ENVISIONING BLACK CHILDHOOD

Black Nationalism, Community, and Identity Construction in Black Arts Movement Children's Literature

---

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of American Studies

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

---

by

Meredith Meagan Crawford

2005

APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Meredith M. Crawford

Meredith M. Crawford

Approved by the Committee, November 2005

M. Lynn Weiss

M. Lynn Weiss, Chair

Grey Gundaker

Grey Gundaker

Kimberley L. Phillips

Kimberley L. Phillips

To Gram:
Mary "Mac" Murphy Falcone
August 1919 – January 2004
Glasgow, Scotland – Cranston, Rhode Island

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This writer wishes to thank Professor M. Lynn Weiss, Chair, for her advice and support throughout this project. She would also like to thank Professors Grey Gundaker and Kimberley Phillips for their help and criticisms.

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores seven forgotten works of children's literature written during the Black Arts Movement. It seeks to shed light on these works within the context of late-twentieth-century black nationalism and contemporaneous debates over black identity and pedagogical approaches. Using the conflicts in theory and practice between notorious nationalist rivals the Black Panthers and US as a framework for analysis, this essay situates the BAM children's literature and their authors' approaches within a complicated history and identity politics.

ENVISIONING BLACK CHILDHOOD

Black Nationalism, Community, and Identity Construction in Black Arts Movement Children's Literature

On 17 January 1969, a disagreement between members of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense and the US organization culminated in the deadly shooting of two Southern California-area Panther officials, Bunchy Carter and John Huggins, by US members, and the wounding of US member Larry Watani-Stiner, allegedly by cross-fire (Brown 96). While such tragedy is not an anomaly in the history of the most notorious rivals within the larger black nationalist movement, the circumstances surrounding the shootings make the date remarkable for reasons pertinent to this essay. The catastrophic event provides a useful way into the subject of black nationalism and its complicated connections to education and youth.

In the years leading up to this 1969 explosion, proto-Affirmative Action programming at the University of California-Los Angeles had precipitated an influx of young, local African Americans to the school. Many had pre-existing affiliations to either the Panthers or US, a black nationalist organization started by Maulana Ron Karenga following the Watts uprising. "By late 1968 and early 1969, the UCLA Black Student Union became a major forum for both groups to compete for influence" (Brown 95). The Black Student Union, as a whole, agreed upon the need for a Black studies program, but the Panthers and US each promoted a different candidate for the position of Program Chair. Their respective selections for Chair reflected the groups' perceived stylistic and political differences. Maulana Ron Karenga, US chairman as well as chairman of the search committee for Program Chair, ultimately proved unwilling to resolve the dispute democratically, and this, combined with both groups' use of

democratically, and this, combined with both groups' use of militaristic intimidation techniques during BSU meetings, created a volatile environment (S. Brown 94-7).

That Carter and Huggins lost their lives as a result of a power struggle between US and the Black Panthers seems obvious. More than just another iteration in a series of violent struggles, though, this particular struggle for the power to elect a Black Studies chair, and, consequently, to direct the tenor, purpose, and content of such a program, reveals the high premium both groups placed on education as an arena for promoting black consciousness. Indeed, in 1971, Robert G. Newby and David B. Tyack could state unequivocally in *The Journal of Negro Education*, "Today the quest for power in education links with a broad social movement [black nationalism] which seeks. . . 'to plan for a new order'" (192). Throughout the nation, African Americans found all aspects of their lives, from the mundane to the sublime, highly politicized. While the shootout at UCLA represents the extreme of this politicization, – indeed, it seems almost a caricature of itself – it nonetheless brings into sharp focus the importance of education to black nationalist and African-American identity politics. In using the US-Black Panther conflict as a frame for this essay, I intend not to suggest that black nationalism can or should be reduced to such a binary, violent representation of itself, but rather to position the conflict within a wider universe of nationalist politics and to explore the ways in which African-American authors during the period integrated various aspects of US *and* Panther imperatives into their own politics.

US and the Panthers agreed upon the need for a system of education that could enlighten the African American masses to the need for revolution. However, each group stood for a distinct branch of black nationalism, each with its own logic and blueprint for

that revolution. US promoted cultural nationalism, an approach to achieving revolution that necessarily began with the individual revolutionizing his/her consciousness by rejecting white culture and adopting an essential, "black value system" designed by Karenga (Warren 24) . By contrast, the Panthers advocated armed struggle and active, physical resistance against the United States, which it viewed as a constellation of white, hegemonic institutions. The material circumstances and conditions of black life betrayed the inequalities that majoritarian democracy (the ultimate white hegemonic institution) inevitably perpetuated. This history, according to the Panthers, provided motivation for revolution (Huey P. Newton Foundation). The engagement of black nationalism with blacks' struggle to determine the educational agendas of their own communities, as the UCLA incident proved, meant that these competing visions would also be engaged.

While black nationalists called for change at all levels of education, the various elements of the Black Power movement especially rallied around the black child and his/her education as the vehicle for racial uplift. Malcolm X's "accent on youth" and Black Panther initiatives like the Free Breakfast Program fell neatly alongside Karenga's credo for US:

> "We believe that children are the real life after death and our greatest duty to them is to leave our community in better shape than the way we inherited it." (as quoted in S. Brown 34)

In addition, both US and the Black Panther Party established community-controlled educational institutions, often called "liberation schools." The purpose and design of these respective organizations' schools, as well as their expressed relationship to state-controlled education, reflected the organizations' respective political agendas.

Spurred by Black Power's general convergence upon youth, children's books written by black writers, for a black audience, with pedagogical intent proliferated during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Some of these writers, like Gwendolyn Brooks and Mari Evans, explicitly aligned themselves, in interviews and essays, with the Black Arts Movement. This literary movements' key shapers pledged their allegiance to Karenga's US organization specifically, and to black cultural nationalism generally. Others, like Lucille Clifton and John Steptoe, were less explicit about their particular, nationalist political affiliation. However, the presence of a reductive, "binary discourse" of black nationalism, outlined by Scot Ngozi-Brown in *Fighting for US: Maulana Karenga, the US Organization, and Black Cultural Nationalism*, inevitably pitted cultural expression against armed struggle according to the US/Panther dialectic (115). Literature that did not promote militant, physical struggle as the *sole* means to black revolution seems to have been lumped into the category of cultural nationalist expression. The children's books produced during the Black Arts Movement, though, tell a different story about the period; one that reveals their authors' engagement with and use of the nationalist principles articulated by *both* the Panthers and US, of blacks' material *and* cultural concerns.

Black Arts Movement children's literature, precisely because of its articulations with Black Power and contemporary African American pedagogy, presents a unique and ideal space within which to grapple with the complexities of late-twentieth century black nationalism. Children's literature historian and critic Diane Johnson-Feelings maintains that, "Children's books are cultural products whose existence straddles various realms. . . We utilize children's books as agents of socialization, politicization, and of formal

education" (1). As products of a given moment, Black Arts children's books capture their authors' attempts to make sense of the competing voices for black leadership at particular historical moments. Further, since these authors used the books as tools for children's socialization into African America, the degree to which the books might succeed depended upon their applicability as interpretive tools through which black children might make sense of "blackness." The children's literature of the Black Arts Movement, then, perhaps more so than its adult literature, participated in the construction of *functional* definitions of blackness, just as it inevitably engaged the tensions within black nationalism as a whole.

This essay explores seven works of children's literature that offer insights into the Black Arts Movement (BAM), African-American educational pedagogies, and late-twentieth-century constructions of race across the boundaries of US/Panther binary discourse: Gwendolyn Brooks' *Bronzeville Boys and Girls* (1956), *Aloneness* (1971), and *The Tiger Who Wore White Gloves, or, What You Are You Are* (1974); Lucille Clifton's *All Us Come Cross the Water* (1973); Mari Evans' *JD* (1973) and *I Look at Me!* (1974); and John Steptoe's *Uptown* (1970). Each of these authors was, in his/her own way, heavily invested in understanding the impact of identity politics on black children and in fostering among black children a strong sense of self within an equally strong community.

I concentrate most heavily on Gwendolyn Brooks for several reasons. Of all of these authors, Brooks has left the most detailed account of her involvement with black nationalist politics. Before her death in 2000, she penned two autobiographies, *Report from Part One* (1972) and *Report from Part Two* (1996), that trace her personal

awakening into a revolutionary black consciousness and its aftereffects. Additionally, Brooks' political evolution corresponds to her literary evolution, making an analysis of her children's books over time particularly useful to understanding the development of black nationalist identity. For this reason, I have included Brooks' *Bronzeville Boys and Girls*, even though Brooks wrote the collection of poems before 1967, the year she marked as the beginning of her rebirth. The continuities between these three children's books reveal that Brooks did not entirely remap her political (or literary) orientations after 1967 to suit the dictates of any one particular, nationalist discourse. Additionally, her self-positioning at once within and without the Blacks Arts Movement afforded her a more critical perspective than her younger colleagues, for whom the movement constituted their first reference point.[1]

Before looking at the children's books produced during the Black Arts Movement, we must further explore the complicated cultural moment out of which these books arose. To begin, the Black Arts Movement represented "the artistic corollary to the Black Power movement" (S. Brown 131). The Black Power movement as a total entity encompassed countless sub-groups, including, but not limited to, the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, its many, unaffiliated namesakes, Maulana Karenga's US, and the Nation of Islam. The various institutions comprising Black Power resisted coalescing their goals under one leader or auspice. One of the most striking consequences of this was the "bifurcation" of the Black Power movement, with US and the Black Panther Party emerging as the most cogent examples of two seemingly antithetical poles of black

[1] I am not suggesting that Brooks was the only African American whose work anticipated the BAM. Other authors, such as Muriel Feelings, evinced a commitment to the same concerns and principles. However, Brooks' status as mentor and her close relationship to key BAM figures, like Don L. Lee and Amiri Baraka, better position her for analysis in this particular essay.

nationalism (S. Brown 88-9). The tension between the Black Panther Party and the US Organization acts as a macrocosm for the tensions among the competing voices in the struggle for African American liberation. The following passage by Civil Rights historian Clayborne Carson encapsulates this phenomenon:

> [T]he major line of cleavage within the black nationalist militant community was between cultural nationalists, who urged blacks to unite around various conceptions of a black cultural ideal, and self-defined political revolutionaries who were more likely than cultural nationalists to advocate armed struggle to achieve political or economic goals. (qtd. S. Brown 88-9)

According to Scot Brown's *Fighting for US*, this "line of cleavage" was drawn from within the Black Power movement itself as a reaction to vitriolic encounters between US and Black Panther leaders and members. Both organizations envisioned US and the Black Panther Party in a dialectical relationship. "The image of the weak cultural nationalist was part and parcel of the Black Panther Party's own vanguard self-perception" (S. Brown 115). The social predicaments of African Americans, the Panther's held, mandated immediate action, not rumination on the finer points of African culture. The Huey P. Newton Foundation's explanation of the Panthers' original vision reveals the party's commitment to serving as a permanent "political vehicle [that could] voice the interests of the people and serve as their advocates." The Panthers deduced the peoples' interests by looking to their social - and particularly economic - conditions. Conversely, Maulana Karenga asserted that, despite the Panthers' efforts, without a value system to unite them, African Americans would always lack "identity, purpose, and direction," key ingredients for mass revolution (19).

Embedded within the Panther/US conflict lays an implicit class conflict between the organizations' members. The Black Panthers claimed to be the true representatives of

"oppressed communities" of blacks, "responding to the obvious needs of Black people" (Newton). To meet these obvious, immediate needs, the Panthers developed community-based initiatives like the "Free Breakfast Program,. . . Free Health Clinics,. . . Clothing and Shoe Programs, and [the] Buses to Prisons Program" (Newton). To the Panthers, "the overwhelmingly favorable response to these programs in every community [was] evidence that they [were] serving the *true* interests of the people" (Newton, emphasis added). In a 1997 interview, Kathleen Neal Cleaver, former wife of the late Eldridge Cleaver and a revolutionary activist in her own right, likewise maintained that the Black Panther Party "*was* the community, generating programs and activities, pulling people into a highly confrontational political structure" (183). The Panthers accused Karenga of acting as an agent provocateur determined to divert blacks' energies away from the Panthers' "radical activity" and to channel it into non-threatening activities like the "exploration of the African past," and the "adoption of African hairstyles and traditional dress" (Warren 2).

Meanwhile, the Panthers' focus on blacks' material conditions, coupled with their literal calls to arms, were easily exaggerated by the US Organization to suggest that the Black Panthers embraced and perpetuated a lower-class culture unmoored from an African moral or value system. Amiri Baraka, early Karenga devotee and one of the founders of the Black Arts Movement, defined his art and politics in opposition to Black Panther rhetoric, which he tellingly dubbed "'pimp art'" (qtd. S. Brown 112). Brown relates:

> Baraka assailed Eldridge Cleaver's leadership [of the Panthers] and philosophy, calling the Black Panthers "misguided dudes who think by saying 'Pick up the Gun,' that the devil will wither up and die, or just by picking up the literal gun. . . using the same sick value system of the

> degenerate slavemaster, the same dope, the same liquor, the same dying hippy mentality, that they will *liberate* all the slave peoples of the world. (qtd. S. Brown 112)

Baraka, like his fellow "US advocates. . . viewed Black Panther Party members as promoters of the very behaviors that cultural nationalists were seeking to change" (S. Brown 112-113). Indeed,

> the US Organization's internal culture discouraged behaviors and mannerisms attributed to 'street life,' and inspired a common fascination with education out of emulation of its leader [Karenga holds several degrees in political science]. There was a general perception among US advocates that elements in the [Black Panther P]arty celebrated a lifestyle unfit for revolutionaries. (S. Brown 113)

More so than the rumors of drug use or excessive force by the Black Panthers, though, what bothered Karenga and US followers about the Black Panther Party was its focus on the material and social at the expense of the cultural and emotional. Many Panthers read the works of Karl Marx and Mao Tse-Tung, from whom they acquired a distrust of culture in general and of cultural expressions like religion specifically. The Panther's Ten-Point Plan captures the essence of their focus:

1. WE WANT FREEDOM. WE WANT [the institutionalized] POWER TO DETERMINE THE DESTINY OF OUR BLACK AND OPPRESSED COMMUNITIES.

2. WE WANT FULL EMPLOYMENT FOR OUR PEOPLE.

3. WE WANT AN END TO THE ROBBERY BY THE CAPITALISTS OF OUR BLACK AND OPPRESSED COMMUNITIES.

4. WE WANT DECENT HOUSING, FIT FOR THE SHELTER OF HUMAN BEINGS.

5. WE WANT DECENT EDUCATION FOR OUR PEOPLE THAT EXPOSES THE TRUE NATURE OF THIS DECADENT AMERICAN SOCIETY. WE WANT EDUCATION THAT TEACHES US OUR

TRUE HISTORY AND OUR ROLE IN THE PRESENT-DAY SOCIETY.

6. WE WANT COMPLETELY FREE HEALTH CARE FOR All BLACK AND OPPRESSED PEOPLE.

7. WE WANT AN IMMEDIATE END TO POLICE BRUTALITY AND MURDER OF BLACK PEOPLE, OTHER PEOPLE OF COLOR, All OPPRESSED PEOPLE INSIDE THE UNITED STATES.

8. WE WANT AN IMMEDIATE END TO ALL WARS OF AGGRESSION.

9. WE WANT FREEDOM FOR ALL BLACK AND OPPRESSED PEOPLE NOW HELD IN U. S. FEDERAL, STATE, COUNTY, CITY AND MILITARY PRISONS AND JAILS. WE WANT TRIALS BY A JURY OF PEERS FOR All PERSONS CHARGED WITH SO-CALLED CRIMES UNDER THE LAWS OF THIS COUNTRY.

10. WE WANT LAND, BREAD, HOUSING, EDUCATION, CLOTHING, JUSTICE, PEACE AND PEOPLE'S COMMUNITY CONTROL OF MODERN TECHNOLOGY. (Newton)

Self-consciously styled after the Declaration of Independence, the Ten-Point Plan served a dual purpose. It presented a set of appeals for concrete change to the dominant white culture. The Panther's demands grew out of the historical context of the tumultuous 1960s and were developed out of frustration with the non-violent Civil Rights Movement, the actual gains of which many African Americans had begun to question by the late 1960s. The Plan also codified the needs around which (presumably, for the Panthers, *all*) African Americans might rally. What, though, was to unite blacks of every social strata in this common pursuit for racial uplift? What would motivate, say, an economically successful black professional to disavow capitalism and all its trappings in favor of the cooperative economics that the Panthers – as well as Karenga, for that matter – mandated for the black community? The Panthers' silence on this question suggests

that the organization believed black Americans shared an inherent connection to each other. In his autobiography, *Die Nigger Die!*, H. Rap Brown, one-time Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee chairman turned Black Panther, envisions violence directed against persons of color as the root of this inherent connection. Brown asserts that "violence. . . has a way of unifying people" (38). Writing about the notorious race riots that erupted in the north in the late 1960s, Brown recalls:

> One significant thing about Detroit and Newark was that violence created a peoplehood. Black people had walked around under the illusion that they had a class system in the Black community. But the white man changed all that. He went in and beat "middle-class" as hard as lower-class Blacks. And "middle-class" Blacks were throwing as many fire bombs as the brother on the block. And afterwards, there was a real sense of community among the people, a real feeling of pride and togetherness. That came from the fact that they fought together. It also came from the fact that they recognized that the honky cop kills Black people because they're Black. He doesn't put his gun away when he sees one in a suit or one who speaks so-called "good English." He will shoot just as many bullets at him as he does at the brother with a conk. So a peoplehood was forced upon Black people, through white violence. (38-9)

By contrast, Karenga felt that, if this essential affinity among African Americans had ever existed, it had long since been subsumed by capitalistic doctrines like individualism and competition. A set of values that promoted unity among African Americans, then, had to be actively cultivated and practiced, not just assumed. Indeed, "membership in the Black community require[d] more than just physical presence" (Karenga 8).

For Karenga, "to go back to tradition" by fostering a collective, black cultural identity within individuals was necessarily the first, and most important, step toward politicizing and revolutionizing African America. He and "the US organization. . . [were] burdened with the responsibility of recovering and reinterpreting lost African

customs for a people void of a genuine cultural identity" (S. Brown 17). Where the Panthers relied almost exclusively on Marxism as a lens through which to understand and articulate African Americans' oppressed status, Karenga theorized the "African American dilemma in cultural terms, maintaining that the lack of racial pride and a disconnection from the African heritage caused a general lack of motivation and achievement" (S. Brown, 28). In other words, it was not only whites' hegemony over blacks that had caused their plight, but also the refusal of some blacks to appreciate the imperative for a collective culture that could, at once, promote blackness and galvanize disparate black voices:

> The reason why the Black man is such a weak-minded person, . . . why he is so easily led by the White man is because he has no standards, no culture. He doesn't understand love of Black people because he's a slave-minded person. He can only love his master, and as much attempts as he makes, unless he is imbued with cultural values. . . he will never be able to [love black people]." (as quoted in S. Brown, 17)

To promote blacks' self- and group-love, Karenga urged embracing seven core, African values: "umoja – unity;" "kujichagulia – self-determination;" "ujima – collective work and responsibility;" "ujamaa – familyhood and cooperative economics;" "nia – purpose;" "kuumba – creativity;" and "imani – faith" (Salaam 40-1). Each point of this value system, called the Nguzo Saba, encouraged blacks to cultivate and deploy an *emotional*, rather than merely an objective or political response to reality that reflected what Karenga saw as the most important elements of black Americans' "lost" African culture. Karenga argued that "sometimes a man moves by reason, but most of the time he moves by emotion. That's why we say that the first commitment is an emotional one" (18). Self-revolution, then, started on the subjective, individual level. Ironically, though, once that person had revolutionized him/herself, s/he would reject the very lens of

individuality because it did not allow for blacks' interdependence. The new pledge would become, in the words of Karenga, "I reject individualism for I am of all Black men. I am Joe the sharecropper, John the janitor and Mose the miner. When they catch hell, I catch hell!" (9).

Despite considerable, mounting strife, Black Panther leadership and Maulana Karenga shared a fundamental commitment to consciousness-raising and action, and this guided their separate but parallel enterprises. Both organizations recognized the crucial role childhood education could play in popularizing and cementing this commitment within the black community. The Panthers began running their liberation schools around 1970 to supplement state-mandated education in California. Initially, these schools operated only during the summers and on weekends, but eventually, they supplanted public education for many African Americans throughout the country. Chairman Bobby Seale announced the paradigm for the liberation schools in the 5 July 1969 issue of *The Black Panther*:

> The liberation school is the realization of point five of the Ten-Point Platform and Program, that is, "We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches our true history and our role in the present-day society." We recognize that education is only relevant when it teaches the art of survival. Our role in this society is to prepare ourselves for change. The change we want is within this decadent society. It's the implementation of the Ten-Point Platform of the vanguard Party. It's the destruction of the ruling class that oppresses the poor. (qtd. Wei 12).

A Marxist viewpoint remained fundamental to the Panther liberation schools. Seale expressed pleasure at the liberation schools' success in teaching black youth about the connections between capitalism and racial oppression:

> The youth understand the struggle that's being waged in this society. . . They understand that we're not fighting a race struggle, but in fact, a class struggle. They recognize the need for all the oppressed people to unite against the forces that are making their lives unbearable. Their understanding manifests itself in their definitions, i.e. "Revolution means Change;" "Revolutionaries are Changers;" "Liberation means Freedom;" and by their collective view of themselves as being part of a "big family" working, playing, and living together in the struggle. The beauty of socialism is seen through their daily practice while involving themselves in the program. (qtd. Wei 13)

Through their liberation schools, committed Black Panthers introduced black youth to the party's way of viewing reality. Liberation school teachers taught their students to think analytically, but most importantly, the teachers "[sought] to transform the way in which the youth interrelate[d] with each other" (*The Black Panther-Samuel L. Napier Institute*). Teachers taught revolutionary principles through their own actions and, for the students, "everything [was] done collectively in order [that the children might develop] an understanding of solidarity and socialism in a practical way" (same note). In the classroom as elsewhere, the Panthers believed consciousness was a direct result of action and participation.

Maulana Karenga and other members of the US organization also developed liberation schools, but unlike the Panthers' schools, US-inspired programs were always intended to take the place of state education. Black separatism was necessary to the learning process, Karenga believed, because it allowed the students to focus on intra-group development. A pedagogical song created at one of the liberation schools, the School of Afroamerican Culture, evinces this focus. In the call-and-response song "Mama, Mama," children learn to distinguish between Negroes, those "who had not arrived at a proper identity consciousness," and blacks, those who had (S. Brown 20):

[Child]: Mama, Mama, Negroes are insane

They straighten their hair and don't know their name.
They bleach their skin and act so white.
They don't even have any purpose in life.
[Teacher]: You see my child it's a pity and a shame,
that your sick brother doesn't even know his own name.
It's not his fault, he's not to blame
The white man robbed him of his Black brain.
[Child]: Mama, mama, what does it mean to be black?
Is it like a color so lovely and dark?
[Mother]: To be black my child is much more than that.
It's the way you think and the way you act. (qtd. S. Brown 20-1)

The song seems to parallel the Panther maxim that blackness derives from action and analytical thought. However, the line lamenting "they don't even have any purpose in life" suggests a schism between the Panthers and US at this pedagogical level. As stated previously, US members derided Panthers for failing to appreciate Africa as a source of strength and values and Karenga warned that the Panther agenda alone could not combat the "slave mentality" and consequent lack of *purpose* rampant within the black community. It seems safe to say, then, that this line equates the Panthers with the misguided Negroes. Further, the definition of blackness as "the way you think and the way you act" must be understood alongside Karenga's definition of culture, rather than as a complement to the Panthers' position. As Karenga explained, "We define culture as a complete value system and also means and ways of maintaining that value system" (qtd. S. Brown 12). Action and thought were inextricably bound up with consciousness for Karenga. Indeed, they flowed *from* and were a result of blacks' "proper" consciousness, which the Nguzo Saba value system instilled.

The schisms between the Black Panther Party and the US organization amplify problems inherent to black nationalism in general: How might one make historical, cultural identity – the emphasis of Karenga and US - applicable and relevant to a

generation increasingly affected by the structural inequalities and broken promises of the present – the emphasis of the Panthers? How might one, in effect, heal the black population's late mid-twentieth century iteration of double-consciousness? For many, education seemed the only hope. Indeed, pedagogies concerning African American youth, although permeated by the divisive agendas of nationalist factions, often combined and employed these agendas in fruitful ways.

The 1970 volume of essays, *What Black Educators Are Saying*, reveals the impact nationalist principles and their corollary concerns made on teachers of black students in separatist and integrated classrooms alike. These essays announce the key problems educators faced in trying to understand and remedy contemporary double-consciousness within the black community. In his essay, "On Correct Black Education," educator John E. Churchville explains that the black nationalist "understands clearly that black people in this country suffer from a twofold problem: external and internal" (179). White hegemony remained the external problem facing blacks. As for the internal problems, Churchville clearly took his cue from Karenga. Churchville diagnoses:

> The internal problem of black people as a group is our slave mentality. . . The internal problem of black people as individuals is that we are totally corrupt and need to be purged from our incorrect desires, motives, thinking, and actions. (179)

Churchville casts the internal problems of black people as a group and as individuals in a cyclical relationship. A corruptive group "slave mentality" informs and defiles the everyday rituals, events, and movements of black American individuals. Meanwhile, the individual's corruption precludes group cohesiveness and progress. The peculiarly American, hegemonic (external) forces of capitalism, individualism, racial prejudice, and structural inequality produce and perpetuate the cycle.

Like most black nationalists, Churchville identifies the black individual's psyche as the starting point for the spiritual, cultural, and political transformations associated with liberation. Indeed, the individual represented the literal seed of potential, large-scale African American liberation. Because of this, cultivating the individual's relationship to a collective past *and* present – and thus merging cultural nationalist and revolutionary nationalist agendas – seemed the central concern for teachers of black students. *Black Educators* contributor John Henrik Clarke quotes educator Baba Lamumba's address to the 1968 Conference of Afro-American Educators, in which Lamumba outlined his seven-point plan for fostering black identity in the classroom. Lamumba believed:

> "Education must: (1) teach black people who they are, (2) teach black people what they are fighting for, (3) teach black people who they must identify with, (4) teach black people where their loyalty must lie, (5) teach black people what must be done, (6) teach black people how to do it, and (7) teach black people that the destinies of all black people are inseparably linked." (qtd. Clarke 222)

Lamumba's pedagogical model reflects a balanced commitment to both revolutionary nationalist principles and cultural nationalist concerns. Lamumba recognizes the importance of the collective present and past to shaping the individual student's identity. Each of Lamumba's points rests upon the others for its success. For example, without a foundational understanding of "who they are" embedded in the concept "that the destinies of all black people are inseparably linked," black students could not be expected to identify "what they are fighting for," "what must be done," and "how to do it" (qtd. Clarke 222).

Each of the theorists included in *What Black Educators Are Saying* presumes an inherent essence – whether based on the shared experience of similar material conditions or "cultural memory" of African values, practices, and rituals – to African American

culture. Each recognizes the importance of treating the black child as an individual. Each struggles to balance this individualistic approach to child development with one that allows for the development of a strong, black group identity. This struggle derives from a presumed essential unity of blacks in traditional African pedagogy that the historical African American experience disrupted. Psychologist and scholar of Afro-centric pedagogy Na'im Akbar explains that ancient African educators believed:

> the human being was already equipped with the tools of enlightenment. The word education did not assume that critical knowledge had to be imposed from without, but as the word itself implies, it was to be educed from within. The method for educing knowledge was done through the cultivation of an inner discipline which brought these resources to the fore. . . The original teachers cultivated self-esteem or a positive self-knowledge by fostering an awareness of one's historical (and/or mythological) origins which gave insight into the resources that each individual contained by virtue of his Divine and genetic legacy. (ix)

A belief in the receiver's untapped "race memory" underscores this approach to education. The teacher trusts that the student already possesses all of the sociocultural, biological, and psychological material constituting blackness that is necessary for the acquisition of knowledge. In contrast, the American public school system downplayed racial difference. However, the elision of race was actually no elision at all, but rather a tacit boost to white cultural hegemony (Shujaa 296). This contributed to a culture of low self-esteem and even self-abnegation among black students. Clearly, the black nationalist focus upon the individual as the potential site for liberation derived from this African pedagogical model.

For black nationalists and educators alike, the subject of the black child offered fertile ground for explorations of black identity construction, racial collectivism, and individual agency. As black nationalism challenged Civil Rights-era integrationism, a

corresponding shift in black consciousness occurred.[2] Whereas before double consciousness had represented blacks' divided loyalties to black culture and to advancement in the larger, white-dominated society, black nationalism turned the focus inward to black society, with revolutionary nationalism and cultural nationalism representing the two halves of a new double consciousness. The oppositional nature of the relationship between the figureheads of revolutionary nationalism (the Panther Party) and cultural nationalism (US) helped to structure, reinforce, and motivate this double consciousness. In addition, the class and color distinctions historically drawn within the African American community exacerbated divisions between the groups. While Karenga chided the Panthers for promoting what he saw as a low-class street culture, the Panthers often derided Karenga's organization for espousing (comparatively less militant) methods consistent with "the Negro," an especially provocative, loaded, and demeaning term by the late 1960s meant to imply that one's ultimate affiliation and aspiration pointed to white culture (S. Brown 4-8). The black nationalist who chose sides was forever cognizant of the opposing groups' condemnations.

Despite the allegiance of many Black Arts Movement authors to Maulana Karenga's US – Amiri Baraka was once the organization's "key propagandist" - the children's literature produced by Black Arts Movement authors acts as a meeting ground for blacks' material and cultural concerns (S. Brown 151). These books both educate black children as to the obstacles facing them *and* acculturate them. Black Arts

---

[2] This shift was by no means monolithic or linear. Instead, countless African American intellectuals, artists, activists, and everyday people created and faced new and complicated definitions of what it meant to be black in an increasingly racist United States, as well as within their own increasingly intertwined networks of affiliation. For the purposes of this essay, I intend my historical reduction of this process to bring into sharper focus the particular people, texts, and issues treated herein.

Movement children's authors addressed everyday problems and larger social issues like prejudice, as well as matters of history, culture, and racial identity.

I begin with Gwendolyn Brooks' *Bronzeville Boys and Girls* because, as the only text in the group written before the advent of black nationalism, it offers a standpoint against which to view the other texts. *Bronzeville Boys and Girls* appeared in 1956, a decade before Brooks' reawakening into nationalist consciousness. In it, Brooks conveys a characteristically Modernist concern for the individual's alienation during this period. Brooks had always addressed the tension between the Modernist impulse to individualize and the compulsion to speak for a black community as a whole. Brooks had been deeply schooled from the beginning of her career in the DuBois-ian double consciousness of her mentor, Langston Hughes (Lindberg 285). For her, this divided consciousness first manifested in terms of her split allegiance to the Modernist principles of individuality, freshness, and originality, and a compulsion to speak to and represent black subjects collectively. In *Bronzeville Boys and Girls*, these two streams prove mutually exclusive. Individualism does not precipitate conventional success for Brooks' black child subjects. Instead, individualism threatens intragroup and intergenerational communication, dispossesses the children of an historical imagination rooted in an actualized black culture, and blinds them to the possibilities of the future.

In *Boys and Girls*, Brooks composes portraits of children in various socioeconomic positions that could well stand by themselves. When read together, these poems construct a community, albeit one within which the individual members seem oblivious of their membership. In this collection, Brooks demonstrates her concern as a Modernist for structure and precise language as she applies different poetic forms to

different characters. Despite audience's assertions that Brooks created *Boys and Girls* as a depiction of a universal childhood, I offer that a close reading of the collection reveals Brooks' treatment of her child subjects' complicated, racial identity within a specific historical context – the Civil Rights era and its integrationist mandate.

A subtext of alienation unites the poems of *Boys and Girls* on a thematic level. Brooks never describes the world from which the children feel alienated. She is interested instead in locating the *source* of the feeling of alienation. She finds it within her child-subjects. With stark, simple language, Brooks offers in Charles' poem:

> Sick-times, you go inside yourself,
> And scarce can come away.
> You sit and look outside yourself
> At people passing by. (7)

Charles' poem stands out. Brooks avoids overt suggestion of race as the *real* cause of Charles' feeling of alienation, but she does imply it. The poem's inside-out metaphor suggests that Charles is experiencing the phenomenon called double consciousness. Significantly, while Charles is under its sway, he "scarce can come away." "The people passing by" whom Charles looks at so intently represent white society. Brooks refigures this theme in "Robert, Who is Often a Stranger to Himself," in which clothing acts as a stand-in for race:

> Do you ever look in the looking-glass
> And see a stranger there?
> A child you know and do not know,
> Wearing what you wear? (22)

Brooks' lack of reference to a world beyond the limits of Bronzeville underscores the individualism of the community. Brooks constructs the outside world as a silent other that, even in its absence, handicaps Bronzeville. It prevents the Bronzeville boys and

girls from developing a holistic sense of self. Or, rather, it forces them to conceive of themselves in two halves. Dislocated selves contribute to a disconnected community. The ultimate tragedy of the Bronzeville boys and girls' lives derives not from the poverty of some of the children, or the inattention of some of their parents, but rather from their unawareness of a black community independent of a white world.

The poem, "Cynthia in the Snow," illustrates how whiteness, broadly construed, permeates Brooks' Bronzeville. Here, the snow acts as a metaphor for whiteness, which asserts its hegemonic prescriptions for beauty, just as it curtails Cynthia's winter idyll. Brooks positions the snow as the literal, active agent in the poem. Cynthia would like to play in it, participate in it, but this whiteness is deafeningly pervasive. It falls around and onto Cynthia, moves away from her:

> It sushes.
> It hushes
> The loudness in the road.
> It flitter-twitters,
> And laughs away from me.
> It laughs a lovely whiteness,
> And whitely whirs away,
> To be
> Some otherwhere,
> Still white as milk or shirts.
> So beautiful it hurts. (8)

This whiteness, though it eludes Cynthia, will not go away. Neither does Cynthia wish for it to go away. Here, Brooks offers a neat metaphor for double consciousness: The black child is forever aware of whiteness, forever chasing it, only to be reminded that, as a black child, whiteness is unattainable, making it "so beautiful it hurts." Further, whiteness infiltrates even everyday objects like "milk" and "a shirt," alienating Cynthia from such symbols of (white-defined) normalcy.

An unnamed force inhibits the natural, kinetic desires of the boys and girls of Bronzeville for movement and growth. Sometimes, the characters' parents appear responsible for the restrictions. However, parents have little inherent authority in Bronzeville. Instead, Brooks positions authority without the character's immediate community and within the looming, oppressive apparatus of white hegemony. Young Paulette wishes she might play outside among the elements, but her mother cautions her daughter against such impropriety. Pauline wonders:

> What good is sun
> If I can't run?
>
> "You're eight, and ready
> To be a lady."
>
> That is what my Mama says.
> She is right again, I guess.
>
> But there! I saw a squirrel fly
> Where it is secret, green, and high.
>
> And there! those ants are bustling brown,
> And I require to chase them down!
>
> What good is sun
> If I can't run? (11)

For Paulette, such restriction proves arbitrary, contrary to the movements of nature she witnesses. This undermines her mother's "authority." Like her child counterparts, Paulette suffers a lack of parental guidance and independent example. As a result, the Bronzeville boys and girls emerge as a fractured and directionless lot.

Brooks' unguided child subjects make easy victims. Eppie, a little girl who yearns for something "that's perfectly her own," confuses the politics of individualism

with the mandates of consumer capitalism (13). Eppie believes owning objects will contribute positively to the construction of her identity:

> A little girl wants something
> That's perfectly her own.
>
> Something she can talk about
> On the telephone.
>
> Or in the classroom (softly,
> And knowing that she shouldn't!)-
>
> Or at the movies, to her chum,
> (Although she mostly wouldn't
> Disturb a nervous neighbor!)-
>
> Or maybe to her mother.
>
> Something to talk about, and put
> Into a box, or other
> "Own place": perhaps a drawer,
> Beneath the hankies and
> Pink camisole, best anklets,
> Sash with the satin band. (13)

In the collection's penultimate poem, Brooks treats young Tommy, who has an interest in gardening. "Tommy" acts as a parable for the fate of black children in the absence of leadership. Tommy plants a seed and nurtures it "as well as [he] could know" (39). Ultimately, though, Tommy learns he can exert little control over the direction the seed takes. Agency seems elusive to Tommy:

> I put a seed into the ground
> And said, "I'll watch it grow."
> I watered it and cared for it
> As well as I could know.
>
> One day I walked in my back yard,
> And oh, what did I see!
> My seed had popped itself right out,
> Without consulting me. (39)

Almost all of the children who populate *Bronzeville Boys and Girls* manifest a false consciousness of their own reality, identity, and destiny. These consciousnesses mirror Brooks' own during her pre-1967 career. Her characters exist in a world that is dictated *to* (from above) and dictated *by* its material contours. The children cannot escape the blocks of Bronzeville. Bound by their own geographic specificity, by their frustrated imaginings, and by material conditions, the children of Bronzeville turn inward to answer their myriad questions. Their community offers no leaders and no localized authority. Instead, the specter of white hegemony looms.

Almost two decades separate *Aloneness* (1971) and *Bronzeville Boys and Girls*, and with these decades came both the rise of black nationalism that precipitated the shift in double consciousness and Brooks' own political conversion. As her first nationalistically conscious work, *Aloneness* concerns the politics of black separatism. Brooks differentiates between aloneness – a trope for separatism – and loneliness – integration. For Brooks, these terms have personal, intimate contours that challenge and complicate their political valences.

Aloneness (1971) takes a young, unnamed, black child as its object. Brooks begins her book with the affirmation, "Aloneness is different from loneliness" (1). She posits aloneness as a positive, creative force and loneliness as a negative, pointless condition. For Brooks, aloneness celebrates individualism while at the same time recognizing that the individual understands his/herself in terms of his/her relationship to a community. Loneliness, by contrast, connotes racelessness, the individual's ignorance of his/her membership within a black community. Brooks uses concrete images to symbolize aloneness. These provide a realistic context for the word, as if Brooks would

suggest a subtle allusion to the concrete reality of blackness. Unlike aloneness, loneliness does not offer concrete reminders of its identity, its blackness. Loneliness occurs in a disconnected world:

> Loneliness means you want somebody.
> Loneliness means
> you have not planned to stand
> somewhere with other people gone. (2-3)

Further, "Loneliness never has a bright color" (4). Sometimes, "it does not have a sound" (4). Loneliness is sensory deprivation. It is denial of blackness and of voice. Here, Brooks implicitly positions loneliness as a metaphor for integration. Under the banner of integration, in the integrated classroom, for example, whiteness is tacitly held up as the standard by which being is measured. As I mentioned previously, the elision of racial difference in the American public classroom actually only further solidified white hegemony, according to nationalist logic. Meanwhile, aloneness is literally palpable:

> Once in a while aloneness is delicious.
> Almost like a red small apple
> that is cold. An apple that is small
> and sweet and round and cold
> and for just you. (5)

Aloneness stresses the power of imagination and the creativity that can come from Brooks' – and nationalists' - conception of an individualism rooted in the surrounding world and community:

> You make presents to yourself,
> presents of clouds and sunshine,
> and the dandelions that are there.
> Aloneness is like that. Sometimes.
> Sometimes
> I think it is not possible
> to be alone.
> You are with you. (8-9)

Brooks ends *Aloneness* with insightful lines suitable for any of her adult volumes. In these, she embeds her conception of individualism within the context of a caring community. The narrator acknowledges that an internalized sense of community both prevents loneliness and frees oneself to act as an individual. Brooks' "I" declares:

> I know another aloneness.
> Within it there is someone.
> Someone to ask and tell.
> One who is Mary, Willie,
> John or James or Joan.
> Whose other name is Love. (11-12)

The Tiger Who Wore White Gloves or What You are You are seems the most radical of Brooks' children's books. It stands at the end of this series of Brooks' increasingly generalized portraiture of black youth. While *Bronzeville Boys and Girls* features class-conscious children with names and *Aloneness* suggests a young, androgynous, black child, *The Tiger Who Wore White Gloves* excuses itself from the human realm except by metaphor. Brooks uses jungle animals as her subjects in the tradition of African proverbs.

In *The Tiger*, the main character samples the outward trappings of the white world in an attempt to differentiate himself from other tigers. By putting on white gloves, the tiger denies his own inner toughness and style, thereby initiating a disruption of the natural order of the jungle. An act of divine intervention reveals to the tiger that he has been an individual all along. The tiger realizes that his rejection of his true identity has consequences for the entire community. Brooks positions blackness as the locus of the tiger's identity. All individuality emanates from that point.

Upon initial reading, Brooks' insistence upon the tiger's disavowal of his gloves seems almost dictatorial. However, when one reads *The Tiger* in the context of Brooks'

movement toward a new, self-determined black aesthetic, it becomes clear that Brooks uses the tiger's gloves as a metaphor for the naturalized racial order of American society. The values of white society cause the tiger's feelings of inadequacy. The tiger's sense of identity and what constitutes it intimately intertwines with the arbitrary proscriptions of a dominant, racial discourse. The tiger's break from this discourse is difficult – even painful: "With a sigh/ And a saddened eye,/ And in spite of his love,/ He took off each glove" (29-30). But it is necessary.

The tiger's break with his white gloves obviously recalls Brooks' break with her largely white audience. It also signifies her future reluctance to treat individuality in terms of racial alienation from white society. She retires from her struggle to maneuver such a conception of individualism within the politicized poetics of the Black Arts movement. Brooks espouses instead a new individualism emanating from blackness itself. She figures the black body as the ultimate work of art. With *The Tiger Who Wore White Gloves*, Brooks makes artistically intelligible that which she proposes in "Poets Who are Negroes":

> Simply because he is a Negro; he cannot escape having important things to say. His mere body, for that matter, is an eloquence. His quiet walk down the street is a speech to the people. Is a rebuke, is a plea, is a school. (312)

In a clever reversal of the old-fashioned caricatures of the black Sambo figure in children's books, Brooks includes a caricature of little white girls. No other humans populate *The Tiger*. This accentuates the girls' whiteness even more. Brooks' *Tiger* reaches its crescendo with the lines:

> White gloves are for girls with manners and curls
> And dresses and hats and bow-ribbons. *That's*
> The way it always was,

> And rightly so, because
> It's nature's nice decree
> That tiger folk should be
> Not dainty,
> But daring,
> And wisely wearing
> What's fierce as the face
> Not whiteness and lace! (23-27)

As Brooks assigns nature's "nice decree" the status of myth, she performs a remarkable feat. She exposes a mythological basis for racism, uproots it, and reappropriates it so that blackness assumes the dominant position within a naturalized racial order. This is a sophisticated idea, and it is unlikely that a child would be able to grasp it. However, it is clear that whiteness comes to connote inauthenticity. Blackness, by contrast, remains wise and fiercely proud, beautiful on its own terms. As the title instructs, "What You are You are."

That same year, in 1970, John Steptoe, though not expressly a member of the Black Arts junta, subscribed to the salient principles of the movement and grappled with black child development. Steptoe's *Uptown* follows two young boys from Harlem, Dennis and John, the story's main character. Steptoe's book focuses on the young boys' search for career direction. Steptoe limns an ideologically diverse, vibrant uptown community that acts as a source for the boys' imagination. Despite the racial pride and seeming collectivism apparent in Steptoe's Harlem, Dennis and John find themselves measuring their future in material terms.

Indeed, *Uptown* seems Steptoe's condemnation of a certain kind of black community – one in which individuals evaluate the success of their actions by subsequent reverberations within white society. I argue that Steptoe has the Panther platform in

mind. Around Harlem, blackness is defined in opposition to whiteness. Karenga obliquely criticized the Panthers for positing blackness as a set of reactions to whiteness. Harlem pulsates, but its inhabitants suffer from ease of movement and exposure to many conflicting philosophies, leading to group divisiveness. There is no figurative or literal, codified center from which to understand Harlem's many streams of racialized politics. Karenga would criticize this lack of organization for its effects on local, black ethics. How can one locate morality in a place where "any time you wanna do somethin' you can just do it" (3). The irony, of course, is that there are more things that *cannot* be done in Steptoe's Harlem than that can be done due to structural inequalities and larger prejudice.

For the young boys in Steptoe's Harlem, material reality literally precludes certain choices and dictates certain paths. John begins by asking Dennis, his "main man," "what are we gonna do when we grow up?" (2; 1). Interestingly, Steptoe chooses to implicate Dennis in John's question, perhaps to underscore the group problem of identity construction and deployment. The individual and the group become nearly impossible to separate as *Uptown* progresses. As the young friends consider their possibilities as individuals operating within a larger community, respect and reputation become their most pressing considerations. The boys seem adrift in the many streams of Harlem racial politics. Without the benefit of guidance or a black separatist education agenda (despite the fact that both boys likely attend segregated inner-city schools), Dennis and John can identity political consciousness only by its outer, material markers. They discuss returning to "that bookstore up near 135th street" where there are "a lot of nice Black Power things in the window" (4; 6). John recalls, "The man in there was a nice cat. He told us a lot of things about black people, and it's different from what they tell you in

school" (6). John sees Black Power as a set of accoutrements necessary for the development of a community reputation:

> Plus like with black pride you can wear all these fine clothes and beads. I'm gonna get a dashiki and a kufti to wear. Then everybody will call me Brother John and I'll be as bad as I wanna be. (6)

John's interpretation empties Black Power of its galvanizing potential by reinforcing the hierarchization of the black community. Further, John and Dennis might "play" at brotherhood like they play Cops and Junkies, the neighborhood version of Cowboys and Indians. In *Uptown*, black nationalism is just one of many games and part of the local commerce. The material proscriptions for proper Black Power dress leave the cultural nationalist movement vulnerable to cooptation by consumer capitalism. John threatens to propagate his false consciousness, "I'm gonna be a Brother when I grow up, and anybody wants to know anythin' about black, just ask me, cause I know my stuff" (8).

Ultimately, Dennis admits, "I really don't know what we're gonna be" (21). John declares, "Guess we'll just hang out together for a while and just dig on everythin' that's goin' on" (22). Steptoe's *Uptown* ends with this meta-commentary on the state of contemporary black identity politics. John and Dennis, caught in the disorienting whirlwind of black nationalist thought, ultimately cannot determine a direction or course of action to take.

Issued four years after *Uptown*, Mari Evans' early-education primer, *I Look at Me!* (1974), deals more successfully with the integration of the individual child into his/her family and larger community. Evans concentrates on two young, unnamed subjects, a boy and a girl. The book begins with their simple assertions of individual preference: "I like milk. Water is good. I like apples" (1-3). Evans follows her children

through a day in their community. They visit the grocery store, ride the bus, play at recess, go to the doctor, and greet friends on the street. Evans' *I Look at Me!* depicts the everyday activities of a self-sufficient, interconnected black community. She incorporates the young boy's food choices into the workings of the community with the sentences, "My mother buys apples" and "My daddy buys oranges" and the accompanying pictures of a woman and man buying from a black grocer (4; 6). Evans follows the Panther paradigm of action as the source of consciousness. It is what one *does* that determines their identity in *I Look at Me!*.

Black economic self-sufficiency dovetails nicely with the playground politics of sharing and participation. Evans' characters greet their neighbors on the street, addressing them as sister or brother. She underscores this sense of community when her young male subject disavows individual, material possession in favor of collective identification. He declares, "This is my ball," but concedes on the next page, "This is our ball" (13-14). Such collectivity inspires both the boy and girl to assert, "Nation Time!" (15). In the classroom, the teacher reads to several students from *I Look at Me!* Part of the phrase "Black is Beautiful" scrolls across the chalkboard, above a series of numbers and the alphabet. This establishes the doctrine as the foundation for this classroom experience. At the same time, conflating the alphabet with "Black is Beautiful" lends an organic authority and determinative quality to the latter phrase.

Evans concludes *I Look at Me!* by phrasing individual assertions of identity within the identity of "a beautiful nation" of individuals (24). Evans leaves each of her readers with a picture of "a liberation flag" (25). She instructs, "It is your special flag. Color it red, black, and green" (25).

Mari Evans published her provocatively-titled young adult chapter book, *JD* (**J**uvenile **D**elinquent?), a year before *I Look at Me!*. *JD* follows the trials of JD Brown, a struggling preadolescent living in a city housing project with his mother. Evans begins the story by situating JD geographically and politically:

> JD lived at 817 Salem Court, Apartment #302. Salem Court was named after a Black hero, Peter Salem. Salem was a brave man who fought heroically in the Battle of Bunker Hill. (7)

In this simple passage, Evans suggests that JD is an individual living within a larger, politically- and racially-conscious community. Several factors, however, threaten this community. Money seems the most nefarious of these. When JD finds a mysterious, locked box in an abandoned lot near his apartment, he launches into a materialistic reverie. Evans describes JD:

> JD sat there not breathing very much. His eyes were wide open but he wasn't really seeing the people on the sidewalk or the cars passing on the street. Instead, there were pictures in his mind. (11)

Consumer fantasies fill JD's mind as he imagines acquiring a dog, or buying his mother a new dress. Such individualistic, self-serving, economic desires literally blind JD to his everyday surroundings. JD's imagination quickly reaches its limits, though. JD comes back to reality when he recognizes a friend from his community:

> JD shook his head to get the picture out of his mind. He looked hard at real things. He looked hard at the cars. They were real. He looked hard at Walker who had just come out of the grocery store. Walker was real. Walker was very real. (12)

The two boys fail to open the mysterious box, but JD learns a valuable lesson. He realizes his mother's love, patience and dedication to him. He feels comfort in returning to 817 Salem Court. Ironically, JD must return to his home, to his community, to find the real treasure. Here, Evans envisions Salem Court as the locus of a self-regulating

community. JD shares, "People who were looking for Salem Court wouldn't get lost if they just looked for the 817 stone" (16). If the searcher is properly equipped, Salem Court proves impossible to miss. By the end of his journey, JD understands his immediate community's relationship to the rest of the world. In a sort of *Our Town* gesture, he writes his home address as, "JD Brown, 817 Salem Court, Apartment 302, Meadow Hill Housing Project, everything" (49).

Story Two of *JD* treats the young main character's introduction to the "struggle." Evans follows JD's Saturday afternoon peregrinations throughout his neighborhood. JD muses about popping into the Hill barbershop to "listen to the men talk all that stuff about old baseball players and the time Black people were kings and ruled the world" (24). JD nixes that plan, realizing, "No use in trying it cause Mr. Allen would run him out if he wasn't waiting for a haircut" (24). JD's lack of money means that he has no access to stories of his heritage that might differ from those he learns in school. There are no liberation schools or community resources to which JD might turn, either. His own afro hairstyle, though, offers JD a sense of self-sufficiency, and later proves a source of cultural capital when an attractive older lady pats his head and calls him "lil brotha" (27). Still, JD lacks the foundation in black ethics that Karenga believed essential to fostering correct black action.

As JD walks past the facades of black-owned businesses and homes (interestingly, Evans' streets have no street names – these are the only identifiers) he cannot enter because of his age and physical stature, he happens upon a fight between neighborhood kids. The fight encapsulates the larger, parallel struggle of the adult world. JD recognizes the two fighters. He "didn't have any intention of messing into the big kid's

business – but that little kid! That little kid was that same little kid that ran up to JD every morning when JD passed his entrance and said, 'Hi, Buddy!'" (27-8). Without knowing the details surrounding the argument, JD makes a brave decision:

> He understood, somehow, that once he knew what was happening he became part of it. . . "All of us are part of it,' he thought, 'except I'm the only one walking over there." (28)

Not surprisingly, one of the onlookers says the boys had been fighting over "money, I guess" (30). JD manages to defeat the bully without physical contact, by displaying his karate poses. When he finds his friend, who has escaped to his and JD's apartment complex, JD encourages his friend, Toller, to join JD in a Black Power salute. The story ends as JD runs from the scene, "his heart tight with feeling for Toller" (31). At this moment, halfway through the journey, JD enters "the struggle." Interestingly, he does not have to act to beat the bully. Instead, the very fact that JD reveals he understands his connection to a fellow community member proves enough.

Story Three follows JD out of his community and into his classroom. Evans details JD and his mother's morning rituals, establishing parallels between their respective struggles to maintain dignity in the face of white authority. Mrs. Brown "had to wear a clean white dress every morning. Every night when she came home it was wrinkled and dirty" (36). Meanwhile, JD dreads going to school because he owes his teacher, Miss Ackerman, $3.25 in overdue fees. JD knows:

> Miss Ackerman was going to want that money again and ask him in front of the whole class. He could see them all now. Sitting there. A sea of black faces except for Miss Ackerman who was white and skinny and Tim Weingold whose daddy taught in the building. (36)

JD's reality – his material conditions, his community, the ethos he develops at the end of Story Two – proves incompatible to Miss Ackerman's. The two cannot communicate

effectively. Miss Ackerman does not understand JD's predicament. In front of the classroom, Miss Ackerman tells JD to inform his mother that, "'If she can't afford to send the three dollars – when Miss Ackerman said "three dollars" she made it sound like a nickel – we'll put you on the Trustee List'" (47). Miss Ackerman's attempt to humiliate JD does not prevent JD from developing and asserting his own interpretation of the situation. "Everybody knew what the Trustee List was. Welfare. Lots of kids were on welfare. Tutu, Jimmy Bellows, Edna Martin, Johnny. Being on welfare wasn't bad. It just made you feel bad" (47).

Ultimately, JD determines not to bother his mother about the $3.25 for Miss Ackerman's class. Mrs. Brown cannot economically support her son, JD, but she does offer him guidance. JD sees his mother as the anti-Miss Ackerman. He muses, "Mothers felt brown and warm and soft and you knew nothing could bother you because they loved you. Even Miss Ackerman couldn't get him when his mother's arm was around him" (40). The degradation and distrust of black mothers fostered by the Moynihan Report of 1967 provides an important context for JD's sentiment as Evans attempts to re-image black motherhood. Evans' challenge to negative depictions of black mothers, though, still seems inextricably tied to traditional readings of black women within the black community itself. As James Edward Smethurst points out in *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s*, "African American women [represent] touchstones of essential blackness who renew the identity of black men who will in turn change the world" (Smethurst 82).

Still, money and other structural inequalities threaten to dissolve JD's sense of maternal protection and community. Evans underscores Mrs. Brown's economic failure

in Story Four, as JD goes in search of a male father figure (a conventional breadwinner). By the end of the chapter, though, it becomes clear that JD has conflated love and protection with reputation and material success. JD ducks into an alley to get away from Coolaid, a local bully. There, JD encounters a small group of men and immediately believes he will be safe. Among the men is Papa Go, a "young and famous athlete. . . [and] his friend" (52). JD soon discerns that the men are shooting heroin. Papa Go nods in and out of reality as Coolaid finds JD and beats him unconscious. JD has "no one to turn to because of the stuff in the needle. It had taken Papa Go's mind. Even though Papa Go wanted to move, it wouldn't let him" (57). When JD awakens, he steals fifty cents from an unaware Papa Go and contemplates how to spend the money. "Then he threw it. Threw it as far as he could make it go. And ran. Ran as hard as he could for Salem Court" (58). JD returns to his community and looks to himself, to the lessons he has learned throughout his self-titled journey, to make sense of what has happened to him. Significantly, JD is returning to his mother, whom I have already established as a symbol of "essential blackness" and renewal (Smethurst 82). JD is defeated and saddened, but, as James Edward Smethurst notes, defeat in Black Arts writing often foreshadows a character's conscious, political transformation. Smethurst argues:

> The notion of reconstruction was often predicated on the cultural fall of a prehistoric Africa, . . . figured as a loss of masculinity - a familiar trope of African American nationalism reaching back into the nineteenth century. (87)

With Papa Go an inarguable failure as a father figure and a man, JD is left to pick up the pieces for himself – and to start again.

Lucille Clifton's *All Us Come Cross the Water*, published the same year as Evans' *JD* and featuring illustrations by John Steptoe, explicitly focuses the story on the

classroom. During a history exercise, Miss Willis, a black teacher, asks her students "to tell where they people come from" (1). Young and feisty Ujamaa (whom Miss Willis persists in calling "Jim") refuses to cooperate. Miss Willis misunderstands Ujamaa's reasoning, confiding to him, "We must not be ashamed of ourselves. . . You are from a great heritage and you must be proud of that heritage. Now you know you are from Africa, don't you?" (1). Miss Willis' directive upsets Ujamaa because he understands "Africa is a continent not a country" (2). Ujamaa is a leader among his black peers. They look up to him, but also cannot understand his refusal to perform the exercise. This spurs Ujamaa to investigate the specifics of his family's heritage.

Ujamaa's investigation effects a shift in the way he conceives of history and African Americans' role within it. He first asks his sister, Rose, where his parents' ancestors came from "way back before" their removal to the United States. Rose mocks Ujamaa, "They wasn't no way back before that. Before that we was a slave" (3). Ujamaa will not accept this answer. He vents, "I could a punched her in her face. Rose make me sick" (3). After receiving a similarly unsatisfactory answer from his father, Ujamaa decides to consult the family expert, Big Mama, his "Mama's Mama's Mama" (7). Big Mama proves an enigma. "She real old and she don't say much, but she see things cause she born with a veil over her face. That make it so she can see spirits and things" (7). Big Mama represents Ujamaa's literal tie to Africa and his heritage. She gave him his African name, which means *unity*. In addition, Big Mama subtly urges Ujamaa to reconsider what he had previously accepted as fact. Ujamaa asks, "'Big Mama, where we come from. . . Us?'" (7). Big Mama cryptically replies, "Which us?" (7). Ujamaa appreciates that Big Mama "say a lotta stuff you just have to figure out" (7).

Ujamaa pursues his conversation with Big Mama patiently until she shoos him away. Ujamaa wants to know, "'That mean I'm from Ashanti people?'" (10). Big Mama responds with her own question, "'Who are you, boy?'" (10). To Big Mama, the facts and figures of her family's heritage do not matter much. She views Ujamaa as the living connection to and embodiment of his African past. She suggests that he already knows his identity. Still undeterred, though, Ujamaa heads to the Panther Book Shop in search of answers. Here, Ujamaa's "grown man friend," Tweezer, reinforces Big Mama's point by advising Ujamaa that self-definition is the most important factor of (particularly African American identity. Ujamaa becomes distressed when Tweezer informs him that he doesn't have his own name and that his parents didn't either. Tweezer teaches, "'When they stole my Daddy's Daddy to make him a slave they didn't ask for his name and he didn't give it'" (13). Ujamaa boasts, "'Big Mama give me my name. It mean Unity'" (13). Tweezer authoritatively concludes, "Long as your own give you the name you know it's yours. We name us. Everybody else just calling us something, but we name us. You named a good name'" (13).

As *All Us Come Cross the Water* reaches its crescendo, Ujamaa struggles to incorporate the concept of a black diaspora into his understanding of heritage. Tweezer sends Ujamaa off with the admonition, "'Wasn't none of us [Africans] free though. All us crossed the water. We one people. Boy got that name oughta know that. All us crossed the water'" (16). Ujamaa admits he "had a whole lot to think about!" (17). Overnight, he recognizes his potential for leadership and redefines his conception of race. He claims:

> What I mostly ended up thinking about was ol Bo and ol Malik and how they didn't even know what was the matter but they went right along with

> me on the not standing up cause we brothers. And Bo ain't even lived in this block that long and his Mama is from a island but we all brothers anyhow. I thought about Tweezer and him and me being brothers too. All us come cross the water. Somebody name Ujamaa oughta know that. (17-18)

The next morning, Ujamaa unveils his newfound identity politics to his class. Despite her clear portrayal as black in the book's illustrations, Miss Willis represents a tool of an educational machine bent on dividing and conquering individuals. Ujamaa "jump[s] up and stand[s] straight as a king" with his knowledge and convictions. Ujamaa triumphantly declares:

> "Miss Willis, my name is Ujamaa and that mean Unity and that's where I'm from." Man, Malik and Bo stand right up too, tall as me and just grinning. We all stand there awhile and she don't say nothing. Shoot, she don't even know what we talking about! (23)

Now nearly forty years later, the question begs itself: What became of all of these lessons, all these principles, all these agendas set forth by the Black Power Movement and its myriad offshoots? The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, the US Organization, and other black nationalist groups were dealt a deadly blow by government intervention and the criminalization of the nationalist cause, just as these groups were brought down by their own internal contradictions. To many, that tragic shootout at UCLA epitomizes black nationalism and its legacy. It is, after all, a convenient shorthand for would-be racists and detractors of African American culture and history. However, to the authors and intellectuals treated in this essay, that shootout stands in for myriad experiences and events that radicalized African Americans' psyches, instigated new approaches to black subjectivity, and altered African-American cultural production irreversably.

The echoes of this period of black nationalism continue to reverberate today. In *Tupac: Resurrection*, the posthumous biopic of controversial, iconic "gangsta" rapper, Tupac Shakur, Shakur embeds himself within the historical struggle for African American liberation, paying particular attention to the Black Power Movement. Shakur muses:

> Everybody's past is what made their future. It's like my destiny. My mother was a Black Panther and she was really involved in the movement. . . All of my roots to the struggle are real deep.

Shakur meets the inequalities of the present with the same immediacy as the Panthers and US members. He explains his sometimes-abrasive lyrics and unapologetic nationalist politics to an interviewer:

> We was asking with the Panthers, we was asking with that, you know, with the Civil Rights Movement. Now those people that were askin', they all dead and in jail. So now what do you think we're gonna do. . . Ask?

An excerpt from Shakur's speech before the Indiana Black Expo in 1993 sounds as if it could have been issued twenty-five years earlier by a Black Panther:

> And when I say thug life [as a politics around which young African American men might rally] I mean that shit 'cause these white folks see us as thugs. . . I don't care if you a man, if you a African American, or whatever the fuck you think you are – we thugs and niggas to these motherfuckers. . . And until we own some shit I'm gonna call it like it is. . . How you gonna be a man if we starving?. . . How we gonna be a man? How we gonna be African American?. . . We thugs and niggas until we set this shit right – trust me when I tell you that.

To many, Tupac Shakur embodied the successes and excesses (e.g. hyper-masculinity, womanizing, glorification of violence) of a late-1960s-style black nationalism. More than this, though, Shakur reminds that history is neither linear nor teleological. Too often students of history forget that, though a movement loses its perceived coherence, or its appointed figurehead, the principles and ideas behind that movement do not cease to

exist. Instead, they move forward, taking on new meanings, forming new associations, and engaging new conditions, circumstances, and individuals with their own complicated histories.

One of the things that motivated me to undertake this project was the sheer paucity of criticism relating to the Black Arts Movement in general and the children's literature produced during it specifically. With the exception of *All Us Come Cross the Water*, which has been almost universally incorporated into the canon of children's literature, the children's books I treat in this essay proved difficult even to locate, as their printing had been stopped or they had been discarded from public libraries. It was as if someone had decided to raze every trace of their existence, to invalidate the issues addressed in those books, and to frustrate any attempts to draw parallels between the present day and such a notorious moment in the nation's history. Their recovery and reinsertion into a multi-faceted consideration of black nationalism will, hopefully, serve as a reminder of all of the unresolved issues of identity, power, and resistance with which Americans, black and white, have yet to fully deal.

REFERENCES

Brooks, Gwendolyn. *Aloneness*. Detroit: Broadside Press, 1971.

--------. *Bronzeville Boys and Girls*. New York: Harper Collins, 1967.

--------. *Report from Part One*. Detroit: Broadside Press, 1972.

--------. *Report from Part Two*. Chicago: Third World Press, 1996.

--------. *The Tiger Who Wore White Gloves; or, What You are You are*. Chicago: Third World Press, 1974.

Brown, H. Rap (Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin). *Die Nigger Die!: A Political Autobiography*. New York: Dial Press, 1969.

Brown, Scot Nguzi. *Fighting for US: Maulana Karenga, the US Organization, and Black Cultural Nationalism*. New York: NYU Press, 2003.

Cleaver, Kathleen Neal and Susie Linfield. "The Education of Kathleen Neal Cleaver." *Transition*. No. 77 (1998), pp. 172-195.

Clifton, Lucille. *All Us Come Cross the Water*. New York: Henry Holt, 1973.

Evans, Mari. *I Look at Me!* Chicago: Third World Press, 1975.

--------. *JD*. New York: Avon Books, 1982.

Johnson, Dianne. *Telling Tales: The Pedagogy and Promise of African American Literature for Youth*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1990.

Karenga, Maulana Ron. *The Quotable Karenga*. Timbuktu: University of Sankore Press, 1966.

Lindberg, Kathryne V. "Whose Canon? Gwendolyn Brooks: Founder at the Center of The 'Margins.'" *Gendered Modernisms: American Women Poets and their Readers*. Ed. Margaret Dickie and Thomas Travisano. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania Press, 1996. 283-311.

Newby, Robert G. and David B. Tyack. "Victims without 'Crimes': Some Historical Perspectives on Black Education." *The Journal of Negro Education*. Vol. 40, no. 3. (Summer, 1971), pp. 192-206.

Newton, Huey P., Foundation. "Black Panther Index,etc.". *The Huey P. Newton Foundation*. 1 September 2005. http://www.blackpanther.org.

Shujaa, Mwalimu J. *Too Much Schooling, Too Little Education: A Paradox of Black Life in White Societies*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1994.

Smethurst, James Edward. *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s*. Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 2005.

Steptoe, John. *Uptown*. New York: Harper Collins, 1970.

Tupac Resurrection. Dir. Lauren Lazin. 2003. Paramount, 2004.

Warren, Nagueyalti. "Pan-African Cultural Movements: From Baraka to Karenga." *The Journal of Negro History*. Vol. 75, no. ½ (Winter-Spring, 1990), pp. 16-28.

Wei, Debbie. "BPP Handout." *Putting the "Movement" Back into Civil Rights Teaching*. 2004. 1 September 2005. http://www.civilrightsteaching.org.

Wright, Nathan, ed. *What Black Educators are Saying*. New York: Hawthorn Books, 1970.

VITA

Meredith Meagan Crawford

Meredith Meagan Crawford was born 5 February 1980 in Middletown, Connecticut, to Jim, a seventh-grade Social Studies teacher and former Vietnam War Race Relations Officer, and Elaine, a children's librarian. She attended Westbrook, Connecticut, public schools, graduating as Valedictorian from Westbrook High School in 1998. She majored in English and concentrated in American Studies at Kenyon College in Ohio and received her B.A. in 2002. Meredith entered the Department of American Studies at the College of William and Mary in August, 2003, where she has pursued her interests in American literature, immigration, and African American social and cultural history.