd, D. (2005). Theorizing and theories: how does children's literature exist? In P. Hunt (Ed.), *Understanding children's literature* (pp. 15-29). New York: Routledge.

Russell, D. L. (1997). *Literature for children: A short introduction* (3rd ed.). New York: Longman.

Sands-O'Connor, K. (2001). Why are people different? Multiracial families in picture books and the dialogue of difference. *The Lion and the Unicorn*, *25*(3), 412-426.

Sarland, C. (2005). Critical tradition and ideological positioning. In P. Hunt (Ed.), *Understanding children's literature* (pp. 30-49). New York: Routledge.

Saulny, S. (2011, February 11). RACE REMIXED: In a multiracial nation, many ways to tally. *The New York Times*, pp. A1-A17.

Saulny, S. (2011, January 30). Black? White? Asian? More Americans choose all of the above. *The New York Times*, pp. A1-A20.

Seale, D., & Slapin, B. (2005). *A broken flute: The Native experience in books for children*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

Smith, C. L. (n.d.). *Interracial children's and young adult novels*. Retrieved November 18, 2011, from http://www.cynthialeitichsmith.com/lit_resources/diversity/multiracial/multi_race_novels.html .

Smith, C. L. (2001). Interracial themes in children's and young adult fiction. *Library Talk*, (Jan/Feb), 14-16.

Spencer, R. (2011). *Reproducing race: The paradox of generation mix*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.

Spickard, P. (2001). Who is an Asian? Who is a Pacific Islander? Monoracialism, multiracial people, and Asian American communities. In T. Williams-León & C. L. Nakashima (Eds.), *The sum of our parts: Mixed-heritage Asian Americans* (pp. 13-24). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Spickard, P. (2003). Does multiraciality lighten? Me-too ethnicity and the whiteness trap. In M. Coronado, R. P. Guevarra, J. Moniz, & L. F. Szanto (Eds.), *Crossing lines: Race and mixed race across geohistorical divide* (pp. 45-62). Santa Barbara, CA: Multiethnic Student Outreach, University of California, Santa Barbara.

Stewart, M. P. (2002). Judging authors by the color of their skin? Quality Native American children's literature. *Melus*, *27*(2), Summer, 179-196.

Stephens, J. (2002). *Ways of being male: Representing masculinities in children's literature and film*. New York: Routledge.

Stonequist, E. V. (1961). *The marginal man; a study in personality and culture conflict*. New York: Russell & Russell.

Suleri, S. (1989). *Meatless days*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Temple, C. A., Martinez, M., Yokota, J., & Freeman, E. B. (2006). *Children's books in children's hands: An introduction to their literature*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Thornton, M. C. (1996). Hidden agendas, identity theories, and multiracial people. In M. P. Root (Ed.), *The multiracial experience: Racial borders as the New Frontier* (pp. 101-120). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Trites, R. S. (2000). *Disturbing the universe: Power and repression in adolescent literature*. Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press.

Wannamaker, A. (2008). *Boys in children's literature and popular culture: Masculinity, abjection, and the fictional child*. New York: Routledge.

Williams, K. M. (2005). Multiracialism & the civil rights future. *Daedalus*, (Winter), 53-60.

Williams, P. (2011, November). Address presented at National Association of Multicultural Education, Chicago.

Williams-León, T., & Nakashima, C. L. (2001). Reconfiguring race, rearticulating ethnicity [Introduction]. In *The sum of our parts: Mixed-heritage Asian Americans* (pp. 3-10). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Williams, T. K. (1997). Race-ing and being raced: The critical interrogation of 'passing' *Amerasia Journal*, (23), 61-65.

Yokota, J., & Frost, S. J. (2002). Multiracial characters in children's literature. *Book Links*, *December*, 51-57.

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE CITED

Adoff, J. (2004). *Names will never hurt me*. New York: Dutton Children's Books.

Adoff, J. (2005). *Jimi & me*. New York: Jump at the Sun/Hyperion.

Adoff, J. (2008). *The death of Jayson Porter*. New York: Jump at the Sun/Hyperion Books for Children.

Anderson, J. L. (2009). *Border crossing*. Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions.

Balliett, B., & Helquist, B. (2004). *Chasing Vermeer*. New York: Scholastic Press.

Balliett, B., & Helquist, B. (2006). *The Wright 3*. New York: Scholastic Press.

Balliett, B., & Helquist, B. (2008). *The Calder game*. New York: Scholastic Press.

Brady, L. S. (2000). *Say you are my sister*. New York: HarperCollins.

Bruchac, Joseph. *Hidden roots*. New York: Scholastic, 2004.

Burg, A. E. (2009). *All the broken pieces: a novel in verse*. New York: Scholastic Press.

Carbone, E. L. (2005). *Last dance on Holladay Street*. New York: Knopf.

Cárdenas, T., & Unger, D. (2006). *Letters to my mother*. Toronto, ON: Groundwood Books.

Chang, M. S. (2009). *Celia's robot*. New York: Holiday House.

Creel, A. H. (2006). *Call me the canyon: a love story*. Weston, CT: Brown Barn Books.

Cruz, M. C. (2003). *Border crossing: a novel*. Houston, TX: Piñata Books.

Easton, K. (2007). *Hiroshima dreams*. New York: Dutton Children's Books.

Edwards, N. (2009). *The dog whisperer*. New York: Square Fish.

Ernst, K. (2000). *Trouble at Fort La Pointe*. Middleton, WI: Pleasant Company Publications.

Flake, S. (2001). *Money hungry*. New York: Jump at the Sun/Hyperion Books For Children.

Flake, S. (2003). *Begging for change*. New York: Jump at the Sun/Hyperion Books for Children.

Frank, E. R. (2002). *America a novel*. New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers.

Frazier, S. T. (2007). *Brendan Buckley's universe and everything in it*. New York: Delacorte Press.

Frazier, S. T. (2010). *The other half of my heart*. New York: Delacorte Press.

García, C. (2008). *I wanna be your shoebox*. New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.

Garland, S. (2001). *Valley of the Moon: the diary of Maria Rosalia de Milagros*. New York: Scholastic.

Grimes, N. (2006). *The road to Paris*. New York: G.P. Putnam.

Hesse, K. (2003). *Aleutian sparrow*. New York: Simon & Schuster Children's Pub. Division.

Marsden, C. (2010). *Take me with you*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press.

McDonald, J. (2007). *Off-color*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

McMullan, M. (2009). *Cashay*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Murphy, R. (2001). *Black angels*. New York: Delacorte Press.

Myers, W. D. (2009). *Riot*. New York: Egmont.

Namioka, L. (2003). *Half and half*. New York: Delacorte Press.

Osborne, M. P. (2000). *Adaline Falling Star*. New York: Scholastic Press.

Partridge, E. (2011). *Dogtag summer*. New York: Bloomsbury Books for Young Readers.

Peck, R. (2003). *The river between us*. New York: Dial Books.

Peña, M. D. (2008). *Mexican whiteboy*. New York: Delacorte Press.

Peña, M. D. (2009). *We were here*. New York: Delacorte Press.

Platt, R. B. (2000). *The likes of me*. New York: Delacorte Press.

Resau, L. (2006). *What the moon saw: a novel*. New York: Delacorte Press.

Ryan, P. M. (2004). *Becoming Naomi León*. New York: Scholastic Press.

Salisbury, G. (2001). *Lord of the deep*. New York: Delacorte Press.

Sanders, S. L. (2009). *Gray baby: a novel*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Schwartz, E. (2006). *Stealing home*. Plattsburgh, NY: Tundra Books of Northern New York.

Sjoholm, B. (2002). *A clear spring*. New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York.

Smith, C. L. (2001). *Rain is not my Indian name*. New York: HarperCollins.

Taylor, M. D. (2001). *The land*. New York: Phyllis Fogelman Books.

Wenberg, M. (2010). *Stringz*. Lodi, NJ: WestSide Books.

Werlin, N. (2001). *Black mirror: a novel*. New York: Dial Books for Young Readers.

Wolf, A. (2007). *Zane's trace*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press.

Wong, J. S., & Côté, G. (2008). *Minn and Jake's almost terrible summer*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Woodson, J. (2000). *Miracle's boys*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.

Woodson, J. (2008). *After Tupac & D Foster*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.

Yee, L., & Santat, D. (2009). *Bobby vs. girls (accidentally)*. New York: Scholastic.

Yee, L., & Santat, D. (2010). *Bobby the brave (sometimes)*. New York: Arthur A. Levine Books.

Yep, L. (2001). *Angelfish*. New York: Putnam's.

CURRICULUM VITAE

AMINA CHAUDHRI

EDUCATION

University of Illinois, Chicago, Ph.D. in Curriculum Studies 2011
- Dissertation: *The Skin We're In: A Literary Analysis of Representations of Mixed-Race Identity in Children's Literature*

DePaul University, Elementary Teaching Certification 2001
- Illinois Standard Elementary Certificate Type 03

Michigan State University, M.A. in Curriculum and Teaching 2000

Oberlin College, B.A. in English Literature 1994
- Honors Thesis: *Negotiating Nation and Self in Sara Suleri's Meatless Days*

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago Fall 2012
Assistant Professor, Teacher Education

North Park University, Chicago
Lecturer: EDUC 3130 Social and Cultural Diversity Policy and Practices 2011-2012

University of Illinois, Chicago
Research assistant: Asian American Studies Program 2011-2012
Instructor: EDPS 361 Education in Urban Context Fall 2010
Co-instructor: CI 546 Children's and Adolescent Literature Fall 2009
Instructor: ED 135 Child and Youth Policies in Urban America Spring 2009

Alexander Graham Bell Elementary School, Chicago 2003 – 2010
Classroom teacher, 4th grade, Gifted Program

George B. Swift Elementary School, Chicago 2000 - 2003
Classroom teacher, 5th grade

American International School/Dhaka, Bangladesh 1996 - 1999
Middle School Art and English Teacher

PUBLICATIONS

'Straighten Up and Fly Right: HeteroMasculinity in *The Watsons Go to Birmingham -1963*,' *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*. Summer 2011, Vol. 36, No. 2.

"Growing Mixed/Up: Multiracial Identity in Children's and Young Adult Literature". Chapter in *Sliding Doors in a Pluralistic Society: Critical Approaches to and Intercultural Perspectives on Diversity in Contemporary Literature for Children and Young Adults*. Naidoo, Jamie and Park Sarah (eds). ALA Editions. Forthcoming

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Blurring the Boundaries: Literary Representation of the Intersections of Race and Sexuality in Jacqueline Woodson's The House You Pass on the Way, paper presentation, National Association of Multicultural Education, Chicago, IL, November 2011

Shades of Resistance: Negotiating Mixed-Race Identity in Mexican WhiteBoy, and The Other Half of My Heart, paper presentation, Children's Literature Association, Roanoke, VA, June 2011

"Brown Girl, Brown Boy: Intersections of Race and Gender in Children's Literature", paper presentation, Critical Mixed Race Studies Conference, Chicago, IL, November 2010

"Intersectionality in Children's Literature", paper presentation, National Women's Studies Association, Atlanta, GA, November 2009

"Who Am I in the World? Individualism, Identity and Intersectionality in Children's Literature" paper presentation, Children's Literature Association, Charlotte, NC, June 2009

"Constructing American Identities and Communities", paper presentation, American Studies Association, Philadelphia, PA, October, 2007

"Multicultural Children's Literature", paper presentation, National Women's Studies Association, St. Charles, IL, June 2007

"Colonial Legacies: Individualism in Curriculum and the Construction of Identity" paper presentation with J. Lucasik, American Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies, Chicago, IL, April 2007

INVITED PRESENTATIONS AND WORKSHOPS

Gender and Sexuality in the Classroom, guest speaker, Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago, IL, April 2011

Social Justice in the Classroom, faculty workshop, A. G. Bell School, April 2010

Writer's Workshop: Getting Started, faculty workshop, A. G. Bell School, November 2009

"Can LGBTQ + School = Safe?" panel discussion and film screening, AERA Roundtable, Chicago, IL, April 2007.

"Teaching Queer", guest speaker, Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago, IL, April 2006

"Can LGBTQ + School = Safe?" panel discussion and film screening, Gerber Hart Library, Chicago, IL, October 2005

ORGANIZATION MEMBERSHIPS

American Association of University Women	2009 - present
American Educational Research Association	2006 - present
American Library Association	2008 - present
American Studies Association	2007 - present
Children's Literature Association	2008 - present
Critical Race Studies in Education Association	2011 - present
Illinois Reading Council	2010 - present
Modern Languages Association	2009 - present
National Council of Teachers of English	2011 - present
National Women's Studies Association	2006 - present
National Association for Multicultural Education	2009 - present
Teachers for Social Justice	2003 - present
The Centre for Research in Young People's Texts and Cultures	2010 - present
United States Board on Books for Young People	2008 - present

SERVICE

Member – CReATE (Chicagoland Researchers & Advocates for Transformative Education)	2012
Member – Critical Mixed Race Studies Conference K-12 Committee	2011
Reviewer - *Community Literacy Journal*	2011
Volunteer - Swift Elementary School	2011
Member - Bell School Principal Search Committee	2010
Founding Member - Bell School Green Committee	2007 - 2010
Board member - *Beyondmedia Education*	2005 - 2007
Chair – Bell School Social Justice Committee	2003 - 2010
Volunteer - Apna Ghar domestic violence shelter	2003 - 2005

LANGUAGES

Fluent in written and spoken Urdu and spoken Bangla