



With a Sprinkle of Fairy Dust and a Splash of Color:
How *The Brownies' Book* Embodied the Black Elite's
Integrationist Vision of Racial Uplift and Carved Its Place in the
White-Washed World of Children's Literature

Amanda Ashley Jones
Haverford College Class of 2017

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James Krippner
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Abstract

In January 1920, W.E.B. Du Bois, Jessie Redmon Fauset, and Augustus Granville Dill – three prominent race activists of the black elite who strove to prove black people’s deservingness of equal rights and fought for racial integration – published the first major periodical released monthly for an audience of black children. Their magazine showcased an exclusively positive, bourgeois image of black people, and provided a counter-balance to the overtly racist imagery found in children’s literature of the period. This study explores the significance of *The Brownies’ Book* to early 20th century integrationist efforts of racial uplift, while examining how the periodical fit into the era’s predominantly white and racially discriminatory world of children’s literature.

Through an in-depth analysis and comparison of the magazine and selected works of mainstream children’s literature from the early 20th century, this thesis argues that *The Brownies’ Book* embodied black elite integrationists’ vision of racial uplift and emulated works of mainstream children’s literature, particularly in its assimilative socialization of black children with white middle-class ideals, its reproduction of beauty norms in favor of whiteness, and its adoption of the European fairy-tale tradition. This thesis also demonstrates how *The Brownies’ Book*’s integrationism often clashed with its inherent nationalist goal of empowering black people as a collective and inadvertently disempowered them, an irony explained by black elite integrationists’ internalization of racism, and the consequent development of feelings of black inferiority. *The Brownies’ Book* is a multifaceted and complex work of children’s literature, and is a historical source that deserves far more scholarly attention than it has been given because it provides invaluable insight on the intersections of race, class, gender, and power still relevant in the present day.

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Introduction

“All the pictures he [the black child] sees are of white people. Most of the books he [the black child] reads are by white authors, and his heroes and heroines are white.”¹ Furthermore, the “Negro” of mainstream children’s literature of the early 20th century, as W.E.B. Du Bois explains, usually appears as “a caricature or a clown,” and consequently, “[the black child] unconsciously gets the impression that the Negro has little chance to be good, great, heroic or beautiful.” Du Bois expressed these thoughts in a column entitled, “the Grownups Corner,” published by a novel magazine, *The Brownies Book*, one year after its birth. This thesis examines *The Brownies’ Book* within the context of mainstream children’s literature of the early 20th century, and delves into the significance of this periodical as a manifestation of the black elite integrationist vision of racial uplift.

Lasting from January 1920 through December 1921, *The Brownies’ Book* pioneered as the first major magazine published to address black children as an audience by the premier black-owned, Manhattan-based publishing company, Du Bois and Dill, Publishers. The magazine grew out of the immense success of Du Bois’ annual children’s section of *The Crisis* entitled, “The Children’s Number,” which published stories, political and social news coverage, and photos every October specifically for an intended audience of black children. Du Bois, a famed sociologist, intellectual, founding editor of *The Crisis*, and civil rights activist of the black elite, created *The Brownies’ Book* with the help of two other prominent, elite, black members of the NAACP: Augustus Granville Dill, who served as his publishing partner and the magazine’s business manager, and Jessie Redmon Fauset, who served as the magazine’s literary editor in 1920 and managing editor in 1921.

In an article entitled, “The True Brownies,” published in the October 1919 number of *The Crisis*, Du Bois announced the impending publication of the monthly magazine, stating:

¹ W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Grown-ups Corner,” *The Brownies’ Book*, February 1921.

We shall hereafter publish not one Children's Number a year, but twelve! Messrs. Du Bois and [Augustus] Dill will issue in November, in cooperation with *The Crisis*, but as an entirely separate publication, a little magazine for children - for all children, but especially for ours, "The Children of the Sun."² It will be called, naturally, *The Brownies Book*, and as we have advertised, "It will be a thing of Joy and Beauty, dealing in Happiness, Laughter and Emulation, and designed especially for Kiddies from Six to Sixteen. It will seek to teach Universal Love and Brotherhood for all little folk-black and brown and yellow and white."³

Du Bois calls *The Brownies' Book* a thing of "emulation," which can be interpreted in two ways.

The first way suggests that *The Brownies' Book* aimed to foster emulation of the black role models featured in the magazine within its young black readers. The second interpretation points to the creators' aims for the magazine to equal or surpass works of the mainstream while copying these works in some way. Furthermore, the article reveals that although Du Bois, Fauset, and Dill created *The Brownies' Book* with the needs of black children in mind, it suited "all children" regardless of race. Though middle to upper-class black children constituted the majority of the readership, a few white children, presumably of the same class, read and contributed to the magazine. One such reader was Bertie Lee Hall, who wrote in a letter to the editors, "I want to tell you that I enjoy the *Brownies'* magazine immensely. I am a little white girl; I am ten years old . . ."⁴ The magazine also garnered international subscriptions from countries including Cuba, Guyana, and France. Ten-year-old Gabrielle Gonay from Chambéry, France wrote a letter to the editors about the arrival of American soldiers in her town. She remarks, "Among all, the happiest were the colored boys. They were unhappy in America . . . They were . . . glad to see that the French made no difference between them and the white . . . We shall remember, also, forevermore, their

² "Children of the Sun," by which Du Bois means black children, refers to a poem written by a black poet, Fenton Johnson, published by *The Crisis* in December 1913. In this poem, Johnson encapsulates the idea that black children possessed within them great potential to carry the race upward.

³ W.E.B. Du Bois, "The True Brownies," *The Crisis*, October 1919.

⁴ Bertie Lee Hall's letter in "The Jury," *The Brownies' Book*, July 1921.

affection and we shall not forget that in America they are unhappy, and on this side of the ocean we shall do all that we can to help them.”⁵ Though Gabrielle’s race remains unclear, she was likely the child of one or two black expatriate parents, bringing to light the trend of black emigration to Western Europe during the 1920s and 30s to escape America’s severe, institutionalized racism. Furthermore, her letter demonstrates the “universal love and brotherhood” that the magazine sought to teach instead of fostering contempt for other races.

For the price of a dollar and a half a year or fifteen cents a copy (and an additional twenty-five cents for international subscriptions), *The Brownies’ Book* offered black children - from California to Oklahoma to New York and beyond - an entertaining, educational, and inspirational body of literature free of the grotesque depictions of black people found in mainstream children’s literature of the time. It published a variety of material including songs, short stories, photographs, drawings, news, biographies of prominent black figures, African folktales, and poems. Black authors, illustrators, and children submitted many of these, and depicted black characters in a positive manner. *The Brownies’ Book* frequently included advertisements, typically for works of black literature, such as *Unsung Heroes* by Elizabeth Ross Haynes, published by Du Bois and Dill, Publishers in 1921. Each issue of *The Brownies’ Book* featured seven regular columns for children, and one column for adults: *The Jury*, *The Judge*, *As the Crow Flies*, *Playtime*, *Little People of the Month*, *Our Little Friends*, and *The Grown-Ups’ Corner*. The periodical published children’s letters to the editors in *The Jury*. In these letters, the children introduce themselves, request certain stories or topics they want to be included in future issues, and ask questions. Written monthly by Fauset posing as a grandfather figure, *The Judge* served as the magazine’s advice column that addressed wide-ranging issues black children

⁵ Gabrielle Gonay’s letter in “The Jury,” *The Brownies’ Book*, February 1920.

experienced. In *As the Crow Flies*, Du Bois, a regular columnist, sought to inform children about current events happening worldwide, and encourage social and political awareness and responsibility. *Playtime* offered intellectually stimulating puzzles, songs, and games. *Little People of the Month* highlighted the achievements of black children in school, music, writing, art, sports, and community service with the intention of inspiring readers. The *Our Little Friends* section compiled photographs of young readers and their siblings, and lastly, *The Grown-Ups' Corner* featured letters and suggestions from parents. *The Grown-Ups' Corner* reveals how children - many of whom read with their parents - were not the only intended audience for the periodical.

The Brownies' Book came about at an interesting point in time for mainstream children's literature, American race relations, and black publishing, and it certainly reflected the epoch. The preceding year, 1919, brought the first National Children's Book Week. The 19th century saw the steady rise in popularity of children's books, leading to a period commonly regarded as the "Golden Age" of children's literature, spanning from around 1865 to 1924. Whites created this body of mainstream children's literature with white children in mind, as its overtly racist messages, imagery, and discriminatory nature – revealed through notorious works such as *The Strange Tale of Ten Little Nigger Boys* – suggest.⁶ Racial tensions boiled over during the Progressive Era, which lasted from approximately 1890 to 1920 and preceded the New Negro Era - also referred to as the Harlem Renaissance - of the 1920s. Racial violence against blacks reached a high point in the early 20th century as race riots and increased lynching exploded in the 'Red Summer' of 1919, a summer marked by the killing of hundreds of black people by whites. In spite of the racism and discrimination, *The Brownies' Book* emerged at the tail-end of a successful period for black

⁶ The Pilgrims, *The Strange Tale of Ten Little Nigger Boys* (Chicago: M.A. Donohue & Company, 1900)

publishing, marked by the flourishing of black magazines and newspapers. Jean Marie Lutes specifies, "Between 1895 and 1915, more African American newspapers — some twelve hundred — were launched than in any other era of American history."⁷ During the lifespan of *The Brownies' Book*, between the years 1920 and 1921, the country entered a brief yet sharp economic recession brought on by the end of World War I in 1918. The return of American troops caused a massive influx of workers into the civilian labor force, consequent wage reduction, and the rise of unemployment, all of which triggered The Depression of 1920 to 1921 among other factors. Due to this recession, *The Brownies' Book* struggled to gain enough subscriptions to sustain activity, which resulted in its eventual decline by the end of 1921.

Also during the years of the magazine, the New Negro Movement, driven by the desire to reinvent the Negro and transcend limiting stereotypes of blacks, was in full motion. Characterized by the rising popularity of Negro culture and the blossoming of black creative art, the New Negro Era of the 1920s marked a new age in which many people, regardless of race, sought to break free from Victorian norms – except for *The Brownies' Book*, which held on to many of these traditional norms. Due to the peculiar positioning of *The Brownies Book* at a temporal overlap between the Progressive and New Negro eras, this study does not contextualize the magazine in specifically one era or the other; rather, it contextualizes *The Brownies Book* within the relevant movements of both periods, in addition to situating it within the context of Progressive Era mainstream children's literature. These relevant movements include Progressivism, Racial Uplift, and the New Negro Movement, which are discussed in the following paragraphs.

During the crucial three to four decades preceding *The Brownies Book* - years spanning The Gilded Age and the Progressive Era - the emancipation of enslaved blacks, post-Civil War

⁷ Jean Marie Lutes, "Beyond the Bounds of the Book: Periodical Studies and Women Writers of the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *Legacy* 27, 2 (2010): 336-56. 337.

urbanization, Reconstruction, immigration, industrialization, growing class and racial conflict, poverty affecting mostly immigrants and blacks, World War I, and the mass northward migration of black people seeking social and economic opportunity in industrial cities triggered a period of social upheaval in America. The country could no longer ignore the destitute children, the dangers of child labor, urban crime, and rising social tensions. These issues led white middle-class social reformers – progressives - to attempt to restore order through progressive reform. A desperate “search for order” and national advancement defined the era as the chaos of the period threatened both social coherence and national identity.⁸ Immigrants, twenty-four million of whom arrived before World War I from mostly Eastern and Southern Europe, posed the largest threat to national identity. Anti-foreign sentiment was strong during this time, particularly against Eastern Europe and immigrants from the region who, despite looking white, were perceived as “other” by American whites. When World War I began in 1914, which the United States entered in 1917, white progressives launched Americanization programs to assimilate the recent immigrants.⁹ Anti-foreign sentiment intensified toward the end of World War I during the first “Red Scare,” a period of hysteria across America characterized by the widespread fear of the spread of communism following the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.

The Progressive Era also saw an increasing focus on children, whom progressives believed could carry the country to a better future. Americans, regardless of race, fought to ensure a “right to childhood” for American children. This focus on children gives insight as to why the “Golden Age” of children’s literature in America came about when it did. Progressives thought that assuring the wellbeing of (white) children and molding them into the idealized, happy, healthy, “good citizens”

⁸ James Marten, *Children and Youth during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2014) 2.

⁹ Marten, *Children and Youth during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, 4.

would hold together the social fabric tearing before their eyes, and assure the current and future wellbeing of the country. 1912 brought the founding of the Children's Bureau, the first national government-created agency in the world dedicated specifically to the welfare of children. The slogan, "The health of the child is the power of the nation," which appeared on a World War I poster endorsed by The Children's Bureau in 1918 (see **Figure 2**), encapsulates the belief in the importance of the health of (white) American children to the welfare of America as a nation, while highlighting the contributions of the agency to the war effort.¹⁰ As the image below shows, the poster exclusively features white children. This reflects how the bureau protected the welfare and childhood of this group only.



Figure 2. This figure features the World War I poster, "The health of the child is the power of the nation: Children's Year, April 1918 - April 1919," by Francis Luis Mora. The bottom reads, "United States Children's Bureau and Woman's Committee of the Council of National Defense."

While the strengthening of national identity and citizenship were pressing issues for progressives, these efforts excluded blacks.

¹⁰ Francis Luis Mora, "The health of the child is the power of the nation: Children's Year, April 1918 - April 1919," Poster, (New York, NY: The W. F. Powers Co., Litho., 1918). Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.

During the turbulent and violent Progressive era, it became increasingly evident that Reconstruction - the period following the Civil War that rendered African Americans cautiously optimistic due to novel opportunities for black mobilization and for social progression after emancipation – had failed to secure the basic civil rights of blacks as ‘citizens’ of America. Government-implemented restrictions that followed the Civil War, such as Jim Crow¹¹ and disenfranchisement, reversed black people’s gains from Reconstruction. This led to a profound questioning of black people’s place in America’s white-dominated society, one that deemed blacks and their peculiar position between ‘enslaved’ and ‘true citizen’ problematic. Whites refused to integrate blacks into their social, political, and economic spheres because they viewed them as socially and genetically inferior, and therefore unfit to receive the full advantages of citizenship. As whites continued to strip blacks of their rights, their dignity, and their humanity, black race activists took it upon themselves to ensure the advancement of all blacks in America.

There was no unitary vision for racial progress. The Racial Uplift Movement involved various strategies backed by diverse ideologies to uplift black people as a race. As these strategies were proposed to serve the collective interest of blacks in America and resolve the country’s “Negro problem,” the Racial Uplift Movement depended upon the idea of black people sharing both a collective identity and fate. The discourse surrounding the movement fell into four main political ideologies: Pan-Africanism, nationalism, accommodationism, and integrationism. Black race activists often identified with more than one of these ideologies, even if they conflicted. Pan-Africanism, the official doctrine of the NAACP, asserted not only the shared history but also the shared fate of all black people, including native Africans on the African continent or people of African descent dispersed during the diaspora. Pan-Africanists believed black people to comprise a single “race” that

¹¹ Jim Crow was a set of southern laws enacted in the 1880s to enforce racial segregation.

shared a common culture, and defended that unity around African heritage was vital for the overall success of black people everywhere. Black nationalism, which also fostered the idea of shared cultural blackness, stressed black political solidarity and the embracing of one's roots. The ideology's main objective was to uplift the race without sacrificing ethnic distinctiveness and ties to African heritage. Nationalism's subcategory, black separatism, offered a more radical strategy for nationalistic uplift that involved the complete separation of blacks and whites in different nations. In complete opposition to integrationists, separatists saw full integration of blacks in America as a delusional vision and considered striving to reach that point a futile effort. Marcus Garvey, a black activist and intellectual from Jamaica who founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association in 1912 to unite all blacks dispersed by the African Diaspora, believed that the creation of an all-black nation in Africa would secure the best collective fate for blacks everywhere. Garveyism, a global movement inspired by Pan-Africanist and black nationalist thought, gained thousands of followers during its peak in the 1920s. Accommodationism - notably backed by Booker T. Washington - argued that in order for black people to better their condition in the quickest fashion, they ought to temporarily accept discrimination, forge social peace with white people, and become self-sufficient through vocational training and industrial work. Accommodationist uplift was gradual, and prioritized preparing blacks to be competent members of a growing capitalist society. Many activists, especially the integrationists, charged this ideology with accommodating white superiority and asking blacks to temporarily settle with the little that they were given.

The three creators of *The Brownies Book* endorsed the integrationist vision of racial uplift, and sought to integrate blacks into the larger white society. The black elites' integrationist vision involved fighting for and attaining civil rights by proving to whites that blacks shared the same values, integrated well, and deserved immediate respect and equal rights. Elite integrationists,

privileged and highly educated themselves, advocated for higher education rather than vocational training. More out of touch with working class blacks than other groups, such as accommodationists, black elite integrationists created an intraracial class divide as their ideology relied heavily on the “Talented Tenth”¹² to uplift the race to white middle-class standards. The movement was also largely assimilationist. In this thesis, ‘assimilationism’ refers to the ideology that emphasizes cultural assimilation and conforming to white standards in order to integrate and attain civil rights. Assimilationists were integrationists, though not all integrationists were assimilationists. Du Bois, for example, was an integrationist who claimed to be against cultural assimilation as a strategy due to his black nationalist belief in preserving black ethnic and cultural distinctiveness; his actions and his magazine, however, demonstrate both nationalist and assimilationist tendencies. This ideological inconsistency demonstrates the complexity of “double consciousness,” an idea that asserts the inherent dual nature of black Americans in which their identity is divided into “black” and “American.” Furthermore, the idea states that blacks have the ability to perceive themselves through the eyes of whites. Many black integrationists, such as Du Bois, struggled to balance two contradictory goals, typically black nationalist and assimilationist.

Throughout the Progressive Era and during the active years of *The Brownies' Book*, which caught the very beginning of the New Negro Era, elite integrationists' primary strategy to ensure black people's welfare in America involved focusing on conservative intraracial reform to reconstruct the collective image of black people into one that was wholly positive and suited their bourgeois, assimilationist (yet also black nationalist) vision of “black respectability.” This new, refined image of blacks that embodied white middle-class ideals constituted the integrationist “New Negro.” This figure refuted the pervasive and inescapable racist stereotypes

¹² The “Talented Tenth” refers to the small group comprised of the black elite, the educated and “best” of the race.

of blacks reproduced by all areas of American culture, society, and politics. Mainstream children's literature of the era, for example, reinforced anti-black racist beliefs in young minds through either degrading and ridiculing blacks in storylines and illustrations or through completely omitting black characters altogether. This body of literature depicted blacks as miscreants: thieves, fools, and beings distinctly and fundamentally different from and inferior to whites. Elite integrationists developed *The Brownies' Book* especially for "The Children of the Sun" not only out of the genuine necessity for children's literature dedicated to the nurturing of black children and the celebration of black ethnic distinctiveness – the nationalist component – but also out of the desire to politicize black children and cultivate a young "New Negro" generation capable of uplifting the race and transcending the stereotypes – the integrationist component. *The Brownies' Book*, with its exclusively positive portrayal of blacks, provided a counterbalance to these racist depictions.

Although *The Brownies' Book*, as a magazine created by and for black people, stood out among works of mainstream children's literature, it still closely aligned with works of the white-washed genre in a few notable ways. This thesis argues that *The Brownies' Book* embodied the black elite integrationists' image-conscious and class-conscious vision of racial uplift through its emulation of works of mainstream children's literature, particularly in its assimilative socialization of black children with white middle-class ideals, its reproduction of beauty norms in favor of whiteness, and its adoption of the European fairy-tale tradition. Furthermore, as its integrationism often conflicted with its inherent nationalist goals of empowering blacks as a collective and embracing shared African roots, *The Brownies' Book* exhibits a unique push and pull dynamic between black nationalism and integrationism, and the empowerment and inadvertent disempowerment of blacks.

As few scholars have devoted studies specifically to *The Brownies' Book*, this study takes into account the following works. In *Once Upon a Time in a Different World: Issues and Ideas in African American Children's Literature*, Neal A. Lester mentions *The Brownie's Book* as a catalyst for liberating change in children's literature. He also argues that black children's literature provides a way for people to study ideology, constructions of power, and frequent pedagogical oppression. In *Children's Literature of the Harlem Renaissance*, Katharine Capshaw Smith considers the creation of *The Brownies' Book* primarily as a strategy to advance political plans such as the NAACP's anti-lynching agenda in response to the 'Red Summer' of 1919. Violet J. Harris' "Race Consciousness, Refinement, and Radicalism: Socialization in *The Brownies' Book*" discusses the ways in which the New Negro philosophy influenced *The Brownies' Book's* composition. She argues that the magazine served to encourage its young readers to devote themselves to the racial uplift movement, and that breaking the selective tradition of children's literature reflects New Negro philosophy through its oppositional nature. "The *Brownies' Book* and *Ebony Jr.*: Literature as a Mirror of the Afro-American Experience," Courtney Vaughn-Roberson and Brenda Hill propose that *The Brownies' Book* is rooted in the ideals of uplift ideology, specifically African and Afro-American heritage, Afro-American unity, racial consciousness, and a rising emphasis on values, education, and gender roles. In "Once Upon a time in Aframerica: The "Peculiar" Significance of Fairies in *The Brownies' Book*," Fern Kory discusses the literary-historical context of fairies and folk tales in children's literature, and argues that incorporating fairies into *The Brownies' Book* served as a means of responding to the Eurocentric, Western canon of children's literature.

This thesis contains three sections arranged thematically, based on the three ways that *The Brownies' Book* reflected elite integrationism. The first section, entitled, "Assimilative

Socialization in *The Brownies' Book*,” discusses how the periodical – and children’s literature as a whole – served as a tool to socialize and reinforce socio-cultural ideals. It argues that the magazine promoted the conservative, Victorian - and outdated - values of the white gentry class to socialize a young “New Negro” generation that conformed to white bourgeois standards. In doing so, it aligned with mainstream children’s literature of the Progressive Era, which promoted the same values. The second section, “The Reinforcement of Racial Biases,” shows how *The Brownies' Book* reinforced certain prejudices, particularly with regards to white beauty standards. This inadvertently complicated the magazine’s stated, nationalist intentions to empower its young black readers and encourage them to embrace their black identity. The section argues that the magazine’s problematic reproduction of biases stemmed from both the conscious assimilationist desire to conform to white standards and deeply internalized racism. The third section, “Fairies in *The Brownies' Book* as Symbols of Assimilationism,” discusses the magazine’s adoption of elements from the European literary fairy tale, and asserts the significance of the fairy figure as a representation of elite integrationists’ assimilationist vision.

Assimilative Socialization in *The Brownies' Book*

Regardless of how imaginative and wildly unreal a children’s story may seem, children’s literature is never innocent or completely removed from reality; rather, behind the fairies, the rhymes, and the seemingly carefree nature of children’s literature, works within the genre are deeply founded in the specific societies to which their authors belong and play a particularly crucial role in child development. In addition to its value as a form of entertainment, children’s literature holds the responsibility of teaching children how to be functioning members of the older generation’s society. Authors of the genre strategically design their works to convey the particular values, attitudes, morals, and other information that they believe children need in order

to succeed within their cultures or societies. This reveals one of the principal functions of *The Brownies' Book* and of children's literature as a whole: to serve as a means of socialization and reinforce certain socio-cultural ideals of an older generation. Du Bois and the integrationist contributors to *The Brownies' Book* took advantage of the fundamental function of children's literature to socialize children as a way to shape young black readers to fit their vision of the "New Negro." This section explores how *The Brownies' Book* promoted conservative middle-class values congruent with those promoted in mainstream children's literature of the Progressive Era to advance the integrationist "New Negro" movement.

Literature has long served as a socializing agent, especially for children. One can argue that for as long as literature has existed it sustained this function, while oral tales - the predecessor to literary fiction - functioned in the same manner to distinguish desirable from unacceptable behavior and impart values onto its audience. MacLeod writes, "When American writers undertook the moral and social instruction of children through fiction, they necessarily documented their own attitudes, both conscious and unconscious, toward childhood and society."¹³ Since individuals possess a system of beliefs, morals, and biased perception of the world around them based on how they were socialized, inevitably, and often unconsciously, writers weave these values and beliefs into the fabric of their writing. Children, inexperienced, ignorant about what the world expects of them and have yet to grasp their society's unique code of ethics and conduct, receive and internalize these messages exceptionally well because they have all to learn and nothing yet to unlearn. Child readers – the primary targets of socialization through literature – are therefore easily shaped until they learn with age and exposure to different situations to not only form but also trust their own beliefs and judgments.

¹³ Anne Scott MacLeod, *American Childhood: Essays on Children's Literature of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1994) 93.

The Brownies' Book, which Harris argues “represents one of the first literary manifestoes to explicate the socialization function of literature for Black children,” focused on conservative socialization and promoted a normative code of ethics and behavior.¹⁴ A regular column written by Jessie Fauset entitled, “The Judge,” demonstrates one of the most visible ways in which the magazine taught children social norms and values. It served as the magazine’s advice column and features an elderly man, the Judge, whose wisdom supplemented the guidance of parents. In it, he addresses the issues - including prejudice, how to dress, how to solve arguments, and understanding the value of education - faced by its fictional characters, children William, Billie, Wilhelmina, and Billikins. The children in this column belong to the black middle-class as demonstrated by their mention of French lessons and leisure time among other signifiers.¹⁵ One can assume that the Judge belongs to the same socioeconomic class or higher given his title, which suggests that the Judge taught bourgeois values and lessons applicable to the lifestyles of his specific class. Their privileged status immediately differentiates them from the vast majority of blacks who were not as economically stable, educated, and independent. In the very first issue of *The Brownies' Book*, the Judge introduces himself:

I am the Judge. I am very old. I know all things except a few, and I have been appointed by the King to sit in the Court of Children and tell them the law and listen to what they have to say. The law is old and musty and needs sadly to be changed. In time the children will change it, but now it is the law.¹⁶

This “law” of which the Judge speaks is a system of general societal rules. Following this code of ethics and behavior would, as Harris words it, “ultimately lead to the shaping of the refined

¹⁴ Violet J. Harris, “Race Consciousness, Refinement, and Radicalism: Socialization in *The Brownies' Book*,” *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 14, no. 4 (Winter 1989) 192.

¹⁵ Jessie Fauset, “The Judge,” *The Brownies' Book*, October 1920.

¹⁶ Jessie Fauset, “The Judge,” *The Brownies' Book*, January 1920.

youth, a refined colored youth who was politicized.”¹⁷ He says though, that the law is “old and musty” – outdated – which speaks to how *The Brownies’ Book* held on to Victorian ideals of gentility and respectability in spite of the modernizing times. One way that “The Judge” demonstrates the outdatedness of “the law” and the need to change it is in Fauset posing as a male in order to be a wise judge. It displays the normative gender biases and gendered occupations inscribed into “the law”; however, the children will change “the law” once they possess the skills and the power to form their new world.

Though his purpose was didactic, the Judge avoids an authoritarian approach to teaching these rules. The following excerpt illustrates how the Judge advised the young characters:

We understand that among individuals like us we can all get on a good deal better if we do not lie and steal and fight. If we are just honest and kind and try to teach each other we can get the Best for All and yet keep the peace and our own self-respect.¹⁸

Here, the Judge responds to Billikin’s assertion that in politics one must lie, cheat, and steal. He stresses the importance of honesty and respect, qualities that show good character.

A poem entitled, “Whole Duty of Children,” by Robert Louis Stevenson offers another example of *The Brownies’ Book* emphasizing the importance of morality and behavioral refinement. It reads:

A child should always say what's true,
And speak when he is spoken to,
And behave mannerly at table,
At least, as far as he is able.¹⁹

This brief poem, written by a white author and originally published in *A Child’s Garden of Verses* in 1885, concisely dictates to children how they should behave.²⁰ According to

¹⁷ Harris, “Race Consciousness, Refinement, and Radicalism,” 194.

¹⁸ Jessie Fauset, “The Judge,” *The Brownies’ Book*, August 1920.

¹⁹ Robert Louis Stevenson, “Whole Duty of Children,” *The Brownies’ Book*, January 1920.

²⁰ Robert Louis Stevenson, *A Child’s Garden of Verses* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1885)

Stevenson, ‘proper’ comportment involved speaking when spoken to, using one’s manners, and telling the truth. The very first issue of *The Brownies’ Book* featuring this poem, written in Victorian Era England by a white author for a popular children’s book, reveals from the beginning the publishers’ intentions of guiding the development of black children toward Victorian gentility.

‘Proper’ comportment also involved respectable, conservative dress. *The Brownies’ Book* aimed to show its readers how to dress presentably, which it achieved in large part through its photographs. The impeccably dressed children featured in the magazine’s *Our Little Friends* section, which contained a compilation of photographs of young readers and their siblings as demonstrated by the image on the title page of this thesis, served as positive examples for the young readers. The visibly privileged children are carefully posed in elegant garments and clean shoes. Many appear to be in professional photography studios or participating in bourgeois activities, such as violin concerts, that required formal attire. Very rarely does a child appear in casual clothing except for in certain pictures of boys participating in outdoor activities such as caddying; instead, boys often sport bowties and suits, and girls have on dresses and bows.

The periodical promoted highly traditional gender roles and expression. Gender, as Hunt defines it, refers to the “characteristics given to individuals through ‘nurture,’ rather than the physical sex characteristics given by ‘nature.’”²¹ Although people did not recognize gender as a social construct in 1920, external influences such as children’s literature played a crucial role in the development of a child’s gender expression and perceived role in society based on gender. While some *Brownies’ Book* stories involved either a girl or a boy, most of the content featured both girls and boys with very clear distinctions between the two genders. “The Little Orphans,” a

²¹ Peter Hunt, *Understanding Children's Literature* (London: Routledge, 1999) 179.

playlet by Daisy Cargile Reed, demonstrates this difference in gender construction of girls and boys. The scene, which takes place at a toyshop, opens with a number of boys “dressed in overalls, all busy with tools, making toys.”²² A woman enters looking to buy an expensive toy that would please her spoiled son. The toymaker offers to bring the boy a mechanical doll and as the boy and his mother wait, two orphan children - a boy and a girl - enter seeking bread, happiness, and a loving home. The boy eventually rejects the toymaker's doll, choosing instead to take the orphan boy home as a playmate. These are the last two lines of the playlet:

Boy: Say, Ma, may I take this boy home? I want someone to play with. I want a sure-enough boy to play with. I don't want all those dolls. They're for girls to play with. What's the use of boxing gloves, and nobody to box? What's the use of a base-ball bat, and nobody to play ball with? Come on home with me, boy, and we will be pals! [GIRL ORPHAN clings to brother.]

Woman: Well, of all things! Then we'll take home both children, and the little girl can have these pretty toys and dolls, and we'll have a very happy family.

The excerpt illustrates the normative idea of boys' and girls' interests and what they should and should not play with. As it clearly states, dolls are “for girls to play with”; boys should box or play baseball - “boy games.” The mother reinforces this idea by saying, “the little girl can have these pretty toys and dolls.” Additionally, differences in gender construction relegated boys and girls to different spheres; for example, there are no girls in the toy workshop since working with tools was a “masculine” activity.

Many stories, however, such as “A Girl's Will,” challenged gender biases with regards to education and intelligence.²³ The story begins with two young black girls, Helen and the narrator, who are about to graduate from high school and discuss their plans for the future. The narrator admits, “I could talk of nothing but the wonderful career I expected to have in college the next year, for my parents were ‘well-to-do.’” Helen, however, is poor, and the narrator

²² Daisy Cargile Reed, “The Little Orphans,” *The Brownies' Book*, May 1920.

²³ Ella T. Madden, “A Girl's Will,” *The Brownies' Book*, February 1920.

assumes that she will not attend college due to her lack of funds. Helen clarifies, “But I am going to college... I am going to college and I am going to become the greatest teacher that ever was... Booker T. Washington worked his way through Hampton and Robert Dent is working his way...” Helen’s career aspirations demonstrate how many young women of her time viewed teaching as a respectable profession for their gender. The narrator responds to Helen, “Yes, but they were all boys.” Helen replies, “And I’m a girl... and as smart as any boy. Dad said so... I can do anything I want to, if I want to hard enough.” Her reply illustrates how the magazine countered the gendered associations between smartness and masculinity, and encouraged females to receive a college education since elite integrationists believed only educated blacks could uplift the race.

At the same time, the rest of the story advocated for traditional gender roles and expression. Helen becomes valedictorian of her high school class, an academic feat that exceeds gender expectations; nevertheless, the narrator makes sure to include that she still looks “sweet and girlish in her cotton voile dress” at commencement, just as a respectable girl “must.” When Helen’s mother suddenly dies of malaria, Helen must abandon her plans to save money and go to college in order to take her mother’s place in the household. The narrator says, “She did not allow even her father to realize what the sacrifice of her plans meant to her. She cooked and scrubbed and washed and ironed and cared for her swiftly aging father and little brothers and sisters with loving devotion. The little house was spick and span, the children happy and contented.” Helen’s obligation to take over the household duties and sacrifice her only chance to go to college shows how women and girls were expected to take charge of the domestic sphere. Males, such as Helen’s father, “who had all he could do to support his wife and seven children,” provided for the household.

The lyrics to the folk dance, “Hey! Lassie,” demonstrate the same principles. The boys say:

HEY! Lassie, will you kindly have me?
Here are gloves to wear, if you will have me.

To which the girls respond:

Yes, Laddie, I'll be glad to have you, —
I'll wash and sew, too, when I have you;
You're from the East; I'm from the West;
We'll have a home, cosy [*sic*] as a birdie's nest.²⁴

“Hey! Lassie” portrays hetero-normative gender roles in which a boy “courts” a girl, offering her material items - in this case, gloves - which represents the role of males to provide economically for their families. On the other hand, females contributed domestically, demonstrated here through the mention of washing, sewing, and creating a home “cozy as a birdie’s nest.” However, this arrangement exposes a class divide as it did not apply to the typical lower-class family in which women – and even children – had no choice but to work to support their families.

Children’s literature from the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era - *The Brownies’ Book* included - promoted Victorian era values and norms embraced by the white gentry class. As Harris explains, “The gentry class consisted of ‘cultured’ individuals who espoused traditional values such as truth, honor, temperance, prudence, justice, polite speech, culture, refinement, and discipline.”²⁵ It also advocated normative gender construction. One particular page that appeared in a 1907 issue of *St. Nicholas* magazine, the white, mainstream analog to *The Brownies’ Book* than ran from 1873 to 1940, illustrates some of these values that *The Brownies’ Book* also

²⁴ Helen Fauset Lanning, “Hey! Lassie,” *The Brownies’ Book*, February 1920.

²⁵ Harris, “Race Consciousness, Refinement, and Radicalism,” 192.

endorsed. An advertisement on this page for an occasional series of articles demonstrates the differing constructions of boyhood and girlhood. The top of the page reads:

“HISTORIC BOYHOODS”

Describing the boy life of some of the world’s greatest men.²⁶

Boyhood, as this advertisement reveals, was a socially accepted construction wherein boys were steered away from “girly” activities to “all-boy” activities that would make them men. The articles - including “Naval Divers and their Work,” “The Underseas Sailor and his Boat,” “The Wondrous Diamond Caves of Kimberley,” “Cooking Without Fire,” and “Famous Alpine Guides,” to name a few of the titles listed - served to inspire young boys to partake in adventurous activities in which some of the “world’s greatest men” participated. Such activities were meant to satisfy boys’ ‘natural’ appetite for outdoor exploration.

Furthermore, *St. Nicholas* praised the historic role model figures for their discipline, diligence, honesty, and bravery among other qualities. “The Boyhood of Michael Angelo,” for example, tells readers that the artist, “from the outset...pursued his studies, as well as the apprentice work assigned to him, with the utmost earnestness and activity.”²⁷ The author then asserts the value of diligence by stating, “Behind every work of genius, whether book, picture, or engine, is an amount of labor and pains – yes, and of *pain* – that would have frightened off a weak spirit.” In doing so, he emphasizes to children the importance of building strength and good character during childhood.

On the same page beneath “Historic Boyhoods” appears advertisements for “Hints and Helps for Mother,” “For Very Little Folk,” as well as two photographs of girls that contrast the construction of “boyhood” and masculinity. “Hints and Helps for Mother,” an article by Lina and

²⁶ “St. Nicholas for 1908,” *St. Nicholas: An Illustrated Magazine for Young Folks*, November 1907.

²⁷ Alexander Black, “The Boyhood of Michael Angelo,” *St. Nicholas: An Illustrated Magazine for Young Folks*, January 1891.

Adelia B. Beard provided information on “what may be done with visiting cards... how to decorate a Christmas tree beautifully, with ornaments and novelties entirely home-made.” This reinforces the idea that crafts and home-keeping belong in the female sphere as “Hey! Lassie” does as well. The paragraph on “For Very Little Folk” speaks of “stories for mothers to read to the little ones,” again, relegating women to domestic roles in stark juxtaposition to the way the advertisement directly above it encourages boys to participate in non-domestic, outdoor activities. Lastly, the illustrations of the girls on the page portray them as elegant, refined, and proper, drawn with bows in their hair and with one sitting cross-legged reading a book. Clad in clean and frilly dresses, the depiction of these girls contrasts the image of adventure-seeking boys.

Comparing how *The Brownies' Book* and *St. Nicholas* socialized their readers exposes many shared, class-based values; however, despite these shared values with the black elite integrationists, the gentry class instilled anti-black racist beliefs in young minds. Harris elaborates, “The selective tradition espoused by these individuals included racial intolerance, institutionalized discrimination, and social inequity.”²⁸ Mainstream children’s literature taught white children to see themselves as superior to blacks. Meanwhile, it taught black children – the ones who had the time and the money to read – to think lowly of themselves through constant ridicule, and to understand their place in society as the “caretakers of whites.”²⁹ The infamous nursery rhyme, *The Strange Tale of Ten Little Nigger Boys* demonstrates this idea of the white gentry class’ racist socialization of children.³⁰ Published in 1900 by M.A. Donohue & Company, the book taught children how to count through series of events that “humorously” eliminated caricatures of black boys one by one, counting down until only one remained. It sent a message

²⁸ Harris, “Race Consciousness, Refinement, and Radicalism,” 192.

²⁹ Harris, “Race Consciousness, Refinement, and Radicalism,” 192.

³⁰ The Pilgrims, *The Strange Tale of Ten Little Nigger Boys*.

to white children that it was completely acceptable, amusing, and harmless to degrade black people, which highlights the incredibly racist nature of the times.

The historical context of early 20th century America explains why children's literature of that era taught the values and lessons that it did. Children's fiction reflects the specific historical period in which the works were created and reading between the lines reveals a story that can say more than what an author consciously wrote. According to MacLeod, "What the fiction speaks of is not so much what happened in the period as what many quite representative middle-class Americans *felt* about what was happening. It tells of their pride in the United States and in its institutions and its recent past, and it says much about their hopes for the future."³¹ It also projects early 20th century America's unique concerns, insecurities, and anxieties. As the introduction explained, a variety of factors, such as the decline of rural America, immigration, and growing class and racial conflict, sent the nation into a state of social and political unrest during the Progressive Era. Consequently, white middle-class progressives sought to regain control of the nation and strengthen national identity through progressive social reform. One way that the Progressive movement, which picked up speed in the late 1880s and persisted throughout the first twenty years of the 20th century, tried to fix the disorder ailing America was by shifting focus onto America's youth.³² In an attempt to bring order, governments, reformers, manufacturers and writers invested in shaping the development of white American children.

Mainstream children's literature produced during the Progressive Era revealed the influence of Progressive ideology, social consciousness, and an attempt to handle stresses and uncertainties. For example, as MacLeod elaborates, urbanization and "the conditions of the middle-class urban boyhood – sedentary pursuits, pervasive feminine influences, and prolonged

³¹ MacLeod, *American Childhood: Essays on Children's Literature of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 93.

³² Marten, *Children and Youth during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, 9.

dependency – raised widespread fears that the boys were growing up weak in physique and will power.”³³ Therefore, there was a growing push to make boys more “masculine,” which explains why “Historic Boyhoods” appeared and strongly encouraged boys’ participation in rugged, outdoor activities. As MacCann argues, children’s literature - due to its function as a socializing agent - served as “a means of stabilizing social assumptions that were under some strain.”³⁴

Historical context is crucial to understanding why the values and norms that mainstream children’s literature promoted in the Progressive Era demonstrate a conscious effort to steer children away from delinquency, and mold them into the kind of “exemplary citizen” that the middle-class reformers believed the nation needed to strengthen.

Blacks and their wellbeing did not fit into the predominantly white progressive reform movement. Marten explains this by stating, “[black people’s] race and their location in the rural South rendered them more or less invisible to many reformers”; however, blacks inhabited urban environments, too. As war efforts created a demand for industrial laborers, thousands of rural blacks from the South moved to urban industrial neighborhoods in the North, which gave them increasing visibility.³⁵ Black urbanization conjured sociocultural turbulence involving racial, gender-based, and class-based anxieties, and black and white moral panic. Integrationists of the black “gentry class” developed their own reform agenda and policed the behavior of black people.³⁶ Their particular social reform reflected their intraracial, class-based anxieties. Eventually, just as progressives turned their efforts toward white children, the uplift movement made the wellbeing of black children - the future “race leaders” - a primary focus of their efforts.

³³ David Macleod, “Act Your Age: Boyhood, Adolescence, and the Rise of the Boy Scouts of America,” *Journal of Social History* 16, no. 2 (Winter 1982): 3-20, 3.

³⁴ Donnarae MacCann, *White Supremacy in Children’s Literature: Characterizations of African Americans, 1830-1900* (New York: Routledge, 2001) xiv.

³⁵ Marten, *Children and Youth during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, 13.

³⁶ Harris, “Race Consciousness, Refinement, and Radicalism,” 193.

While mainstream children's literature of the Progressive Era was imbued with progressive ideology and characterized by social consciousness, *The Brownies' Book*, which emerged toward the end of that era, was imbued with integrationist uplift ideology characterized by racial, social, and class consciousness. As Sarland argues, "all writing is ideological since all writing either assumes values even when not overtly espousing them, or is produced and also read within a social and cultural framework which is inevitably suffused with...ideology."³⁷ In the case of *The Brownies' Book*, the periodical overtly espoused assimilationist "New Negro" values. The integrationist "New Negro," "a self-conscious creation of Blacks themselves," engaged in 'proper' behavior that conformed to 'white' middle-class standards, particularly regarding gender, comportment, and morality; this explains why *The Brownies' Book* focused on controlling these specific areas.

The normative portrayal of gender in *The Brownies' Book* speaks to the imposed normativity of the black uplift movement. Black elites - from Garveyists to accommodationists to integrationists - placed an enormous emphasis on heterosexuality, traditional gender roles and expression, and a patriarchal societal structure resembling the powerful white patriarchy. They turned to the heavy policing of gender and sexual expression to counter the stereotype portraying black people as hypersexual and sexually deviant beings.³⁸

Furthermore, the black elite engaged in a highly gendered discourse of racial uplift that divided female and male spheres in society. Integrationist leaders assigned women to family-centered, domestic, 'race mothering' roles that fit within the boundaries of 'respectable ladyhood.' Black women found themselves under more pressure than men to uphold high moral

³⁷ Charles Sarland, "The Impossibility of Innocence: Ideology Politics, and Children's Literature," in *Understanding Children's Literature* ed. Peter Hunt (London: Routledge, 1999) 41.

³⁸ Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (University of North Carolina Press, 2004) 74.

standing lest they hurt their *entire* race, while integrationist reformers expected black women to serve as the pillars supporting the foundation for the racial uplift movements.³⁹ Additionally, however, women were encouraged to receive an education and have a respectable career to fully embody the ideal, educated, cultured “New Negro woman.” This explains why *The Brownies’ Book* heavily stressed the importance of education and career aspiration for both girls and boys. While *The Brownies’ Book* trained black girls for their position as future ‘race mothers,’ it taught boys to be masculine, strong race leaders.

Black uplift reformers monitored the behavior and morality of black people and taught children a specific white-middle class code of ethics and behavior to combat the idea of blacks as an unrefined, immoral race. They sought to demonstrate their equality to whites by exhibiting an elegant display of “blackness” that conformed to ‘white’ standards and abided by the strict politics of respectability. Returning to the excerpt from “The Judge” discussed earlier that addresses the harm in lying, cheating, and stealing, these actions were associated with both the lower class and black people. Most blacks found themselves in the lower-class. Though teaching against immorality was valuable to all regardless of race, the black elite actively strove to dissociate perceived lower-class qualities such as corruptness or crudeness from “blackness” by “shaping their fictional response, in part, to meet threats posed by alternative belief systems.”⁴⁰ Alternate, racist belief systems found in all areas of American mainstream culture posed an enormous threat to the advancement of black people as a whole.

There are visible parallels between the social uplift efforts of Progressive reform and integrationist reform: just as white reformers shifted focus onto molding children into respectable, functioning individuals who would uplift the nation, black integrationists shifted

³⁹ Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation*, 75.

⁴⁰ MacCann, *White Supremacy in Children’s Literature*, xv.

focus onto molding black children into respectable, functioning individuals who would uplift the race and counter racist beliefs. However, there was a fundamental difference between the strategic socialization of children by black integrationist reformers and white Progressive reformers. This difference was in positioning: bourgeois whites, who set in place all the standards and rules in America, stood on higher ground than blacks whether they reformed or not, while blacks - citizens merely on paper –faced an uphill battle, reforming to win recognition as respectable citizens.

Ultimately, the close alignment of middle-class conservative values that *The Brownies' Book* taught to its “Children of the Sun” with those in mainstream children’s literature reflects the fears, insecurities, and anxieties of black integrationists that arose from being regarded as the inferior race. It is understandable why *The Brownies' Book* took the approach that it did to shape children into the black “ideal,” though the inherent issue with its assimilative socialization is that it imposed bourgeois standards and a limiting collective identity and expression to achieve a largely unrealistic goal.

The Reinforcement of Racial Biases

As section one discusses, children’s literature takes on the crucial role of educating the young on the social intricacies and dominant values of a certain society during a particular time. Black integrationist authors revealed the shared, traditional, and often outdated values of the white gentry class within the pages of *The Brownies' Book*, some of which - such as the value of kindness - did not directly relate to race. At the same time, many dominant beliefs and values contributed to the systemic oppression of blacks. Some of these normalized, pervasive racial biases and prejudices managed to infiltrate even *The Brownies' Book*, undermining the magazine’s vision of cultivating within black youth a sense of racial pride and self-love. The

conscious efforts of *The Brownies' Book* to promote white middle-class ideals, dispel stereotypes, and integrate blacks - though well intended - resulted in the reinforcement of certain biases. These biases, most notably concerning the idealization of white feminine beauty and the dichotomy of “good” and “bad” hair, intertwined inextricably with both race and power. By bringing to the forefront this complex issue within *The Brownies' Book*, section two reveals yet another way that the magazine reveals assimilationist ideology through its alignment with certain ideals presented in mainstream children’s literature. The reproduction of beauty biases in favor of whiteness resulted not only from a conscious desire to conform to white standards, but also from a deep, subconscious internalization of racism.

“Beauty” was not merely a concept, but also a social issue. The first of the seven stated objectives of *The Brownies' Book*, which Du Bois articulated in his article for *The Crisis* entitled, “The True Brownies,” concerned teaching children to recognize the inherent beauty of black people. That teaching children about black beauty appeared first on the list of objectives immediately identifies physical appearance as an important subject to the magazine’s creators and readers alike, and reveals the magazine’s black nationalist side. In his list of objectives, Du Bois states that *The Brownies' Book* sought “To make colored children realize that being colored [was] a normal, beautiful thing.”⁴¹ In contrast, Mary Mapes Dodge, the editor of the comparable *St. Nicholas* magazine, included no such objective of making white children realize that being white was “a normal, beautiful thing” in her similar list of goals.⁴² This crucial difference speaks to the racial beauty bias on which this section focuses.

Though developing positive self-image was an important issue for all children regardless of race, white children had an advantage over black children because they did not have to worry

⁴¹ Du Bois, “The True Brownies.”

⁴² Mary Mapes Dodge, “Children's Magazines,” *Scribner's Monthly*, July 1873.

about the color of their skin as a “negative” feature. ‘White’ set the beauty standard. Beloved children’s stories, such as *A Little Princess* from 1905, placed their white characters on a pedestal of beauty - a pedestal that had no room for black characters. For example, although Sara, the white protagonist of *A Little Princess*, openly denies her own beauty, other characters see her as beautiful. Sara describes her idea of a beautiful girl, which does not differ from popular opinion, remarking, “Colonel Grange's little girl, Isobel, is beautiful. She has dimples and rose-colored cheeks, and long hair the color of gold.”⁴³ The narrator describes this combination of features - atypical to black children - as “the beauty of the regiment.” All aspects of American culture defined beauty in a white, Eurocentric context, and the white beauty ideal so deeply ingrained in societal belief made convincing people of the normalcy and beauty of whiteness wholly unnecessary.

The creators of *The Brownies’ Book* sought to teach children that being black did not inhibit a person from being beautiful and that black *was* beautiful because mainstream American culture repeatedly rejected the normalcy and beauty of blackness. In contrast, the relatively few children's stories that prominently featured black characters - such as *The Story of Little Black Sambo*, a popular book published in England in 1899 and in America in 1900 - mocked, exaggerated, and stereotyped the physical appearance of black people.⁴⁴ Although Sambo was Indian, *The Story of Little Black Sambo* was a typical “pickaninny”⁴⁵ tale hurtful to black children’s self-image as Bannerman drew upon popular stereotypes of black physicality in illustrating him. The illustrations of its black characters tended toward the grotesque. Bannerman gave Sambo, his mother, Mambo, and his father, Jambo enormous red lips, wide smiles, and bulging white eyes that juxtaposed with their tar-colored skin. While black children who read

⁴³ Frances Hodgson Burnett, *A Little Princess* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1905) 6.

⁴⁴ Helen Bannerman, *The Story of Little Black Sambo* (London: Grant Richards, 1899).

⁴⁵ “Pickaninny” is a derogatory term referring to a black boy or a racist caricature of a black child.

such stories learned to view themselves, their color, and their features as unappealing and inferior, white children learned to perpetuate the mockery of black people, and developed feelings of superiority.

The messages conveyed by children's literature surrounding race as it related to beauty influenced the way that children understood beauty as well as how they perceived their own appearances. In a letter to the editors of *The Brownies' Book*, Alice Martin, a young girl from Philadelphia, demonstrates a typical black child-reader's acute awareness of the link between race and beauty. She writes:

Sometimes in school I feel so badly. In the geography lesson we read about the different people who live in the world, all the pictures are pretty, nice-looking men and women, except for the Africans. They always look so ugly. I don't mean to make fun of them, for I am not pretty myself; but I know not all colored people look like me. I see lots of ugly white people too; but not all white people look like them, and they are not the ones they put in the geography...⁴⁶

Alice's remark that the Africans in her textbook "always look so ugly" demonstrates the bias in favor of whites in the depiction and perception of race and beauty, a critical issue in children's literature. Though Alice does not specify what about the Africans she found "ugly," the textbook likely featured depictions of them that exaggerated certain features, dehumanized them, and rendered them inferior in an aesthetic sense to the white people in the book. She questions why only the "ugly" Africans are shown, acknowledging the existence of black people better looking than both herself and how they appear in the textbook. Likewise, she acknowledges the existence of "ugly" white people, and questions their exclusively positive portrayal in the textbook. In doing so, she reveals her consciousness of the inequality she faces both in and out of literature regarding issues of physical appearance and race.

⁴⁶ Alice Martin, "Letter," *The Brownies' Book*, June 1920.

Disgraceful visual depictions of black people, in contrast to the positive ones of whites in popular literature, contributed to the associations formed in early-childhood of “white” with beauty, and the perceived mutual exclusivity of “black” and “beautiful.” Alice woefully admits, “I am not pretty myself,” a comment both sad and troubling to hear from a young girl since physical appearance has such a significant impact on the self-esteem of children and adults alike. This is especially true for females in patriarchal societies, who experience enormous, unfair, and detrimental societal pressure to fit established beauty standards. It is not abnormal, though, for girls, regardless of race, to admit that they do not think of themselves as pretty. Sara from *The Little Princess*, for instance, does not consider herself pretty; however, black girls have long seen themselves as less attractive than whites, or unattractive in general, because they are black. Alice likely learned to associate her black features with physical unattractiveness, and a story published in *St. Nicholas* entitled, *Marth’ Ann of the Evergreens, a Leader of a Band of Piccaninnies*, by Ruth McEnery Stuart, illustrates this idea.⁴⁷ The narrator reveals that Martha’ Ann, the black protagonist, often wondered, “Why were some born white and some black? Why would the good Lord, who could make so beautiful a child as Gladys [*a white girl*], think out a plain, kinky-haired brown piccaninny like herself?” The narrator then adds, “Just because of her color Marth’ Ann thought herself ugly, but never was a child more mistaken... [she had] a beautiful head quite in keeping with her straight, symmetrical body.” Marth’ Ann had called herself a “plain, kinky-haired brown piccaninny” in an act of self-deprecation, which planted or reinforced the association in young readers of the traits, kinky-haired and brown, with negativity. At the same time, the narrator praises the girl’s appearance, though this is more so as if Marth’ Ann represented an exception to the rest. There is a reason given, after all, explaining why

⁴⁷ Ruth McEnery Stuart, “Marth’ Ann of the Evergreens, a Leader of a Band of Piccaninnies,” *St. Nicholas: An Illustrated Magazine for Young Folks*, January 1901.

she thought herself ugly: her color, as the narrator specifies. This signifies that she both received and internalized societal messages that said black was ugly.

The Brownies' Book completely avoided grotesquely drawn caricatures of black people found in other pieces of literature in part to ameliorate the issue that Alice, the fictional Marth' Ann, and many others faced. Doing so gave black children the opportunity to see people of their race portrayed and perceived positively. Furthermore, black beauty and acceptable appearance were prominent components of integrationist racial uplift. The integrationist goal of recreating black people's overall image included fighting the stereotype of blacks as unkempt, lazy, and unhygienic – adjectives associated with the state of black people's natural hair and skin.⁴⁸ This speaks to why all the children featured in *The Brownies' Book* photographs appear impeccably dressed, groomed, and refined. Integrationist leaders understood that cultivating positive self-image in black children would lead to increased self-esteem and healthy development, and result in strong race leaders who would challenge negative stereotypes of blacks.

In spite of its efforts and its successes - which must not go unappreciated - *The Brownies' Book* did not always succeed in cultivating positive self-image for all black children. “Dolly’s Dream,”⁴⁹ a story written by Nora Waring for the November, 1920 issue of *The Brownies' Book*, reveals how a story that appears as a purely positive display of black beauty in *The Brownies' Book* reflects implicit beauty bias and conflicting messages. Waring’s aim for *Dolly’s Dream*, consistent with one of the main objectives of *The Brownies' Book*, was to instill in children a sense of racial pride and love for their own blackness. Her story is an exceptionally strong piece of evidence because it simultaneously showcases *The Brownies Book’s* intentions and

⁴⁸ Laretta Henderson, *Ebony Jr! : The Rise, Fall, and Return of a Black Children's Magazine* (Scarecrow Press, 2008) 83.

⁴⁹ Nora Waring, “Dolly’s Dream,” *The Brownies' Book*, November 1920.

complications, and addresses both colorism - intraracial prejudice favoring lighter skin color - and conformity to 'white' beauty ideals. It also highlights how *The Brownies' Book*, like mainstream children's literature, emphasized the physical appearance of girls more than boys, revealing the gendered aspect of racial beauty discourse.

The protagonist of "Dolly's Dream" is a six-year-old black girl named Dorothy who goes by the name, "Dolly." Dolly, described as having "soft, 'cwickly' curls" and brown skin, loves playing with her dolls, but she adores one doll more than all the rest: the white one with the "long golden curls." Longing for her favorite doll's locks, she makes a wish to trade her hair for smooth, light hair. Seeing as mainstream children's literature and general norms of the time placed white girls, with their light hair and light eyes, on a pedestal of beauty, and that brown dolls were rarer and perceived as less "pretty," many of the black girls reading *Dolly's Dream* likely identified with Dolly and her wish. The narrator clarifies with the reader, "of course as you know golden curls belong to people with pinky white skin and blue, blue eyes," but Dolly does not understand that wishing for blond hair would also give her light skin and transform her exterior entirely. A fairy godmother appears in the middle of the night to grant her wish, not only giving her long, blonde curls but also white skin and blue eyes; however, Dolly is oblivious to the complete transformation caused by receiving the blonde curls she wished for. Eventually, after realizing that nobody recognizes her, Dolly decides she would rather be her normal self. A fit of screaming and crying ensues, leading her mother to come to her bedside and reassure her that she has only been dreaming, and that her "pretty black curls are just the same." The story ends with Dolly saying, "I am so glad it was all a dream and I just love my 'cwickly' black curls." From beginning to end, the reader sees as the protagonist evolves from wanting the hair of her white doll to embracing her black, curly hair, which symbolizes her black identity.

Although the story ends happily with Dolly embracing her natural hair, Dolly's light complexion and hair texture complicate the intended moral that one should embrace his or her blackness and the features that come with it. The narrator describes her skin as "rosy tan," which falls on the lighter end of a scale that ranges to dark brown. Additionally, her hair is described as soft ringlets, which are also visible in the story's one photograph. These features imply Dolly's mixed race identity. The vast majority of African-Americans had some European ancestry as a result of both the rampant sexual exploitation of enslaved people and mutually-desired interracial relationships (which did occur), which explains the significant phenotypic variation in hair texture and skin color of African-Americans; however, the most prominent hair phenotype within the African-American population remained that of a texture often described as "kinky,"⁵⁰ or a more racially-charged term, "nappy."⁵¹ Dolly's loose ringlets and light brown skin more closely resembled the white ideal than the "bad," "kinky" hair and dark skin attacked by racist mainstream culture.

As Waring demonstrates with her choice of Dolly's features, colorism is present in *The Brownies' Book*. Waring could have used her story to empower darker children with socially-rejected "Negro hair," as it was called at the time, by giving Dolly those features; however, her choice of light brown skin over dark, and mixed hair type over unmixed to argue that black is beautiful only further supports the idea that underlying beauty biases exist throughout the magazine. Though there are dark-skinned children shown throughout the magazine, a large portion of the children - male and female - not only appear to have light skin but also very mixed features, despite the black and white nature of the photos. Some of them may have even been

⁵⁰ "Kinky" describes hair with curls so tight that it has a 'wooly' appearance.

⁵¹ Neal A. Lester, *Once Upon a Time in a Different World: Issues and Ideas in African American Children's Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2011) 83.

able to “pass”⁵² as white and deny their African roots, which *The Brownies’ Book*, influenced by Du Bois’ black nationalism, did not want blacks to do. Additionally, the girls in portraits generally wore their hair either pressed and curled or in a natural, mixed state of loose, smooth curls or waves. One photo, published in the December 1920 “Little People of the Month” section, for example, captured twenty-one members of the Victory Girls’ Musical, Literary and Debating Society. Not a single girl in the photograph has “kinky” curls, and half have light skin.⁵³ Girls who are not visibly mixed with white seldom appear with their hair naturally curly, though they are occasionally represented in the magazine.

Given that many of *The Brownies’ Book* readers were middle-class or higher, this discrepancy may have been due in part to the demographic of the magazine’s privileged readership. As Lester explains, “Hair has long been a social marker for gender, race, and even class.”⁵⁴ Black people with lighter skin, “good” hair, and other European features – especially if they were light enough to pass for white - had more opportunities for social mobility. They were generally wealthier, which allowed them to participate in bourgeois activities or afford the one dollar and fifty cents yearly subscription fee to Du Bois’ elite magazine. Those with flowing hair who were not visibly mixed belonged to the privileged class of blacks - further indicated by their clothing - that tended to follow integrationists’ strict politics of respectability. Class offers one explanation for the high frequency of smooth hair and light skin in the magazine, in addition to the general societal preference for these features and the pressure to adjust one’s appearance accordingly. Furthermore, hair straightening – an act of concealing one’s African heritage rather

⁵² Passing for white occurs when a person of multiracial ancestry possesses the phenotypes that allow him or her to assimilate into the white majority. This typically happens within a social system that practices hypodescent, where a mixed child is assigned to the minority ethnic group rather than the dominant one. Hypodescent explains why people who were half black or even one-eighth black were categorized as just black, even if they looked white.

⁵³ “Little People of the Month,” *The Brownies’ Book*, December 1920.

⁵⁴ Lester, *Once Upon a Time in a Different World*, 99.

than embracing it, facilitated passing for those who were light enough. For those who were darker and could not pass, this assimilative act eased fitting in.

In a more overt display of racial beauty bias, *The Brownies' Book* published content such as the notable recurring advertisement entitled, “The Gift of the Good Fairy,” for Madame C.J. Walker's “Superfine Preparations for the Hair and for the Skin.”⁵⁵ Deemed by many as “the most successful female entrepreneur of her time,”⁵⁶ Madame C.J. Walker is recognized as the nation's first black millionaire and its first female self-made millionaire. She takes credit for developing a groundbreaking system to relax black women's hair using a combination of her original serums and hot irons, making it possible for black women with “kinky” hair to adopt this coveted feature and gain “the social acceptance unavailable to those with “kinky” hair and other so-called ‘African’ features.”⁵⁷ She claimed that the preparations would “make beautiful the unfortunate ones whom nature had not given long, wavy hair and a smooth, lovely complexion,”⁵⁸ directly implying that black girls with short, curly hair and lacking a “smooth, lovely complexion” were not beautiful in their natural state.

Moreover, the prominently displayed “Good Fairy” character in the advertisement was white, which carries enormous significance because of the message it, and Madame C.J. Walker, who was black, sends - that white women, such as the fairy, possessed the features, the social acceptance, and the power that black women longed for. The white fairy's ability to bestow upon unfortunate-looking black girls the gift of “beauty” demonstrates the superiority-inferiority dynamic between whites and blacks. Through repeatedly endorsing Walker's “Superfine

⁵⁵ Madame C.J. Walker, “The Gift of the Good Fairy,” *The Brownies' Book*, November 1921, Back Cover.

⁵⁶ Edward Glaeser, *Triumph of the City: How Our Best Invention Makes Us Richer, Smarter, Greener, Healthier, and Happier* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011) 75.

⁵⁷ Kathleen Morgan Drowne and Patrick Huber, *The 1920's* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004) 108.

⁵⁸ Walker, “The Gift of the Good Fairy.”

Preparations for the Hair and for the Skin,” *The Brownies’ Book* continued the tradition in and out of mainstream children’s literature of elevating white standards of beauty while lowering the value of natural black beauty. It encouraged black children to accept and conform to white standards in order gain respectability, while undermining the magazine’s intentions of getting black children to love themselves and their natural features.

Though the advertisement disempowered darker children, children with “kinky” hair, and less affluent children who could not afford straightening or lightening serums, neither Madame C.J. Walker nor the creators of *The Brownies’ Book* were truly at fault - in fact, they were victims, weakened, themselves, by prejudice. Their reinforcement of the beauty bias demonstrates the effect of internalized prejudice underlying the construction of the integrationist New Negro. Conforming to white standards of beauty, such as through hair pressing, served as a cultural marker to show whites that blacks were no less refined and civilized than they were. This, in turn, reinforced the belief that untreated hair was unacceptable and showed lack of refinement, resulting in the rejection of this “inferior” trait. Dianne Johnson describes the theme of black hair as “the site of struggle between the African and the Western.”⁵⁹ The common decision to straighten one’s hair or lighten one’s skin invokes Du Bois’ idea of double consciousness, which Cornel West eloquently describes as being caught “between a quest for white approval and acceptance and an endeavor to overcome the internalized association of blackness with inferiority.”⁶⁰ As Du Bois suggests, the peculiar ability of black people to see themselves through the eyes of whites renders them conscious of the fact that every part of

⁵⁹ Dianne Johnson, "Hairitage: Women Writing Race in Children's Literature," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 28, no. 2 (2009): 337-55, 338.

⁶⁰ Cornel West, "The New Cultural Politics of Difference," in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Culture* ed. Russell Ferguson (Routledge, 1991) 28.

themselves - including their hair - is judged by a white mainstream gaze.⁶¹ This awareness led to the dilemma of both the integrationist wanting to abandon the attributes associated with black inferiority to gain white approval and the nationalist wanting to preserve connections to black heritage, identity, and pride. The choice between losing part of oneself to fit in and remaining problematic and inferior in the eyes of whites proved enormously challenging.

In a country that had long ridiculed their features, blacks, under enormous pressure to adhere to white standards of beauty, faced feelings of inferiority that led many to seek ways to get closer to the white ideal and gain power. As Ronald E. Halls states, “It was virtually inevitable that [people] of color in the United States... would idealize the Eurocentric standard of beauty in their desire to emulate celebrated attributes.”⁶² Walker provided a means to more easily emulate these attributes, creating her products out of a feeling of necessity and inferiority. People demanded her products - believing they needed them - enough to both make her a millionaire and create an entire industry surrounding black beauty. Females were not the only consumers of this industry; black males also straightened their hair using lye, a dangerous, corrosive chemical, and underwent physical pain to achieve a sleek look, such as the “conk” hairstyle.⁶³ Hair straightening developed into a thriving national phenomenon, demonstrating the widespread internalization of the idea that black features were issues in need of “fixing.” As it is difficult to love the things that others constantly point out as flaws, black integrationists thought that fixing their so-called flaws would help them gain acceptance and fit in with mainstream white society. In addition, “hair that was closer to the appearance of the powerful - that is, white hair - was

⁶¹ W. E. B. Du Bois, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," in *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co.) 1903.

⁶² Ronald E. Hall, *Historical Analysis of Skin Color Discrimination in America: Victimism Among Victim Group Populations* (New York, NY: Springer, 2010) 56.

⁶³ The “conk” was a popular hairstyle among black men from the 1920s to the 1960s. Achieving this style involved relaxing one’s hair with lye, risking chemical burns and permanent scarring.

coveted by the powerless” because of the undeniable link between appearance and power: the more closely one resembled those in power (the lighter one’s skin and the sleeker one’s hair), the more privilege and power one held in society.⁶⁴

The Brownies’ Book demonstrates a dynamic of loving and rejecting natural black beauty. On the one hand, the magazine undoubtedly deserves commendation for its genuine attempt to portray black people and characters positively. On the other hand, though it appears to fight the discriminatory pedestal of beauty that favored those with “rose-colored cheeks, and long hair the color of gold,” it still reproduced beauty biases favoring white ideals because white features possessed power, and following white norms facilitated integration. Additionally, the creators of *The Brownies’ Book* were not immune to the internalization of prejudice and the pressure to meet the standards of the ones in power. The ironic reproduction of these biases by those who fought fervently to change the social order shows how deeply ingrained these beliefs were in American culture, and speaks to the deep level at which black people internalized racism.

Fairies in *The Brownies’ Book* as Symbols of Assimilationism

One of the most notable aspects of *The Brownies’ Book* is the frequent appearance of fairies and its appropriation of elements from the literary fairy tale tradition. Section two introduces two of these ethereal characters that appear in “Dolly’s Dream” and in Madame C.J. Walker's advertisement, “The Gift of the Good Fairy.” The fairies in *The Brownies’ Book* epitomize the fusion of politics and lighthearted children’s entertainment, and are greatly symbolic with regards to the elite uplift movement. Deeply rooted in the intersection of race, power, beauty, and the assimilationist component of the uplift movement, the fairy figure symbolizes the manifestation of elite

⁶⁴ Johnson, “Hairitage,” 340.

integrationists' strategic assimilationism in *The Brownies' Book*. Through a discussion of "brownies," an analysis of fairies as they relate to race and beauty, and a historical overview of the rise of fairies in American literary culture, this section not only explores how fairies symbolized assimilationism, but also how the incorporation of fairies allowed *The Brownies' Book* to assimilate into the discriminatory western canon of children's literature while splashing color onto one of the genre's staple traditions.

The explanation of the complex connection between *The Brownies' Book*, assimilationism, fairies, race, power, and mainstream children's literature begins with the magazine's title. A 'brownie' is an elf-like creature of Scottish folklore who emerges at night to complete unfinished chores in exchange for food, milk, and cream.⁶⁵ This elf-like fairy inspired the title of *The Brownies' Book*. Shortly before the launch of *The Brownies' Book*, Du Bois announced in "The True Brownies" that the magazine "[would] be called, naturally, *The Brownies' Book*."⁶⁶ This choice of title seems ironic, seeing as the brownie from folklore is a fairy that comes out at night to do housework and therefore closely resembles a servant. Du Bois referring to black children as the "True Brownies," appears at first to relegate them to their usual portrayal in mainstream children's literature as servants to whites, contradicting the magazine's aims to inspire black children to reach higher than society wanted them to and reinforcing the association of black people with servitude. This, though, was not the case. Du Bois chose not to appropriate the negative aspects of the folkloric brownie when adopting it for *The Brownies' Book*, and therefore, Du Bois' brownies were not figures confined to domestic servitude.

What Du Bois did retain from the brownies of folklore - and what explains in part why Du Bois chose to adopt the brownie for this magazine - was this particular fairy's commonalities with

⁶⁵ Daniel Hahn, "Brownie," in *The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015) 96.

⁶⁶ Du Bois, "The True Brownies."

black people, specifically its “dual nature.”⁶⁷ While characterizations of the folkloric brownie include “industrious and helpful... [and] capable of affection and even devotion,” they also include “tricksy, touchy,... easily driven away” and capable of “active mischief” and danger.”⁶⁸ Their duality evokes what Du Bois calls, “double consciousness,” which suggests the inherent duality of black people, and proposes the idea that black people struggle to reconcile the two parts of their identity - being black and being American. The fairy’s dual nature, in addition to its name’s emphasis on the color brown, made it a fitting icon for a magazine for black children.

In naming the magazine, “The Brownies’ Book,” and adopting this famed fairy character, popularized in America by Juliana Horatia Ewing’s *The Brownies and other Tales* and Palmer Cox’s *The Brownies* series in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Du Bois demonstrates assimilationism, but with an added twist. Cox’s *The Brownies* books had led to a national commercial phenomenon (albeit one that had more or less calmed down by 1920) in which brownies appeared in forms outside of literature such as toys, games, and household items. Inspired by Ewing’s helpful brownies in *The Brownies and other Tales*, the Girls Scouts changed the title of their junior girl guides from ‘Rosebuds’ to ‘Brownies’ in 1918, and their first handbook, created in 1920, included a shortened version of Ewing’s story.⁶⁹ Despite how, in keeping with the era’s tendency to omit blacks from children’s literature, the brownie stories of the mainstream rejected black children as subject matter and implied audience, Du Bois intentionally adopted one of the most visible figures of popular culture and in doing so, he conformed, on the surface level, with the mainstream. Beneath the surface, however, he reworked the popular brownie by engaging in “an act of African American signification

⁶⁷ K.M. Briggs, *Fairies in Tradition and Literature* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967) 38.

⁶⁸ Briggs, *Fairies in Tradition and Literature*, 28, 90, 39.

⁶⁹ Fern Kory, “Once upon a Time in Aframerica: The “Peculiar” Significance of Fairies in *The Brownies’ Book*,” *The Keep* (2001) 98.

in an oppressive literary-historical context.”⁷⁰ One scholar, Theodore Mason, explains the act of signification, stating that one signifies *on* something “by copying central elements of practices, even while revising them in some significant way.” Mason continues, “The repetition implicit in this form of signifying criticizes or extends the previous and frequently... white literary or cultural source by setting it within the context of African American expressive culture.”⁷¹ The twist to Du Bois’ assimilationism here is the adoption, subtle reworking, and critique of the oppressive and discriminatory brownie figure by making the brownie represent the black children it had originally rejected.

Additionally, “The Brownies’ Book” signifies on the title of a leading children’s magazine, *St. Nicholas* - an analog to *The Brownies’ Book* - whose title refers to a northern European, white-bearded, fairy-like creature who brings presents to good children (Santa Claus). The magazine’s mostly white, privileged readership could relate to and appreciate this icon more than any other demographic. In featuring a fairy-like creature in its title, *The Brownies’ Book* mimicked *St. Nicholas*. This act of signification occurred, quite literally, with a color difference, due to the emphasis on “brown” in Du Bois’ title. Despite its European roots, Du Bois’ earthy, brown, laborious fairy purposefully contrasts the jolly, white, fat St. Nicholas of the rival magazine in a title that ultimately fits in smoothly with those of other works of mainstream children’s literature.

Aside from the appropriation and reworking of the brownie of Scottish folklore, *The Brownies’ Book* drew heavily from traditional fairy tale elements for many of its stories, revolutionizing them by adding black characters to the exclusively white fairy tale genre. Nora Waring’s “Dolly’s Dream,”⁷² the story discussed in section two, illustrates how *The Brownies’ Book*

⁷⁰ Kory, “Once upon a Time in Aframerica,” 96.

⁷¹ Theodore O. Mason, Jr., “Signifying,” in *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience* (Oxford University Press, 2005) 756.

⁷² Waring, “Dolly’s Dream.”

added color to a recognizable form of children's literature by replacing the usual white protagonists found in mainstream stories with black ones, and by addressing issues specifically relevant to black children. To provide a brief reminder, the plot involves a young, middle-class black girl, Dolly, who wishes for long, blonde curls like her favorite doll's. A fairy godmother of an unspecified race appears to grant Dolly's wish, transforming her into a white girl whom nobody recognizes despite how hard she tries to convince her friends and family that she is Dolly. Eventually, Dolly wakes up from this nightmare of being unrecognizable to her loved ones to realize she had only been dreaming. In a "happy ending," Dolly exclaims that she loves her hair the way it is, 'cwinkly' and black. The story aimed to teach black children to embrace their black identity.

Though "Dolly's Dream" is not exactly a literary fairy tale since, as the ending reveals, the fairy encounter occurred in a dream instead of in the story's "reality," its fairy tale-inspired elements are clear. On a structural level, Dolly's dream largely follows the standard fairy tale progression: the narrator introduces Dolly in general terms, she then encounters a challenge or metamorphosis, she experiences difficulty coping with the adversity or perceived danger stemming from said challenge, attempts to find a way out of his or her dire situation, and then the story terminates in the way many fairy tales do - in a happy ending. On a more easily recognizable level, the presence of the fairy godmother immediately ties the story to the fairy tale genre. The narrator describes to the reader "a tall, beautiful lady, clad in the most wonderful dress Dolly had ever seen," who appears to Dolly, who then asks, "Are you my Fairy Godmother?" This question reveals Dolly's familiarity with the concept of fairy godmothers, probably having encountered fairies of this sort in popular children's books at some point during early childhood. Consistent with existing fairy godmother storylines, such as that of the late 17th century tale of Cinderella, Dolly's fairy possesses the supernatural ability to grant any

wish.⁷³ With a gentle touch of Dolly's head with her magic wand, she grants Dolly's wish and transforms her into a white girl only to vanish immediately after. When Waring chose to adopt basic structural elements of the traditional fairytale genre, she appears to have also adopted the race of the fairies of mainstream literature who were almost exclusively white. Though it remains uncertain, this "tall, beautiful lady" is probably white.

Although Waring does not mention the race of Dolly's fairy godmother, one tends to assume the fairy is white because mainstream children's literature established white as the default race - the "normal," standard race. One very similar fairy story to "Dolly's Dream" that *St. Nicholas* published in 1882, "Tinkey," shows how easily and commonly mainstream children's stories propagated the idea of "implied whiteness" demonstrated in "Dolly's Dream."⁷⁴ The story begins with a school boy, Tinkey, who, instead of studying his lessons as he is supposed to, lounges about reading a fairy tale. Once the hour he was supposed to devote to his studies passes, he exclaims, "I wish there were fairies nowadays!" Suddenly, "A little old woman in a scarlet cloak, a black pointed hat, and tiny high-heeled shoes" appears to him and says that she is a fairy. The woman reveals that she intends to grant the very first wish he makes and that he must take great care in choosing a wish. After she disappears from sight, Tinkey impulsively blurts out, "I wish I was that red-and-white calf under the willow, and need n't go to school!" Within a second, his body transforms into that of a calf. Trouble and panic ensue as Tinkey realizes the severe consequences of his wish. He is unable to talk or attend school, and neither his schoolmates nor his own family recognize him as a calf. After great efforts to escape ending up at the butcher, he begs the fairy to change him back into a boy. With a wave of her wand, she grants him another wish. This story not only shows how "Dolly's Dream," the representative fairy story of *The Brownies' Book*, conforms structure-wise with similar mainstream stories, but it

⁷³ Maria Tatar, "Why Fairy Tales Matter: The Performative and the Transformative," *Western Folklore* 69, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 55-64, 57.

⁷⁴ S.A. Shields, "Tinkey," *St. Nicholas*, July 1882.

also uncovers a larger, racial issue in both “Dolly’s Dream” and “Tinkey.” Though the illustrations depict the characters as white, not once does Shields mention race as it pertained to Tinkey, the fairy, or any other of the characters.

Shield’s omission of race indicates that she deemed it unnecessary to specify the race of white characters, or, more specifically that the characters’ whiteness was implied *through* her omission of that detail. This was only possible because mainstream children’s literature, dominated by whites, featured stories about white people far more frequently than those of any other race. Due to this inequality in representation, which speaks to the disparity in privilege and power between whites and people of other races, mainstream children’s literature normalized whiteness to the extent where white became the default race in literature. The normalization of whiteness was a widespread issue; the powerful, learned association between ‘white’ and ‘standard’ or ‘default’ affected not only the authors and readers of *The Brownies’ Book*, but also all authors and readers regardless of race. Though one may attempt to argue that, as a magazine for black children, *The Brownies’ Book* made black the default race, the fact that “implied blackness” simply did not exist as a socially-constructed mental process in the minds of readers invalidates this argument. *The Brownies’ Book* did not have to feature exclusively black characters and had the right to include white fairies in its content, but in implying whiteness through not specifying or hinting at Dolly’s fairy’s race while discussing Dolly’s, it conformed to the norms of discriminatory mainstream children’s literature that privileged whites.

Both in *The Brownies’ Book* and in mainstream children’s literature, people - and most commonly, fairies - are white unless otherwise specified or hinted; this reveals once more the internalization of prejudice by the magazine’s contributors, and provides another example of the magazine’s inadvertent perpetuation of racial bias. White fairies appear throughout the magazine’s numerous stories and poems, such as in “Fairies” by Langston Hughes and “A Visit to Fairyland” by

Bertie Lee Hall, and authors do occasionally give characteristics that hint to race instead of leaving it up to the imagination or illustrations. “A Visit to Fairyland,” for example, written by a white girl around the age of twelve, tells the story of a little black girl named Esther who gets lost in a forest, where she encounters a fairy whose “golden hair” is “bound by a wreath of leaves and daisies.”⁷⁵ The fairy’s hair color suggests that she is white, though Hall does not directly state it. Most often, however, the authors leave the race of these fairies unspecified or reveal them only through illustrations. In “The Story of the Little Tin Horn,” Johnson tells of a boy (of an unspecified race), Tommy, who encounters both “a tiny fairy” and a Fairy Queen on Christmas morning.⁷⁶ Neither of the two fairies’ races are clear in the text, leaving one to imagine them as white. The story’s illustration confirms the presumed race of the fairies and the boy, which supports the claim that not specifying race indicates whiteness. The same occurs in Madame C.J. Walker’s advertisement, “The Gift of the Good Fairy.” The text reads, “Once upon a time there lived a Good Fairy...” and does not state the fairy’s race. Above the text, however, the advertisement prominently displays an illustration of a white fairy with a magic wand in her hand, which she uses to make black children beautiful - though not possibly as beautiful as herself due to the relationship between beauty and race discussed in section two. Why, though, are so many of *The Brownies’ Book* fairies white?

The whiteness of fairies ties into the idea of beauty, which in this case, wholly connects to race and power. The feminine beauty ideal is a prominent component of fairy tales, as demonstrated by the adjectives attached to these fairies.⁷⁷ Children’s literature typically portrays fairies as delicate, ethereal creatures of “beauty,” and both beauty and daintiness were strongly associated with white females because white set the socially-constructed standard for beauty; thus, if a story describes a

⁷⁵ Bertie Lee Hall, “A Visit to Fairyland,” *The Brownies’ Book*, February 1920.

⁷⁶ Georgia Douglas Johnson, “The Story of the Little Tin Horn,” *The Brownies’ Book*, December 1920.

⁷⁷ Lori Baker-Sperry, “The Pervasiveness and Persistence of the Feminine Beauty Ideal in Children’s Fairy Tales,” *Gender & Society* 17, no. 5 (2003): 711

fairy as beautiful, she is probably white unless otherwise indicated. The narrator of “Dolly’s Dream,” for example, describes the presumably white fairy godmother as “a tall, beautiful lady.” The white fairy godmother in “The Gift of the Good Fairy,” drawn as a delicate, angelic creature of nature with butterfly wings, must also be beautiful if she has the power to bestow upon others the gift of beauty. The fairy with the golden hair that Dolly coveted in “A Visit to Fairyland” embodies delicateness, with “shoes... so dainty that they reminded Esther of rose petals” and a “dress [that] seemed to be made of silvery cob-webs.” Fairies and fairy tales in children’s literature propagated the white, feminine beauty ideal. Furthermore, these beautiful and dainty white females quite literally possessed power, which, in a story with black characters, invokes the superiority-inferiority dynamic between races. In having more white fairies than black ones or ones of any other races, *The Brownies’ Book* adheres to the socially-constructed beauty standard idealizing whiteness instead of countering the norms. Furthermore, white fairies gave *The Brownies’ Book* greater opportunity to fit in with mainstream children’s literature.

That *The Brownies’ Book*, which heavily influenced the genre of African American children’s literature, regularly featured fairy stories suggests that the creators of *The Brownies’ Book* saw fairies and the European fairy tale tradition as important elements to the conception of African American children’s literature. Even before the birth of the magazine, fairy poems and magical stories for black children appeared in the annual children’s section of *Crisis* and later, the fairy motif appeared in every one of the twenty-four issues of *The Brownies’ Book*. Fauset, *The Brownies’ Book’s* literary editor, frequently recommended European fairy tales to black children, such as those of the Grimm brothers, as well as a few written by black authors; however, she recommended the European works more enthusiastically than those by black authors concerning black subject matter.⁷⁸ Why, though,

⁷⁸ Kory, “Once upon a Time in Aframerica,” 101.

did black authors consider fairies, specifically those of the European tradition, such an integral part of the magazine and of literature for black children?

The recurring appearance of white fairies in the magazine and in “The Children’s Number” of *The Crisis* reflects an intentional choice to adopt the existing trends and standards of white mainstream culture, and clearly reveals the assimilationist component behind the fairy. The publishers and authors who contributed to *The Brownies’ Book* recognized the fairy motif as one that was recognizable and popular. Not only were fairies “in style” by 1920, but they were also normalized as a staple figure of American children’s literature and of constructions of American childhood. By the early 20th century, many regarded the fairy tale as “the literature of American childhood.” Mainstream works such as *St. Nicholas Magazine*, *The Youth’s Companion*, and Cox’s *The Brownie Books* - three of the most popular children’s series of the late 19th and early 20th centuries - had drawn upon elements of magic, fairies, and elves to enliven their pages decades before the birth of *The Brownies’ Book*, while earlier writers and oral tellers did so centuries before. With the emergence of *St. Nicholas* magazine in 1873, which frequently published fairy stories, tales, and poems, the fairy motif appeared on a more regular basis in children’s literature.⁷⁹ *The Brownies’ Book* readers displayed a general familiarity with the conventional, discriminatory fairy tale as evidenced by their letters to the editor that appear in “The Jury.” One reader writes in the September 1920 issue, “[I can imagine] all the princesses in the fairy-tales standing tall and white in the corners and Tom Thumb and Puss In Boots,” which speaks to an unfortunate truth that fairy princesses of mainstream children’s literature were white but never brown.⁸⁰ The magazine’s fairy stories offered black children access to a nurturing “fairyland” accepting of blackness by adopting the fairy and the fairy tale and adjusted them to better suit an audience of black children by adding black characters

⁷⁹ John Clute and John Grant, “Fairytales” in *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (Macmillan, Mar 15, 1999) 332.

⁸⁰ Sybil Borden’s letter in “The Jury,” *The Brownies’ Book*, September 1920.

and eliminating the derogatory images of black people. At the same time, the magazine's preference for white fairies and European fairy tales speaks to the internalization of the idea that white was better.

Aside from providing black children with a temporary escape into a "fairyland" that welcomed them for a change, the magazine's steadfast attachment to fairies and the fairy tale genre demonstrates three things. First, it demonstrates its publishers' tendency to adopt and tweak existing white literary conventions to better suit a black child audience. Second, it reflects the publishers' efforts to facilitate the integration of black children and the magazine into the white-dominated world of children's literature. Third, it reveals how even with black characters and black cultural subject matter, *The Brownies' Book* did not stray far from the norm. Considering the period's pervasive white superiority in and out of the literary sphere, assimilation of this sort was an understandable choice for a premier black children's periodical in order to defend its rightful place in the all-white world of children's literature and carve out a necessary space for black children in mainstream American culture; however, this strategy also ironically reproduced racist tropes and assumptions common to mainstream children's literature, which shows how the magazine paradoxically empowered and disempowered those it sought to liberate.

Conclusion

With the creation of *The Brownies' Book*, children's literature served as a battleground for issues of race and politics. When white children's authors chose to include black characters in their stories, they perpetuated racial stereotypes and the oppression of blacks by regularly degrading them. Mainstream children's literature offered limited and distorted representations of black people – they featured caricatures, deliberately and shamelessly manipulated by white authors and racist minds, and crafted into perpetual objects of mockery for the monetary and social profit of whites. With only

grotesque caricatures of themselves to see in the whitewashed world of children's literature, black children of the early 20th century learned of their perceived inferiority to whites. This awareness of being regarded as the "inferior race" and the desire to combat racist stereotypes led elite black integrationists, such as Du Bois, to act upon their justified insecurities and construct a positive, refined "New Negro" image based on white, middle-class ideals. Elite black integrationists hoped that this reconceptualized and bourgeois Negro image - which they broadcast to black children through *The Brownies' Book* - would uplift the entire race by demonstrating their deservingness of full, equal citizenship. Their version of racial uplift, driven by class-conscious, assimilationist, yet also nationalist integrationism, manifested itself within the pages of *The Brownies' Book* through the magazine's assimilative socialization of black children, reproduction of beauty norms in favor of whiteness, and adoption of the European fairy-tale tradition. Due to the movement's assimilationist nature, the manifestation of the uplift movement in *The Brownies' Book* resulted in visible similarities between the magazine and works of mainstream children's literature published within the two decades leading up to its creation in 1920.

The Brownies' Book provided a means for integrationists to cultivate the young integrationist "New Negro," a figure that represented the black elite's quest for gentility and embraced the middle-class, conservative values prolonged from the Victorian Era. Early 20th century children's literature promoted the same perspectives as *The Brownies' Book* on gender, refinement, proper dress and behavior, and the values of education and good character. The reason that the magazine could serve as a tool for black integrationists to advance their movement is its inherent power, as a work of literature, to socialize and reinforce socio-cultural ideals, attitudes, norms, values, and social codes. Comparing the bourgeois values and social norms promoted in *The Brownies' Book* to those in similar works of mainstream children's literature, such as *St. Nicholas*, reveals the magazine's

assimilative approach to socialization in which the values, norms, morals, and codes conveyed therein mirrored those promoted in mainstream children's literature of the Progressive Era - with the exception of the overtly racist messages that mainstream works often conveyed. Embodying and promoting these values served as external evidence of black people's respectability. The assimilative socialization of *The Brownies' Book's* readers clearly reflects integrationists' desires to transcend stereotypes through assimilating to middle-class white standards, and to produce a more refined and educated generation of elite black youth to carry the race forward and upward. It also exposes the black elite integrationists' class-based anxieties and deeply-rooted insecurities regarding the perceived weaknesses of the black race – anxieties that stemmed from feelings of inferiority that propelled integrationists to focus on intraracial reform as their principal means to counter racism.

As integrationists created their bourgeois "New Negro," their conscious desire to prove their respectability to whites through intraracial reform ironically reinforced certain biases visible within *The Brownies' Book*, such as the idealization of 'white' beauty. The preference for smooth hair, fair skin, and light eyes dominated in both the realm of mainstream children's literature and outside of it. Meanwhile, blacks with features that displayed their African heritage faced ridicule, degradation, and the rejection of their normalcy. In direct response to the harmful messages sent to black children from all directions regarding their physical inferiority to whites, *The Brownies' Book* sought to make black children realize both the beauty and the normalcy of being black through positively portraying black characters and people.

Despite the black nationalist efforts of *The Brownies' Book* to celebrate African heritage, however, certain aspects of the magazine, such as colorism and the endorsement of Madame C.J. Walker's hair and skin serums, reproduced beauty biases favoring white ideals, and complicated the magazine's intentions of encouraging black children to love themselves and their black

identities. This demonstrates the magazine's internal conflict between assimilative integrationism and nationalism. Ultimately, the reinforcement of this bias was due to the deeply internalized prejudice and consequent feelings of inferiority. "Fixing" one's "problematic" traits through assimilating to white beauty standards demonstrated refinement, and since assimilation allowed one to blend in, it facilitated integration as well. Furthermore, white features possessed power in society, while black features did not, causing the powerless to covet white features.

The fairy – a political figure that directly relates to issues of beauty, race, and the desire to integrate with whites into society - embodies integrationists' strategic assimilationism as a response to how mainstream children's literature omitted or degraded blacks. Beginning with the appropriation of the brownie - the magazine's eponymous figure - and the strategy of signification to critique existing discourse, the magazine's frequent usage of fairies demonstrates how *The Brownies' Book* adopted a staple of white children's literature, splashed color into it, and claimed it for black children, too. Adopting the fairy figure and structural elements from the literary fairy tale tradition allowed *The Brownies' Book* to assimilate into the discriminatory western canon of children's literature with black characters, but without the racist imagery.

Though it splashed color onto the European fairy-tale tradition, it still reinforced certain racist norms of discriminatory mainstream children's literature that privileged whites. For example, in tales, such as "The Story of the Little Tin Horn," the fairy's race remains unspecified until an illustration reveals that the fairy is white. When a story does not specify its white characters' race and leaves it to readers' imaginations, readers tend to assume that these fairies are white because omitting this detail means white, the 'default race' in children's literature. This demonstrates the damaging effect and power of "implied whiteness," a socially-constructed and learned mental process created by unequal representation in children's literature and the normalization of whiteness. In addition, fairies'

portrayals as “beautiful” and “dainty” linked fairies with whiteness, since “white” set the beauty standard. The reproduction of racist norms of discriminatory mainstream children’s literature, including the preference for the European fairy tale tradition and white fairies, shows the extent to which the contributors to *The Brownies’ Book* normalized racism.

In an effort to facilitate the integration of black children and black people as a whole into American mainstream culture, integrationists encouraged conforming to white middle-class standards. As each section has demonstrated, there is something positive yet also disconcerting about *The Brownies’ Book’s* integrationist and assimilationist picture. While elite integrationists had black people’s best interests in mind, their movement’s heavy reliance on the black elite and its imposition of highly specific, bourgeois standards to elevate the race made it so that *The Brownies’ Book* showcased a very narrow - albeit positive, at least - image of black people to counter the also narrow, negative image of blacks in mainstream literature. In embracing a certain, privileged image of blackness while completely omitting the majority of black people in the lower class, the magazine disempowered and ignored blacks who were not middle-class, not yet ‘respectable,’ and thus, ‘problematic.’ This need to portray a highly specific image of black people hindered the magazine from embracing black identity regardless of social status or image, and prevented it from reflecting the diversity - positive or negative - within and among black people. All of its weaknesses, however, reflect the longing, struggles, and the uphill battle blacks faced in order to carve out an equal place for themselves in early 20th century America.

Criticisms aside, *The Brownies’ Book* deserves enormous credit for all it did accomplish as a pioneer work of black children’s literature. Giving black writers and illustrators a platform to publish material, offering black children stories and poems to read, games to play, songs to sing, and illustrations to look at that had positively portrayed black characters, and asserting its place in a

whitewashed sea of overtly racist works of children's literature is no small feat. For that, *The Brownies' Book* holds an important and permanent place in history and in the world of children's literature.

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