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Neighborhood Books of Ezra Jack Keats as a Racial Project: Depictions of Children and Families in Urban Environments

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Neighborhood books of Ezra Jack Keats as a racial project: Depictions of children and families in urban environments

by

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Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

May, 2014

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Anthony Brown, Dr. Cynthia Salinas, Dr. Katherina Payne, Dr. Nancy Rosen for their thoughts and professional reflection on these ideas. I would like to thank my parents and my sister for proofreading my drafts and challenging my arguments. I also want to thank my son and my husband for their patience, flexibility, and unending support.

Abstract

Neighborhood books of Ezra Jack Keats as a racial project: Depictions of children and families in urban environments

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2014

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Abstract: Much of the research and writing about the neighborhood books of Ezra Jack Keats has centered on depictions of his character 'Peter' as a non-racial 'every child,' or on the role of play in his stories. This thesis analyzed Keats's neighborhood books and his research for them within the context of race and class discourses of the 1960s and 1970s. This work used a racial literacy framework and drew on ideas about power inscribed in space and hierarchical representations in children's picture books. This research found Keats's neighborhood books and research materials function as a racial project by constructing a cultural memorial to the atmosphere of the great transformation (Omi & Winant, 1994) and to a systematically produced racialized and classed space (Hankins, et al, 2012). Findings indicate that future research is needed to consider spacial depictions of race and class in picture books, and that there is a need for place-based historical inquiry among elementary students.

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Introduction

This year, Phillip Atiba Goff, et. al. published a study entitled "The Essence of Innocence: Consequences of Dehumanizing Black Children" (2014). In it, researchers found that Black boys are consistently seen as older as and less innocent than their White same-age peers. Study authors proposed that this perception essentially truncates Black boys' childhood and the protections inherent for youth. This research has direct implications in cases such as the shooting of Trayvon Martin in Florida and the discourse surrounding that event. Charles Blow, in an opinion piece for the New York Times, wrote, "The system failed [Trayvon Martin] when the neighborhood watchman grafted on stereotypes the moment he saw him, ascribing motive and behavior and intent and criminal history to a boy who was just walking home" (Blow, 2013). This kind of research has significance in matters of law enforcement and the judicial system, but it also reminds professionals who work with children or with schools of the incredible importance in how children—and the neighborhoods in which they live—are portrayed. In an interview regarding his research, Goff commented, "[T]he problem is we rarely see our Black children with the basic human privilege of getting to act like children…We need to portray Black boys in the state of childhood so that we can protect them in that state and keep them in that state before the early onset of adulthood that all parents fear for their kids" (Martin, 2014). The way we portray children matters, and not just a little bit.

Ezra Jack Keats wrote stories which focused on the universal concerns of children including "the joys and sorrows of a snowy day, inviting friends to a birthday party, participating in the local pet show, the problems created by a new sibling" (Silvey, 2002, p. 9). His Caldecott Award winning book *The Snowy Day* (Keats, 1962) remains on the Publishers Weekly All Time Bestselling Children's Books list, nestled among classics such as *Caps for Sale* (Slobodkina, 1940) and the *Babar* books (Roback & Britton, 2001). His books are cited in children's literature and textbooks as exemplars of collage and urban settings (Glazer & Giorgis, 2005; Hunt, Ray, & Bannister, 1996), and in a chapter on realism describing how Keats' work had the ideological impact of "making space for groups and issues that had thus far been absent from children's fiction (Rudd, 2010, p. 67). Despite its publication over fifty years ago, *The Snowy Day* was cited as one of teachers' top books for children in a 2007 survey by the National Education Association, indicating its popularity in the classroom.

This study focused on the neighborhood books of Ezra Jack Keats. In it, I found that Keats's books complicate child characters' race and class in important and lasting ways. I also found that details in the neighborhood setting represent urbanity in our cultural memory as a place of struggle but also a place of community.

The Snowy Day (1962), *Peter's Chair* (1967), *Louie* (1975)—these works are used in early childhood classrooms across the United States, but so far little has been done to relate these texts to the context in which they were created. One might argue that this is in part because the stories appear to be timeless: the play and adventures any

young child might have (Silvey, 2002). When asked how he chose a Black child to be Peter in his books, Keats responded

> [As an illustrator], I never got a manuscript about a black [sic] kid. This hurt me as it would anybody who cared about kids or people of this world, and I decided that if I ever wrote a story, the hero would be a black [sic] kid. He would be there on his own, not through some situation where a kid has a party and there's a tough black [sic] kid who comes in. He would just wake up, look out, it's his world. No explanations. He's there, as he should be…I thought, how horrifying, for black [sic] kids to open up books and never see themselves in any dignified way. How horrible it is for white [sic] kids to be denied this whole hunk of the world. So I did it. (Keats, as quoted in Laughlin & Laughlin, 1993, p. 137)

Yet Peter wasn't born solely from Keats's imagination. He was styled after an image Keats tore from a 1940 Life magazine photo essay featuring a little boy taking a blood test (Breaking Color Barriers Quietly, 2012). Keats created these characters, painted these neighborhoods from his own world, and his own time, and as such, we as educators must question what messages these works convey to our young children and what messages these works convey about young children. Therefore, this work asks: How is Keats's neighborhood related to the socio-cultural context of its creation? What power structures are conveyed through the images and texts? In other words, how can Keats's neighborhood be understood in relation to discourses surrounding sociocultural contexts of similar neighborhoods in United States urban history?

Before I can place Keats's neighborhoods in their sociocultural context I must first situate them in existing literature. Throughout the following sections I surround Keats's work, eventually outlining research which has explicitly studied Whistle for Willie (1964), Goggles (1969), and the rest of Keats's picture books. I begin, however, with my theoretical framework, establishing the lens from which I question these texts and which has helped me to review the literature addressing them. I then explore the context in which Keats's work was created: urban neighborhoods and families of the 1960s and 1970s. Finally, I locate Keats' picture books within the field of children's literature, both as a work featuring Black characters and on its own. This work necessitates a broad, interdisciplinary look at the process of picture books: their context, their text, and their messages for readers.

Chapter 1: Theoretical Frameworks

In order to examine the structures of power within and surrounding the neighborhood books of Ezra Jack Keats, I employ Guinier's (2004) racial literacy framework and Omi and Winant's (1994) notions of a racial project. By intersecting these frameworks I am able to draw on conceptions and relationships between race, power, and "mitigating variables such as…class and geography" (Rogers & Mosley, 2008). In this section I present a clear description of these ideas and how they intersect in my work.

RACIAL LITERACY

Racial literacy originally emerged as a part of critical race theory. Critical race theorists argue that despite the Civil Rights Movement and the legal changes it wrought, significant social inequality still exists for African Americans and other groups of color (Brown & Brown, 2010). Critical race theory emphasizes the systemic and structural elements of racism while acknowledging that, while race is a social and political construct, its impact is concrete and devastating (Guinier, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1999). "Race is sociopolitical rather than biological," wrote Mills (1997), "but it is nonetheless real" (p. 126). Critical theorists of race recognize that race and racism are contingent on the contexts of the time (Roediger, 2010; Holt, 2010), and that they are perpetuated within the structures of political, cultural, and social means (Mills, 1997). It was within that perspective that racial literacy emerged as a move away from racial liberalism, which critics viewed as overly individualistic and overly reliant on a legal system as the solution to inequality (Guinier, 2004).

According to Guinier (2004), a racially literate analysis indicated "the ability to read race in conjunction with both contemporary institutional and democratic hierarchies and their historical antecedents" (p. 118). Utilizing a metaphor of "reading" race allows researchers to move past simply decoding the concrete characterization of race to examine the relationship between a conception and its historical context. In applying this metaphor I draw on Freirian notions about the importance of the act of reading. "Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world" (Freire, 1983, p. 10). In order to comprehend a work—be it book, text, research, art, event, neighborhood or other creation—one must comprehend the world in which it was created. In other words, we must read the world of Keats's neighborhood: his personal research, his writing, and his illustrations. Racial literacy is a process rather than a product, a mechanism to investigate rather than simply a theory to understand.

A racially literate analysis "uses race as a diagnostic device, an analytic tool, and an instrument of process" (Guinier, 2004, p. 202). For example, some researchers (Rogers & Mosley, 2006; Rogers & Mosley, 2008; Twine & Steinbugler, 2006; Winans, 2010) have employed racial literacy to examine conceptions of Whiteness among students and pre-service teachers. Twine (2004) described racial literacy as a means of discourse by which White parents, teachers, or researchers might engage others in anti-racist behavior.

Because racial literacy is contextual, it allows researchers to 'read' the ways in which "everyday microcultural practices" (Twine & Steinbugler, 2006, p. 357)—such as

reading picture books—inform and are informed by race and racism. In other words, racial literacy emphasizes the relationship between race and power and deeply considers the contexts in which the content was created. For my analysis, racial literacy offers a meaningful conception of how to read the racial project of Ezra Jack Keats's neighborhood books. I examine race in its socio-cultural context and consider how economic and geographic factors impact the ways we remember the world of Keats' characters. In the next section I explain how Omi and Winant's (1994) idea of a racial project applies to Keats's neighborhood books, both as a depiction of racial dynamics and as a construct of cultural memory.

KEATS'S TEXTS AS A RACIAL PROJECT

This work is a racially literate analysis of Keats's work as a racial project. The term racial project was proposed by Omi and Winant (1994) as a part of their racial formation theory. For Omi and Winant (1994), racial formation is defined as the sociohistorical process "by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed" (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 55). Central to American racial formation is what the authors term "the great transformation," (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 95), a period during the 1950s and 1960s in which new social movements rearticulated racial identity and race itself through collective behavior, a 'culture of resistance' and an ideology of liberation (Omi & Winant, 1994). Racial formation, they argued, is comprised and conducted through an assortment of racial projects, such as civil rights legislation or cultural experiences like the Democratic Party convention in 1964 when the Mississippi

Freedom Democratic Party protested the inequality of Mississippi Democratic Party's election (Omi & Winant, 1994).

Racial formation suggests viewing race as an element of social structure, with racial projects doing the "ideological 'work' of making these links…between structure and representation. A racial project is simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular race lines" (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 56).

Racial projects may be conducted at structural levels, such as public policy (Myrdahl, 2010), state activity, or collective action (Omi & Winant, 1994), but may also exist in daily experience such in parenting literature (Rhee, 2013), religion (Alumkal, 2004), or African American folklore (Shaffer, 2012).

I argue that Keats's work acts as a racial project in which the depiction of racialized characters "subtly colors children's understanding of status arrangements, social boundaries, and power" (Pescosolido, Grauerholz, & Milkie, 1997, p. 444). Because Keats set multiple books within the same context, we can see how that fictional setting changes over time and compare it to the urban neighborhood changes in the real world. How his characters engage with their setting transmits messages of social boundaries and power structures to young children—especially when viewed across texts. As a racial project, Keats's neighborhood books can be seen as the link between the structure of the 'real-world' urban neighborhoods and the representation of race within them. When Keats first won the Caldecott Award Medal in 1963 for his book *The Snowy Day* (1962), he was honored for his artistic telling of a simple adventure. Since Peter, the

main character, was Black, the award became more significant. "Because of the prestige the Caldecott medal carries, it demonstrated that ordinary, 'normal' Black children could be acceptable (read profitable) subjects for picture books and thus helped to make major publishing houses more welcoming to African American picture books" (Bishop, 2007, p. 116-117). The prestige of the award has also meant that Keats's books have remained quite popular, and can be seen as a racial project on multiple levels: in the development of Peter as Keats's 'everychild' from a real world origin, in the depiction of racialized characters, and as a cultural memorial to an (perhaps fictional) urban neighborhood. The next sub-sections examine cultural and geographical memory, and the ways in which Keats's neighborhood books' role in our cultural memory makes it a racial project.

THE ROLE OF PICTURE BOOKS IN CULTURAL MEMORY

Assmann (1995) defined cultural memory as the body of texts, images, and rituals which are used to shape and perpetuate a society's identity. For example, textbooks and formal school curriculum are often cited as mechanisms of cultural memory for students (Brown & Brown, 2010a; Brown & Brown, 2010b; Wills, 2005; Zerubavel, 1996). "Memory, private and individual as much as collective and cultural, is constructed, not reproduced...this construction is not made in isolation but in conversations with others that occur in the contexts of community, broader politics, and social dynamics" (Thelan, 1989, p. 1119). Co-creating memory with others enables members of a community to not only recollect and reconstruct their own memories but those of their mnemonic communities. These communities may be made up of families, social groups such as

neighborhoods, or another structured society (Assmann, 1995; Reese & Fivush; 2008; Thelan, 1989; Wineburg, 2001; Zerubavel, 1996).

Textbooks are not the only example of cultural memory mechanisms. Mnemonic communities shape how narrative occurs in public discourse through a confluence of popular culture, myths and narratives, acts of state, formal school curriculum, rituals, discourses, and symbols (Assmann, 1995; Brown & Brown, 2010; Brown & Brown, 2010; Scott, 1991; Reese & Fivush, 2008; Wineburg, 2001). This cultural memory is constructed and reconstructed to form collective memory. Picture books, such as Keats's neighborhood books, are an example of both popular culture and school curriculum cultural memory mechanisms. Though they are not an exhaustive representation of collective memory, as a cultural object they serve as a significant means by which we transmit memory and ideology (Pescosolido, Grauerholz, & Milkie, 1997; Nodelman, 2005). In this research, therefore, I explore Keats's neighborhood books as a racial project, transmitted to children as a mechanism of cultural memory and engaging readers in a discourse of race and power in an urban setting. In other words, what do Keats's books say to children about race, about power, and about the lives of children in urban settings of the 1960s and 1970s?

MEMORY OF PLACE

Streamas (2008) argued that in most children's literature, "[Social] issues are more often part of setting rather than plot—they are the social backdrop against which individuals solve problems" (p. 4). Although Keats does not explicitly address race or racism among his characters, one of the questions I ask in this research is how the

neighborhood that Keats creates lends itself to be a racial project. It is useful, then, to utilize some work on geography and memory of place. "Social memory relies on storytelling, but what specialists call place memory can be used to help trigger social memory through the urban landscape" wrote Hayden (1995, p. 46). In other words, the mechanisms of cultural memory work to define memory not only through the discourses and experiences of a people but through the symbols and spaces in which they take place. The story of a place may not only be concrete. It may be literary: the story of a neighborhood that exists in imagination only (Hayden, 1995). The representation of a world in fictional discourse is in part how that world is represented in our memory, and in the memory of children.

Geographers have noted that in order to understand the impact of a space, one must understand the production of that space (Cuff, 1989; Lefebre, cited in Hayden, 1994). Physical shapes have social and political meanings, and narratives of identity and power are embedded into landscapes. Each space was produced and produced social relations; therefore they can be studied. By studying a space, researchers may understand the space's impact on its inhabitants as well as the influences of the systems involved in its production. Cuff (1989) noted in particular the power of a neighborhood as a discursive space.

> The neighborhood is the smallest political unit that is defined by physical space, whether that be the houses along a street, around a park, between some natural boundaries, or within a township. It is in the neighborhood, then, where the interaction between space and society goes public. (Cuff, 1989, p. 331).

How do the characters and the fictional neighborhood in the works of Ezra Jack Keats demonstrate the interaction between the space and society of their time? In the following review I outline past literature on the power of place and on some neighborhoods analogous to Keats's neighborhood. I then examine some of the literature surrounding the people within those neighborhoods, including literature on class, poverty, and family. Finally, I bring us into the fictional world, outlining the field of multicultural and African American literature, concluding with an examination of Ezra Jack Keats's works' role in children's literature.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

THE POWER OF PLACE

To understand how an individual neighborhood might impact its residents we must first examine some broad geographical ideas about the power of place. Any social group, including neighbors, members of a specific community, or any larger scale group, operates within what geographers call the socio-spacial dialectic (Wolch & Dear, 1989; Soja, 1980). The socio-spacial dialectic is defined as the ways in which social life influences territory, and in which territory influences social life. To refer to the power of 'place' is to refer not only to that dialectic, but to the history and specific context of a locale. Agnew (1993) argued that within the term 'place' are three elements: 'locale', or the specific setting, whether formal or informal; location, which Agnew terms "the effects upon locales of social and economic processes operating at wider scales;" and 'sense of place,' which makes up the local structures of feeling (Agnew, 1993, p. 163). Any place, then, is subject to the simultaneous interaction of physical landscape, community processes, and political and economic processes (Agnew, 1993; Wolch & Dear, 1989).

Wolch and Dear (1989) outlined three aspects of the socio-spatial dialectic. First, that social relations are established through space, with the example of natural resource processing influencing "arrangements for production" (Wolch & Dear, 1989, p. 9). Second, that social relations may be constrained by space. Finally, that social relations are mediated by space. They use the term 'friction of distance' to describe the patterns of

everyday life in which deficiencies in the environment such as availability of mobility or local resources influence opportunity.

The extent to which space establishes, constrains, or mediates social relations is moderated by the distribution of power in social, economic, and political spheres (Agnew, 1993; Cuff, 1989; Hankens, et al (2012) Harvey, 2012; Wolch & Dear, 1989). Capitalist forces control the availability of resources. Political entities manipulate housing markets and the availability of public housing to various groups. Design professionals influence issues of zoning, mobility, and city layout (Cuff, 1989).

The discourses and mechanisms at work in a space dictate and naturalize privilege for certain kinds of people. As Hankins, et al. (2012) wrote, "The [result] is the production of space and society arranged in such a way that privilege and accumulation can continue to operate" (p. 383). Caroline Knowes outlined four aspects of racial and spatial interaction, including negotiations and conflict of built environment, "the everyday embodied and performed social lives of people," (Neely & Samura, 2011, p. 1941), the placement and displacement of people, and individuals' and groups' social engagements (Knowles, 2003; Neely & Samura, 2011). The interplay between race and space occurs at all levels, but are of particular impact to children at the community and neighborhood level, where they often involve schools, resources, and places of play (Neely & Samura, 2011).

The interaction of physical locale, political and economic location, and community sense of place may serve to reproduce social relations and hierarchies, but they can also produce social change. Neighborhoods, due to their usual intersection of

homes, schools, and resources such as business and utilities, can be examples of both. In the next section I give an overview of some major examples of neighborhoods in which we may see instances of both social reproduction and social change.

NEIGHBORHOODS

Quantitative studies define the neighborhood as a geographic area of 2,500 to 8000 residents, as defined by census data. Qualitative and ethnographic studies, such as most of the studies reviewed in this section, define neighborhoods from the sense of place and coherence within a social and geographical landscape (Pattillo, 2005). In other words, quantitative studies consider neighborhoods as a quantifiable entity, while qualitative studies consider neighborhoods as an experience. These neighborhoods, in which "the interaction between space and society goes public" (Cuff, 1989, p. 331), are by no means universal. In fact, geographers such as Agnew (1993) argued against their use in social science research, claiming that simply by using them as examples researchers ignore the specific social, geographic, and historic context—that is, their locale, location, and sense of space. The neighborhoods included here tell the tale of the neighborhood in Keats's books; not that it is universal, or that we might imagine it to be the same as Groveland in Chicago, or Harlem in New York City. I include these ethnographies and urban histories that we might instead understand that the environment and experiences which Keats's characters Peter and Louie might have encountered would have been created under complex and unique circumstances. That said, there are enough similarities in the experiences, power hierarchies, and histories of these neighborhoods to make them useful as a whole.

Prior to Emancipation in Houston, Texas, a small group of free Black men and women along with some slaves who rented housing away from their owners lived in the area now known as the Fourth Ward (Cuff, 1989). They hired out their own labor. By 1850, some of the Fourth Ward had already been on city maps, and by 1880 extreme housing shortages led to a boom in Fourth Ward development. The streets were a rigid replica of central Houston, with one exception: they were laid out at a disparate angle from the rest of the city. "Here, quite literally, the environment reflects the dominant social group's patterns and interests, as if to say that Fourth Ward was inferior and did not belong to the city's core" (Cuff, 1989, p. 334).

In Southern cities (and many Northern ones) such as Atlanta, response to Progressivism, particularly in the early 20th century, was to increase segregation as an attempted means to improve racial relations. Portions of Atlanta which housed the Black community were widely neglected, particularly in terms of infrastructure. "William Hartsfield, Atlanta's mayor from the 1930s to the 1960s, observed, "When I became mayor, you could always tell where the Negro sections started. Lights stopped, streets, sidewalks stopped'" (as quoted in Bayor, 1993, p. 289). Zane Miller, an urban historian, noted that during this time city planning across the nation increasingly viewed cities as a conglomeration of sections "with interests superior to any sense of the whole" (Miller, 2001, p. 4). This meant the development of central business districts, suburbs for the middle and upper class, and low-income communities, especially Black communities, were frequently pushed to either the inner city (Frazier, 1939; Miller, 2001) or to the very edge of city limits (Pattillo, 2005).

With the influx of Black immigrants to northern cities from the South, the term "Black Belt" became a common reference to Black communities. Pattillo (2005) noted, "The term 'Black Belt' …is a telling metaphor. Some invisible but durable strap seemed to geographically confine the black [sic] community, and its population bulged as new migrants streamed in from the South" (p. 309). Frazier (1939), Drake and Cayton (1945), and other sociologists (Anderson, 1990, Wilson, 1987) described the expanding Black communities in northern cities such as Chicago and Harlem. Frazier (1939) described the move by many Black families out of the rural South to the urban north as tearing "the Negro loose from his cultural moorings," (p. 484) resulting in increased family disorganization and instability in family and community life.

These Black Belts were explicitly constructed through economic and political means. White landowners and realtors restricted Black residents to certain areas. Federal relief projects of the New Deal encouraged residential segregation, as in Cleveland, where federal government funded five housing projects: three in the center of the expanding Black community, and two on its edges (Trotter, 1993). The central projects were restricted to Black residents, and the outer two became nearly all White.

Despite the Supreme Court's 1948 *Shelley v. Kramer* decision barred racial covenants on real estate, most Black residents were prevented from purchasing homes eligible for loans from Federal Housing Authority or United States Department of Veteran Affairs (Bartelt, 1993; Sugrue, 1993). Policy from federal and local officials plus capitalist influences in the real estate market intersected to increase the move of lower-income Black Americans to inner city housing, while pushing the Black middle

class into suburbs near the city limits (Pattillo, 1999; Pattillo, 2005; Trotter, 1993; Venkatesh, 2002). As Bartlet (1993) put it, "The sensitivity of housing to its neighborhood context, plus the dependency of the housing market on long-term debt financing, places housing at the center of a web of social and institutional relationships" (p. 120)—relationships, it should be noted, with race at the heart.

After World War II, many northern neighborhoods experienced racial or ethnic changes as home building increased, single family homes were partitioned into kitchenettes and apartments, and poverty declined, allowing more middle class Black residents the capability to move into White middle class neighborhoods (Katz, 1993; Pattillo, 1999; Pattillo, 2005). Yet as Black residents moved in, White residents moved out. Each neighborhood dealt with the changing racial makeup with their own strategies: some with interracial coalitions (Venkatesh, 2002), and some with violence (Pattillo, 1999).

Along with post-war transformations in housing options and neighborhood makeup came a dramatic change in collective neighborhood action. Cox (1989): "A study of neighborhood organizations in Seattle over the period 1929 to 1979 documents a contrast between an earlier emphasis on social functions (street carnivals, pageants, flower shows, construction of community clubhouses), with a more contemporary and political orientation" (p. 63). Led by—though not exclusive to—Black female heads of households in inner cities, neighborhood organization and civic action struggled for control over neighborhood resources (Miller, 1989). For example, residents in the Robert Taylor neighborhood of Chicago struggled to define their space in terms of what they

could sell, buy, and obtain for their families (Venkatesh, 2002). Residents in Atlanta's Black neighborhoods, such as the Vine City neighborhood that Dr. and Mrs. Martin Luther King Jr. visited in 1966, struggled for changes in public housing, city services, and recreational space (Bayor, 1993). Petitions, marches, and rent strikes grew as the Civil Rights movement became localized in homes, neighborhoods, and communities.

Ethnographies and urban histories of the Robert Taylor neighborhood in Chicago (Venkatesh, 2002), Vine City in Atlanta (Bayor, 1993), Harlem in New York City (Bell, 2013), and the Fourth Ward in Houston (Cuff, 1989) have all helped me construct some part of the picture of 1950s-1970s urban Black neighborhoods. However, I want to conclude this discussion of neighborhoods with the middle class neighborhood of Groveland described in Mary Pattillo's 1999 book *Black Picket Fences*. Despite attention to both low-income and middle class neighborhoods in earlier sociology work by Frazier (1939), Drake and Cayton (1945), Wilson (1987), and others, little recent work has addressed middle class Black neighborhoods of that time as thoroughly as Pattillo did.

Drake and Cayton (1945) noted that "Negroes are unable to keep their communities 'middle-class' because the Black Ghetto is too small to accommodate its population and the less well-to-do must filter into these 'best' areas'" (p. 659). To some extent, Pattillo found that assumption to be true of the Groveland neighborhood, yet she made it clear that that assumption is not as complex as any neighborhood, much less Groveland (Pattillo, 1999).

Single family housing and suburban lifestyle in Groveland appealed to many middle class Black families in the post war period. Some children recalled being the target of small scale violence, such as thrown milk bottles, by their White neighbors but, Pattillo wrote, “There were no organized efforts in Groveland to impede the geographic advances of African Americans” (Pattillo, 1999, p. 32-33). Many of Groveland’s residents were immigrants from the South, and with its high rate of residential stability and growth of extended families, the social network was both highly important and thoroughly intertwined into the neighborhood (Pattillo, 1999).

The neighborhood’s structures, residents, and leaders influenced neighborhood sense of place through economic, political, and social means. Places and symbols in the neighborhood often had dual meanings: their cultural significance and the influences they represented.

> So on the four corners of the busiest intersection in Groveland, the neighborhood's predominantly middle-class composition is represented by the imposing bank structure; the presence of a non-negligible low income population is suggested by the Currency Exchange; the African American cultural ownership is signified by a soul food restaurant; and black-owned [sic] Keen Bros.' thirty years in business is evidence of neighborhood stability. (Pattillo, 1999, p. 39)

As Groveland has matured, it has been inherited by a second, and now a third generation, and both its structures and its residents struggle with conflicting and conflating images of Black middle class. Pattillo uses Anderson’s (1990) categories of ‘street’ and ‘decent’ to argue that neither poor nor middle class families can clearly be

dichotomized. “The simultaneous privileges and continuing constraints faced by the black [sic] middle class make the intermediate position of balancing street and decent orientations are tangled together—in the neighborhood context, in the same family, and even within the same person" (Pattillo, 1999, p. 116). In other words, the nuances of space, identity, and power are not just complex for neighborhoods, but for their residents as well.

While social changes occurred within neighborhood, discourses surrounding Black neighborhoods largely centered on accounts of their deficiencies (Bernard, 1966; Cavan, 1959; Drake & Cayton, 1945; Pattillo, 1999; Sharkey, 2013; Trotter, 1993). Researchers focused on crime and poverty rates, but most extensively they concentrated on family structure, both its roots and its impact on children (Frazier, 1939; Moynihan, 1965/1967; Rainwater, 1966). Sharkey (2013) argued that Black children raised in the Civil Rights era have inherited their parents’ neighborhoods—both the middle class neighborhoods such as Groveland in Chicago (Pattillo, 1999; Pattillo, 2005) and those neighborhoods which are more disadvantaged. As noted previously, opportunities and resources are inscribed in space (Hankins, et al, 2012; Katz, 1989; Pattillo, 1999; Sharkey, 2013). For Sharkey (2013), this means that children who are raised in neighborhoods with higher poverty, fewer resources, poor schools, and more violence will be negatively impacted as they mature. In the following sub-sections I outline some of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s discourses on class, poverty, and family structure paying particular attention to their perceived roots in neighborhood environment and their perceived influence on children’s lives.

THE UNDERCLASS DEBATE

In 1977 when *Time* magazine proclaimed the existence of an 'underclass' in America (Katz, 1993), sociologists were anything but surprised. After all, academic debate over the 'culture of poverty'—a term not altogether different from the 'underclass'—had been raging on since it was introduced by anthropologist Oscar Lewis (Katz, 1993) in 1961. Both the 'underclass' and the 'culture of poverty' referred not just to low-income citizens, but to a way of life, one riddled with poverty, crime, and general 'delinquency' (Katz, 1993; Wilson, 1987).

There is some contradiction about the reality of poverty levels. Stern (1993) argued that in actuality poverty declined faster during the 1960s, yet Trotter (1993) noted that, "Recent analysts emphasize a shift from relatively low levels of unemployment and social disorder before the 1960s to a new era of widespread joblessness, crime, and welfare dependency thereafter" (p. 56). Other researchers focus on male joblessness (Wilson, 1987; Frazier, 1939; Moynihan, 1965/1967), or issues of housing and the distribution of necessary commodities among low income neighborhoods (Bartlet, 1993; Bernard, 1966). The underclass, which Lee Rainwater proclaimed a 'permanent fixture of our nation's social structure" (1966) has been debated over, with multiple facets to the debate. Wilson (1987) called on both his own and prior research to analyze male joblessness (Moynihan, 1965/1967), geographic concentration and 'social isolation'—i.e. the Black Belts—and family structure (Bernard, 1966; Frazier, 1939) as perpetuators of its growth. Critics, including Valentine (1968), Gutman (1975), Sampson and Milan in 1975 (Pattillo, 1999) and several later researchers such as Trotter (1993) and Katz (1993)

argued that Frazier and Moynihan's assertions created "an image of the black [sic] poor as so abysmally disorganized and so hopelessly infected with social pathologies that they even lack public opinion, social control, or community institutions" (Valentine, 1968, p. 20). Nevertheless, those images permeated public discourse, including political rhetoric surrounding Johnson's War on Poverty, as seen in Johnson's address to Howard University in 1965 (Moynihan, 1965/1968). The following subsection outlines some of that discourse, particularly in reference to Black family life.

BLACK FAMILIES IN ACADEMIC AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE

In 1939 sociologist E. Franklin Frazier published *The Negro Family in the United States*. In it, Frazier argued that trauma derived from the Middle Passage and slavery had irreparably damaged Black families (Frazier, 1939; Miller, 1993). "When the yoke of slavery was lifted, the drifting masses were left without any restraint upon their vagrant impulses and wild desires" (Frazier, 1939, p. 96-97). Frazier wrote of Black women's sexual promiscuity, described a culture of female-headed households, "roving men," absent fathers, and delinquent children (Frazier, 1939). This was not the only—or first--work of its kind. Yet Frazier is frequently seen as one of the major influences on research and theories concerning Black families for years (Brown, 2011; Gutman, 1975; Katz, 1993; Miller, 1993; Nobles, 1978; Valentine, 1968; Wilson, 1987).

Frazier (1939), and later, Moynihan (1965) and others (Bernard, 1968; Cavan, 1959; Rainwater, 1966) emphasized the importance of a female headed household in the Black family culture. Illegitimate children, joblessness among men, and cultural holdovers from plantation life were all cited as explanation for the rise in families headed

by women, the majority of whom resided in urban settings (Bernard, 1968; Rainwater, 1966). Moynihan (1965/1967) cited family structure as the fundamental problem within Black communities, resulting in lower intelligence scores and juvenile delinquency. As Brown (2011) pointed out, the research surrounding Black women as heads of households also constructed an image of the Black male as "powerless and emasculated" (p. 2056). "Their conclusions invariably verified the belief that the black [sic] family system was an organization inherently laden with problems and inadequacies" (Nobles, 1978, p. 679).

Inevitably, a narrative of the Black child—particularly Black boys—as delinquents emerged (Brown, 2011; Gutman, 1975). "Lower-class Negro city children…are permitted more freedom on the streets and may attend movies alone and remain out until late hours of the night at a young age. These findings are for nondelinquent [sic] children, and would perhaps be even more true for delinquents" (Cavan, 1959, p. 232). Images of the Black male child as wanderer, irresponsible, and delinquent permeated discourse surrounding Black families—particularly poor Black families (Moynihan, 1965; Rainwater, 1966; Valentine, 1968).

Obviously, the discourse surrounding Black families did not go without debate. Valentine (1968), and Ryan (1972) for example, were early dissenters, noting the pejorative nature of Frazier and Moynihan's arguments. Ryan (1972) argued against the 'heritage of slavery' argument, although he did consider "that differences in family structure can be most adequately related to contemporary issues such as employment" (p. 72). Some more recent analyses note that focus on female-headed households and

assumptions about family structure obscured strategies for combating poverty (Stern, 1993) and developing a sense of place within the community (Miller, 1993). Stern (1993) asserted, for example, that although decrease in child labor limited families' ability to use working children as a strategy against poverty, many households used household extension. "Faced with an increasing number of individuals and families unable to survive on their own resources, urban jobless householders opened their homes…even through it did nothing to improve the economic status of their immediate family" (Stern, 1993, p. 248).

Other researchers (Miller, 1993; Nobles, 1978) pointed to White, Western notions of families as skewing assumptions about Black family practices. These notions presumed that a male-headed, nuclear family "is the prerequisite of family stability" (Miller, 1993, p. 266). Miller (1993) pointed to practices of child fostering and sharing of maternal duties among families and communities as both evidence of a child centered notion of family and a partial explanation for female heads of household. Although fostering was practiced by both White and Black families, Black families were more likely to foster children whether they had their own children or not (Miller, 1993).

Considering the types of discourses surrounding children of color, the development of multicultural children's picture books and African American children's literature which portrayed its characters and settings in culturally authentic ways is especially important. The development of culturally responsive children's literature emerged as a response to such discourse, particularly addressing issues of family life, identity, self-representation, and countering stereotypes (Bishop, 2007). In that way, the

fields themselves acted as racial projects, engaging with depictions and discourse of race on the level of popular culture and literature. As culturally authentic literature emerged along with a rise of historical fiction, teachers began to use children's literature within the social studies. The next section examines that use, both its benefits and its difficulties.

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES

Historical fiction, particularly historical fiction picture books, are often utilized in elementary classrooms as a means to integrate social studies into language arts curriculum. Teachers and researchers cite it as a means of stimulating interest and engagement in history (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Cruz, 2013; Freeman & Levstik, 1998; Levstik & Barton, 2005) and as a means to humanize history (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Cruz, 2013; Freeman & Levstik, 1998). Historical fiction is also used as a means for students to safely investigate troubling themes and events, such as slavery and racism (Damico, Baildon, & Greenstone, 2010, Levstik & Barton, 2005, Sipe, 1999). Because this genre is presented as a marriage between history and fiction, it offers opportunities for students to analyze differences in narratives and the way authors may manipulate or distort facts (Freeman & Levstik, 1998, Levstik, 1986). Nevertheless, as McCall (2010) and Boyle-Baise, et al. (2008) noted, when social studies getw integrated into language arts, it is often the reading goals which are emphasized rather than historical thinking or other social studies objectives. This is in part due to the declining practice of social studies in elementary school (Mcguire, 2007; Tanner, 2008). As teachers are required to place language arts and math in foremost importance, social studies runs the risk of being supplanted by testing goals (Tanner, 2008). There has been a call, therefore, to integrate

social studies in authentic ways. For instance, place-based education (Maguth & Hilburn, 2011) highlights schools' local community, resources, and environment for students' real-world investigation and engagement. Other researchers emphasize the influence of Dewey on authentic and integrated experiences to call for integration of social studies in science (Christou & Bullock, 2014). McCall (1996; 2010), advocates for ways social studies objectives can be met within literature circles. The integration of social studies and children's literature is both prevalent and important for the ways in which it portrays history and characters in popular culture. The following section examines the field of culturally responsive children's literature and Ezra Jack Keats's work within that context.

KEATS'S WORK IN THE CONTEXT OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

In order to understand the significance of Keats's work in context, we must first establish the importance of picture books for young children. Picture books have long been used as devices for teaching literacy, building a love of reading, and instigating questions and topics. As noted previously, these books offer a significant means of transferring ideology to young children (Nodelman, 2005). The choices made in the picture books we treat as "classics," transmit to them a sense of what we as adults find important. Both the content and the messages in picture books build toward children's comprehension of their world (Roethler, 1998). To that end, the multicultural literature movement--derived from the multicultural pedagogical movement--seeks to promote texts which feature authentic work from or about what Bishop (2003) calls 'parallel cultures' (Short & Fox, 2003). In other words, this movement promotes counter- or alternative narratives to dominant ones. The definition of multicultural literature varies.

Some definitions focus on race or ethnicity, while some more broadly include homosexuality and gender. Nevertheless, advocates of multicultural literature share a common goal: to expose and promote that which has traditionally been ignored or silenced (Cai & Bishop, 1994; Short & Fox, 2003). This allows multicultural literature to act as a racial project, defining race in the pages of children's books.

With that goal in mind, Rudine Sims Bishop developed a framework used for a variety of analyses of parallel culture literature, consisting of three major categories (Bishop, 1991). First, 'social conscious' books, which are primarily aimed at White readers with the aim of developing a sense of responsibility for righting social injustice. Second, 'melting pot books,' which "focus on integrating literary black [sic] children into the mainstream of American children's literature," (Bishop, 2012, p. 7) but which do not necessarily include particular culturally identifying elements. Finally, Bishop studied 'culturally conscious' books, which are set in culturally specific environments and include textual means of identifying the characters as Black (Bishop, 2012).

Before *The Snowy Day* (Keats, 1962) won the Caldecott Medal in 1963, few major picture books featured African American characters in a positive light. Along with *The Snowy Day*, Jacob Lawrence's Harriet and the Promised Land—the first major picture book by an African American published by a mainstream press—helped to pave the way for other African American children's picture books (Bishop, 2007). Books like *Stevie*, and *Uptown* by John Steptoe established the use of Black voice and authentic experiences explicitly aimed at Black children (Bishop, 2007). As Violet Harris wrote,

> The social conscience and melting pot books served important functions: the amelioration of ignorance about African Americans, the portrayal of African Americans as possessing universal values and sharing universal experiences, and the provision of aesthetic experiences. (Harris, 1990, p. 549)

Cultural authenticity quickly became the most powerful measure of a book aimed at Black children, or of a book aimed at children of any parallel culture (Ching, 2005). The number of major works by Black authors and for Black children increased, although the depictions of Black life were often at discord with continued racial discrimination and living conditions (Harris, 1990). Black characters remained a controversial issue for publishers. Pescosolido, Grauerholz, and Milkie (1997) noted a direct relationship of what they termed 'interracial strife' and the amount of Black characters in picture books. "When Black-White relations are stable…Black characters are more visible, whereas during the time of contested Black-White relations, Blacks and Black-White interactions were virtually deleted from children's books" (p. 460). Books with an authentic Black experience often emphasize family relations, pride in Black heritage, and fostering self-esteem, as with a plurality of books which address Black children's physical features, such as *Nappy Hair* (Bishop, 2003; Bishop, 2007, Short & Fox, 2003).

Despite Keats's Caldecott award, critics claimed he did not escape stereotypes such as the "mammy" character (Pescosolido, Grauerholz, & Milkie, 1997) and that, while his characters may appear Black on the surface, they do not demonstrate the cultural authenticity that many other books have shown (Bishop, 1991; Bishop, 2003; MacCann & Woodard, 1985; Shepard, 1971). Keats's works as a whole have typically

been characterized as melting pot books, focusing on inter-racial harmony and omitting culturally specific distinctions (Bishop, 2003). Smith (1991) analyzed Keats's texts for images of stereotypes. Finding none, she heralded Keats as a "harbinger of the 'Age of Understanding'" (Smith, p. 80). Yet Smith also hailed what others have decried—that Keats's characters do not display culturally specific characteristics. Until now, analyses of Keats's works for racial or cultural meaning have focused primarily on his award winners—especially *The Snowy Day*—or have centered their analysis on the characters in Keats's works.

Nikola-Lisa's analyses of Keats's picture books have focused on themes of play, both of the characters and in Keats's illustrations (Nikola-Lisa, 1989; Nikola-Lisa, 1991a; Nikola-Lisa, 1991b). He found that Keats weaves graphics and found objects into the illustrations and into the actions of the characters. The settings allow the character to remain "in perpetual motion" (Nikola-Lisa, 1991a, p. 255), engaging in pretend play as the archetypal young child (Nikola-Lisa, 1989).

Although Keats's characters hold an important place in the history of children's literature, such analyses have usually ignored the importance of the urban neighborhood setting, aside from noting their relevance primarily to middle-class children (MacCann & Woodard, 1985). As previously noted, John Streamas (2008) argued that the settings of children's books may provide the politics of storytelling. For Peter, for Archie, and for many of Keats's "neighborhood" characters, the setting is essential to the story. "Time after time the world presents itself to Archie, and Archie responds accordingly" (Nikola-

Lisa & Donaldson, 1989, p. 79). The structure of the world, or the setting, plays a key role in these character's lives—just as it does for every child.

One recent study which did examine the setting of Keats's neighborhood in broader relation to its socio cultural context was a chapter in Benjamin Looker's (2009) dissertation. In it, Looker charges that Keats's work, along with the *Sesame Street* set and other cultural work for children of the time period called to mind the hopefulness and, to a certain extent, naiveté of a pluralist Great Society in the cities. Looker (2009) argued that the intense attention to the grit of the inner-city neighborhood, along with the racial diversity of the characters were indication of Keats's view of a realistic modern urbanity. The tensions between character friendships and their universal neighborhood stories and the urban, "threatening" world were indicative, according to Looker, of the idea of neighborhoods as an oasis, a site for community and safety in a difficult world (Looker, 2009).

Although Looker's (2009) work takes tremendous strides in considering the socio-cultural context of Keats's work, the implications of that his findings have not yet been explored in terms of what ideologies are portrayed for and about children. In addition, Looker only takes a cursory look at the issues of power, race, and space as represented in Keats's work. While I acknowledge the importance of Looker's research in opening Keats's work up to deeper socio-cultural examination, it is clear that, since Keats's books were written for an audience of children, we must analyze them as such.

To see examples of how such an analysis might be done, we can look at other children's literature analyses, including Burbules (1986) analysis of the 1945 Golden

Book *Tootle*, as well as more recent work such as Kohl's (1995) book *Should We Burn Babar?*, and works by Kelley (2007) and Winston (1996). Each of these pieces argues that books for children contribute to the formation of culture (Kohl, 1995), that picture books inform ideology (Burbules, 1986) and are often representative of power structures and hierarchical cultural systems (Kelley, 2007; Winston, 1996; Zipes, 1995).

In *Should We Burn Babar?* (1995) Kohl analyzed multiple texts, including Babar, books and biographies about Rosa Parks, and various retellings of the classic Pinocchio tale. In each, Kohl analyzed the texts and illustrations in terms of power structures, inequities and stereotypes. For example, in his analysis of Rosa Parks books Kohl found Parks to be portrayed most often as "Rosa the Tired." This was a character of exhaustion and impulsivity, and authors discounted the planning and preparation Parks herself put into the Civil Rights Movement and her role in it in particular. Although Kohl's (1995) and other analyses (Burbules, 1986; Kelley, 2008; Winston, 1996) consider the ideological implications of the texts, they do not examine works in the context in which they were created.

However, Burbules's comments on the portrayal of life in picture books implicitly ask the reader to consider the "truths" of a text. To put it another way, Burbules implies that we should examine picture books and their role in cultural memory.

> [W]e should understand ideology on the model of a literary text: as a portrayal of social and political life that is suggestive, poetic, and nonliteral as telling a truth if not the truth. The process of ideology-analysis and ideology-critique is akin to literary criticism; it includes an attempt to hold a portrayal accountable to social

> reality while recognizing that ideologies that capture the imagination, however partial or biased, must be granted a degree of coherence and plausibility. (Burbules, 1986, p. 240)

Thus far, significant work has been done analyzing issues of play (Nikola-Lisa, 1991a; Nikola-Lisa, 1991b), race (Smith, 1991), and neighborhood culture (Looker, 2009) in Keats's work. In addition, others have used ideological textual analyses in order to question positions of power and bias in children's books. In this work I propose to use textual analysis to consider the ideological implications of representations of childhood, race, and space within Keats's picture books, his research materials, and the surrounding discourse of the 1960s and 1970s. In the next section I outline my methodology, including my own positionality, and detail my methods of analysis.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This research is designed to situate the neighborhood books of Ezra Jack Keats in the socio-cultural context of its creation, not just the realities of urban neighborhood life, but the discourses surrounding it at the time Keats wrote. Through the research I also questioned how power structures are conveyed through the texts and images of Keats's books. This research is a departure from most research on Ezra Jack Keats's books, which only analyzed selected individual works. The exception is Smith's (1991) content analysis of Keats's books for racial diversity and stereotyping and Looker's (2009) dissertation chapter. My work goes beyond racial diversity to look for themes of race, racism, class, and place. This section includes an overview of the research paradigm used, discussion of my positionality, and methods of data gathering and analysis.

RESEARCH PARADIGM

Before beginning any discussion of particular methods, it is important to question why studying Ezra Jack Keats's work may be considered a useful means of understanding the context in which it was created, as well as why we may consider implications of its current use in relation to the messages it includes. I drew from Hodder and Hutson's (2003) work, which considers the value and complexity of material culture. Material culture and society are each defined in relation to the other. Hodder and Hutson (2003) focused attention on mechanisms for production of material culture, which both defines societal agents and is defined by it. They (2003) gave the example of burial practices: "The relation between burial and society clearly depends on attitudes to death" (p. 3).

In other words, examining discourses and realities of 1960s and 1970s urban neighborhoods must be done by examining the material culture created within them. In the same way, one cannot examine the works of Ezra Jack Keats without examining the attitudes and context which would have surrounded their original publications. It is impossible to understand Keats's impact on the field of children's literature without understanding the "sociocultural and political milieu" (Taxel, 2003, p. 154) that children's literature operated within at the time.

I used a qualitative content analysis methodology in order to analyze the neighborhoods of Ezra Jack Keats as an example of material culture. Qualitative content analysis methodology utilizes Foucalt's consideration of documents: "Documents are 'products' like speech itself, of a system within which they are defined and made meaningful" (Foucault, 1973, as quoted in Manning & Cullum Swan, 1994, p. 464). Qualitative content analysis is a flexible research technique for "making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorf, 2004, p. 18). Because qualitative content analysis may be flexible depending on texts, research questions, or researcher framework (White & Marsh, 2006), it is useful to apply to different research problems.

In particular, I employed a literary analysis, using other literary analyses as a guide (Alridge, 2006; Brown & Brown, 2010; Burbules, 1987; Kohl, 1995). Alridge (2006), quoting historian Richard Beringer claims that literary analysis, "involves reading source material and drawing evidence from that material to be used in supporting a point of view or thesis" (p. 664). The process includes the reading of the literature, noting

themes, "discussing the themes, and supporting conclusions with examples" (Brown & Brown, 2010, p. 40). Through this process the researcher makes a series of inductive inferences. Because researchers use inferences, this implies that "instead of generalizability there is transferability (White & Marsh, 2006). By utilizing a qualitative literary analysis, I was able to examine the nature of the data (Merriam, 2009), 'reading' the data which, importantly, included both text and images. I 'read' Keats's neighborhood books as objects of material culture, both for themes in which one might see the context of their creation, and for themes which might be more explicitly transferred to readers. To use Hodder and Hutson's metaphor, I engaged in a literary analysis to study the relationship between society and Keats's picture books and its attitude toward the urban neighborhoods and multiracial characters depicted in them.

POSITIONALITY

In conducting this research I had to acknowledge the, as Rogers and Mosley (2006) put it, "affordances and constraints" that I brought to the work. As a former early childhood and elementary school teacher with a background in education and comparative literature, I had an insider perspective in the consideration of classroom implications for this research. As a student working on my master's degree in social studies education, I was able to consider some of the complications and contexts of these texts as material culture.

However, my experiences growing up as a White, middle class female in Mississippi were a significant complication in conducting this research. Fine (1994) proposed that, "As researchers, we need to position ourselves as no longer transparent,

but as classed, gendered, raced, and sexual subjects who construct our own locations, narrate these locations, and negotiate our stances with relations of domination" (p. 76). With my background, I found many of the experiences and environments depicted in my research to be profoundly different than my own experiences. I was raised in an anti-racist household in which my mother, a community college history teacher, and my father, a city planner with additional background in history and philosophy, were actively involved in community organizations dedicated to the exposure and elimination of racism. Nevertheless, as a White, middle class, heteronormative student I experienced White privilege in the opportunities afforded to me and interactions with people in positions of authority.

To engage in this type of work—the analyses of material culture in terms of race, class, and geography—I had several major considerations. 1) How do my experiences influence my interpretation of this data? 2) How do I deconstruct my own privilege in this research? 3) Is engaging in this research merely another exercise of my own privileges? Banks (1998), proposed that "It is not their experiences per se that cause individuals to acquire specific values and knowledge during their socialization with their ethnic or cultural communities; rather, it is their *interpretations* of their experiences" (emphasis in original, p. 5). I found the work of Thompson (2003) and Bergerson (2003) particularly helpful in reflecting on these questions.

Thompson's (2003) work argued that, "We trust profoundly in our ability to think critically and responsibly about things, and it is this very trust that betrays us" (p. 19). In other words, being what she called a "friend to people in color" may result in "self-

congratulatory assumptions about our antiracist credentials," (p. 10) in which researchers fail to reflect fully on issues of identity and motivation. Indeed, actions in research may belie the very antiracism researchers wish to enact. Young (2000) commented on the value in cross-group research, encouraging multiple perspectives for racial issues. Yet Young also noted the dangers in the Other being defined or represented by White researchers (hooks, 2003). "White academics who take up the texts (and lives and projects) of people of color for progressive purposes risk exploiting them for our own insufficiently examined ends" (Thompson, 2003, p. 11). Although representing stories which might otherwise be discarded may seem on one level to be antiracist, to annex such work is an act of colonization in order to enhance one's own scholarly authority (Fine, 1994; Thompson, 2003). "In itself, antiracism is not the problem; the problem lies with the agenda it often conceals, namely, white [sic] academics' desire for unproblematic solidarity with people of color—people with *other* kinds of antiracist commitments" (Thompson, 2003, p. 10, emphasis in original).

Thompson attempted to problematize not only conceptions of Whiteness, but of the antiracist agenda related to it. An ally, for Thompson, is not someone who helps, but who advocates on their own and also challenges themselves to reflect on their true purposes and goals and how those can best be achieved. The issue of taking up the work or theories of the Other for ones' own gain is explored in the next essay by Amy Aldous Bergerson (2003).

For Bergerson (2003), critical race theory signified a powerful response by academia to structural racism. Critical race theory (CRT), as previously described,

emphasizes experiential knowledge, is skeptical of neutrality, merit, and colorblind arguments, and centers race and the 'permanent fixture' of racism. Despite her own attraction to the theory and scholarly work in critical race theory, she found herself struggling with her role in using and doing this work. "Some of my colleagues of color…introduced the notion that for whites [sic] to move into the area of [critical race theory] would be a form of colonization in which we would take over [critical race theory] to promote our own interests or recenter our positions while attempting to 'represent' people of color" (Bergerson, 2003, p. 52). Bergerson's work considered the role of traditional academia in the use of a parallel epistemology such as critical race theory, as well as the role of White academics in its use. Bergerson ultimately determined that while White researchers should avoid appropriation of critical race theory, she did "emphasize the importance of incorporating CRT's tenets into our work to show that norms and assumptions about racism are changing," (Bergerson, 2003, p. 60).

Banks (1998) argued that "[Researchers'] most important responsibility is to conduct research that empowers marginalized communities, that describes the complex characteristics of ethnic communities, and that incorporates the views, concepts, and visions of the communities they study" (p. 15). Therefore, throughout my research I have worked to acknowledge my own White privilege (Mcintosh, 1989) and to explicitly question and consider my motivations, the sources and researchers I employ, and conclusions in light of my background. For example, in my review of literature I found sources which characterized Peter's mother as a mammy stereotype (Pescosolido, et al., 1997). As a White mother, my initial reading of Peter's mother was primarily as an

image of safety and domesticity. In order to trouble this image and consider the data at large for racist tropes, I discussed the characters and books with colleagues who study race and pedagogy. In addition, I examined my own readings of the data in relation to that of other scholars, including Patricia Hill Collins (2000), Viola Harris (1990), and Rudine Sims Bishop (2003), in an attempt to open my reading up to different perspectives. Finally, by triangulating my reading of the picture books with Keats's own research materials and writings I opened up new aspects to analysis. For example, upon examination of Keats's writings I discovered that Peter's mother's dress was made out of, in Keats's terms, "oilcloth used for lining cupboards" (Keats, 1963). The utilitarian quality of the material used added, then, another layer of consideration for the character and her role within this racial project.

In addition, it was essential in my work to not only consider the discourses surrounding race, class, and geography at the time Keats was writing, but the narratives and histories which have emerged surrounding urban neighborhoods at the time. In presenting narratives and histories produced through a critical lens I hope to, as Banks (1998) wrote, incorporate the views, concepts, and visions of the community" (p. 15)—not just my own interpretations of their views and visions.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

In a qualitative content analysis, researchers choose texts based on the uniqueness of the text and "are consciously aware of the multiple interpretations that can arise from close perusal of it" (White & Marsh, 2006, p. 36). While I initially chose to study the picture books of Ezra Jack Keats, I quickly narrowed my selection down to only those

books which were original texts and illustrations, excluding works such as Keats' illustration of the folk song "Over in the Meadow" (Keats, 1971), or *The Little Drummer Boy* (1968). I then narrowed my selection down a bit further by excluding any books which did not have humans as the main characters and those which did not place in Peter and Archie's urban neighborhood, such as Keats's *Kitten for a Day* (1974) or *Clementina's Cactus*, (1982), which took place in the desert. This left me with ten books, many of which contain one or more of the same characters. In addition, I analyzed materials housed in the de Grummond collection, including original manuscripts, typescripts, sketches, dummies, illustrations, proofs, and pictures which inspired Keats's work. These items were chosen based on their relevance to the texts I analyzed. For example, I analyzed all pictures in the collection, as well as all research materials, but only examined sketches for the texts included in the study.

I analyzed each set of data—the books and the de Grummond collection materials—in two phases. My methodology was informed by other picture book content analyses, such as Martinez and Harmon (2012) and Smith (1991). Nodelman (1988) noted a flexible relationship between pictures and texts in picture books. They do not always reflect one another, although often in picture books there is a "hierarchic relationship among the objects depicted: only one of them is important enough to be named by the text, and so require more attention from the viewer" (Nodelman, 2005). Conversely, only one moment from a text may be depicted in the illustration, drawing the reader's attention to it in that way. Therefore, I used a constant comparative method of analysis by examining the data, determining patterns and themes, then comparing and

contrasting themes within and among data (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). As White and Marsh (2006) pointed out, in qualitative content analysis, "Analysis is integrated into coding" (p. 39). I did this first for the images in the picture books, ignoring the text, then for the text, ignoring the images. This analysis included coding illustrations and texts for instances of transitional spaces, trash, and children "making their mark." I then selected quotations and images representative of the themes which emerged in both the image and text data.

For the second set of data—the de Grummond collection materials—I followed the same procedures, analyzing first the images available, including three dimensional models. I then analyzed the texts, paying attention in particular to differences in manuscripts and dummies from the final texts. This analysis included coding all images and texts for trash, interracial friend groups, transitional spaces and graphics. As before, I selected quotations and images representative of the themes.

Chapter 4: Themes

In this study I analyzed this fictional neighborhood and the stories told about it in ten different picture books. I also analyzed the materials in the De Grummond collection, focusing primarily—though not exclusively—on the photographs and research clippings Keats often posted in his workspace while he worked.

Each of the books I analyzed contributed in its own way to the conceptual neighborhood that Keats created. This neighborhood was constructed through the inclusion of buildings, stores, homes, and facilities in the setting of each character's stories. By examining this neighborhood as a collective fictional geographical space, I consider the implications of its characteristics in relation to the research materials Keats collected and used in his work. In order to appropriately place the events, characters, settings, and research materials within my themes, I first summarize and describe the neighborhood and the materials in the de Grummond collection which I analyzed, as well as my findings about them.

In 1962 Ezra Jack Keats created a neighborhood from his own experience and imagination. The neighborhood was covered in snow, and it had, for sure, a smattering of 'big boys,' a friend, a mother, and a little boy with dark skin named Peter. Over the next twenty-five years the neighborhood grew and developed. As readers, we never saw anyone move in, we never saw anyone leave; we saw no major holidays, and only one birthday party. No one went to school, to church, or to the store. Nevertheless, Keats literally painted a picture of a neighborhood we knew. This was a neighborhood representative of spacial inequities, a place in which power divisions were played out in

the built environment and the representation of safe spaces (Hankins, et al., 2012). The characters—Peter, Archie, Louie, Roberto, and Amy—were interracial, but this neighborhood was a racialized and class-based space (Katz, 1989; Pattillo, 1999; Sharkey, 2013). This can be seen, for example, in the neighborhood's limited infrastructure. It had a laundry, a blue post office box, and a barber shop—complete with its requisite striped pole. It had a grocery store with fruit right out front, and some clothing stores. Stand-alone street lights, trash cans, and lines of laundry accented the streets. The neighborhood had fences, gates, and buildings crowded in so tight they seemed to be layered on top of one another, indications of the presence of a crowding force of some kind, presumably zoning laws and housing restrictions. Some of the buildings had smoke emerging from the rooftops, and some did not. There was at least one empty lot, which contained a hideout consisting of an old bed frame, a door, and a great big pipe. It also had homes. These grittily styled apartments and trash lined streets housed the neighborhood's children.

Ezra Jack Keats often went on walks around his neighborhood in New York City, sketching people and buildings, taking pictures, and meeting children. In the De Grummond collection which currently holds Keats's materials are hundreds of photographs, most of which are children, nearly all of which are outdoors. Keats kept photographs of himself with children he met in schools, at signings and events. He took pictures of buildings, the details of the neighborhoods, and of graffiti. Keats tore pictures from magazines for research: buildings, families, objects he found interesting, cats, and children. As previously discussed, it was one such photograph that inspired the character

of Peter, although the issue of *Time* magazine it was torn from was nearly twenty years old when Keats used it. He took some photographs of models in various poses to aid in his drawing, but the vast majority of the pictures he took were of children at play with their friends around the neighborhood.

In my analysis, I found that Keats's neighborhood books and research materials function as a racial project by constructing a cultural memorial to the atmosphere of the great transformation (Omi & Winant, 1994) and to a systematically produced racialized and classed space (Hankins, et al, 2012). These ideologies were often in tension in Keats's work, but they were clearly represented in the four major themes which emerged in this analysis. Despite the harshness of the setting itself (and its ideological implications), each of these themes speaks to a larger view of children as independent actors in their own environments, as well as to the complementary and conflicting ideologies of liberation and systemic oppression. First, I found that Keats made frequent use of domestic and transitional spaces, which work to counter discourse of troubled homes and delinquent boys. In the second theme, I note the ways Keats's child characters make their mark on the world, through literal graffiti as well as through the use of imagination. In doing so, characters establish themselves in the production of their own neighborhood. Third, I examine the ways the relationships in Keats's books—both human and animal—offer opportunity for independence and power among his characters. Finally, I found that Keats explored ways of truthfully representing neighborhood physical characteristics through his use of trash imagery and collage materials. The next section outlines my findings through the illustrations and stories in these picture books

and through the images and writings of the Keats collection. To begin, I analyze Keats's use of domestic and transitional spaces.

DOORS, STOREFRONTS, WINDOWS, AND STOOPS

In his picture books, Keats used the spaces and settings of the stories to transmit messages of safety, growing up, and venturing out. He did so through his placement of story elements in domestic spaces characterized by images of family and femininity and through the use of transitional spaces such as doors, storefronts, windows and stoops.

The images and motif of 'venturing out' clearly connotes a hopeful view of these children's interaction with the world. This is in keeping with Looker's (2009) findings, in which he noted that "Keats's stories and illustrations captured a new sense of urban space and a new hopefulness for a pluralist Great Society in the cities" (p. 313). I argue that the metaphor of a neighborhood designed to give characters' movement and independence calls to mind the 'ideology of liberation' which Omi and Winant (1994) ascribed to the Black community of the 1960s and 1970s. It is a hopeful and transformative view of children as increasingly independent actors in an environment that sends conflicting messages about the dangers of the adult world. For adults, the great transformation involved the expansion of political concern. This was done in part by rearticulating Black collective identity in the face of "established social order" (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 99). For the children in these books, however, their identity is rearticulated through the motif of 'venturing out.' In this way, it acts as a racial project (Omi & Winant, 1994), defining race in the terms of character action and the influence of the setting. This section examines the use of domestic spaces as a separation from the

city, the use of windows as a signifier of the communal characteristics of the neighborhood, and the use of transitional spaces to signal the liberated view of the neighborhood's child characters.

Domestic spaces

The domestic spaces in Keats's neighborhood are one example of the conflicting messages of Keats's settings. Although the city becomes increasingly gritty and physically distressed as the books continue, the domestic spaces of the featured family homes remain clean and contemporary. In other words, the domestic spaces fail to reflect the same elements of outside production and influence as the surrounding neighborhood streets. In this space of safety, the characters and the readers cannot see the memory of the neighborhood's physical production (Cuff, 1989).

The inside of Peter's home is pictured in multiple texts (Keats, 1962; Keats, 1964; Keats, 1967). It is a place rich with pattern and color. The red geometric pattern on the walls reminds the reader of Peter's bright red snowsuit, and of his adventures in it (Keats, 1962). In *Whistle for Willie* (Keats, 1964), for example, we see the flowered background in three different spaces in whites and yellows, cool sea foam and sunny orange. Pinks and whites, beiges, tans, and yellows fill the flowered patterns of the walls in *Peter's Chair* (Keats, 1967). Peter's home is, we infer from the walls, a happy, loving space.

The tale of *Apt. 3* (Keats, 1969), however, paints a slightly different picture of domestic spaces. In it, we never see the safety and domesticity of the boys' own home. Instead, the reader explores the darker and more threatening living spaces of the other apartment dwellers. By far the darkest of the books—literally—*Apt. 3* is the story of a

pair of brothers investigating the source of some mysterious music they have heard. Unlike Peter and Louie's homes, which are clean and orderly in appearance, this apartment complex does not appear to be kept in good repair. The hall light is broken and there is an abandoned mattress (with a floral print) in the hallway. The boys examine themselves in a broken mirror, and sneak down hallways littered in trash. Unlike the yellows, pinks and whites of Peter and Louie's homes, this building is pictured in browns and greys, greens and blacks. When they finally find the source of the music, however, there is a significant shift in the color pallet. The musician's apartment does not look like Peter's home, or Louie's, or even the floral curtains we see in the Archie's windows. This apartment is rich in color but has very little pattern or detail. However, it echoes the colors in the boys' clothing: bright greens, bright blues, bright reds, implicitly telling the reader that this, too, is a safe domestic space to which the boys may retreat.

In Keats's neighborhood, windows become a symbol of community, indicating a communal network of support among families (Miller, 1993). Archie's windows, with their floral patterns, are some of many windows in Keats's books. Archie communicates with his friends through his window (Keats, 1972). Peter's mother calls him back home through her window. In fact, nearly every window pictured from the outside includes a plant or a flowerbox: the window on the cover of *Whistle for Willie* (Keats, 1964), windows on pages ten and fourteen of *A Letter to Amy* (Keats, 1968), and the window in which we see Archie and his mother silhouetted (Keats, 1970). Windows which do not have a plant often have an animal—for example, on pages three and four of *Dreams* (Keats, 1974), Keats pictures an apartment building, including a clear view of eight

different windows and a partial view of seven more. Of the eight clear windows, two have plants, three have animals, and five windows show people in their homes. In Keats's collection of research photographs were included thirteen different photographs of window boxes: flowers in buckets and boxes outside neat looking brick buildings with tidy trash cans and trees (Photographs of Ezra Jack Keats, Flowers in window boxes; trees, 120.02).

These windows are images of domesticity and beauty, as well as a means of transition, perspective, and communication with the outside world. However, it is important to note that, along with a view of windows as representatives of communication and community, there may be an undertone of observation and outside scrutiny; after all, of the windows in *Dreams* (Keats, 1974), only one window has its curtains drawn.

Transitional spaces

To be clear, Keats makes no explicit or implicit reference to the political realms of the great transformation. Instead, his work calls to mind the atmosphere of liberation, resistance, and community which worked to transform Black identity and engender reform (Omi & Winant, 1994). The transitional spaces and refrains of 'venturing out' in Keats's work can be seen as a response to discourse which characterized the Black male child as a wandering delinquent (Cavan, 1959; Moynihan, 1965; Rainwater, 1966; Valentine, 1968). In his works, the characters—particularly the Black boys Archie and Peter—wander, but rather than participating in troublesome behavior, they engage in the universal play that White reader parents might ascribe to their own children. This can be

seen in the imagery of windows, doors, and stoops and the activities that take place in them.

For Roberto, his window is the space of *Dreams* (Keats, 1974). When everyone else's windows have turned to marbled color, his window remained dark. "Soon everybody was dreaming—except one person" (Keats, 1974, p. 8). When Roberto approaches his own window, he sees an adventure take place between a cat, a dog, and his paper mouse, fantastically recreated for us with exaggerated shadows and perspectives. Our first image of Peter is of him seeing the possibility of a snowy adventure through his window. In *Goggles*! (Keats, 1969), Peter and Archie peer through a hole in a board and through their found goggles, changing perspectives and verifying safety before venturing out and away from the danger of the big boys. Windows are not the only transitional spaces important to characters in these books.

Doors are a frequent symbol of venturing out. In *Pet Show*! (Keats, 1972), the sign advertising the event is posted on a wall made from brightly colored doors, inviting the characters and the reader to come out and enjoy the fun. Behind each door in *Apt. 3* (Keats, 1969) lies a mystery, some of which invite exploring, some—like the door behind which a family argued—did not. When Peter ventures into the storm to mail his birthday invitation in *A Letter to Amy* (Keats, 1968), we first see the storm taking up the entire open doorway. Unlike *The Snowy Day* (Keats, 1962) and *A Whistle for Willie* (Keats, 1964), in which Peter explores the world and his own abilities, this storm is the first actual problem Peter encounters. Like the mystery doors in *Apt. 3* (Keats, 1969), this door is a reminder that venturing out may present its challenges as well as its joys.

Photographs in Keats's collection frequently included doors and windows. For example, of six photographs of the Brooklyn Public Library, Arlington Branch, two of them showed the front doors, one pictured library windows, and one focused on the library's front steps (Photographs of Ezra Jack Keats, Brooklyn Public Library - Arlington Branch, 119.12). Seven pictures in the collection explicitly displayed doors, including a green door with faded paint, big double doors at a synagogue, and a bright yellow doorway up the stairs from a yellow shop (Photographs of Ezra Jack Keats, Doorways, 120.06). A picture, credited to David Oliver Pfeil, torn from a magazine showed a baby looking out a screened window (Research Materials of Ezra Jack Keats, 165.14). Another torn page showed pictures of walls and dividers made by attaching standing doors together (Research Materials of Ezra Jack Keats, 165.15). An additional picture, a 1936 view of a warehouse at Water and Dock Streets in Brooklyn, showed a building with multiple doors and shutters almost the size of doors, most thrown open (Research Materials of Ezra Jack Keats, 165.15).

Most of the pictures Keats took of children and of buildings centered on their facades, their storefronts, and their front stoops and steps (Photographs of Ezra Jack Keats). Fifteen pictures included only storefronts, both in use and abandoned, including grocery stores with windows full to the top with food and shelves of dry goods, and laundry facilities such as the "Chinese Hand Laundry" pictured in *A Letter to Amy* (Keats, 1968). Of a folder of 38 pages torn from magazines for research, 17 of them included pictures which featured windows, doors, stoops or storefronts (Research Materials of Ezra Jack Keats, 165.14; 165.15).

The stoops and spaces right in front of homes included in the stories are for the characters places of safety as well as play. When Peter feels the need to escape from his own house, which he feels is being taken over by the needs of a new baby, he need go no further than the spot directly in front of his home, below his own open window (Keats, 1967). The neighborhood is Peter's safe space, but it still has strong connections to his home. In *Goggles!* (Keats, 1969), Peter and Archie are threatened by a group of big boys and their hideout is compromised by violence. The boys then retreat to Archie's front steps for safety.

The spaces in which these stories take place—on the steps, on the sidewalk, in the streets, and in homes—are primarily spaces in which the characters have increasing measures of ownership and independence. In other words, these are spaces in which they are in charge, their perspectives guide what we as readers see and what happens in the story. In the next section I examine the ways in which these children exercise that ownership and independence through graphics and through the alteration of reality by their imaginations.

MAKING THEIR MARK

Nikola-Lisa (1991b), who examined graphic play in the picture books of Ezra Jack Keats, wrote, "[Keats] achieves the height of picture book art by dissolving the thin line between text and illustration, and he does so primarily by 'playing' with various graphic images as subtexts that both clarify and extend his main narrative intentions" (Nikola-Lisa, 1991b, p. 254). Keats certainly did play with various graphic images, but my analysis of his texts as well as of his research materials reveals that extending

narrative intentions is not the only—nor may it be the most important—result of these graphics. By graphic images, I mean the use of written words—other than the story text—'character created' lines and marks such as games and scoring mechanisms, and graffiti. Though created—or recreated—by Keats, these marks represent the marks of the characters or of other children like them. Through Keats, our view of reality is skewed by children's own marks and by their imaginations. For these children, their writing and imposition of reality is their form of activism, of writing their own stories—part of the 'culture of resistance' (Omi & Winant, 1994). As Looker (2009) wrote, "[T]he surroundings indicate that the characters are the makers of, rather than victims of, their environment….In this sense, the community's children are presented as participants in 'writing' their own neighborhood" (p. 325). This is another form of the rearticulation of Black and 'Underclass' children's identity. Omi and Winant (1994) wrote that in the process of redefining identity, "They take elements and themes of his/her culture and traditions and infuse them with new meaning" (p. 99). In the case of Keats's children, they infuse new meaning not into culture or traditions, per se, but in their environments. The graffiti becomes symbolic of their play and youthfulness, and racialized and classed environments bend to the will of characters' imaginations. This can be seen in the increasing use of graphics as well as the ways in which characters' views of the world alter the readers' reality as created in the books.

POST NO BILLS

In some ways, children's graphics in the books of Ezra Jack Keats represent the struggle of these children to 'write' their presence in the production of this neighborhood

(Cuff, 1989) even at the occasional risk of undermining authority. This can be seen through the contrasting use of children's graphics and adult graphics, such as the fading stamp of "POST NO BILLS."

When we first meet Peter the only graphics we see are the patterns and graphic play in the walls and objects of his home (Keats, 1962). Whether the snow obscures such graphics or not, it is not until Peter begins his attempt to learn to whistle—a rite of passage—that the readers see Peter encounter graphics (Keats, 1964). Suddenly Peter passes by a wall with lots of graphics, including the word "CAT," numbers, arrows and fingers pointing this way and that, stars, and, stamped upside down, the laughing "ha ha" (Keats, 1964). This is not the world of adults; these graphics are clearly for and possibly even by children. This environment is not an imposition on Peter's play; it's an accomplice in his fun. Similarly, the smiling faces drawn on the walls in *Hi, Cat*! (Keats, 1970) mirror the mask Archie wears to amuse his friends. On the back cover of *Hi, Cat!* (Keats, 1970) are footprints walking up and down the wall. These footprints were directly recreated from a photograph of graffiti Keats took, which also included the words "My shoe size is getting bigger" (Photographs of Ezra Jack Keats, Graffiti, 122.3). In fact, many of the graphic images included in his works were drawn in the style of graffiti he photographed, although of the twenty photographs of graffiti included in his collection, at least half of them included peace and anti-war images and references such as "STREET FOR PEACE," and "Vietnam for the Vietnamese" (Photographs of Ezra Jack Keats, Graffiti, 122.3).

In *A Letter to Amy* (Keats, 1968), the reader can see Peter getting older as he invites a girl to his birthday party. This book displays a dramatic shift in the way the adult world moves into the world of children. The back cover of the book shows a collage of adult graphics and children's names, messy and bold. One wall on page proclaims, in faded letters, "POST NO BILLS," an image included in Keats's research photographs. In fact, no adults have posted anything. Yet the same wall houses scribbles and a human figure, as well as the remains of the score of a baseball game between the "cats" and the "bats" (Keats, 1968, p. 10). As soon as Peter enters the world there are graphic marks of children on the ground and low on fences, but there are also the collaged bills of the adult world: they indicate the presence of adults, but their layered and unclear presence gives the impression that their role here is not as important as the clearly drawn train tracks and hopscotch games of other children (Keats, 1968, p. 5-6; 11-12). *Goggles*! (Keats, 1969) and *Pet Show*! (Keats, 1972) also display a combination of adult and child graphics. In *Goggles*! (Keats, 1969) the "PARKING" sign is frequently seen in conjunction with the big boys who threaten Archie and Peter's play space (pp. 19-20, 25-26, 27-28). Finally, although the event in *Pet Show*! (Keats, 1972) is run by adults, the literal writing on the wall was child-created.

The importance of balance between adult and child graphics is seen most of all in the 1975 picture book *Louie* (Keats). In the story, quiet, shy Louie interrupts a puppet show with his excitement over a puppet named Gussie. When the show is over, he hugs Gussie amid an array of child graphics; not the organized sets of the puppet show, but a set of train tracks, sketches and tic tac toe games splayed around him. "Then he walked

home," reads the text on the next pages. These pages picture Louie, walking hunched over, with a wall of loud, bold adult graphics rising behind him. Louie retreats to his room, where his own drawings are hung on the wall, and his own crayons are on the floor nearby. Later, Louie follows a string past some trash cans holding the remnants of adult bills and graphics. In the subsequent scene where he is gleefully reunited with Gussie, the ground is littered with adult posters, and the only child graphics appear in the word "Hello," hung below Gussie like an invitation.

Although obviously created—and recreated—for readers by Keats himself, by centering the graphic world of children as they themselves might create it, the reader is reminded that this is children's microcosm of the adult world. The two exceptions are *Dreams* (Keats, 1974) and *Apt. 3* (Keats, 1969). *Apt. 3* is almost completely devoid of graphics save for the numbers on apartment doors. Unlike the other neighborhood books, this story is not set in the world of children, but in the mysterious world of adults. In *Dreams* (Keats, 1974), there are no graphics, but the world is altered instead by imagination. Readers are not only subject to characters' actions on the world around them, but on their perspective of that world. In the following subsection I describe how characters' imaginations recreate reality for the reader.

Dreams in the windows

"Soon they were all in bed," wrote Keats in *Dreams* (1974, p. 4). "Someone began to dream" (p. 6) In that moment, between pages three and four where the windows are filled with people and animals preparing for bed, and pages five and six, there is a shift between a realistic view of this apartment building, and one flavored by

imagination. The one bright window is filled with sparkling, marbled light, and then on pages seven and eight every window but Roberto's is filled with dream-imagery. The shift from a realistic view to one influenced by imagination is fluid, and is seen throughout Keats's books in a variety of ways, including the imaginative actions of Peter and the affective response of Archie to play.

Peter cannot make many active changes to his environment. He can't make the snowball last in his pocket (Keats, 1962), and he can't detach from his own shadow (Keats, 1964). Yet as readers we see the ways in which Peter's imagination recreates his world. From the beginning, when Peter ventured into the snow, the world is recreated by imagination. Snow obscures the buildings—the whole world, really—in *The Snowy Day* (1962), but it isn't realistic; what is covered and what is revealed fluctuates dependent upon Peter's engagement with the environment. When he first ventures out into the snow he sees the snow covering buildings, which are bright and bold, but as the story goes on the colors of the buildings change, as do their number. There are no signs, no graphics of the adult world to identify them. What is pictured on the page is solely what Peter is engaging with: when Peter makes tracks in the snow, there is only the snow and there is only the tracks. When he smacks a snow-covered tree there is only the tree and there is only Peter with his stick. When in *Whistle for Willie* (1964) Peter "turn[s] himself around…faster and faster," (p. 8-9) the whole world tips with Peter. The ground lifts into a slant, and even the lights fly right off the stop light.

Although as the books go on Keats altered his design style, filling open space with textured color instead of the broad open white space of *The Snowy Day* (Keats,

1962) and *Whistle for Willie* (Keats, 1964), the manipulation of reality continues in favor of imagination. Archie's world in *Hi, Cat!* (Keats, 1970) is full of graphics and details: on pages one and two when Archie first spies the title character perched on a trash can overflowing with adult graphics, the walls are layered with children's scribbles and even a chair has a happy face scrawled onto it. Yet as Archie begins to play with his neighborhood friends, these details become blurred and scarce. The only detail now belongs to the people, to the animals, and to the mask. It is the characters who are important to Archie, and so that is all we as readers can see. This is somewhat of a departure from Nikola-Lisa and Donaldson's (1989) argument that in Keats's books setting drives the story. "Time after time the world presents itself to Archie, and Archie responds accordingly," they wrote (p. 79). It is true that Archie acts in response to the initial sighting of the cat, but the subsequent changes in the world as we see it and the play he engages in with Peter and the other children is driven solely by the characters, not the environment in which we see them. In *Apt. 3* (Keats, 1969) the mysterious world is depicted in mysterious colors. The shadows of the animals in *Dreams* (Keats, 1974) are hyperbolically large. By skewing the size and visual relationships of the world the characters see, Keats limits the reader's perspective to that of the characters he is attempting to create.

Louie, a character who interacts less with his peers than Peter and Archie, takes the reader into his imagination often and in more explicit ways. Upset over his separation from the puppet Gussie, Louie falls asleep. As readers, we join him in his dream as he feeds Gussie from a giant ice cream cone and then loses them both (Keats, 1975). When

in *Louie's Search* (Keats, 1980) Louie is chased by an angry man, he is pictured as hyperbolically large, towering over the terrified Louie, but gradually reducing in size as Louie's mother intervenes and the situation is resolved. The ways in which the images shift for the characters makes allies of the readers, who fear the stranger as Louie does.

Each character's world is created from their own perspective, with the fluctuating influence of adults and their own imaginations altering our own view of it. Though not portrayed as an intentional act, it is nevertheless an expression of their own ability to alter the world as they know it. On the one hand, this echoes the atmosphere of resistance (Omi & Winant, 1994). On the other, however, is the implication that in some ways there is a need to alter or even escape the space these children inhabit. To put it another way, while production of their own reality acts as a form of resistance for these characters, the need for such acts subtly references the subjugation of these children's space due to their race or economic status. Consider the scenes in *Hi, Cat*! (Keats, 1970), for example. Archie's friends are brought to a prominent position, while the surrounding trash and dilapidated neighborhood is obscured from view. As readers, we are meant to focus on the positive friendships, play, and power of Archie's imagination, ignoring the 'reality' of the neighborhood environment. This redirection is reminiscent, though, as noted in the Discussion section, not identical to Bishop's (2003) findings that Keats focused on inter-racial harmony and omitted culturally specific distinctions, as well as Alderson's (1994) critique that Keats erased economic deprivation.

Nevertheless, children's friendship with one another and the other characters in their neighborhood were powerful, not for their interracial quality but for the atmosphere

of resistance that they encouraged. In the next section I examine the allies the children make and the ways in which they enable independence in the world of their neighborhood.

EMPOWERING RELATIONSHIPS

In child development, Bowlby's theory of attachment (Bowlby, 1969) posits that in a secure attachment relationship, the child develops a secure base from which they may venture out on their own, with the implicit understanding that they may always return home. For Keats's characters, that secure base is the safety of the domestic space and the stoops just outside, but it is also the relationships that characters have with parents and with friends. These are the relationships which enable rearticulation of children's collective identities as youthful and independent. Although the portrayal of these relationships is complicated by 'Underclass' connotations and allegations of 'mammification,' the resulting liberation for the child characters remains.

Mothers vs. Mammies

Peter's mother appears in each of the books which feature Peter as a main character. She is centrally located in that domestic space. His mother is pictured sewing, caring for the new baby, and taking off Peter's wet socks. Critics charged that Keats created Peter's mother with a Mammy like appearance (Larrick, 1965; Pescosolido, Grauerholz, & Milkie, 1997). The material Keats used to create her clothing suggests domestic utility: "The mother's dress is made of the kind of oilcloth used for lining cupboards" (Keats, 1963, p. 240). Peter's non-culturally specific appearance and the mother's "huge figure in a gaudy yellow plaid dress, albeit without a red bandanna"

(Larrick, 1965) contributed to such allegations. Peter's, Archie's, and Louie's mothers are only pictured within their homes, and in service of their children's needs. Patricia Hill Collins described a mammy as "the faithful, obedient domestic servant…By loving, nurturing, and caring for her White children and 'family' better than her own, the mammy symbolizes the dominant group's perceptions of the ideal Black female relationship to elite White male power" (Collins, 2000, p. 80). Despite her appearance, Peter's mother serves no family but her own, in care and in play. In her first appearance in *The Snowy Day* (Keats, 1962), Peter's mother takes off his wet socks and listens to his adventures, and in her next appearance she plays along with Peter's imaginary role play (Keats, 1964). "When his mother saw what he was doing, Peter pretended that he was his father. He said, 'I've come home early today, dear. Is Peter here?' His mother answered, 'Why no, he's outside with Willie.'" (p 20-21). Her role as a secure base can be seen most clearly in *A Letter to A*my (Keats, 1968). During a short dialogue about Peter's letter, Peter says, "Now I'll mail it," and his mother asks him what he wrote, encouraging him to add the time and date of the party. When he again comments, "Now I'll mail it," she reminds him to put on a stamp. Finally, when he begins to leave, she cautions, "Wear your raincoat. It looks like rain" (Keats, 1968, p. 3). Each time Peter prepares to leave he is unready in some way, unprepared for the realities of this simple act. His mother prepares and supports him as he endeavors out into the rain. She and the other mothers are home base, enabling their children to venture out, prepared, and with the knowledge that they can always return home to safety.

Connotations of safety and retreat in a domestic space can also be seen in the book *Louie's Search* (Keats, 1980). Unlike Peter, whose father briefly appears in two of his books, the character of Louie, whose skin is light, has no father. "Louie put on some funny things and took a walk. Maybe someone would notice him—someone he'd like for a father" (Keats, 1980, p. 1). Louie's home, too, is filled with floral patterns—even more so than Peter's home. The lamp, the walls, Louie's mother's dress, his mother's chair, all loudly and firmly proclaim that this is her space. When Louie and the stranger barge into her home in the middle of their own altercation, Louie's mother never moves. Instead, still seated, she resolves the conflict and offers the stranger a cup of tea (Keats, 1980).

"Things look real fine now."

Many of the photographs Keats took of children playing picture an interracial group of children similar to the children found in the Keats's own picture books. The focus in each picture and each book is not, however, on the racial differences between children, but on their shared goals. For example, in one picture, four children walk together in an empty lot (Photographs of Ezra Jack Keats, Children, 119.08). Two of them are looking directly at the camera, and the other two are looking down and at the others. Their arms are slung around one another's shoulders, and three of them are walking in sync. Their skin is varying shades of tan and brown. Although there are other people in the background, this is clearly their territory, if only for the moment in which their image is captured by the camera. In another picture, readers can see a brick wall with a pipe. Pictured are three boys, one with dark skin, two with light skin (Photographs of Ezra Jack Keats, Children, 119.8). One of the boys is climbing up the pipe, assisted by

his blonde-headed friend's head under his posterior. The friends in Keats's neighborhoods, be they human, cat, dog, or puppet, are there for the support of one another's play. The following subsections look at how Amy, Peter, and Archie act as defenders of and catalysts for their own play, as well as the ways in which the animals in the stories act as co-creators of play. Interracial harmony (Looker, 2009) and agency of one's own fate are the primary messages of these friendships.

Peter is initially a lone character, exploring and playing on his own. Although at the end of *The Snowy Day* (Keats, 1962) he ventures out with a friend, his solo adventures are the ones to which we as readers are privy. *Whistle for Willie* (Keats, 1964) introduced the reader to Peter's canine friend, which will be discussed in the next section. In *A Letter to Amy* (Keats, 1968), however, we read, in the act of growing older (his birthday party), Peter's first efforts at a new kind of friendship. When Peter writes an invitation for Amy to his party, his mother remarks, "You didn't write to anyone else" (Keats, 1968, p. 2). "Peter stared at the sheet of paper for a while and said, 'We-e-el-l, this way it's sort of special" (Keats, 1968, p. 2). Peter's efforts at a special kind of friendship with Amy give him cause to venture out into the storm. Through no action of her own, she is the catalyst for another adventure—one which she rewards by appearing at Peter's party. Despite a room full of other children, it is Amy that Peter hopes for at his party.

Soon, Peter is involved in a friendship with much higher stakes. Peter and Archie's found object play in *Goggles*! (Keats, 1969; Nikola-Lisa, 1991a) is soon interrupted by the appearance of a threatening group of 'big boys.' When the boys

demand the goggles, Peter immediately acts in defense of Archie, first by putting up his fists, and then by making a plan for Archie and himself to escape the boys. Peter's defense creates opportunities for action and independence for Archie as he first escapes the violent big boys and then makes it home to play in safety. Although the big boys appear to be interracial, the boy pictured in front who knocked Peter down is White. By including boys of multiple races as threatening figures, Keats obfuscates any racist implications. As Pattillo (1999) noted, interracial violence occurred for children in increasingly integrated neighborhoods. Even if seen as a racial clash, Keats's heroic characters easily escape the situation through cleverness and physical prowess, underscoring messages of power among this newest generation. After Archie and Peter return to Archie's front stoop, Archie says, "Things look real fine now" (Keats, 1969, p. 31). It is no surprise, then, that Archie and Peter's friendship appears in subsequent books. In *Hi, Cat*! (Keats, 1970), Peter helps Archie to entertain his friends, first with a show, and then with Willie.

The relationships pictured become broader; rather than a pair of friends, we see a neighborhood group of friends. In *Louie* (Keats, 1975) the friends come together for a puppet show, seemingly created solely by and for the children. In *Pet Show* (Keats, 1972) the clamber and excitement of the friends is the joy of the pet show: "They got to the entrance. A lot of people were already there. Just then, Roberto's mouse took off. Willie chased the mouse. Roberto chased Willie. Peter chased Roberto. Susie chased Peter—and the show started" (Keats, 1972, p. 11-12). Although in his books Keats positively depicted the power of friendship independent of adults, his own writings

revealed a somewhat more complicated view of that friendship. "Parents live out their lives well intentioned—send them to school—{sic}buying them books and toys, clothing, food—what else is there to care about?...The intensity and involvement—the imagination that sets afire—how it plays a formative role in their lives. I am their secret friend" (Keats, *Typescript for Talk*, 87.12, p. 2). Keats was not the only secret friend. Hidden in the stories were another set of friendships less frequently noted: the pets. The next subsection outlines the role of these friendships in characters' independence and play.

A cat, a dog, a mouse, and Willie

Peter's Dachshund Willie is the most constant animal friend in Keats's neighborhood books. When Peter ventures out to play, so does Willie, though he meanders in and out of Peter's play. Just as Amy is a catalyst for Peter's moment of maturation in *A Letter to Amy* (Keats, 1968), Willie is an unwitting accomplice in Peter's attempts at learning to whistle (Keats, 1964). In *A Letter to Amy* and *Goggles*! (Keats, 1969) Willie acts as a protector, accompanying Peter in a storm, growling at the threatening big boys, and as a distraction, providing the means for Archie and Peter's eventual escape. He is a source of fun and excitement in *Hi, Cat!* (Keats, 1970) as he skirmishes in traditional fashion with the cat. Consistently, Willie is a source of fun and an enabler of independence—without Willie, would Peter wander the streets as freely?

Among Keats's photographs included multiple pictures of cats, including several images of Keats himself painting in his studio with a large long-haired cat batting at the paintbrush (Photographs of Ezra Jack Keats, Ezra Jack Keats working in studio, 117.4). One of the iconic images of Keats was a publicity photo picturing Keats, smiling, with

the long-haired cat. Although the de Grummond collection included a plethora of pages torn from magazines picturing many different subjects, the largest collection was a folder containing approximately sixty different pages featuring pictures of cats (Research materials of Ezra Jack Keats; Research materials – cat pictures, 165.13). When Archie encountered the little black cat in *Hi, Cat!* (Keats, 1970) it was as more than a street cat. The cat both disrupts the fun (through the skirmish with Willie) and embeds himself in their play. Archie's mom comments that "You're well rid of a cat like that," (Keats, 1970, p. 32). However, the opening of *Pet Show* (Keats, 1972) in which Archie is looking for the cat yet again indicates that the cat becomes somewhat of a fixture in their fun.

Animals are clearly a source of fun and even child empowerment in these picture books. The children care for their own animals, bring them to a pet show, and engage in their world with them. It isn't the adults that bring the pet show to the children, it's the pets. Although the adults run the pet show pictured, the reader is led to believe it could just as easily have been generated solely by children, like the show in *Hi, Cat*! (Keats, 1970) or the puppet show in *Louie* (Keats, 1975). The adventure in *Dreams* (Keats, 1974) is not the adventure of the children, this time, but that of the cat, dog, and paper mouse in the alley. Once again, the animals are co-constructors of the fun in the neighborhood. In fact, nearly every child in the neighborhood has a pet: Amy has a parrot, Peter has Willie, Archie has the cat, and Roberto has a mouse.

Although for the child characters the animals offer independence and playfulness, their presence changes the characteristic of the neighborhood. This neighborhood, we

may infer, has wild animals, including rodents. In their inclusion, particularly since the animal characters are rarely seen within the 'clean' domestic spaces of Peter and Louie's homes, Keats's neighborhood echoes Black Underclass discourse which characterized low income neighborhoods as "infected" (Valentine, 1968, p. 20), and "without any restraint upon their vagrant impulses and wild desires" (Frazier, 1939, p. 97).

The animals, the friendships, the imaginative creation of the neighborhood through graphics and through play are all elements of these children's world. For the most part, these stories are told almost entirely through and with the perspectives of the child characters. As noted in each of the previous themes, the world of adults is secondary yet troubling. Adults intervene only rarely with plot lines, and exist primarily in the subtle aspects of the setting. In this last section, I examine the ways in which, while hidden, the racial and economic troubles of adults are hidden in plain sight.

TRUTH IN THE DISTRESSING

Part of any discussion about cultural memory is discussion of silencing. As Trouillot (1997) wrote, "Whatever has not been cancelled out in the generalities dies in the cumulative irrelevance of a heap of details" (p. 97). Critics and scholars have commented on the almost obsessive attention Keats paid to the grittiness and distressed landscape. "Every illustration shouts, 'Look, see, we're in a ghetto" (Looker, 2009, p. 332). Yet as mentioned previously, Streamas (2008) argued the importance of settings as the realm of politics and social issues in children's literature. For Keats, it is the backgrounds and settings in which he pictures the influence of outside or adult forces and reifies as cultural memory of urbanity as dirty, neglected spaces. This can be seen in the

changing representation of the world based on the characters' ages, in the use of different materials to communicate the time induced distressing of buildings, and in the images of trash and trash cans on the streets. These images connote the ghetto, it is true; yet in this heap of details are the mechanisms of racialized and economically oppressed spaces (Hankins, et al, 2012).

Changing views and changing materials

In 1962 when Peter was first introduced to readers, his world was new and pristine. Keats described the process he used to create the images in his 1963 Caldecott acceptance speech. "As work progressed, one swatch of material suggested another, and before I realized it, each page was being handled in a style I had never worked in before" (Keats, 1963, p. 240). Beginning in *A Letter for Amy* (Keats, 1968), however, Keats begins to use a more textured approach to the neighborhood. For example, on pages thirteen and fourteen, the neighborhood textures are sharply contrasted: the "How Soon Hand Laundry" includes crisply cut out flowers, carefully placed in a yellow display window. Nearby, a wall has ripped collage materials; black text on a goldenrod background layered on a wall with broad, messy blocks of paint layered over one another and mixed together. This technique of spackling and roughly layering paint and adult graphics including text and images became more and more representative of Keats' style. In utilizing these techniques, Keats illustrated the natural distressing of the neighborhood. Walls, front doors, and the miscellaneous items and old furniture in Peter and Archie's hideout (Keats, 1969) all received this treatment. In doing so, we see less of the world created by the characters in their imagination, and more of the reality of a neighborhood

aging naturally through time. After all, the difference in the publication dates of *The Snowy Day*—1962 and *Louie's Search*—1980—spans a distance of nearly twenty years. Though the characters age only a very little, the neighborhood shows its wear. Nevertheless, these characteristics of the neighborhood are never acknowledged by the characters, either explicitly or implicitly. A pile of old furniture in an empty lot is not junk; it is a hideout, a magical place to play. A front door with fading paint is still a way to venture out into the world and explore. Finally, the trash cans and the trash which we as readers see in the scenes are entirely ignored by the characters. The next section examines these images of trash in the Keats neighborhood books.

Trash and trash cans

Like the prevalence of loose animals throughout books, the images of trash and trash cans in Keats's picture books echo a discourse of underclass neighborhoods which characterized its inhabitants as unkempt at best and infected at worst (Frazier, 1939, Moynihan, 1967). Images of overflowing trash and streets littered with paper imply inhabitants who do not care for their neighborhood and its upkeep—or inhabitants who receive inadequate sanitation support.

In *The Snowy Day* (1962), the only images of the adult world in the neighborhood are the buildings and a lone, snow topped street lamp. The same is somewhat true in *Whistle for Willie* (1964) and *Peter's Chair* (Keats, 1967), although Peter has interactions with adults in his own home and plays past a barbershop. In *A Letter to Amy* (Keats, 1968), however, the adult world is introduced in a different capacity: through trash. When we first see trash cans in *A Letter to Amy* they are neat

and appear to either be empty or at the very least not overflowing. In the subsequent books, however, trash becomes increasingly prominent on the neighborhood sidewalks. As previously mentioned, the empty lot in *Goggles*! (1969) and the forgotten items in it play a major role in the characters' environment. By *Hi, Cat!* (Keats, 1970), the trash cans are overflowing and there is trash littered around them—yet Archie has eyes only for the cat. In essence, he doesn't even see the trash. In *Pet Show!* (Keats, 1972), trash is pictured on the ground and overflowing from trash cans in multiple scenes, yet Archie and Willie only lift the lid of a trash can to look for the cat. Over and over again, trash—depicted as scraps of paper with text on it—is seen in the streets and overflowing from trash cans (Keats, 1974; Keats, 1975; Keats; 1980).

These images were drawn, at least in part, from the images Keats took as he walked (Photographs of Ezra Jack Keats, Trash cans, 122.8). One 1974 photograph, for example, shows the façade of a building with a green door. Outside on the stoop are four trash cans, with two more and what appears to be a bag of trash placed by the curb. At least seven other photographs include trash cans, while several more include images of trash on the street.

In summary, I found that Keats placed the hopeful and independent atmosphere of his child characters at a forefront, echoing great transformation discourse (Omi & Winant, 1994). In doing so, however, the racialization and ghetto-ization of his setting and the 'adult issues' therein are shifted to the background. This is consistent—in part—with Looker's (2009) finding that Keats created an image of community as one which deliberately avoided engaging with racial and economic issues in characters' lives.

However, I disagree with Looker's (2009) supposition that Keats ignored issues of economic deprivation. Although issues of race and economic oppression were not central to characters' stories, they are clearly depicted in the neighborhood setting.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined the fictional geographical space of Keats's neighborhood and the characters who lived in it in relation to discourse surrounding similar neighborhoods of the time period. My work was informed by literature about the subjugation of peoples inscribed in their neighborhood spaces, by sociological works addressing Black neighborhoods, families, and the 'Underclass,' and by children's literature analyses of space, race, and hierarchies of power within picture books. I proposed that Keats's books act as a racial project, offering a particular reading of race; situated in the context of Great Society, Underclass, and Civil Rights debates, the significance of the images of young Black boys and interracial friends in a tenement neighborhood takes on important meaning to the readers. In other words, I asked what, as a racial project, do the picture books of Ezra Jack Keats say to children and other readers about Black and low-income families and their neighborhoods in the 1960s and 1970s?

First, this racial project says that in the 1960s and 1970s children of different races played together in relative harmony and independence in their urban neighborhoods. This can be seen through symbols of liberation and voice in Keats's picture books: the doors which almost always open out into the world, children's writing on the walls, and the friendships which overcome what little violence occurs on their streets. These books say that Black boys were wanderers, but not delinquents, that their intentions were joyful play and that they explored their worlds relatively undisturbed by racism, classism, and adults. This is evidenced by Peter and Archie's trips throughout the

streets, where they engaged in object and imaginative play with their friends, bothered only once in ten books by older boys looking for a tussle.

Second, this racial project says that mothers and their homes were the secure base for Black and urban children's lives. Adults played little to no role in the plot development of Keats's picture books and their issues were pictured as part of the setting, the backdrop to the happy play of the characters. Nevertheless, this racial project indicates that mothers stayed home and cared for the domestic aspects of children's lives, and that as such, they enabled children to venture out on their own.

Third, this racial project says that the people of this neighborhood—primarily Black but interracial overall—lived in relative squalor, with many needs and little systemic support. This can be seen in the dilapidated physical qualities of the neighborhood, in the limited city structures, and in the images of trash and trash cans increasingly present in the books. This racial project also says that Black and urban children lived relatively unaffected by their neighborhood's status. Archie never notices the trash; he has eyes only for the cat sitting on top. In fact, as shown in the trash of *Louie* (Keats, 1975), Keats even uses the trash imagery as a negative symbol of growing up.

In these findings, I depart from previous literature in several key ways. First, by examining Keats's work as a racial project, I consider not only the question of stereotypes and oversights in his work, but how his work contributes to cultural memory of race and urban neighborhoods. Second, although I agree with the supposition that Keats does not deal explicitly with race or class in his characters, I argue that Keats's

depiction of the neighborhood and the many details drawn from his own research and documentation of the city does reflect the racism and classism inscribed in such spaces. In this discussion section I explore these departures, and conclude with implications for future research and practice.

MELTING POT CHARACTERS, CULTURALLY CONSCIOUS SPACE

In Keats's photographs of himself at events with children, nestled between one picture of Keats and a little boy grinning broadly and another was a picture of Loretta Long, the actress who plays Susan on *Sesame Street*, posing with her own broad grin and child (Photographs of Ezra Jack Keats, Children, 119.09). The connection between *Sesame Street* and Keats's books is evident; both feature an interracial cast of characters, happily playing in an urban neighborhood. Both neighborhoods even contain a similar, brightly colored fence made of doors. Looker (2009) examined this connection and the ways that both Keats's books and *Sesame Street* contributed in the 1960s to an idealistic view of Great Society Values: "Although Keats's books won widespread praise and criticism throughout the literary world, the era's most self-conscious and sustained effort to shape children's perceptions through neighborhood representation undoubtedly came with the premiere of *Sesame Street*…" (p. 334). The messages are indeed similar: racial integration is both good and natural, racism doesn't exist for children, and even a dilapidated neighborhood can be host to imagination and play.

Neither the set of *Sesame Street* nor the streets of Keats's neighborhood explicitly communicate a time or place, the way descriptions of neighborhoods such as Groveland in Chicago do (Pattillo, 1999). Keats's neighborhood is racialized and classed in

specific—yet complicated—ways. Nevertheless, my findings echo works which proclaim Keats's characters as universal and archetypal (Nikola-Lisa and Donaldson, 1989; Silvey, 2002). Since Keats's books featured integrated characters in youthful play together, Bishop characterized Keats's books as 'melting pot' books, albeit clarifying that "Those are the books that most resemble the third category, culturally conscious" (Bishop, 1991, p. 33). Yet this clarification does not go far enough in acknowledging that the impact of Keats's realistic portrayal of urban neighborhoods alters cultural memory of such neighborhoods. Keats does little to imbue Peter and Archie with culturally authentic qualities. However, their situation within a truthful urban neighborhood constructs them as 'Underclass,' if not Black in particular, and the depictions of their adventures contribute to an image of childhood and play.

DEPICTIONS OF MOTHERS AND SONS

Archie and Peter's adventures offer a narrative somewhat counter to discourse about Black boys of the time (which, as the research mentioned in the introduction, as well as works such as Brown (2011) noted, have persisted). As Brown (2011) wrote, "…findings give credence to the idea that the depiction of the African American male as absent and irresponsible was more of the manufacturing of myth than objective sociological findings. However, despite such inaccuracies, the narrative of the wandering, footloose, irresponsible, and sexually promiscuous Black male remained" (p. 2055). Peter and Archie and the other characters of Keats's books complicate that narrative. They are wandering their neighborhood unsupervised. They are not characterized as delinquent or destructive. Cavan's (1959) argument that "unfavorable

conditions are much more frequently found in the families of Negro delinquents" (p. 289) suggests that popular discourse might see them, perhaps, as future delinquents. Nevertheless, overall Peter and Archie are counter-images of harmless and playful children.

Critics have cited the "mammification' of Peter's mother as an example of stereotypes within Keats's work (Pescosolido, Grauerholz, & Milkie, 1997) by noting that she resembles stereotypical mammy images. Yet despite her appearance, Peter's mother does not function as a mammy within the text. Instead, she speaks to the positive force of a secure attachment and its impact on children's independence. These stories are not about Peter's mother, or any of the parents; their role is not center to plots about venturing out and play. Her physical features and limited role keeps Peter's mother from being a portrayal of Black mothers that works as a counter narrative to discourse which characterized Black mothers as sexually promiscuous and emasculating (Frazier, 1939; Brown, 2011).

STOOPS, LAUNDRY LINES, AND TRASH

"In persuading us that they do represent the actual world in a simple and obvious fashion, picture books are particularly powerful deceivers" (Nodelman, 2005, p. 73). In some ways, the picture books of Ezra Jack Keats do represent a deception, a departure from discourse about the families pictured. Yet in some ways, these picture books actually do represent the real world, in part due to Keats's habits of neighborhood photographic research. If explored, these representations can offer a glimpse not only into these families' lives but the implications that the details provide. From the

deteriorating state of the buildings (Pinkney, 1970) to the laundry lines strung between buildings (Bell, 2013), Keats drew on research and his own experiences. Marilyn Goodman said in an oral history about East Harlem:

> Tenements also allowed you to have the clothesline. We didn't have a dryer, so we needed a clothesline…But you had to get in touch with the other person across the yard. Let's say if you lived on 112th Street then you went around to 113th street to locate the building in front of you. Sometimes you would be able to see the person across the yard and you would motion the person to put up the line. Most often the owner said yes, because that's what we did. (Goodman, in Bell, 2013, p. 8)

Picturing a clothesline strung between the buildings tells us that the characters didn't have dryers, and that they had to develop at least enough relationship with their neighbors to string up the line. That laundry line, like the windows, can be a symbol of community and interconnectivity. Similarly, the stoops Keats pictured were a mechanism for community. "The stoops allowed each tenant to sit down with their family and friends" (Nicholasa Mohr, in Bell, 2013, p. 7). Other details, such as the sometimes constant presence of trash and trash cans included by Keats, offer other details of life in urban neighborhoods which indicate the extent to which those spaces were classed and racialized.

In the post-World War II boom, neighborhoods in East Harlem and Brooklyn saw a dramatic increase in population, many of which were Black or other people of color (Bell, 2013; Purnell, 2007; Pinkney & Woock, 1970). Despite that boom, the city's

sanitation department failed to adequately increase garbage pickup service (Purnell, 2007). Denise Oliver:

> The tenements had alleyways behind them and a lot of garbage was spread throughout the vacant lots as well. But the garbage was never picked up which rotted in the back and in the summertime the stench was unbelievable. It also attracted a huge number of rats and the unsanitary health conditions sent neighborhood children to the hospital. The sanitation department pretended as if East Harlem didn't exist, or garbage didn't need to be picked up above 96th street. (Oliver, as quoted in Bell, 2013, p. 174)

Garbage trucks were sent inconsistently and too infrequently to these neighborhoods (Enk-Wanzer, 2010; Purnell, 2007), resulting in an overabundance of trash and garbage lining the streets and alley-ways.

Throughout the 1960s trash collection became increasingly important as a political dispute among neighborhoods and, due to the prevalence of these issues in Black neighborhoods or neighborhoods of other people of color, a civil rights concern. New York City (Gill, 2011), Cincinnati (Miller, 2001), Seattle, Columbus, Ohio (Cox, 1989), and other urban areas all saw a rise in post-war neighborhood politics around micro-issues such as trash collection. Some neighborhoods had representatives in various levels of government, including City Council, but as Purnell (2007, July 1) noted, "[O]nly City Hall had the power to remedy problems with sanitation services" (p. 4).

In 1962, organizations in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood launched a campaign to increase awareness about the problem of inadequate trash pickup in

Brooklyn. A nine day sanitation workers strike over unfair wage rules in February of 1968—the year *A Letter to Amy* (Keats, 1968) was published—left the city dirtier than ever (Stetson, 1968). In 1969 Puerto Rican activists began their own "Garbage Offensive" (Enck-Wanzer, 2010). As members stated in oral histories, "We had asked people what was the major contradiction in the community. And they said it was the garbage, which deflated our balloons a lot, since we wanted to go fighting…" (Felipe Luciano, in Bell, 2013, p. 173). Nevertheless, their actions continued to increase the awareness about the inadequate sanitation coverage.

Keats's inclusion of trash imagery does not explicitly reference the actions of neighborhood activists or striking sanitation workers. Nevertheless, its inclusion not only references the prevalence of garbage in these tenements, but it invites exploration as to why these neighborhoods were forced to endure such conditions. In the conclusion I outline this and other potential implications for research and practice.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings in this study indicate that in research on children's literature and in educational practice it is critically important not only to examine picture books in terms of race, class, and power, but that one must not discount the details in such work. The consideration of that which is explicitly occluded, such as racially specific identifiers, themes of family relations, and pride in Black heritage (Bishop, 1991), is important to help teachers and parents identify books which do promote cultural authenticity for children. However, a more nuanced examination of Keats work not only tells us about

ideologies transmitted to children but also about the production of cultural memory of a time frequently studied in our schools.

In order to do this work, however, preservice teachers must be able to deconstruct texts and examine them from multiple standpoints. The field of critical literacy, for example, offers opportunities for students and teachers to examine texts and create works from a critical perspective. Critical literacy enables students to examine multiple perspectives in and out of texts (Soares and Wood, 2010; Stevens and Bean, 2007), and issues of agency and identity (Brooks, 2006; Damico, Baildon, & Greenstone, 2010; Stevens & Bean, 2007). Students and teachers use critical literacy to question biases (Boutte, 2002), intended audience, and who stands to benefit or is silenced by a text (Stevens & Bean, 2007). However, if one does not delve into the details of a text, the ability of students—or researchers—to see the extent of systemic oppression cannot be realized. We must open up our history—in textbooks, in picture books, in narratives of all kinds—to that heap of details that Trouillot (1997) suggests is being omitted. Wineburg (2001), Brown and Brown (2010) and others (Levstik & Barton, 2005) have found that by centering curriculum on heroes and villains, students' views of history are becoming overly simplistic and skewed toward a non-critical perspective. By examining Keats's texts for the details within it, I was able to open up discussion of the inequalities of basic human rights in East Harlem and Brooklyn. If students do not know that disparities in garbage pickup frequency was largely based on race, and that those disparities were systemically produced by city mechanisms, they do not fully know the extent of racism in New York City in the 1960s.

For teachers who increasingly are required to integrate social studies in language arts and science, these findings imply that more work is needed to interrogate the ways in which social justice, critical literacy, and place based education can be integrated. In her work, Tyson (2002) examined how historical fiction contributed to African American students' definition of social action and ideas for social action in their local community. In other research, students use critical literacy practices to research an urban renewal proposal of their neighborhood and draw up their own proposals for their spaces (Comber, Thomson, & Wells, 2001). Place-based education, as noted previously, draws from Dewey's ideas to develop real world experience and authentic interaction in local communities and environments (Maguth & Hilburn, 2011). Place-based education is intended to engage students with local environment and politics. However, thus far it has been more about social justice, or reshaping the community moving forward, and less about a critical study of a neighborhood's past. The implications of this study indicate research on place-based historical inquiry is needed. Teachers find place-based social justice and environmental study to increase engagement through its connections to students' lives. This suggests that place-based historical inquiry could provide opportunities for integrating family history into content, examining production of students own spaces, as well as how their neighborhoods and its inhabitants have been depicted in local popular culture.

My findings also indicate that more work is needed which examines picture books in this way. As has been shown in this work, picture books are not only communicators of ideology, as Nodelman (1988), Burbules (1986) and others have argued, but they are

also material culture, indicators and shapers of cultural memory. Culturally conscious characters in picture books are of critical importance; they authenticate children's real world experiences and contribute to cultural memory. Nevertheless, melting pot books and even books which portray inequalities in power and depiction must be examined, because they are part of our cultural memory. Only by troubling them can we learn about the details of our past, interrogate our present, and construct future spaces which enable the equity and action of children.

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