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***The Brownies' Book***

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Ms. Williams-Sanchez studied Spanish language and cultural history at the Universidad de Salamanca and was an undergraduate teacher at Berkeley High School's East Campus, part of UC Berkeley's Break the Cycle educational program for at-risk youth. She has developed adult literacy programs for immigrant parents in her native Southern California and projects and programs for residential therapeutic group homes for at-risk teenaged girls.

## **Abstract**

With editors such as legendary scholar and visionary publisher, W. E. B. DuBois, and Jessie Faucet, a renowned literary voice of the Harlem Renaissance, *The Brownies' Book* (January 1920-December 1921) is a publication for the ages. In print just two years, the children's magazine catered to an audience that targeted "all children, but especially for ours, the Children of the Sun," (DuBois, 1919, p. 285). In view of its groundbreaking contributions, the monthly is distinguished as a foundational work in American children's publishing, literature, and literacy. Examination of the short-lived magazine's successes and challenges uncovers and sheds light on its core strategies to move past decades-old impediments to achieve new gains in literacy, publishing and community building.

*Keywords:* African American children's literature, children's magazines,  
Harlem Renaissance

## Introduction

On examination of its rich textual and visual storytelling content, it is no wonder the magazine's audience of “Kiddies from six to sixteen,” (Johnson-Feelings, 1996) — and their parents—were challenged to stretch their thinking on issues of the day facing African-Americans, their communities, and identities. In parallel with the mission of its informal parent publication, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’s (NAACP) *The Crisis*, *The Brownies’ Book* (*TBB*) magazine spoke to a variety of social and psychological needs and offered cultural matter that Young (2009) referred to as remnants, but identified as “the racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, political, social, historical, educational, and economic artifacts embedded in discourses” (p. 2). It is in this context that critical discourse analysis works solidly to reveal the sociopolitical and economic realities in which the lifecycle of *TBB* magazines are situated. Through such a prism, what is revealed is a thoughtfully crafted artifact that was a cornerstone in the radical reformation of an emergent social class known as the “New Negro.”

A literature review of extant critical discourse analysis about *TBB* reveals a periodical encompassing elements prosaic and of high literary and artistic value, ranging from music and games, as well as poetry, essays, letters to the editor, short fiction, and persuasive, creative, and expository prose. In combination with the photography, drawings, and other illustrations, each book was unique and reflected the narratives and imagery of everyday black life with beauty and dignity, a sensibility rarely attributed to black subjects of that era. For these reasons and more, the magazine was remarkable in

the scope and quality of its content as well as its implications for the literate identity of a culture merely 55 years emancipated.

Honoring Dianne Johnson-Feelings and Honda McNair's Call to Action for inclusion in the Children's Literature Association's Centennial Studies Series, this article will include a forward-looking discussion of *The Brownies' Book (TBB)* magazine that will touch upon Piaget's (1936) Cognitive Development Theory, Chall's (1983) Stages of Reading Development, and Holdaway's (1979) Theory of Literacy Development, as well as those credited to DuBois (1919), and current theories in emergent and family literacy, to parse out clues from past success, to increase traditional and digital literacies and publishing commitments, and to affect change along lines of access, equity, and family engagement. Such issues are prioritized in the report from the International Literacy Association, *2018 What's Hot in Literacy?*

### **Literature Review**

This literature review seeks to parse together a historic and sociopolitical literacy profile of *TBB* publication. Created from a qualitative meta-analysis of core *TBB* analysis, this examination will be formed by the highlights and shading cast by reviews of the publication's structure and selected content as discussed in scholarly works that explore textual lineage (i.e., the examination of texts that help an individual make meaning of his/her life), children's literature, traditions of Black Liberation and selective criticism, as well as critical race theory (CRT), critical discourse analysis (CDA), and instructional design (Gyant, 2017; Harris, 1988; King, 2017; McNair, 2008; Smith, 2016; Young, 2009).

Young (2009) provides a thorough outline of the magazine's structure including a description of its publishing genre, timing, structure, cost, and scope:

*TBB*, a monthly periodical, was published from January 1920 to December 1921. It sold for 15 cents per issue or \$1.50 per year. There are a total of 24 publications, and each issue has a 32-page format, with 8 to 10 pages of visual representations. The magazine is divided into columns that include *The Judge*, *The Jury*, *Playtime*, *As the Crow Flies*, *Our Little Friends*, *Little People of the Month*, and *The Grown Ups Corner*. (p. 3)

The contrast between *TBB*'s ostensible print media type (magazine) and its articulated format (a book) is noteworthy inasmuch as it highlights implications for the editors' intentions for the longevity and historic significance of its text. As Young (2009), pointed out, "DuBois visually presented [*TBB*] as a magazine but thought of it as an instructional text" (p. 9).

With clarity and purpose, DuBois framed *TBB* and its content through a set of seven goals that were stated in the precursory edition of *The True Brownies* (DuBois, 1919). Many scholars (e.g., Gyant, 2017; Harris, 1988; King, 2017; McNair, 2008; Smith, 2016; Young, 2009) note them in their analyses as follows:

1. To make colored children realize that being "colored" is a normal, beautiful thing.
2. To make them familiar with the history and achievements of the Negro race.
3. To make them know that other colored children have grown into beautiful, useful and famous persons.

4. To teach them delicately a code of honor and action in their relation with white children.
5. To turn their little hurts and resentments into emulation, ambition and love of their own homes and companions.

In the composite, the points suggest a tome more akin to a child development textbook than an entertaining magazine created exclusively for enjoyment and pleasure reading. Just beneath the surface of all the songs, games and storytelling fun, was a groundbreaking primer for pro-social indoctrination. Young (2009) noted:

DuBois had these very specific developmental goals for Black children—all of which bordered on the improvement of character, consciousness, identity, and self. This type of positive academic, moral, and character education for Black children was unique for its time. (p. 11)

Of the points elaborated, it is perhaps the fourth point; “To teach ‘colored’ children delicately a code of honor and action in their relation with white children” that most directly engages and challenges historic notions of literacy as a sociopolitical construct. By this measure, *TBB* stands as an impressive literacy artifact, an unprecedented work that not only flew in the face of “the emergence of a new subjective mode of identification that crossed national borders,” (Lake, 2005, p. 209) for whites, but also served as a new script for social engagement for the “New Negro.” Jones (2017) described the dynamics for blacks of the period:

“Throughout the Progressive Era and during the active years of *The Brownies’ Book*, which caught the very beginning of the New Negro Era, elite integrationists’ primary strategy to ensure black people’s welfare in America

involved focusing on conservative intra-racial reform to reconstruct the collective image of black people into one that was wholly positive and suited their bourgeois, assimilationist (yet also black nationalist) vision of “black respectability.” This new, refined image of blacks that [emulated] white middle-class ideals constituted the integrationist “New Negro.” This figure refuted the pervasive and inescapable racist stereotypes of blacks reproduced by all areas of American culture, society, and politics. Mainstream children’s literature of the era, for example, reinforced anti-black racist beliefs in young minds through either degrading and ridiculing blacks in storylines and illustrations or through completely omitting black characters altogether. (pp.10-11)

Motivating this campaign of denigration, according to DuBois, whites were actively reasserting themselves, their ideas and their privilege and had concurrently become “painfully conscious of their whiteness” (Lake, 2005, p. 211). DuBois stated:

Beginning with Mississippi in 1890, the deployment of a literacy test for racial purposes was a key aspect of the transnational process [he noted]: the constitution of ‘whiteness’ as the basis of both personal identity and transnational political community. Literacy was used to patrol racial borders (electoral as well as national) within and between nations, and in the process became a code for whiteness. (Lake, p. 213)

More succinctly, Lake (2005) captured the requisites needed to claim this identity stating, “Literacy was fundamental to the citizen’s capacity for self-government and only Anglo-Saxons were blessed with that capacity” (p. 219). This is to say, for the literate, the benefits were nothing short of sovereignty in a democratic state replete with access to

free lives of liberty and the equitable pursuit of happiness afforded by the Constitution, family lives depicted in the children's literature of the day.

By contrast, children's text in books and periodicals presented few scenes of black parents interacting with their children. Instead, as Harris (1988) pointed out:

They were more often shown as overly solicitous of white children. Black family life was not an integral component of children's periodicals. Black parents were depicted as disinterested, amused by their children's contretemps, or depicted as slightly remiss in their parental duties. In contrast, the parents who wrote the letters published in the "The Grown-Ups' Corner" were loving. They were concerned and they were proud of their children. They desired what all children want for their children: health, happiness, and success. (p.16)

DuBois, acutely aware of the stakes and determined to teach African American "embryonic men and women," (Johnson-Feelings, 1996, p.13) doubled-down on his integrationist tactics with the addition of *TBB* to his publishing portfolio to educate and to teach black youth the "delicate code of honor and action" required for meaningful engagement within and among the national hegemony. DuBois sought to arm the youth with literacy, the power to read and write and actively exchange ideas on a leveled playing ground. *TBB* aspired to enlighten its readers with history, facts, and counter-narratives. All were powerful warehouses of information and ammunition intended to tip the scales of public discourse and American racial identities. Moreover, it was through *TBB* that DuBois sought to create an international and multiracial platform for literate engagement and dialogue.

For these reasons, and across texts, *TBB* sections including: *The Jury* – international letters submitted by children; and *Our Little People* – drawings, illustrations and pictures sent in by readers, are rich demonstrations of literacy. Set in a sociopolitical framework that intentionally and regularly relegated the existence of black American's printed and pictorial narratives to stereotypes and denigrating tropes, these textual and visually literate sections of the *TBB* publication represent disruptive and hyper-political acts of agency, self-empowerment, and self-determination. The letters written and submitted by readers in and of themselves stand as lessons and demonstrate to children of color the code of honor and action afforded only to the literate classes. The exchanged knowledge and know-how as expressed in the published pages subverted gatekeeping tools and technologies leveraged to deny access, equity and inclusion to coveted geographical and intellectual spaces reserved and controlled by whites.

### ***The Jury***

For evidence of this, we must simply look to one of its seven sections, *The Jury*, in which children from around the globe sent in letters for publication in the magazine's pages. Its authors were written by articulate children, not pickaninnies, comics, or dimwitted sidekicks, rather letters reflected normal kids with normal wants and needs voiced as requests for help/assistance, praise of the publication, assessments of their transforming selves, response to whites, discrimination and international readers, and their reflections and the effects of institutional racism (Harris, 1988; McNair, 2008; King, 2017; Gyant, 2017; Young, 2009; Smith, 2016).

Gyant (2017) described the section as one focused on letters from children who lived in cities including New York, Boston, Pittsburgh, and Washington, DC, among

other urban points of origin and destination in the Great Migration that extended from America's eastern to western shores. But the acts of children's literacy highlighted in the section were not limited by boundaries of geography or language. One inspired Cuban reader wrote in English, yet challenged the magazine's readership to engage in her mother tongue.

Now my dear lectores, I have all as my best friends. I am Cuban born, but my parents are natives of St. Kitts. Think for one instant and then answer these few words: Would you like to have me as a friend? Tell me what you want to know of Cuba. Now I am looking out in the next number to see all my friends. And if there is any that can read and write in Spanish. (Gyant, L., 2017, p. 23)

These are important details given that literacy in this era was synonymous with Whiteness. By reaching out to an international audience of black and brown children of the world, DuBois and the *TBB* further challenged racial constructs, selective traditions, and exclusionary literacy codes. The publication effectively reached into the shadowy corners of the globe to extract points of light in African Diaspora literacy that became beacons of hope and inspiration to a larger debate, a discussion that will be laid out later in this study.

Figure 1 Meta-analysis Children's Text and Visual Literacy Acts in *The Brownies' Book*

Full Citation	<i>The Jury</i> - Letters from Children Across the Nation and Globe	<i>Our Little Friends</i> - Photos and other positive visual portrayals of Blacks and Black life.	Analytical style
Gyant, L. (2015). The Brownies' Book: Preserving African American Memories through Textual Lineage. <i>Black History Bulletin</i> , 78(2), 22-26.	Offers a sampling of letters demonstrating request for assistance; assessment of transforming self; response to Whites/International readers; and effects of institutional racism.	Praised and highlighted photographs of children. Through each section, "children of the sun" were encouraged to dream, to read, to learn about their history, and to know they were part of a big world with many different countries and many different kinds of people, all with their own ways of doing things." (p.23)	Textual Lineage Analysis
Harris, Violet Joyce, 1956-. (1988). The Brownies' book : challenge to the selective tradition in children's literature. Ann Arbor, Mich. University Microfilms International	Written by articulate children; not pickaninnies, comics or dimwitted sidekicks, normal kids with wants and needs. Included 1) requests for help, 2) praise of the motivation influence of the magazine, 3) Responses to white and international readers, 4) comments not he effects of discrimination. (p. 23)	Filipina and Cambridge: Shared with friends and Teacher, "Never seen a mag with pictures of pretty colored children...like pictures of dark babies," (p.25).	Literary criticism of Selective tradition.
Jones, A.A.(2017). "With a Sprinkle of Fairy Dust and a Splash of Color: How the <i>Brownies' Books</i> Embodied the Black Elite's Integrationist Vision of Racial Uplift and Carved It's Place in the White-Washed World of Children's Literature."	Letters voicing a call for acceptance. The Jury passage includes a black child looking for self representation in Fairyland.	Alice Martin, "Letter" <i>TBB</i> , June 1920, (p. 30).	
King, J. E. (2017). Education Research in the Black Liberation Tradition: Return What You Learn to the People. <i>The Journal of Negro Education</i> , 86(2), 95-114.	A magazine written by Black writers for Black children, to disseminate research on the black experience to prepare black children for present realities and future possibilities, (p. 97). "Neither DuBois and Woodson's monumental efforts, the civil rights and African liberation movement nor fifty years of Africana/Black Studies and struggle to transform higher education have enabled the vast majority of educators to grasp the real nature of oppression and education's role in it, (p. 108)		Critical analysis in the Black Liberation context
McNair, J. C. (2008). A comparative analysis of The Brownies' Book and contemporary African American children's literature written by Patricia C. McKissack. Embracing, evaluating, and examining African American children's and young adult literature, 3-29.	No explicit discussion of the section.; acknowledges the importance of readers own voice and imagery in the pub. Explores the tension of social class as relates to the skill and literacy levels of contributors; maps WEB. Dubois's/TBB attitude regarding literary and those who are and or are not literate. Seems to over look the realities of history.	Most issues of the Brownies Books included photographs of children or various hues, from light-skinned to dark skinned. "Trained" Blacks to see black beauty". Images of blacks as beautiful and attractive, via the text and illustrations, pervaded the pages of TBB, (p. 72)	Critical race theory (CRT) & Comparative literary analysis
Smith, K. C. (2016). "The Brownies' Book and the Roots of African American Children's Literature. The Tar Baby and the Tomahawk.	Space for children was ample and young authors were welcomed: Pocahontas Foster, John Bolden, Nina Yolande DuBois, Ruth Marie Thomas and sister were all establish child authored feature in the publication. And artists illustrators: Laura Wheeler Waring, Hilda Wilkinson, Elizabeth Ross Haynes.	It was the late 1910s and early 1920s that the public image of black childhood shifted dramatically, and DuBois at the Crisis [and <i>TBB</i> ] helped spearhead the black civic commitment to the children as embodiments of social change and possibility, (p.3)	Literary analysis
Young, P. A. (2009). The Brownies' Book (1920-1921): Exploring the past to elucidate the future of instructional design. <i>Journal of Language, Identity, and Education</i> , 8(1), 1-20.	Space for youth engagement an response to content, (p.15). Also in analysis grid: The Jury: self-sacrifice, race pride, racial identity, work ethic, reading acquisition promoted through magazine content; motivated kids to work to purchase the magazine; need to identify with other black children and connect with your culture. Motivate children. Re; Classroom use, TBB motivated children to learn child generated ideas, vocabulary, and English language skills; Kids felt about the section: Race Pride, Black History; happiness; racial identity; real stories that authenticate children's race, history culture, communities; Children who wrote in exhibited strong self-confidence; kids established a love of reading and expressed feelings of enthusiasm and appreciation for TBB.	Used latest print technology- photos, text, sketches, and color tints when Blacks weren't associated with technological ingenuity (p.2),	Critical Discourse Analysis/Instructional Design

Children from around the globe contributed to the publication's richness (Smith, 2016; Gyant, 2017). In addition to the legacy Harlem Renaissance writers, editors and publishers behind the scenes (including Augusta E. Bird, Augustus G. Dill, Jessie Redmond Fauset, Langston Hughes, Nella Larson, Effie Lee, and Alphonso Stafford), *TBB* had the dynamism of an early World Wide Web evidenced by the broad range of content, an array of "Stories, games, poems, and puzzles [that] were also written by children from around the world" (Gyant, 2017, p. 22).

Such rich, globally sourced text inspired future acts of literacy on a global scale. Harris (1988) noted the reflections of two readers who were so inspired. One young reader, motivated by DuBois' example, wrote:

I think colored people are the most wonderful people in the world and when I'm a man, I'm going to write about them too, so that all people will know the terrible struggles we've had. I don't pay attention anymore to the discouraging things I see in the newspapers. Something just tells me we are no worse than anybody else. (October, 1920). (p. 308)

While others, college-aged readers asserted, "We find that this magazine broadens our ideas and increases our vocabularies. We are advising every boy and girl to read it," (May, 1921). (p. 156)

Each of these responses marks appropriate milestones in Clay's (1975) emergent literacy and Piaget's (1936) Cognitive Development theories, respectively. Mkandawire, (2015) described in a post:

Marie Clay's studies on emergent literacy indicated that children know a great deal about reading and writing before they come to school, and they are able to

experiment with and apply their knowledge in various ways (Clay, 1975). Emergent literacy was recently defined as “the view that literacy learning begins at birth and is encouraged through participation with adults in meaningful activities; these literacy behaviors change and eventually become conventional over time” (Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp, 2000, p. 123). From a very young age, children who are exposed to oral and written language gradually gain control over the forms of literacy. Print-related knowledge develops similarly to the way children learn oral language (Morrow, 1997). (p. 4)

These passages demonstrate that when children are actively engaged with interesting and meaningful reading and writing experiences, they develop literacy knowledge early in their lives, learning that can prove formative to their adult lives, goals and objectives.

### **Theory**

While readings in the analysis take cues from Foucault, other theorists, and their analytical traditions, the theoretical position that undergirds this review is an amalgamation of Piaget’s (1936) Cognitive Development Theory, Chall’s (1983) Stages of Reading Development, Holdaway’s (1979) Theory of Literacy Development, Vygotsky’s Theory of Social Constructivism (1987), and Denny Taylor’s (1983) Family Literacy.

Core constructs for this look situate the age of *TBB*’s target demographic, children, aged 6-16, and align with Piaget’s third of four stages of cognitive development, the Concrete Operational stage. In this phase, children aged 7-11 develop and use logic and inductive reasoning. They also apply their newly developed thinking abilities to have conversations, learn to write and to learn about themselves and how they are unique from

others. This stage is a precursor to the fourth stage of development, in which preteens aged 12 and up, begin to consider moral, philosophical, ethical, social, and political issues that require theoretical and abstract reasoning (Cherry, p. 2018). It is during these developmental periods that through its pages, *TBB* plant seeds of wise children.

In Howell's (2017) discussion, *Writer's Workshop and Students' Literate Identities*, the author identifies how Vygotsky's (1987) theory of Social Constructivism plays an important role in a child's intellectual development, stating "the way in which children are raised, and the experiences that they go through, all contribute to their identity" (p. 14). In building her argument in this regard, Howell noted McKinley's (2015) study in which social constructivist theory study was shown to explain the phenomenon that "human development is socially situated and knowledge is constructed through interaction with others," (p. 1).

What is core to social constructivism is the idea that meaning and understanding is the product of the learner's social interactions. Their knowledge bases are built, and their identities are shaped by experiences and interactions with others. These outcomes then become fodder for writing, which Ryan identifies as "one of the most successful and highly encouraged methods of teaching literacy in the classroom" (p. 8).

Howell (2017) punctuates this point, adding that this method of teaching writing not only allows students the freedom of choosing their writing topics, but also gives students confidence. In *TBB*, example are found in the letters of *The Jury*, which served a similar function inasmuch as the section exemplified children's successful acquisition of the set skills, absorption and echo of values *TBB* espoused.

McNair cited Sarland's (1999), assertion "all writing is ideological since all writing either assumes values even when not overtly espousing them, or is produced and also read within a social and cultural framework which is inevitably suffused with ...ideology" (p. 41).

The benchmark of writing aplomb needed to gain entrée into *The Brownies' Book* was not facile. For many of the communities' elders and those wresting with the vestiges of post-bellum codes that limited literacy, the periodical exposed its hardline stance in a *TBB* biographical sketch about Sojourner Truth entitled *A Pioneer Suffragist* (*TBB*, April 1920): "Being uneducated, of course, she spoke in dialect or broken English, which I shall not attempt to reproduce here, though her speech, evidently lost nothing by its use" (McNair, p.121).

By assuming emulation as strategy for assimilation, no room was left for a black dialect, particularly a black vernacular that had been held up as a mark of inferiority. McNair (2008) confirms that *TBB* seems to indicate a somewhat negative bias toward the speakers of black vernacular and a pro-bias for "standard" English. This stance again was intended to counter prevalent and pervasive cultural characterizations of blacks as lacking intelligence and being incapable of learning and literacy. For these reasons, the importance of literacy, defined simply in this era as the ability to read and to write, was an important inflexible practice to the editors of *TBB*.

Literacy achievement was stressed through pages and images that celebrated black children's academic successes in the *Little People of the Month*, and that encouraged family literacy through printed ads, propaganda, and didactic admonitions that families curate at-home libraries with *TBB* recommended titles. One such ad read:

“We are prepared to recommend books and periodicals for children. Why not begin a library for your boy or girl today?” (*TBB*, April 1920). This was an explicit invitation to black parents to invest in their children’s literacy and for 24 months, many did. Their purchase of *TBB* funded the continued production and maintenance of the magazine’s exceptionally high-caliber content. Young described the magazine’s technological edge:

*TBB* was produced using some of the latest print technology of its times. It incorporated text, photographs, sketches, and color tints at a time in history when technological ingenuity was not associated with African Americans. *TBB* was instructional, culture-based, and technologically significant. (p.2)

It was a call to action that asked black parents to put their money where their mouths were, and many black parents met the challenge. Smith (2017) expounded:

Longstanding African American dedication to education gained traction during the 1920’s, as black children became increasingly invested in the printed word and the classroom. The Harlem Renaissance thus transformed expectations for black childhood by drawing on the energies of the revolutionary moment. (p. 3)

Smith noted how culture-based ideological expectations evolved and DuBois’s role in the transformation:

It was in the late 1910s and early 1920s that the public image of black childhood shifted dramatically, and DuBois at *The Crisis* [and *TBB*] helped spearhead the black civic commitment to children as embodiments of social change and possibility. (p. 3)

But the financial support for the culturally specific *TBB* proved unsustainable. With a base more narrow than *The Crisis*, which was funded by the broader-based, and

membership sustained NAACP. For the children and family-focused *TBB*, too few were able or willing to subscribe and the publication was forced to end printing. DuBois blamed a pre-depression economy in the final issue of *TBB* for their unsustainable level of subscriptions, which had fallen short of the requisite minimum 12,000 for publication viability. Gyant (2105) cited DuBois:

The fault has not been with our readers. We have an unusually enthusiastic set of Subscribers. But the magazine was begun just at the time of industrial depression following the war, and the fault of our suspension therefore is rather in the times, which are so out of joint, than in our constituency. (p.1)

### *Our Little Friends*

As important as the words in *TBB*'s transformational written messaging were, the publication's images were equally, if not more, important. A children's magazine for a group with emerging mass reading and writing literacy, what was communicated via images, pictures, and drawing were extremely important. *TBB*'s black subjects, as mentioned previously, were included in ways that broke from the Selective Tradition, and reached beyond more common, debasing and denigrating depictions of blacks.

Jones (2017) provided a perfect example in describing Scottish author Helen Bannerman's *The Story of Little Black Sambo*, which is the archetypical "pickaninny" tale that is hurtful to black children's self-image and that drew upon popular stereotypes of black physicality. Jones (2017) elaborated:

The illustration of its black characters tended toward the grotesque. Bannerman gave Sambo, his mother, Mambo, and his father, Jambo enormous red lips, wide smiles, and bulging white eyes that juxtaposed with their tar-colored skin. While

black children who read such stories learned to view themselves, their color, and their features as unappealing and inferior, white children learned to perpetuate the mockery of black people, and developed feelings of superiority. (pp. 29-30)

For these reasons, as with the text itself, divergence was a revolutionary act. Articulate and egalitarian, the images in *TBB* sought not simply to innovate, but rather to incorporate, carry forward, and impact the visual language of the emerging “New Negro” into a visual linguistic expression. To this end, they used *The Crisis* and *TBB* to further the visual aesthetic that was being promulgated as part of the “New Negro” artistic movement as well as an overarching overhaul and repositioning of attitudes toward children and parenthood. Smith (2016) noted:

[A sepia-toned collage] includes a larger number of attractive, well-tended children, and adds the details of their names, cities and states. The effect here is for DuBois is to suggest the range of black cultural accomplishment. The “New negro” child is not particular to New York City, but also populates cities and towns in the Midwest and the South, and extends even into Liberia in Africa. The image demonstrates evidentiary the success of this new image of black childhood, one that stands in clear opposition visually to the caricatures of minstrelsy, cartoon, illustrations, and film. (p. 2)

This notion is echoed in contemporary fine art interpretations on the formation of the Harlem Renaissance’s visual aesthetic. Murrell (2018) described the following:

The African American artists of the Harlem Renaissance comprised the first modernist movement to work in defiance of racial stereotypes. They used wide-ranging artistic strategies to portray all walks of life in urban black communities

that were rapidly expanding during the early twentieth century, fueled by the Great Migration of African Americans from the rural South. (p.121)

From this effort a specific Harlem Renaissance visual pictorial language emerged in which the portraiture was embraced as a means of projecting a new racial identity for black Americans. In this regard, Murrell (2018) noted:

In the wake of Locke's 1925 essay, "The New Negro," Harlem Renaissance artists sought to defy then-prevalent stereotypes with images depicting the new "city Negro". Harlem Renaissance portrait subjects were typically seated, their faces often turned slightly to the side, their gaze contemplative and enigmatic, as if unaware of the viewer, their attire, jewelry and coiffure understated but elegant. (p. 118)

Ironically and as an aside, *TBB* predates the groundbreaking Locke essay (1925), which gave rise to the moniker of the "New Negro" intellectual movement for which *The Crisis* and *TBB* were foundational texts. Moreover, the combined reach of the two aforementioned publications situated and provided access for an international and multigenerational, textual and visual media discursive exchange. McNair (2003) discussed DuBois's stated intent regarding the educational facets of his publications' imagery, noting DuBois's remark that, "as African Americans we needed to "train ourselves to see black beauty" and it can be argued that *TBB* forged a step in this direction" (p. 73). Jones (2017) provided one such example. In a letter to the editors of *The Brownies Book*, Alice Martin, a young girl from Philadelphia, demonstrates a typical black child-reader's acute awareness of the link between race and beauty. She writes:

Sometimes in school I feel so badly. In the geography lesson we read about the different people who live in the world, all the pictures are pretty, nice-looking men and women, except for the Africans. They always look so ugly. I don't mean to make fun of them, for I am not pretty myself; but I know not all colored people look like me. I see lots of ugly white people to; but not all white people look like them, and they are not the ones they put in the geography..." (p. 30)

In other words, the publication was a forum for a conversation that was held using visual and text languages, which spoke to black readers, old and young, as well as the uninitiated and unfamiliar with black culture:

The *Brownies Book* illustrations engendered positive reactions from two girls, one from the Philippines and the other from Cambridge, Massachusetts. The Filipina girl wrote that an aunt sent *The Brownies Book* along with other American magazines. She was delighted with it and shared it with her friends and teacher. In her letter she wrote, "we had never seen a magazine with pictures of pretty colored children in it (September 1920, p. 263). The reader from Cambridge wrote that she enjoyed *The Brownies' Book* "immensely," especially the pictures of dark babies. She found that their photographs made her happy. (July, 1921, p. 208)

As mentioned, *TBB* displayed images of children articulated in the style that came to be emblematic of the Harlem Renaissance aesthetic.

### **Analysis**

With a backdrop cast that included discussion and a deep dive into facets of literacy's sociopolitical history, shifts in visual and textual African American narratives,

as well as the economic challenges and technological advances to publishing *TBB* represented, we can begin to look forward to address the answers it may offer to present day challenges in literacy.

According to a 2018 survey of 91 international countries and territories conducted by the International Literacy Association, among the top five issues of importance included Equity in Literacy Education (#2 of 5), defined as ensuring all students have the opportunities, supports, and tools they need, regardless of economic status, academic proficiency, geographic remoteness, and other barriers to school success, and Access to Books and Content (#5 of 5), defined as ensuring access to books and content (including diverse, multilingual, and digital) for both pleasure and academic reading that are relevant for all learners.

There is an inherent and unresolved conflict in American literacy that continues to resist the culture's hegemony. This is to say, the US strives to be a leading 1<sup>st</sup> world country, but a key factor in determining that ranking includes measures of the literacy of its citizenry. Given the country's growing and ever-changing ethno-linguistic and racially diverse profile juxtaposed with historic efforts to control, moderate, and mitigate literacy as a form of power, there will continue to be a conflict. This conflict is realized as the ongoing push-and-pull among those in various levels who are challenged to keep those "below" running at an acceptable rate—a rate that doesn't jeopardize the nation's ranking and interests as a 1<sup>st</sup> world power. This educational management approach fosters inherent access challenges. Decreolization processes in which a creole or assimilating groups move away from a standard language or a variety of standard languages back to a pre-creole state complicate these challenges. In many ways, *TBB* represents a

decreolization effect inasmuch as DuBois sought to address access challenges specific to African Americans through publishing. Young (2009) wrote:

Throughout *The Brownies' Book*, DuBois' educational philosophies and sociopolitical and economic ideologies were espoused in the context of helping Black people help themselves. DuBois used "multisemiotic" discourse (i.e., written, spoken, and visual; Fairclough, 1995a, p.58) to spread literacy throughout the national and international African American community. The text analysis revealed these multisemiotic discourses as photographs of Black people, the written text, and editorials of children and parents. (p. 18)

Such efforts by subjugated groups elicit pushback and motivate the pursuit of alternate routes to literacies by and for marginalized groups. This type of movement stimulates efforts on both sides of the conflict: on one side, there is an impulse to advance, while on the other, there is impulse to control or constrict movement. And so the dance continues, with the two sides locked in a veritable literacy tango.

### ***Ebony, Jr!***

*Ebony Jr!* that was most aligned in format and affect to *TBB*. Published by black publisher Johnson publishing, its profile was similar to that created by DuBois and Dill, as the progeny of a more lasting and socially minded-cultural phenomenon, *Ebony* magazine. But, like the *TBB* model and its predecessor, *The Crisis*, the former was not economically sustainable. The culturally focused, youth periodical fell out of publication.

Gyant (2017) noted:

[Black children readers] did meet again some fifty years later, when *Ebony Jr!* was published by Johnson Publications in 1973. Like *The Brownies' Book*, *Ebony*

*Jr!* was developed to share with children the history and achievements of African Americans, information about international and national events, and achievements of children around the country, and to remind them “of the great traditions of which you are a part.” Both – as hallowed sites for African American memory and curiosity – sought to heighten racial consciousness and show that reading is fun and opened doors to a new world of opportunities. Since that time, there has not been another publication that has targeted African American Children. (p. 25)

And the literacy education tango continues.

### **Publishing**

Moreover and regardless of the platform, the push to achieve and to create the mechanisms and effects publishing provides drives innovation. In instances where inclusive and representative publishing is absent, self-published efforts emerge.

Young (2009) wrote:

The integration of culture in the design of information and instructional products is not a new idea. However, it is a concept that has not maintained any longevity or support. Young’s (1999, 2001) research has identified primary source documents created through print technology, dating back to 1792, as evidence that African Americans created culture-based information and instructional products in many forms, such as newspapers, magazines, religious matter, and, later textbooks used in historically Black colleges. These materials exemplify the feasibility of creating specialized instructional products. (p.19)

In recent years, a resurgence fueled by technology advances and internet-based access to publishing in all of its forms, has created new industries, filled gaps of access, equity, and inclusion, as previously defined. These gains, which extend into the digital literacy space, are now delivering on their earlier suggested promise. Young (2009) concluded:

The same technological ingenuity of the past should exist today, as there are many learners who would benefit from instructional designs with a cultural context (Gay, 2000). Specialized designs may better meet the needs of learners. The specialization of instructional content has been explored in the field of human-computer interaction, in which the cultural needs of users are considered in the design of user interfaces (Aykin, 2005). Similarly, there is a need to adopt their designs and technology. Generic instructional products have not met the needs of all learners. Therefore, more specialized instructional products are greatly needed across disciplines and educational settings. (p. 19)

What was considered revolutionary cultural integration of learning texts would seem to be a given, as Ortlieb & Marinak (2013) posited:

A wide variety of content is being provided via visual and auditory stimulation to reinforce reading skills. Learning venues have become YouTube, blogs, videoconferencing, and instant messaging. Gender, race, and culture take a back seat when students from around the world collaborate to study themes like globalization and novels that have current relevance (Weigel and Gardner, 2009). The world becomes smaller and larger at the same time through digital media use.

Technology incorporates constructivist, informal, and social literacy learning theories (Weigel and Gardner, 2009). As Freire and Macedo (1987) encourage us to transform the old society, technology is altering the old society to the new society of multiple literacies (Woods, 2011). Response to text writing moves from a cumbersome typewriter or handwritten style into easier composition and editing. Students have the opportunity to personalize responses through searching for additional information on the Internet, allowing for the co-construction and sharing of viewpoints with other authors through online submission systems like Blackboard or WebCT. Technology extends literacy learning of the school into home by increasing motivation to read online texts that appeal to the student. Students can also extend school learning through technology by contacting classmates and worldwide peers for assistance on problem-solving or critical analysis (Stergioulas and Drenoyianni, 2011). (p. 83)

And while many of the challenges *TBB* addressed are exceeded in the digital literacy space, according Ortlieb & Marinak (2017), their look leaves more to be explored. In its conclusion, the study cited indicated no difference in one critical learning measure.

Findings from the digital literacy survey found no statistically significant differences related to self-concept. Regardless of whether students preferred reading traditional texts or digital texts, students were equally confident in their abilities. Students' self-concept was not enhanced as a result of engaging in digital literacies. Further investigation is needed regarding how self-confidence might be nurtured by providing opportunities to interact and communicate digitally. (pp. 86-87)

Digital literacy has the potential to address and remedy such shortfalls in self-concept development more effectively than traditional models and their historic baggage, shortcomings that Ortlieb & Marinak suggest are muted by the dynamics of current technology.

Following *TBB*'s cues of leveraging technology, family interactive literacy (i.e., editorial letter writing) and publishing, modern efforts that continue in the *TBB* tradition offer a model to bolster black children's self-concept. As Young (2008) reflected:

Most prevalent in the analysis are DuBois' ideologies about developing and instilling racial pride in Black people; incorporating authentic examples of Black people's stories, histories, language, and community; promoting literacy acquisition through literature; educating the whole person; and developing one's Black identity. (p. 18)

Literacy building content created by readers via digital platforms has potential to be free of historic constraints. Instead, they offer reframed boundaries for learning communities, are capable of subverting exclusionary ideologies that limit access and equity, and provide tools for democratic content development and literacy demonstration through publishing. These realities suggest what Young concluded: "In this case, there is a need for history to repeat itself." (p. 19)

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