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## Civil Rights Gone Wrong: Racial Nostalgia, Historical Memory, and the Boston Busing Crisis in Contemporary Children's Literature

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Civil Rights Gone Wrong: Racial Nostalgia, Historical Memory  
and the Boston Busing Crisis in Contemporary Children's Literature

On May 14, 2014, three white Boston city councilors refused to vote to approve a resolution honoring the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Brown v. the Board of Education* because, as one remarked, "I didn't want to get into a debate regarding forced busing in Boston....The intent of the law I agree with, but the way it was implemented in Boston, I don't. If you look at the past 40 years, they did it wrong."<sup>1</sup> Against the recent national proliferation of celebrations of civil rights milestones and legislation, the controversy surrounding the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the court decision that mandated busing to desegregate Boston public schools speaks volumes about the historical memory of Boston's civil rights movement. Unlike celebrations throughout the south commemorating the passage of civil rights legislation and the desegregation of public schools, the marches, boycotts, and school protests that sought to redress discriminatory policies in Boston go largely unheralded. Political scientist Jeanne Theoharis has persuasively argued that in comparison to portrayals of the southern civil rights movement, the history of Boston desegregation, erroneously conflated with violent white resistance to busing, is popularly viewed as "foolhardy, disruptive, and ultimately unnecessary."<sup>2</sup>

The erasure of Boston's civil rights history stems, in part, from a reticence to dredge up the painful, polarizing memories of the busing crisis that threaten to mar Boston's image as a liberal city and from a misperception of the civil rights movement as a strictly southern phenomenon, at a far remove geographically, culturally, and politically from the cradle of liberty. Instead, the narrative of busing as a "failed experiment" has supplanted the city's long civil rights history and has worked to undermine black agency and resilience.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps no single event has been more responsible for the entrenchment of this narrative than the 1985 publication

of Anthony Lukas' monumental – in size and impact – *Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families*. Winner of numerous prestigious book awards, including the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize, and dubbed recently by one critic as the “*Moby Dick* of Boston books,” this popular history has set the tone and parameters for the “failed experiment” genre of Boston civil rights history.<sup>4</sup> The central features of the genre include the portrayal of African Americans as passive and disorganized politically and pathological and deficient socially; class- and community- (as opposed to race-) based justifications for white resistance to desegregation; and a failure to account for the decades of black activism and agitation around educational equality that precipitated the 1974 ruling.<sup>5</sup>

As a result, *Common Ground* and other popular narratives of busing perpetuate a racial paradox: Although Judge Garrity's busing plan was implemented to redress the racial inequality and segregation in public education, white resistance to busing purportedly was not motivated by racism as much as it was by the misguided, but justifiable, outcome of white working-class disaffection. In this dominant narrative, poor and working-class blacks and whites are equally victimized by Judge Garrity's decision and equally culpable of exacerbating the inevitable backlash prompted by the doomed plan.<sup>6</sup> The historian Ron Formisano describes the struggle over implementing Garrity's decision as “a war nobody won.”<sup>7</sup> The portrayal of desegregation as a battle with no victors and no clear-cut heroes or villains has dominated the collective memory of Boston's civil rights movement in marked contrast to the redemptive, though similarly reductionist historical memory of the southern civil rights movement.<sup>8</sup> Like the construction of the national civil war memory that relied on what the historian David Blight calls “the denigration of black dignity and the attempted erasure of emancipation from the national narrative of what the war had been about,” the consensus memory of Boston busing erases the

voices and victories of black Bostonians who resisted a separate and unequal reality and fought to realize the promise of *Brown v. the Board of Education*.<sup>9</sup>

For black parents, community leaders, and their allies, this promise was ultimately a hope for and commitment to the future of black children. After all, throughout the civil rights movement, children were an important subject and symbol of divergent views of a democratic society. Civil rights activists endorsed a vision, articulated most memorably in Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, of little black and white children joining hands together to usher in a colorblind future.<sup>10</sup> Segregationists and anti-busing activists, on the other hand, proffered an alternative vision for their children that shielded them from this future by invoking an imagined past of traditional gender roles, fixed racial hierarchies, and conservative family values that they felt were under attack.<sup>11</sup> As the media scholar Henry Jenkins has argued, both visions – the utopian future endorsed by liberals and the nostalgic past protected by conservatives – invoke the cultural mythology of childhood innocence that "presumes that children exist in a space beyond, above, outside the political... noncombatants whom we protect from the harsh realities of the adult world, including the mud splattering of partisan politics."<sup>12</sup> Boston's busing crisis powerfully dramatized this battle over childhood innocence, illustrating Jenkins' assessment that "for several generations, progressive civil rights policies, especially those surrounding school desegregation, have rested on the hope that children, born without prejudice, might escape racial boundaries," while "segregationists – from rural Alabama to South Boston – often posed school busing as a violation of childhood innocence, as a cynical bureaucratic 'experiment' that turned children into 'guinea pigs,' 'scapegoats,' and 'hostages,' of a 'liberal agenda.'"<sup>13</sup> However, children themselves undermined this notion of childhood innocence by engaging in Boston's educational reform movement as active participants or active

resisters who stayed out of school to protest segregated or integrated schools; boarded or attacked school buses; joined rallies and protests in support of or in defiance against desegregation busing; and violently attacked or defended themselves against those with opposing viewpoints.

Given the centrality of children in the debates over and enactment of Boston's busing ruling, children's literature offers an important lens through which to examine how the popular memory of busing is constructed and disseminated. Children's literature is, after all, by its very nature, nostalgic: the recuperation of youth and youthful consciousness by an adult author writing for and about children. Children's literature, then, also provides a window onto adult desires, goals, and politics.<sup>14</sup> This was certainly the case in the early twentieth century, when black librarians, educators, writers, artists, and community activists recognized the importance of children's literature to educate, elevate, politicize, and socialize black children. By removing stereotypical representations of black life from library bookshelves; developing criteria for appropriate and accurate portrayals of African Americans; creating reading lists of black literature; acquiring collections of black history and literature for libraries; putting pressure on publishers to publish black-authored books; and writing and soliciting new works of black children's literature, they used black children's literature as a vehicle to humanize and democratize U.S. society.<sup>15</sup> This view prompted educator and clubwoman Mary McLeod Bethune's address "The Adaptation of the History of the Negro to the Capacity of the Child" to the 1938 meeting of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. She entreated her audience to translate the history of the Negro people into "the language of the young," concluding with the exhortation, "We must see to it that our masses through the influence of the *Negro History Bulletin* and all other available means get the story and tell the story again and

again so that Negro youth who come along this way may rejoice in that story to make a new history....”<sup>16</sup>

In the wake of the civil rights movement, many more scholars, educators, artists, and activists heeded Bethune’s call to create a black children’s literature that documented a more accurate and inclusive history. It is not incidental that the year 1965 marked the passage of the federal Voting Rights Act, which resulted in the mass enfranchisement of black Americans; the passage (though not enforcement) of the Massachusetts Racial Imbalance Act, the first law in the nation to mandate racial balance in public schools; the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, a far-reaching federal education bill that included allocations for school libraries to purchase books for low-income students; and the creation of the Council on Interracial Books for Children (CIBC), an interracial organization committed to “promot[ing] a literature for children that better reflects the realities of a multi-cultural society.”<sup>17</sup> During this transitional period in the civil rights movement, children’s literature coalesced debates about racial equality, educational equity and access, political activism, and cultural nationalism. As the historian Daryl Michael Scott argues, multiculturalism, “with its roots in the postwar pluralist, integrationist, therapeutic ideals that informed the Brown decision,” brought with it new expectations that the state would intervene to foster “societal acceptance of blacks as a people with a venerable past and a living culture.”<sup>18</sup> In the ensuing decades, a proliferation of new authors, presses, reference materials, and book awards focused on black and ethnic children’s literature signaled “the multiculturalization of children’s literature” in the mainstream.<sup>19</sup> Having taken its cues from the social upheavals and political exigencies of the civil rights and black power movements, multicultural children’s literature fundamentally challenged the view of childhood innocence by exploring the difficult topics of slavery, segregation, and urban poverty.<sup>20</sup> Throughout these

developments, the CIBC led a controversial crusade against “ingrained, unthinking racism” in white-authored children’s books about the black experience by issuing proscriptions against stereotypical or offensive representations, censoring works that failed to meet its criteria, and promoting books sensitive to cultural authenticity.<sup>21</sup> At the heart of debates among scholars and children’s authors over the meaning and value of cultural authenticity are the pedagogical objectives of multicultural education: “to transform society and to ensure greater voice, power, equity, and social justice for marginalized cultures” and to “[reform] education...so that students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social class groups can experience educational equality.”<sup>22</sup> Not coincidentally, these were also the goals of black parents, community leaders, and their allies during Boston’s civil rights movement.

However, these goals remain as elusive for children’s literature in the twenty-first century as they were for Boston’s civil rights activists in the twentieth. In the past three decades, a consolidated publishing industry has prioritized profits over politics and pedagogy, resulting in “less diversity in what and who are being published.”<sup>23</sup> Reflecting a stagnating trend since the end of the 1990s, only 93 of 3200 children’s books published in 2013 focused on black people, history, or culture, and only 67 of these were created by black authors or illustrators.<sup>24</sup> In addition to being undermined by a white dominated publishing industry, multicultural children’s literature is also threatened by formulations of a liberal multiculturalism that do not take into account hierarchical relationships, power dynamics, and conflict. The pedagogical theorist Gloria Ladson-Billings makes a clear distinction between the superficial “diversity discourse” of liberal multiculturalism and the “pedagogy of liberation and social justice” created by theorists of multicultural education. She explains that liberal multiculturalism’s “emphasis on human sameness fails to reveal the huge power differentials that exist between the white middle class

and other groups in U.S. society. By acknowledging the existence of various groups while simultaneously ignoring the issues of power and structural inequity, liberal multiculturalism functions as a form of appeasement.... This form of multiculturalism also holds on to notions of meritocracy and argues for equal opportunities to compete in a capitalist market economy. This thinking fails to recognize the structural and symbolic practices that militate against the ability of the poor, women, and non-white ethnic and cultural groups to access (and succeed in) the society.”<sup>25</sup> These structural and ideological changes in multicultural children’s literature coincided with a proliferation of children’s civil rights narratives that sought to delineate lessons from the past.<sup>26</sup>

Two highly acclaimed contemporary works of children’s literature set during or inspired by Boston’s desegregation busing plan reflect and respond to the ongoing battle over the history and memory of Boston’s civil rights movement and its enduring racial legacy: *Busing Brewster*, an illustrated children’s book for young readers, written by Richard Michelson and illustrated by R. G. Roth and *Gold Dust*, a middle-grade novel for adolescents by Chris Lynch.<sup>27</sup> Both works offer representations of an overtly racist past, produced in a historical moment when prevailing ideologies of colorblindness and postracialism suggest not only that racism is passé, but that any attempt to redress past racism that takes race into account is itself racist and unjust.<sup>28</sup> That both books are white-authored texts places them in a long tradition of white writers’ ambivalent uses of black characters to comment on and critique U.S. society. Just as in the wake of the modern civil rights movement, the fiction of Robert Penn Warren, Norman Mailer, Eudora Welty, and William Styron contradictorily challenged racial inequality *and* buttressed notions of white innocence and American exceptionalism, *Busing Brewster* and *Gold Dust* offer equivocal reflections on urban decline and racial transformations at the turn of the twenty-first century.<sup>29</sup>



As children's literary scholar Katharine Capshaw notes, "The popularity of civil rights texts for children speaks of the desire for an uplifting narrative of social progress, a happy ending that would reinforce the viability of American ideals."<sup>30</sup> Both works have as much to tell us about the historical memory of Boston's desegregation efforts as they do about contemporary understandings of race and social justice.

Selected by the *New York Times* as one of its ten Best Illustrated Children's Books of 2010 and one of eight Notable Children's Books of 2010, *Busing Brewster* is a fictional account of busing that interweaves elements from multicultural children's literature with the conventions of the "failed experiment" genre of Boston's civil rights history. According to its author Richard Michelson, the story was inspired by a newspaper article about an African American politician who expressed ambivalence about being bused to a previously all-white Boston school.<sup>31</sup> Michelson's version centers on young Brewster, a black boy, who learns that he will be bused to a new school for the start of first grade. We see the busing controversy through Brewster's six-year-old eyes, caught in between his mother's enthusiasm and his older brother Bryan's resentment over busing.

Michelson's language succinctly captures the ambivalence. On the one hand, he portrays the promise and expectation of black parents who saw in desegregation and compulsory busing the hope for opportunity and equality that outweighed any inconvenience. Brewster's mother reassures her young son: "Don't you worry, Brewster... You're going to like Central. They've got rooms for art and music and a roof that doesn't leak. There's even a swimming pool inside the building and a real library bursting full of books."<sup>32</sup> Her hopefulness stems from the recognition of structural inequalities between black and white schools and the unequal opportunities that they portend. Even the naming of the fictional school as Central evokes the

1957 desegregation of Little Rock's Central High School and the violent resistance that black students endured for the promise of racial equality and educational access. Yet, on the other hand, despite these allusions to disparities between Franklin, Brewster's majority black neighborhood school, and the predominantly white Central school, *Busing Brewster* never explicitly acknowledges the structural inequalities and deplorable conditions of Boston's segregated black schools. The lack of swimming pools or art rooms were not nearly the most egregious of the problems facing black schools in post-World War II Boston, as the Boston School Committee embarked on a systematic campaign to ensure a racially separate and unequal public school system. Brewster and his brother would have likely attended a segregated neighborhood school with substandard, if not dangerous, facilities; severely overcrowded classrooms; inadequate and often racist textbooks and curriculum; an inexperienced and impermanent teaching staff; an uncaring and neglectful administration; and significant perennial discrepancies between black and white per-pupil funding that altogether caused serious intellectual, emotional, and spiritual damage to black children.<sup>33</sup> *Busing Brewster*'s fictional Central does, of course, have better facilities. Brewster's first impression of the newness and cleanliness – and racial exclusivity – of his new school speaks volumes: "Inside is the whitest hall I ever saw," he recalls. "There are brand-new shiny lockers lining one whole wall. There's even a water fountain." "I've never seen so many books," he remarks appreciatively when he enters the library.<sup>34</sup>

In contrast, Michelson uses the character Bryan, Brewster's older brother, to vent blacks' anger and frustration with busing. Bryan complains about the inconveniences ("I ain't waking up at six... sittin' an hour on the bus") and gives voice to the racial tension, explaining to his younger brother, "Central's the white school" and "Ain't no Negroes at Central."<sup>35</sup> It bears

noting that Bryan evokes a particular kind of black defiance and anger, culled from a stereotypical portrait of misguided black militancy, at odds with the consensus memory of the civil rights movement that clearly bifurcates the aims and approaches of the civil rights and black power movements.<sup>36</sup> This stereotype is represented linguistically by his terse, petulant sentences, his emphasis on racial differences, and his use of an exaggerated black vernacular – the only character in the book to use non-standard English, despite the fact that Brewster is the one who doesn't yet know how to read. Bryan's anger is also intimated visually by his afro and afro pick, his crooked frown and inverted eyebrows, his violent punching of his bedroom pillow, and later, his angry confrontation with Freckle-face, the white bully at Central School. Indeed, Bryan might be read as the black mirror image of Freckle-face, a worthy – and equally culpable – foe to the white boy who pushes Brewster at the water fountain at school, taunting, “Wish your kind all stayed at Franklin.” Bryan had, after all, voiced the same sentiment earlier that morning, telling his younger brother, “Wish we could stay at Franklin.”<sup>37</sup> Certainly, Bryan serves as a foil to the innocent Brewster who is seemingly untainted by racism and whose open-mindedness and eagerness to learn make him the ideal pupil for the equally innocent and open-minded white librarian Miss O'Grady.

It bears noting that although *Busing Brewster* is set in 1974, a decade after the enactment of the Civil Rights Act, it often conflates the history of desegregation busing with an attenuated popular memory of the southern civil rights movement that evades the central goal of distributive justice.<sup>38</sup> The rhetorical conflation is apparent in the black characters' anachronistic use of the term “Negro,” which by the late 1960s had been supplanted by the term “black” even in the mainstream press.<sup>39</sup> The characterization of Miss O'Grady likewise evokes a romantic and incongruous memory of the civil rights era.<sup>40</sup> Miss O'Grady promises to teach Brewster to read

and supports his dream of being the first “Negro president.” “Every child deserves an education,” she explains. “It wasn’t long ago that folks didn’t want the Irish in their schools. And just because Kennedy was Irish Catholic, people said he’d never be president. But he proved them wrong.”<sup>41</sup> By giving voice to the lie that the history and plight of blacks and white ethnics are analogous and that Brewster can attain his dreams if he simply studies and works hard enough, *Busing Brewster* hearkens back to an oversimplified integrationist ethic in children’s literature that promoted diversity by glossing over differences, a value system that was intensely challenged by African American children’s authors in the post-civil rights era.<sup>42</sup> This integrationist ethic is reinforced by R. G. Roth’s illustrations and their striking resemblance to the work of 1963 Caldecott winner Ezra Jack Keats.<sup>43</sup> Like the work of author-illustrator Keats, Roth’s illustrations are noted for their stylistic simplicity, incorporation of collage and mixed media, and multicultural subject matter.<sup>44</sup>

However, *Busing Brewster* is discordant with the political exigencies of its own historical moment. By failing to represent Brewster and his brother as political agents in Boston’s civil rights movement, *Busing Brewster* deviates from black-authored children’s literature of the post-civil rights era, such as June Jordan’s 1972 photobook *Dry Victories*, that consciously promoted “visualizations of youth citizenship” as a form of societal reform.<sup>45</sup> The lack of political agency is especially apparent when the story depicts Brewster’s bus ride to school. To get to Central, he must be bused a long distance – spatially and metaphorically – an hour ride from the security of his black neighborhood, past “the Jewish cemetery” and “a bar and then a Catholic church” into a hostile white Irish community.<sup>46</sup> Brewster’s hour-long bus ride would not have occurred historically, as Boston’s desegregation plan limited busing between segregated schools in close proximity.<sup>47</sup> Yet, this historical fiction serves as a powerful symbol of the devastating social and

psychological costs of busing – not segregation – on black children. Even before the school bus reaches its destination, it is jolted by rocks shattering – “Smash! Bam! Crash!” – the school bus windows. However, this iconic image of northern white racism and resistance to the civil rights movement is muted, if not undermined, by R. G. Roth’s understated, whimsical illustrations of angry but racially ambiguous protesters and the busload of frightened black children.<sup>48</sup> The full horror of the incident also escapes Brewster who, not yet having learned to read, cannot recognize the hateful messages on the signs being held by the anti-busing protesters lining the street. Trying to shield him from the virulence, his brother Bryan lies, telling him that the signs read, “Welcome to Central.”<sup>49</sup> To some extent, the reader is also shielded from the full weight of the violence that anti-busing protesters directed against young children. Roth depicts a sparse crowd of protesters, holding signs displaying a collage of disconnected letters, partial words, and incomplete phrases that signify, but don’t ultimately express, anti-busing violence. From this pastiche, it is possible to decipher snatches of phrases: “white[s] only stop,” “go home,” “get out,” “forc[ed],” “bus,” and “schoo[l]” that are rendered meaningless without the appropriate racial and historical contexts. This highly stylized representation of anti-busing protests hardly captures the throngs of angry white parents and children screaming racial epithets, such as “Niggers go home,” or taunting black school children with bananas. Nor does it evoke the menacing “white power” and “Kill niggers” signs and graffiti that children were forced to encounter on their ride to school.<sup>50</sup> Even preliterate Brewster would have been able to see and hear – and register – the hate and hostility directed at him and the other black students.

That said, Michelson’s decision to focus on the violent resistance to busing, as opposed to the use of busing by black activists as one of an arsenal of tactics employed to demand educational equality, is itself a distortion of Boston’s civil rights history. Parents, students, and

community leaders turned to the courts, mass marches, boycotts, sit-ins, and freedom schools to highlight and redress educational disparities throughout the 1960s. Beginning in 1965, black parents started successfully implementing their own busing plans to place students in available seats in majority-white public schools in Boston and the suburbs through the Operation Exodus and Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO) programs.<sup>51</sup> Chances are that by September 1974, when Brewster starts his first day of school, his mother and older brother – if not Brewster himself - would have heard about these busing programs and have known other black children who were already busing voluntarily to majority white schools. By fixating on the white backlash to “forced busing,” *Busing Brewster* minimizes the heroic story of tenacious black children and adults who led a grassroots movement for educational justice.

Instead, even as *Busing Brewster* looks backward toward a romantic vision of the southern civil rights movement, it looks forward to a fantasy of a postracial future prevalent at the time of the book’s 2010 publication. In particular, Barack Obama’s 2008 election as President and the triumph of the postracial moment that it symbolized, are as much a part of the story as the history of busing it depicts. In an author’s note appended to the book, and reiterated in several interviews, Michelson explains that he wrote the story five years before Obama’s victory. “While Miss O’Grady and Brewster’s mother might not have been surprised,” he admits, “it never occurred to me while writing *Busing Brewster* that such a historic event would become a reality in my lifetime, much less before the book’s publication. My words have taken on a greater resonance than I intended, which is what authors hope for.”<sup>52</sup> While Michelson applauds the racial progress that Obama’s election trumpeted, he also uses the author’s note to provide a competing narrative of “forced busing.” Unlike the preceding story recounted in *Busing Brewster*, which makes Brewster, his mother, and Miss O’Grady the moral heroes of the story,

seeking nothing more than a better education for Brewster and an equal opportunity for him to realize the American Dream, the Author's Note opts for a false racial symmetry, wherein there is no distinction between white and black students who "were *forced*" to attend schools outside their neighborhoods (emphasis in original).<sup>53</sup> Though Michelson concedes that "this often led to resentment, and occasionally violence," he does not identify any culprits or villains, refusing to acknowledge the different motivations and consequences for black and white children or their families. Instead, he reiterates the prevailing narrative of Boston busing: "While much opposition was racially motivated, many blacks and whites honestly preferred that their children attend local schools; parents were unwilling to see their children used as pawns in a social experiment, however worthy."<sup>54</sup> This misrepresentation of busing as unwanted by black parents ignores the reality that, though there were detractors, Boston's black community turned to busing after a decade of organizing failed to reform Boston's separate and unequal school system and provide educational and racial equity for black children. It also perpetuates the erroneous idea that white parents were not opposed to desegregation, but understandably opposed to having their children bused away from their neighborhood schools. In reality, most Boston public school students did not attend neighborhood schools by the time of Garrity's ruling; in fact, the Boston School Committee had calculatedly bused both black and white students away from their neighborhoods with the express intent of maintaining segregation.<sup>55</sup>

Given these historical inaccuracies, Michelson's Author's Note makes *Busing Brewster* less a story of the history of desegregation busing than a myth of post-civil rights colorblind meritocracy, which gives all "deserving" Americans an equal opportunity at success. As Michelson asserts, "In the end, of course, a good education almost always comes down to caring individuals: a loving family that fosters curiosity, and the many librarians and teachers who, like

the fictional Miss O'Grady, believe that all children who want to do something important with their lives deserve an equal opportunity."<sup>56</sup> Michelson's view echoes the current racial ideology that holds that individual and family shortcomings, not structural or systemic inequalities, are the cause of persistent racial inequities.<sup>57</sup> It follows, then, that it is the individual's, not society's, responsibility to ameliorate these inequalities. Obama's election as "the first Negro president" serves as extratextual confirmation that race and racism are obsolete, obviating the need for a historical memory that accounts for the racial injustices of the past or that helps to elucidate inequalities that persist in the present.<sup>58</sup>

Chris Lynch's *Gold Dust* is similarly ambivalent about racial justice and desegregation busing in Boston. Narrated by white seventh-grader Richard Riley Moncreif, the 2001 American Library Association (ALA) Best Book for Young Adults centers on his budding friendship with Napoleon Charlie Ellis, a recent émigré from the Caribbean island of Dominica who arrives in Boston in the middle of the 1974-1975 school year.<sup>59</sup> Although they live in the same neighborhood and attend the same school, theirs is an unlikely friendship. Richard is white, working-class, parochial, carefree, and obsessive about baseball; Napoleon is black, middle class, cosmopolitan, guarded, and talented at cricket and singing. *Gold Dust* proffers a quintessential tale of interracial friendship, which, as southern studies scholar Sharon Monteith reminds us, "work[s] microhistorically to expose the context in which friendship may be seen as transgressive, trespassing the borders of what is socially expected or countenanced."<sup>60</sup>

However, Lynch's choice to focus on the anomalous story of a middle-class Caribbean immigrant allows him to conveniently circumvent the historical realities that imperiled such a transgressive friendship. Although Boston's black population increased by nearly 66 percent, from roughly 63, 000 to 105,000 residents between 1960 and 1970, the vast majority of the new



migrants arrived from the southern United States, not other countries. Furthermore, by 1970, black Bostonians were concentrated in the Roxbury neighborhood where the median income of black households was substantially lower than other predominantly white neighborhoods with similar educational and occupational characteristics. During the same period, Boston's predominantly Catholic private schools were almost exclusively white.<sup>61</sup> Napoleon's character clearly marks a departure from the stereotypical portrayals of black social dysfunction common to the "failed experiment" genre of Boston desegregation literature. However, his atypical ethnic, class, and educational status make him an exceptional, even exotic, black character that enables Lynch to evade the historical and political specificity of desegregation busing.

Indeed, although the novel is set against the backdrop of the busing controversy, Lynch escapes addressing the problem of educational equity and access by not including any characters that are actually bused as part of the court-ordered desegregation plan. Instead, Napoleon and Richard attend the fictional Catholic school St. Colmcille within walking distance of their homes.<sup>62</sup> By contrast, the white working-class students who take public transportation from Ward 17 in Dorchester to St. Colmcille each day are portrayed as the outsiders, "the only ones," according to Richard, "who were here strictly because they didn't want to be someplace else. They were kind of angry about the busing deal and they didn't care who knew about it."<sup>63</sup> The Ward 17 students expose the fallacy of the antibusing defense of community schools. Richard notes how the idea of community schools is invoked inconsistently to promote adults' self-interests: "Kids crisscrossing the city to go to *public* schools. In *other* neighborhoods. Other people's public schools. And that's when the 'community' thing got big. It was all over the papers. People were defending their 'community schools' as something sacred. So lots of people bailed out and started sending their kids to Catholic schools. For the community. No matter how

far away the community happened to be. I had to wonder if I just didn't know what the C word meant, or if somebody was changing it."<sup>64</sup> While the novel is predictably silent about the Boston School Committee's longstanding practice of using busing to reinforce segregation and educational disparity before Garrity's ruling, it does illustrate the hypocrisy of antibusing activists who claimed to oppose the desegregation order because it threatened the sanctity of neighborhood schools, but then sent their children to Catholic schools outside of their neighborhoods to avoid integrating.<sup>65</sup> By challenging the myth of Boston neighborhood schools, *Gold Dust* seems to leave open the possibility that racism might have been a central motivation for resistance to school desegregation.

Yet, Lynch projects this racism onto *Gold Dust*'s working-class characters who are presented as atypical of Boston's liberal white population. In particular, the novel vilifies Butchie as the working-class 17<sup>th</sup> ward bully who exemplifies the racist attitudes of antibusing activists. In an inversion of the "forced busing" narrative that portrays unwilling students being forced to board buses for schools outside their neighborhoods, Lynch portrays Butchie's family's refusal to send him to the newly integrated neighborhood school, forcing him to endure the inconvenience of taking a public bus to a Catholic school far from home. Butchie complains, "Walk a half-mile. Take the bus to Forest Hills. Wait in the freezing cold for another stinking bus. Walk another two blocks. And for *what?* And why am I even doing this? Why am I even here? I'm sittin' with *them* anyway now, and tomorrow I'll probably be sittin' with more of 'em. Until my old man finds me a school *three* buses away."<sup>66</sup> Butchie also continually taunts Napoleon by drawing on a familiar stock of racist images and stereotypes to ostracize and other him. He refers to Napoleon's home country of Dominica as a place "where nobody wore any shoes;" he scorns Napoleon for being educated and middle-class, accusing him of "com[ing] in

here, to our place” and “looking down his nose” at the working-class white students; he summons the history of sexualized racism to charge Napoleon with “go[ing] after the...local girls, like he’s just picking one more banana off his own personal tree.”<sup>67</sup> Though initially refusing to see Butchie’s behavior as racist, Richard eventually defends Napoleon by reminding Butchie of his own outsider status: “You know, Butch, you’ve only been here since halfway through last year yourself, so as far as I’m concerned you’re about as foreign as Napoleon.”<sup>68</sup> Yet, by attributing Napoleon’s mistreatment to his foreignness, or his class pretensions, or his being “kind of a hard guy” to get to know, Richard’s defense of Napoleon, like the novel itself, ultimately falls short of a sustained racial critique of the antibusing movement.<sup>69</sup>

Because racism is limited in *Gold Dust* to the actions of a few despicable individuals, such as Butchie, the novel largely ignores its insidious, systemic manifestations and erases middle-class white resistance. Although Napoleon intimates that Boston is “a place where it would be better not to make a point of” being West Indian, he is only directly confronted by racism when he finds himself in Butchie’s white working-class neighborhood or antagonized by Butchie at school.<sup>70</sup> Napoleon attends a school affiliated with the Catholic Church, a performance at the Boston symphony, and a Red Sox game at Fenway Park, some of the most cherished and racially segregated symbols of Boston’s dominant culture. However, despite a long history of black Bostonians being excluded and disrespected by these institutions, Napoleon does not have any racial animus directed at him.<sup>71</sup> In a particularly ironic move, the teachers at St. Colmcille and the Archdiocese Choir School are portrayed as socially liberal and racially enlightened even as they violate the school desegregation order by providing a safe harbor for students like Butchie. Historically, Boston’s Catholic schools were as segregated as its public schools, but while *Gold Dust* is critical of Butchie and his family attending the Catholic school, it

does not level the same criticism at the Catholic schools for helping him to avoid desegregation. In this way, *Gold Dust* reproduces the popular narrative of busing that fixates on working-class resistance to busing without fully acknowledging the centrality of race or the resistance by middle-class whites.<sup>72</sup>

Instead, *Gold Dust* espouses the post-civil rights era ideology of color-blind racism, described by the sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva as an explanation of “contemporary racial inequality as the outcome of nonracial dynamics.” According to Bonilla-Silva, with this ideology, “whites rationalize minorities’ contemporary status as the product of market dynamics, naturally occurring phenomena, and blacks’ imputed cultural limitations.”<sup>73</sup> Richard’s dream of playing professional baseball serves as a symbol of this color-blind racism in the novel. Richard obsesses with convincing Napoleon to adopt his baseball dream, imagining that the two will follow in the footsteps of the highly celebrated Gold Dust Twins, the real life interracial baseball duo of Fred Lynn and Jim Rice, who began their rookie seasons with the 1975 Boston Red Sox. Richard’s view of baseball as a transcendent space, outside of politics and impervious to race, shares much in common with popular sports narratives in which, as media studies scholar Deborah Tudor explains, “the question of racism never exists outside the playing field; and on the field itself, a certain notion exists; that it is only men’s deeds that count, not skin color.”<sup>74</sup> Napoleon, on the other hand, sees baseball as a microcosm of Boston’s racist society. When the boys go to Fenway to see a Red Sox game, Napoleon notices the sparse number of black fans in attendance and the crowd’s seeming bias for the white player Fred Lynn. Annoyed by Napoleon’s race talk, Richard retorts, “I don’t want to listen to *that*, all right. You know, Napoleon, *everything* doesn’t have to do with *that*, does it? You’re always talking about the same thing, no matter what anybody else is talking about.”<sup>75</sup> Napoleon articulates what Richard

is unwilling to name: “this city is a place where a lot of people would do anything to keep from going to school with black people.”<sup>76</sup>

While *Gold Dust* places these two perspectives in dialogue, Richard voices the central question of the novel: “Can’t you just know a guy for the guy, and not think about where he comes from or who he lives with or whatever?”<sup>77</sup> Left unanswered, Richard’s question becomes a common misinterpretation of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech, “an argument *against* considering racism as a factor in evaluating the nation’s moral status, when King in fact was arguing for a consideration of race and poverty’s effects on children’s lives in the present.”<sup>78</sup> Ultimately, Richard gets the last word of the novel. After he and Napoleon get into a fight, and Napoleon transfers to the Archdiocese Choir School, Richard is more relieved than disappointed. The novel concludes as he returns to his baseball – and racial – fantasy: “I was pumped now, and more so with every step. I could feel the old lightness and energy kind of surging back up through me, and I knew I was full of it this afternoon, full of pure baseball, all baseball, nothing but baseball. I was going to be great.”<sup>79</sup> The novel’s ending is as unsatisfactory as the ending of Boston’s desegregation plan, which has eventuated with the Boston public school district among the most segregated in the country. Just as white parents cited reverse discrimination as justification to challenge the consideration of race in school assignments, Richard reclaimed his racial baseball fantasy to resist the transformation that a friendship with Napoleon necessitated.<sup>80</sup>

*Busing Brewster* and *Gold Dust* were published amidst a proliferation of civil rights narratives for children that coincided with the repeal of civil rights policies.<sup>81</sup> This paradox illustrates that children’s literature is an important site for debates about civil rights memorialization. As Renee C. Romano and Leigh Raiford argue, “The struggles over the

memory of the civil rights movement are not a diversion from the real political work of fighting for racial equality and equal rights in the United States; they are key sites of that struggle.”<sup>82</sup> A growing body of children’s photobooks, biographies, histories, picture books, and novels about the civil rights movement have taken up this struggle. The best examples of this literature “mourn the losses of children under violence and demand further action, as they ask children to see themselves as an extension of black history’s commitment to social change.”<sup>83</sup> An active, activist civil rights children’s literature places the individual’s story in its community and organizational context. It portrays racism and segregation, not as social problems that have already been resolved, but as persistent issues that need our attention. It also expands the geographic and temporal boundaries of the civil rights movement to account for freedom struggles outside of the south and outside of the *Brown v. Board-Voting Rights Act* periodization. Like the revisionist children’s story of Rosa Parks that Herbert Kohl proposes, the best children’s literature of the civil rights movement “opens the possibility of every child identifying her- or himself as an activist, as someone who can help make justice happen. And it is that kind of empowerment that people in the United States desperately need.”<sup>84</sup> Children’s literature, such as Angela Johnson’s illustrated children’s book *A Sweet Smell of Roses* (2005), which follows two young girls as they take part in a civil rights march, and Walter Dean Myers’ photobook *One More River to Cross* (1995), which captures the communal nature of the long civil rights movement, exemplify the possibilities of children’s literature to inspire and empower children to join the ongoing struggle for racial justice.<sup>85</sup>

*Busing Brewster* and *Gold Dust*, by contrast, do not elicit that type of activism. Although they are either set in Boston or inspired by its setting, the books detach their black characters from Boston’s urban landscape and the city’s black community. They resort to the familiar

tropes of friendship and personal uplift. Furthermore, they “us[e] relationship rather than politics or social action to resolve racial troubles, a strategy,” Katherine Capshaw argues, “that sometimes elides the hard-wrought political efforts of civil rights movements.”<sup>86</sup> Both texts elide Boston’s civil rights movement by erasing altogether the racial inequities in the public school system and the grassroots activism that precipitated busing. They are ultimately more concerned with resuscitating a nostalgic American heroism and white innocence than with reclaiming a historical memory based on black struggle and resilience.<sup>87</sup> In perpetuating the popular memory of court-ordered busing, *Busing Brewster* and *Gold Dust* contribute to the genre of Boston desegregation literature that downplays black civil rights activism and white racism.<sup>88</sup> Reproducing a postracial mythology, they intimate that the black characters – Brewster’s brooding brother Bryan and Napoleon, whose fixation with race hardens him to Richard’s attempts at friendship – exacerbate racial tensions that are now presumed to be safely in the past. The resistance by historians, memoirists, journalists, and fiction writers to challenging this mythology by centralizing the history of black grassroots activism for desegregation and educational parity replicates the virulent resistance to desegregation by many white Bostonians following Garrity’s decision. Proponents of and participants in Boston’s civil rights movement have, nonetheless, documented and disseminated their own alternative histories and counter-memories of this period leading, unfortunately, to a segregated historical memory.<sup>89</sup> The irony, of course, is that even contemporary multicultural children’s literature with the expressed objective of representing underrepresented cultures to promote a more pluralistic curriculum, often perpetuates the very segregation that it purports to educate against.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sal LaMattina, quoted in David S. Bernstein, “Three Glaring ‘Present’ Votes On Boston City Council,” *Boston Magazine*, May 14, 2014, <http://www.bostonmagazine.com/news/blog/2014/05/14/three-glaring-present-votes-marcouncil-commemoration/>. Since elected in 2006, LaMattina has represented the North End, East Boston, and Charlestown neighborhoods. .

<sup>2</sup> Jeanne F. Theoharis, “‘We Saved the City’: Black Struggles for Educational Equality in Boston, 1960-1976,” *Radical History Review* 81, no. 1 (2001): 84; See also, Jeanne Theoharis, “‘I’d Rather Go to School in the South’: How Boston’s School Desegregation Complicates the Civil Rights Paradigm,” in *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 144; 125–128; Theoharis, “We Saved the City,” 64.

<sup>3</sup> Theoharis, “We Saved the City,” 85, note 1.

<sup>4</sup> “NBA Winners by Category, 1950 - 2013,” *National Book Foundation*, accessed October 12, 2014, [http://www.nationalbook.org/nbawinners\\_category.html#.VDrWI1fuofw](http://www.nationalbook.org/nbawinners_category.html#.VDrWI1fuofw); “The Pulitzer Prizes: General Nonfiction,” *The Pulitzer Prizes*, accessed October 12, 2014, <http://www.pulitzer.org/bycat/General-Nonfiction>; Carlo Rotella, “In Literature, It’s Boston v. Boston — Always,” *The Boston Globe*, April 11, 2014, sec. Opinion.

<sup>5</sup> For other influential works in this genre and the salient characteristics that define it, see Theoharis, “‘I’d Rather Go to School in the South’: How Boston’s School Desegregation Complicates the Civil Rights Paradigm,” 140; 149, note 66; Jeanne Theoharis, “‘They Told Us Our Kids Were Stupid’: Ruth Batson and the Educational Movement in Boston,” in *Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America*, ed. Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi



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Woodard (New York: NYU Press, 2005), 17–18; 37–38, note 6; Theoharis, “We Saved the City,” 63–64; 85, note 4; 86, note 10.

<sup>6</sup> For a recent example of how black and white students’ experiences with busing are portrayed as equivalent, see Scot Helman, “Hinge of History: Two Lives Shaped by Busing, Part I: Orlando Bagwell,” *The Boston Globe*, November 30, 2014, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2014/11/30/tracing-two-lives-shaped-school-busing-boston/h0Op5peCOk2xjchbTPgZoJ/story.html>; Scot Helman, “Hinge of History: Two Lives Shaped by Busing, Part 2: Marsha-Joan Galvin,” *The Boston Globe*, November 30, 2014, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2014/11/30/tracing-two-lives-shaped-school-busing-boston/h0Op5peCOk2xjchbTPgZoJ/story.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Ronald P. Formisano, *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s*, 2nd ed. (The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 203.

<sup>8</sup> Renee C. Romano and Leigh Raiford, eds., *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory* (Athens, Ga: University of Georgia Press, 2006); Theoharis, “‘I’d Rather Go to School in the South’: How Boston’s School Desegregation Complicates the Civil Rights Paradigm,” 126–127; 137–138; Theoharis, “We Saved the City,” 62, 84.

<sup>9</sup> David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2002), 5.

<sup>10</sup> Shari Goldin, “Unlearning Black and White: Race, Media, and the Classroom,” in *The Children’s Culture Reader*, ed. Henry Jenkins (New York: NYU Press, 1998), 136–137; 155.

<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, Kathleen Banks Nutter, “‘Militant Mothers’: Boston, Busing, and the Bicentennial of 1976,” *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 38, no. 2 (2010): 53–75.

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<sup>12</sup> Henry Jenkins, ed., *The Children's Culture Reader* (New York: NYU Press, 1998), 2; See also, *ibid.*, 1–14.

<sup>13</sup> Jenkins, *The Children's Culture Reader*, 13.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>15</sup> Rudine Sims Bishop, "Reframing the Debate about Cultural Authenticity," in *Stories Matter: The Complexity of Cultural Authenticity in Children's Literature*, ed. Dana L. Fox and Kathy G. Short (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2003), 26–27, <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED480339>; Dianne Johnson and Catherine E. Lewis, "Introduction," *African American Review* 32, no. 1 (April 1, 1998): 6, doi:10.2307/3042262; Nancy Tolson, "Making Books Available: The Role of Early Libraries, Librarians, and Booksellers in the Promotion of African American Children's Literature," *African American Review* 32, no. 1 (April 1, 1998): 9–16, doi:10.2307/3042263.

<sup>16</sup> Mary McLeod Bethune, "The Adaptation of the History of the Negro to the Capacity of the Child," *The Journal of Negro History* 24, no. 1 (January 1, 1939): 9, 13, doi:10.2307/2714492.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Beryle Banfield, "Commitment to Change: The Council on Interracial Books for Children and the World of Children's Books," *African American Review* 32, no. 1 (April 1, 1998): 17, doi:10.2307/3042264; See also, Barbara Bader, "How the Little House Gave Ground: The Beginnings of Multiculturalism in a New, Black Children's Literature," *The Horn Book Magazine*, 2002, 660–663; Bishop, "Reframing the Debate about Cultural Authenticity," 27; Katharine Capshaw, *Civil Rights Childhood: Picturing Liberation in African American Photobooks* (Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2014), 160–161; Muriel Cohen and James Worsham, "Boston's School Balance Plan," *Boston Globe*, April 1, 1974, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.lib.umb.edu/docview/610969846/abstract/DEA7C121B4024>

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76CPQ/11?accountid=28932#; United States Commission on Civil Rights, *School*

*Desegregation in Boston: A Staff Report Prepared for the Hearing of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in Boston, Massachusetts, June 1975* (Washington, D.C.: United States Commission on Civil Rights, 1975), 63–69.

<sup>18</sup> Daryl Michael Scott, “Postwar Pluralism, *Brown v. Board of Education*, and the Origins of Multicultural Education,” *The Journal of American History* 91, no. 1 (June 1, 2004): 82, 76, doi:10.2307/3659614.

<sup>19</sup> Barbara Bader, “Multiculturalism in the Mainstream,” *The Horn Book Magazine*, 2003, 273–274; See also, Barbara Bader, “Multiculturalism Takes Root,” *Horn Book Magazine* 79, no. 2 (April 2003): 143–62.

<sup>20</sup> Bader, “How the Little House Gave Ground”; See also, Bader, “Multiculturalism Takes Root”; Bader, “Multiculturalism in the Mainstream”; For a more general overview of the evolution of young people’s literature to focus on more realistic subjects beginning in the 1960s, see Michael Cart, “From Insider to Outsider: The Evolution of Young Adult Literature,” *Voices From the Middle* 9, no. 2 (December 2001): 95–97; I am employing both the literary and pedagogical definitions of multicultural literature as literature written explicitly about a multicultural society and literature that depicts underrepresented cultures to promote a more pluralistic curriculum, respectively. See, Mingshui Cai, *Multicultural Literature for Children and Young Adults: Reflections on Critical Issues* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2002), 3–5.

<sup>21</sup> Bader, “Multiculturalism Takes Root,” 149; 147–150; See also, Bader, “How the Little House Gave Ground”; Bader, “Multiculturalism in the Mainstream.”

<sup>22</sup> Dana L. Fox and Kathy G. Short, “The Complexity of Cultural Authenticity in Children’s Literature: Why the Debates Really Matter,” in *Stories Matter: The Complexity of Cultural*

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*Authenticity in Children's Literature*, ed. Dana L. Fox and Kathy G. Short (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2003), 7, <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED480339>; See also, Mingshui Cai, "Multiple Definitions of Multicultural Literature: Is the Debate Really Just 'Ivory Tower' Bickering?," in *Stories Matter: The Complexity of Cultural Authenticity in Children's Literature*, ed. Dana L. Fox and Kathy G. Short (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2003), 271, <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED480339>.

<sup>23</sup> Fox and Short, "The Complexity of Cultural Authenticity in Children's Literature: Why the Debates Really Matter," 22; See also, Bishop, "Reframing the Debate about Cultural Authenticity," 28, 35; Violet J. Harris, "The Complexity of Debates about Multicultural Literature and Cultural Authenticity," in *Stories Matter: The Complexity of Cultural Authenticity in Children's Literature*, ed. Dana L. Fox and Kathy G. Short (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2003), 127, <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED480339>; Joel Taxel, "The Black Experience in Children's Fiction: Controversies Surrounding Award Winning Books," *Curriculum Inquiry* 16, no. 3 (October 1, 1986): 275, doi:10.2307/1179713.

<sup>24</sup> Walter Dean Myers, "Where Are the People of Color in Children's Books?," *The New York Times*, March 15, 2014, sec. Opinion, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/16/opinion/sunday/where-are-the-people-of-color-in-childrens-books.html>; Kathleen T. Horning, Merri V. Lindgren, and Megan Schliesman, "A Few Observations on Publishing in 2013," *CCBC*, 2014, <http://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/choiceintro14.asp>.

<sup>25</sup> Gloria Ladson-Billings, "New Directions in Multicultural Education: Complexities, Boundaries, and Critical Race Theory," in *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education*, ed. James A. Banks and Cherry A. McGee Banks, 2nd edition (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass,

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2003), 52, 53; See also, Stuart H. D. Ching, "Multicultural Children's Literature as an Instrument of Power," *Language Arts* 83, no. 2 (November 1, 2005): 128–36.

<sup>26</sup> Capshaw, *Civil Rights Childhood*, 221–228.

<sup>27</sup> Although sales figures are not available for the books, their critical reception has distinguished them among other children's literature, making them likely choices for purchase for public libraries and school curricula. Richard Michelson, *Busing Brewster*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 2010); Chris Lynch, *Gold Dust* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000).

<sup>28</sup> The diverse range of scholarship on shifting meanings of race in the post-civil rights era is illustrative. Examples include, Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2012); K. Anthony Appiah and Amy Gutmann, *Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1996); Lawrence Blum, *I'm Not a Racist, But . . . : The Moral Quandary of Race* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*, 3rd ed. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010); Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, "Color Blindness, History, and the Law," in *The House That Race Built*, ed. Wahneema Lubiano, Reprint edition (New York: Vintage, 1998), 280–88; Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003); David Theo Goldberg, *The Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism*, 1st ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008); Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres, *The Miner's Canary: Enlisting Race, Resisting Power, Transforming Democracy* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 2003); Wahneema Lubiano, ed., *The House That Race Built*, Reprint edition (New York: Vintage, 1998); Michael Paul Rogin and Robert Post, eds., *Race and Representation: Affirmative Action*

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(New York: Zone, 1998); Stephen Steinberg, *Turning Back: The Retreat from Racial Justice in American Thought and Policy*, 3rd edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001); Howard Winant, *The New Politics Of Race: Globalism, Difference, Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Tim Wise, *Colorblind: The Rise of Post-Racial Politics and the Retreat from Racial Equity* (San Francisco: City Lights Publishers, 2010).

<sup>29</sup> Jonathan W. Gray, "Introduction: Perfect Unions: Innocence and Exceptionalism in American Literary Discourse," in *Civil Rights in the White Literary Imagination: Innocence by Association* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2013), 3–4; See also, Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

<sup>30</sup> Capshaw, *Civil Rights Childhood*, 220.

<sup>31</sup> The Editors, "Children's Books; Best Illustrated Book," *The New York Times*, November 7, 2010, sec. Books, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html>; "Busing Brewster," *New York Times Book Review*, December 5, 2010; "Notable Children's Books of 2010," *The New York Times*, December 3, 2010, sec. Books / Sunday Book Review, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/05/books/review/KidsNotables-t.html>; "Busing Brewster," *The Callie Crossley Show* (Boston: WGBH, October 26, 2010), <http://www.wgbh.org/programs/episode.cfm?featureid=21014>.

<sup>32</sup> Michelson, *Busing Brewster*.

<sup>33</sup> Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*, 40; Theoharis, "We Saved the City," 65–66; Writing about his experience teaching in a black Boston public school during the 1964-1965 school year, Jonathan Kozol charged the Boston public school system with "compell[ing] its Negro pupils to regard themselves with something less than the dignity and respect of human beings." See, Jonathan Kozol, *Death at an Early Age* (New York: Plume, 1985), 7.

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<sup>34</sup> Michelson, *Busing Brewster*.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Romano and Raiford, *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, xiv; Jeanne Theoharis critiques this false dichotomy between integrationist and nationalist tactics associated with the non-violent civil rights movement and militant Black Power movement, respectively. See, Theoharis, “‘I’d Rather Go to School in the South’: How Boston’s School Desegregation Complicates the Civil Rights Paradigm,” 127–129, 135–136; Theoharis, “‘They Told Us Our Kids Were Stupid’: Ruth Batson and the Educational Movement in Boston,” 19, 29; Theoharis, “We Saved the City,” 62–63.

<sup>37</sup> Michelson, *Busing Brewster*.

<sup>38</sup> Gray, “Introduction: Perfect Unions: Innocence and Exceptionalism in American Literary Discourse,” 13; Carol A Horton, *Race and the Making of American Liberalism* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2005), 228.

<sup>39</sup> Lerone Bennett, Jr., “What’s In a Name?: Negro vs. Afro-American vs. Black,” *Ebony Magazine*, November 1967; Brian Palmer, “When Did the Word Negro Become Taboo?,” *Slate*, January 11, 2010, [http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/explainer/2010/01/when\\_did\\_the\\_word\\_negro\\_become\\_taboo.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/explainer/2010/01/when_did_the_word_negro_become_taboo.html).

<sup>40</sup> Miss O’Grady’s representation romanticizes Boston’s civil rights movement, in part, because it obscures the discriminatory hiring practices of the Boston School Committee that effectively excluded African American from teaching and administration positions. Theoharis, “‘I’d Rather Go to School in the South’: How Boston’s School Desegregation Complicates the Civil Rights Paradigm,” 130.

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<sup>41</sup> Michelson, *Busing Brewster*.

<sup>42</sup> For a history of the post-civil rights era ethnic revival that produced this type of white ethnic success story, see Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008); Bader, “How the Little House Gave Ground,” 659–660. For a history of the post-civil rights era ethnic revival that produced this type of white ethnic success story, see Jacobson, *Roots Too*; Bader, “How the Little House Gave Ground,” 659–660.

<sup>43</sup> Kara Schaff Dean, “Cybils Nominee: Busing Brewster,” *Not Just for Kids*, October 22, 2010, <http://notjustforkids.blogspot.com/2010/10/cybils-nominee-busing-brewster.html>; Lawrence Downes, “The Corner of Bitter and Sweet,” *The New York Times*, November 4, 2010, sec. Books / Sunday Book Review, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/07/books/review/Downes-t.html>; “Ezra Jack Keats,” *R. Michelson Galleries*, accessed July 3, 2014, [http://www.rmichelson.com/Artist\\_Pages/keats/Ezra-Jack-Keats.html](http://www.rmichelson.com/Artist_Pages/keats/Ezra-Jack-Keats.html).

<sup>44</sup> Keats’ 1963 Caldecott Medal winning *The Snowy Day* heralded a new era of multicultural literature that came under the same scrutiny as the civil rights movement by the late 1960s. As critic and children’s author Barbara Bader describes, “*The Snowy Day* is the children’s book equivalent of the March on Washington. And like Martin Luther King’s dream of untroubled, unclouded childhood, it was vulnerable to the aftereffects of Mississippi Summer 1964 – the Project itself, and the ensuing upheaval.” Bader, “How the Little House Gave Ground,” 660.

<sup>45</sup> Capshaw, *Civil Rights Childhood*, xi, 194–209; Although she focuses particularly on African American photobooks, Capshaw’s assessment of the political function of black children’s literature is usefully applied to illustrations, as well. .



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<sup>46</sup> Although the neighborhood is never explicitly identified as Irish, Michelson provides several linguistic and cultural cues, if not stereotypes, to mark the neighborhood as such. The proximity of a bar and a Catholic church; the moniker Freckle-face for Brewster's red-headed antagonist; the librarian's surname O'Grady; and the police officer's dialect ("Well now, lads...it it's trouble you're wanting, you can follow me") all evoke the popular representations of Boston's working-class white Irish communities. Michelson, *Busing Brewster*.

<sup>47</sup> Bradley Barbour, "Urban Priests and the Boston Busing Crisis" (Honors Capstone, American University, 2013), Washington Research Library Consortium, <http://aladinrc.wrlc.org/bitstream/handle/1961/14953/Barbour%2c%20Bradley%20-%20Spring%202013.pdf?sequence=1>; United States Commission on Civil Rights, *School Desegregation in Boston*, 76.

<sup>48</sup> The dark skin of the protesters is not materially different from the dark skin of many of the children pictured on the school bus.

<sup>49</sup> Michelson, *Busing Brewster*.

<sup>50</sup> Reviewers were generally appreciative of Roth's use of understatement to portray the violence of the period. For example, see Dean, "Cybils Nominee"; Downes, "The Corner of Bitter and Sweet"; "Notable Children's Books of 2010."

<sup>51</sup> Theoharis, "We Saved the City"; Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*, 37–38.

<sup>52</sup> Richard Michelson, "Author's Note," in *Busing Brewster*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 2010), n.p.; See also, "Busing Brewster," October 26, 2010; Jules, "One Impossibly Enjoyable Conversation with Richard Michelson Before Breakfast," *Seven Impossible Things Before Breakfast*, October 19, 2010, <http://blaine.org/sevenimpossiblethings/?p=2011>; Rich Michelson,

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Author of “*Busing Brewster*,” PT00H08M15S (Springfield, MA: WGBY, 2011),

<http://vimeo.com/19542191>.

<sup>53</sup> Michelson, “Author’s Note”; I use philosopher Lawrence Blum’s concept of false racial symmetry, which occurs “when a particular type of immoral or problematic behavior is assumed to carry the same moral significance when its target is whites as when it is blacks; or when a race-neutral principle is applied as if there were no significant difference between white and black, when there is.” See, Lawrence Blum, “False Racial Symmetries in Far From Heaven and Elsewhere,” in *Understanding Love: Philosophy, Film, and Fiction*, ed. Susan Wolf and Christopher Grau (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 37.

<sup>54</sup> Michelson, “Author’s Note.”

<sup>55</sup> Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*, 68; Theoharis, “‘I’d Rather Go to School in the South’: How Boston’s School Desegregation Complicates the Civil Rights Paradigm,” 128; Theoharis, “We Saved the City,” 62–64; 74; United States Commission on Civil Rights, *School Desegregation in Boston*, 21–22.

<sup>56</sup> Michelson, “Author’s Note.”

<sup>57</sup> Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*, 4th ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2013), 1–4.

<sup>58</sup> The critical race theorist David Theo Goldberg illuminates the interrelationship between antiracism and historical memory, explaining that “antiracism requires historical memory, recalling the conditions of racial degradation and relating contemporary to historical and local to global conditions” as opposed to “forgetting, getting over, moving on, wiping away the terms of

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reference, at best (or worst) a commercial memorializing.” See, Goldberg, *The Threat of Race*, 21.

<sup>59</sup> Gold Dust was also named a 2001 ALA Notable Children’s Book and received a Bulletin Blue Ribbon Best of 2000 Award. Bob Blumenthal, *A Parent/Teacher Guide to Children’s Books on Peace and Tolerance* (Victoria, B.C.: Trafford Publishing, 2006), 84.

<sup>60</sup> Sharon Monteith, *Advancing Sisterhood?: Interracial Friendships in Contemporary Southern Fiction* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 2–3.

<sup>61</sup> Noel Day, “The Freedom Movement in Boston,” 1966–1964; United States Commission on Civil Rights, *School Desegregation in Boston*, 14–15; U.S. Bureau of the Census, “Table 91. Social Characteristics of the Negro Population for Areas, Towns, and Places: 1970,” in *U.S. Census of the Population: 1970*, vol. Volume 1, Characteristics of the Population. Part 23, Massachusetts (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973); U.S. Bureau of the Census, “Table 144. Citizenship of the Foreign Born by Race and Country of Birth: 1970,” in *U.S. Census of the Population: 1970*, vol. Volume 1, Characteristics of the Population. Part 23, Massachusetts (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973); United States Commission on Civil Rights, *School Desegregation in Boston*, 24–31.

<sup>62</sup> It is possible that the fictional St. Colmcille is modeled on St. Columbkille in the Brighton neighborhood of Boston. St. Columbkille was one of the Catholic elementary schools that may have benefitted from increased enrollments from white students who transferred from Boston public schools following the desegregation order. See, James T. Hannon, “The Influence of Catholic Schools on the Desegregation of Public School Systems: A Case Study of White Flight in Boston,” *Population Research and Policy Review* 3, no. 3 (October 1, 1984): 223–229, doi:10.1007/BF00128461.

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<sup>63</sup> Lynch, *Gold Dust*, 18.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>65</sup> James E. Glinski, “The Catholic Church and the Desegregation of Boston’s Public Schools,” *The New England Journal of Public Policy* 4, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 1988): 65–84; Hannon, “The Influence of Catholic Schools on the Desegregation of Public School Systems.”

<sup>66</sup> Lynch, *Gold Dust*, 19.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 23, 135.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>71</sup> David E. Barney and Robert Knight Barney, “‘Get Those Niggers off the Field!’: Racial Integration and the Real Curse in the History of the Boston Red Sox,” *NINE: A Journal of Baseball History and Culture* 16, no. 1 (2007): 1–9, doi:10.1353/nin.2007.0030; Barry Bluestone and Mary Huff Stevenson, *The Boston Renaissance: Race, Space, and Economic Change in an American Metropolis* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation Publications, 2002), 7; Glinski, “The Catholic Church and the Desegregation of Boston’s Public Schools”; Hannon, “The Influence of Catholic Schools on the Desegregation of Public School Systems.”

<sup>72</sup> Theoharis, “We Saved the City,” 63–64.

<sup>73</sup> Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists*, 2013, 2.

<sup>74</sup> Deborah V. Tudor, *Hollywood’s Vision of Team Sports: Heroes, Race, and Gender*, Reprint edition (New York: Routledge, 1997), 124; See also, John Bloom and Michael Nevin Willard, “Out of Bounds and between the Lines: Race in Twentieth-Century American Sport,” in *Sports*

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*Matters: Race, Recreation, and Culture*, ed. John Bloom and Michael Nevin Willard (New York: NYU Press, 2002), 1–10.

<sup>75</sup> Lynch, *Gold Dust*, 63.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>78</sup> Capshaw, *Civil Rights Childhood*, 217.

<sup>79</sup> Lynch, *Gold Dust*, 195–196.

<sup>80</sup> James Vaznis, “Area School Segregation Called Rife,” *The Boston Globe*, September 20, 2010,

[http://www.boston.com/news/education/k\\_12/articles/2010/09/20/segregation\\_report\\_raps\\_boston\\_springfield\\_schools/](http://www.boston.com/news/education/k_12/articles/2010/09/20/segregation_report_raps_boston_springfield_schools/); Carey Goldberg, “Busing’s Day Ends: Boston Drops Race In Pupil Placement,” *The New York Times*, July 15, 1999, sec. U.S.,

<http://www.nytimes.com/1999/07/15/us/busing-s-day-ends-boston-drops-race-in-pupil-placement.html>.

<sup>81</sup> Capshaw, *Civil Rights Childhood*, 225; Bernice A. Pescosolido, Elizabeth Grauerholz, and Melissa A. Milkie, “Culture and Conflict: The Portrayal of Blacks in U.S. Children’s Picture Books Through the Mid- and Late-Twentieth Century,” *American Sociological Review* 62, no. 3 (June 1, 1997): 460, doi:10.2307/2657315.

<sup>82</sup> Renee C. Romano and Leigh Raiford, “Introduction: The Struggle over Memory,” in *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, ed. Renee C. Romano and Leigh Raiford (Athens, Ga: University of Georgia Press, 2006), xxi–xxii.

<sup>83</sup> Capshaw, *Civil Rights Childhood*, 212.

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<sup>84</sup> Herbert Kohl, “The Politics of Children’s Literature: The Story of Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott,” *Journal of Education* 173, no. 1 (January 1991): 48.

<sup>85</sup> Ching, “Multicultural Children’s Literature as an Instrument of Power,” 133; Capshaw, *Civil Rights Childhood*, 228–238.

<sup>86</sup> Capshaw, *Civil Rights Childhood*, 224.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 220; Gray, “Introduction: Perfect Unions: Innocence and Exceptionalism in American Literary Discourse,” 13.

<sup>88</sup> See, Theoharis, “‘I’d Rather Go to School in the South’: How Boston’s School Desegregation Complicates the Civil Rights Paradigm,” 140; Theoharis, “‘They Told Us Our Kids Were Stupid’: Ruth Batson and the Educational Movement in Boston,” 17–18; Theoharis, “We Saved the City,” 63–64.

<sup>89</sup> The historian David Blight’s observation about remembrances of the Civil War during the Jim Crow era is instructive here: “A segregated society demanded a segregated historical memory.” Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 361.

<sup>90</sup> Cai, *Multicultural Literature for Children and Young Adults*, 3–5.