"The Brownies' Book": An Open Window to Early Twentieth-Century African American Childhood

Regina Ann Clark

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THE BROWNIES’ BOOK:
An Open Window to Early Twentieth-Century African American Childhood

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A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the College of William and Mary in Candidacy for the Degree of
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Master of Arts

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This thesis focuses on letters written by African American children to the editors of a monthly, black children's magazine, *The Brownies' Book*, which was produced by W. E. B. Du Bois and Augustus Granville Dill, Publishers from January of 1920 through December of 1921. The letters were published in "The Jury," a column reserved for children. Du Bois edited the magazine; Dill was business manager; Jessie Redmon Fauset was literary and subsequently managing editor. Letters published in "The Jury" provide insight into children's inner thoughts and intellectual lives in the segregated society of the early twentieth-century U.S. They represent an invaluable resource for scholars' efforts to reconstruct black childhood experiences. The first part of this thesis relies on letters to illuminate black children's inner thoughts, intellectual lives, and their roles as collaborating authors of *The Brownies' Book*. The second half of this thesis considers how children identified with others based on shared experiences and, as a result of publicizing and politicizing their thoughts, empowered themselves and others.
THE BROWNIES’ BOOK:
An Open Window to Early Twentieth-Century African American Childhood
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of the authors of letters published in "The Jury," a column reserved for them in *THE BROWNIES' BOOK*, and to African American children who came of age in the early twentieth-century U.S., whose experiences they illuminate.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the support of others. I wish to express my sincere appreciation to Dr. Kimberley L. Phillips for introducing me to key historiography through coursework, for providing direction as this project took shape, and for carefully reading and critiquing multiple drafts of this thesis. I am equally grateful to Dr. Grey Gundaker and Dr. Charles F. McGovern for the unique perspectives each brought to classroom settings as well as to their responses to my writing. The guidance, patience, and support from my committee throughout the completion of this thesis and the coursework that led to it were invaluable.

I also received tremendous support from outside of The College of William and Mary for which I am appreciative. Dr. Sarah R. Robbins of the Department of English at Kennesaw State University introduced me to *The Brownies’ Book*, also the subject of my first MA thesis, and chaired my committee. Dr. Robert Barrier, who served on my committee, encouraged me to continue research begun on *The Brownies’ Book* at Kennesaw in the American Studies Program. Megan Gonyeau of the Waldo Library Reference Department at Western Michigan University assisted me in locating and gaining access to a complete, bound, photographed copy of *The Brownies’ Book* that had been stored offsite although catalogued as shelved. Danielle Kovacs, Curator of Manuscripts and University Archives at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, was instrumental in helping me to narrow my search among many reels of microfilm from the Du Bois collection in order to locate correspondence specifically related to *The Brownies’ Book*. In response to an inquiry regarding subscribers of or letter writers published in *The Brownies’ Book*, historian Dr. Adele Logan Alexander confirmed her mother Wenonah Bond as author of two letters published in the magazine and led me to her book *Homelands and Waterways*, which provided additional insight into Bond’s childhood. I am also grateful to Bill Harrison for editing earlier drafts of this project and for providing objectivity.

Finally, I am indebted to my family members and friends for their continued support. I especially appreciate my sisters Dorothy Reed and Tina Jackson, who enabled me to spend valuable time at The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York examining bound copies of *The Brownies’ Book* in its original form.
INTRODUCTION

This thesis focuses on letters written by African American children to the editors of a monthly, black children's magazine, *The Brownies' Book*. The letters were published in "The Jury," a column reserved for children. W. E. Burghardt Du Bois and Augustus Granville Dill, the publishers, produced *The Brownies' Book* from January of 1920 through December of 1921. Du Bois was editor, and Dill was the magazine's business manager. Jessie Redmon Fauset was initially literary editor and subsequently managing editor. The *Brownies' Book* was designed for African American children. Its name symbolized black children's ownership of the publication. Du Bois, Fauset, and Dill filled each issue with literature, games, biographies, current events, photographs, and illustrations—all focusing on black children. *The Brownies' Book* provided opportunities for black children to engage with texts and images created by members of their race. Blacks wrote ninety-eight percent of all of the articles featured in *The Brownies' Book*, and black artists created all but one of the original drawings published in the magazine. The magazine credited African American artist Marcellus Hawkins with sixteen illustrations during its twenty-four month existence. One of three covers designed by Hawkins appears in figure 1. "My! But It's HARD TO CHOOSE!" depicts

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3 See Hawkins's work in *The Brownies' Book* 1, April, May, August, September, October, and December of 1920 and *The Brownies' Book* 2, March, April, May, July, August, and September of 1921.
black boys making a choice between going to school or truancy. With each individual drawn with unique, life-like features, this illustration lacks the gross caricatures of racist images prevalent in popular print. Hawkins’s drawing must be examined in the same way Shawn Michelle Smith urges viewers to analyze photographs.\(^4\) One must consider how the scene is staged, what is included or excluded, and what narratives or statements are presented in the image. "MY! BUT IT’S HARD TO CHOOSE!,” depicts four African American boys—three dressed in knee-length pants, shirts, and ties for school and one in casual clothes and perched in a tree near a swimming hole. As one boy turns to join the truant one near the swimming hole and another scratches his head in contemplation, the confident, determined boy walks ahead, waving goodbye to his buddies and prioritizing education over play. The road the boy travels widens as it approaches school, symbolic of education as a means to opportunity, or the publishing team’s objective to inspire black children “to prepare for definite occupations and duties with a broad spirit of sacrifice.”\(^5\)

In addition to images and text commissioned by Du Bois, Dill, and Fauset, the masthead of every issue appealed to black children for manuscripts and drawings. In an effort to acquaint readers living in various regions of the country with the experiences of others, the publishing team requested that they exchange information and ideas with each other through letters in monthly columns. “The Grown-Ups’ Corner” was reserved


Figure 1. “MY! BUT IT’S HARD TO CHOOSE!” by Marcellus Hawkins

September 1921 Cover, THE BROWNIES’ BOOK

for adult comments; “The Jury” column was exclusively for children’s letters to the magazine’s editors. Children whose letters were published in “the Jury” contributed to the magazine’s content. Furthermore, Du Bois, Fauset, and Dill volunteered “to publish answers from one child to another.”

Annie Elizabeth McAden illustrates how black children formed connections through the letters submitted to *The Brownies’ Book*: “I am fond of the little Brownies that I read of in these books and I wish them great success.”

African American children’s experiences of growing up in the early twentieth century have largely been overlooked by scholars of American childhood. In addition, much of the scholarship completed on *The Brownies’ Book* to date has focused on the magazine’s literary contribution. Scholars have argued correctly that the magazine challenged texts and images that often misrepresented blacks in traditional children’s periodicals. Scholars have also identified *The Brownies’ Book* as the first African American children’s periodical.

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8 See the editors’ note in *The Brownies’ Book* 2, no. 2 (February 1921): 62.
9 See McAden’s letter in *The Brownies’ Book* 2, no. 4 (April 1921): 121.


captures the political nature of *The Crisis* as a magazine with “lynching tallies tucked in with ads for Madam C. J. Walker’s Superfine Preparation For the Hair and For the Skin, and S. D. Lyon’s East India Hair Grower ads.”16 Kirschke contends that even as Du Bois “used *The Crisis* to celebrate children and to discuss issues important to them,” he “often included examples of the horrors which children suffered, reminding readers of *The Crisis* of the plight of black children.”17 In light of black children’s challenges, adult readers of *The Crisis* could forecast the future of African Americans under existing social and political conditions.

My study resituates *The Brownies’ Book* as a resource for reconstructing African American childhood experiences from letters written by children to the magazine’s editors. The letters publicized each month in “The Jury” column raise questions about the daily life of black children living in the early twentieth-century. They shed light on how black children viewed their social, economic, and political environments; their inner thoughts; their intellectual lives; and their literacy practices.

My thesis considers letters published by ninety-eight children from every region as primary sources for examining black childhood. Children’s letters show the impact of race, class, and segregation on African American children’s experiences. In the first part of this thesis, I rely on letters for insight into these children’s inner thoughts, intellectual lives, and their roles as collaborating authors of *The Brownies’ Book*. The second half of this thesis considers how children identified with others based on shared experiences and,

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17 See Kirschke, *Art in Crisis*, 214.
as a result of publicizing and politicizing their thoughts, empowered themselves and others.

Despite Du Bois's, Dill's, and Fauset's association with *The Crisis*, THE *BROWNIES' BOOK* represented a publication that was "entirely separate" from the NAACP magazine in identity and content. This distinctiveness was evidenced even in the children's magazine's planning stages. A letter written in 1919 by Du Bois to Harry T. Burleigh, an African American composer who trained at the National Conservatory of Music in New York, requested permission to publish a collection of his children's songs in *THE BROWNIES' BOOK*. Distinguishing the new creation for children from *The Crisis*, which catered to adult concerns, Du Bois made a separate request in the same letter for Burleigh to consider publishing music he wrote for an anti-lynching poem in *The Crisis*. Furthermore, correspondence dated 1919 between Willis Higgins, a teacher who had daily contact with children in seven Chicago public schools, and Du Bois suggests that Du Bois and Dill, Publishers consulted those who worked with children as they prepared to launch *THE BROWNIES' BOOK*. Higgins offered the publishers photographs and stories that "would be of interest to little folk." Du Bois's response indicated that he

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20 Willis N. Higgins to W. E. B. Du Bois, 1919, The Papers of W. E. B. Du Bois. Higgins was editor of *The Up-Reach: A Journal of Education and Social Science* published in conjunction with the Up-Reach Monographs on Education and Social Science. Higgins wrote after meeting or talking with Du Bois and Dill about the upcoming magazine.
would appreciate anything that the teacher could provide “with regard to children, and
especially good photographs.”

**Identifying the Letter Writers**

While the circulation records do not exist, the children’s letters to the editors and
other contributions tell the story of how widely the magazine was distributed. The
publishing team noted only that the magazine’s readership included four thousand
“Brownies” from Oregon to Florida. Letters to the magazine’s editors from ninety-eight
children represent at least twenty-seven states and four foreign countries. In few cases
cities were not identified, and in two letters residences were completely omitted.

Children submitted letters from every region of the U.S. Alabama, California, Colorado,
Connecticut, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky,
Louisiana, Massachusetts, Missouri, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina,
Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington, and
West Virginia were represented. Children also wrote from as far away as Canada, Cuba,
France, and the Philippine Islands, making *THE BROWNIES’ BOOK* international in reach.

At least fifty-five of the ninety-eight letter writers published in “The Jury” in *THE
BROWNIES’ BOOK*’s two-year existence identified their African heritage within their text.

Two letter writers identified themselves as white females. However, the race of many of
the remaining children published in “The Jury” can be determined based on correlations
between the content of their letters and statements or appeals made by the publishing

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22 See *THE BROWNIES’ BOOK* 2, no. 12 (December 1921).
23 Of 100 letters published, two represented second entries by children who had previously published
letters to the editor: Pocahontas Foster and Wenonah Bond.
24 See Amli’s letter from Bordeaux, France in *THE BROWNIES’ BOOK* 1, no. 12 (December 1920): 366 and
ten-year-old Gertrude Marean’s letter from Cambridge, Mass. in *THE BROWNIES’ BOOK* 2, no. 7 (July 1921): 208.
team. The masthead of every issue of *The Brownies’ Book* appealed specifically to readers for “MANUSCRIPTS and drawings relating to colored children.”\(^{25}\) Likewise, the publishing team requested: “stories about colored children, their interests, their difficulties,” their way of life, and the places in which they lived.\(^{26}\) Therefore, children such as Rupert Lloyd of Hampton, Virginia, Evelyn Browne of Washington, DC, and Helen Woods of Long Island responded, submitting stories or drawings with their letters.\(^{27}\) The publishing team also asked African American children living in different regions of the country to acquaint themselves with each other through their letters.\(^{28}\) Consequently, children such as Altoona Jones of Wenatchee, Washington wrote about race relations in their regions, and children like Joshella Brown of Corydon, Kentucky discussed their educational experiences.\(^{29}\) Other children, for example Wenonah Stewart Bond of Washington, DC, described how teachers rewarded academic success in their schools.\(^{30}\) Adele Logan Alexander describes Bond as an African American with “amber skin and wavy jet-black hair.”\(^{31}\) Bond’s paternal grandmother was born into slavery in Virginia; her paternal grandfather was a black man born and raised in Liverpool.

Alexander characterizes Bond’s mother, Georgia Fagain Stewart, as a woman whose

\(^{25}\) See Du Bois and Fauset, eds., *The Brownies’ Book*..


\(^{27}\) See Lloyd’s letter and his story about a horse in Du Bois and Fauset, eds., *The Brownies’ Book* 2, no. 6 (June 1921): 180. See Browne’s letter and her story about a milk bottle in *The Brownies’ Book* 2, no. 3 (March 1921): 96. See Woods’ letter and drawing in *The Brownies’ Book* 1, no. 5 (May 1920): 140.


\(^{30}\) See Bond’s letter about her participation in a second-grade Christmas party reserved for students who had earned the highest grades in *The Brownies’ Book* 1, no. 12 (December 1920): 366. This was Bond’s second letter, her first having been printed in the January, 1920 issue.

features revealed “minimum African ancestry.” Bond’s heritage points to the diversity of the black children who contributed to and read *The Brownies’ Book*. Alexander’s description of Georgia Fagain Stewart’s station in late nineteenth-century American society also applied to early twentieth-century children of African descent. She writes:

> Despite her “white” appearance, both law and practice categorized Georgia Fagain Stewart as a Negro. She therefore would have been subject to all the indignities, inequities, and perils of growing up a ‘black’ girl in Jim Crow Alabama, unless, like some others of similarly ambiguous appearance, she opted to abandon family and friends in order to pass surreptitiously into the Anglo-American community.

African American children who responded to the publishing team’s call for letters, manuscripts, and drawings from “colored” children came from various backgrounds, but they shared the challenges associated with African heritage.

The magazine’s editors provided the strongest arguments for the racial identities of the majority of the children whose letters they published in *The Brownies’ Book*. In an October 1919 editorial for *The Crisis* entitled “The True Brownies” in which he announced the children’s magazine’s anticipated November debut, Du Bois referred directly to the magazine’s targeted audience of African American children. “It will be called naturally, *The Brownies’ Book,*” he concluded. Likewise, Jessie Redmon Fauset wrote to African American children beneath the final letter published in “The Jury:” “Goodbye dear Brownies! How I shall miss your letters.” Fauset made reference to the

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32 See Alexander, *Homelands and Waterways*, 4-7 and 231.
33 See Alexander, 231-232.
35 See *THE BROWNIES’ BOOK* 2, no. 12 (December 1921): 347.
children about whom "black folk" were "sorely puzzled" and the "colored children" for
whom THE BROWNIES’ BOOK was created.36

The majority of the children who did not specify their racial identities in their
letters were most likely African American. Dianne Johnson-Feeling contends: “the young
people who read THE BROWNIES’ BOOK—‘brownies’—were probably children of NAACP
members.”37 In addition to identifying a racial correlation, the likelihood that readers of
THE BROWNIES’ BOOK were children of NAACP members would also suggest that these
children were influenced by their parents’ political views, and by implication, that the
letter writers represented one homogenous group. Yet, a close reading of the letters
published in “The Jury” ultimately reveals varied social, economic, and educational
experiences that broaden our insights into black childhood.

The Magazine’s Objectives

In “The True Brownies,” Du Bois outlined the publishing team’s goals for THE
BROWNIES’ BOOK. The new magazine would be for “all children” ages six to sixteen, “but
especially for ours, ‘the Children of the Sun.’”38 THE BROWNIES’ BOOK would “seek to
teach Universal Love and Brotherhood for all little folk—black and brown and yellow
and white,” counteracting notions of racial supremacy.39 One way in which the editors
demonstrated in the children’s magazine was by their inclusion of letters from white
children in “The Jury,” facilitating the exchange of ideas among children of different

12 and 15.
39 Ibid.
races. The new magazine would also teach black children "a code of honor and action in their relations with white children," replacing children's "hurts and resentments" with "emulation, ambition and love of their own homes and companions." These objectives were reminiscent of Du Bois's vision for the youth who read The Crisis's children's issues. Kirschke explains: "He wanted to educate children, to encourage them to care for others and not learn hatred for other races."

The publishing team incorporated messages such as social responsibility and positive self-image throughout The Brownies' Book's content. Jessie Fauset's recurring segment "The Judge," in which she assumed the role of a wise grandfather interacting with three children, as well as fiction, poetry, letters from children, and Du Bois's current events column "As the Crow Flies" all taught lessons of honor and community.

Promoting positive interaction between black children and white children echoed Du Bois's conviction that the improvement of early twentieth-century U.S. race relations required change on the part of both races. Du Bois, Dill, and Fauset also wanted "to make colored children realize that being 'colored' was normal and beautiful. Therefore, they replaced negative images of blacks with positive ones, publishing black children's letters as integral parts of the magazine's content along with stories, poems,

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40 See letter from Amli of Bordeaux, France in The Brownies' Book 1, no. 12 (December 1920): 366. Amli enjoyed reading copies of the African American children's magazine she received from her teacher. See also ten-year-old Gertrude Marean's letter from Cambridge, Massachusetts in The Brownies' Book 2, no. 7 (July 1921): 208. Marean admired the photographs of African American babies often included in the "Our Little Friends" section of the magazine.


42 See Kirschke, Art in Crisis, 214.

43 See Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk, (New York: Library of America, 1986. Reprint, New York: First Vintage Books/The Library of America, 1990), 136. Du Bois writes: "It is not enough for the Negroes to declare that color-prejudice is the sole cause of their social condition, nor for the white South to reply that their social condition is the main cause of prejudice. They both act as reciprocal cause and effect, and a change in neither alone will bring the desired effect. Both must change, or neither can improve to any great extent."

44 See Du Bois, "The True Brownies," The Crisis, October 1919, 286.
drawings, and photographs. In addition, the team wanted to familiarize black children with “the history and achievements of the Negro race.” They planned to provide examples of African Americans who had “grown into beautiful, useful and famous persons” and to inspire children to “prepare for definite occupations and duties” that required “a broad spirit of sacrifice.” Therefore, the team included regular biographical sketches of notable African Americans in the magazine’s content. Du Bois, Fauset, and Dill also published descriptions of black children’s achievements and their photographs in a monthly column called “Little People of the Month.” The ultimate goal of THE BROWNIES’ BOOK was to bring black children and their welfare to the forefront of the black community’s attention. In a January 1921 appeal for additional subscribers, THE BROWNIES’ BOOK team identified black children as their primary concern:

Will you not speak of it in Sunday School, in public school and in societies for the betterment of our children? We are trying to help children, to the best of our ability, by publishing this magazine. Will you not help us to help? 

The Short Life of THE BROWNIES’ BOOK

By 1919, Du Bois, Dill, and Fauset had produced a circulation of over 100,000 subscribers for The Crisis, but this success did not translate to THE BROWNIES’ BOOK. The children’s magazine required a circulation of 20,000 subscribers in order to defray printing cost. In January of 1921, the business manager reported subscriptions at “less

46 Ibid.
47 See the Grown-Up’s Corner” in THE BROWNIES’ BOOK 2, no. 1 (January 1921): 25.
49 See THE BROWNIES’ BOOK 2, no. 12 (December 1921).
than 5,000 copies per month,” urging an increase to 12,000. Dill made several attempts to launch the magazine. He offered free annual subscriptions to anyone who secured five paid subscriptions. He advertised for agents to increase sells, and he held contests to boost subscriptions. However, individual copies or single subscriptions passed by club leaders, teachers, and ministers to multiple readers potentially replaced the need for yearly subscriptions to the magazine. At the same time, some adults placed large orders for copies of specific issues rather than subscriptions. Consequently, THE BROWNIES’ BOOK had only 4,000 subscribers after twenty-four months of publication and ceased printing in December of 1921.

In addition to insufficient subscribers, the children’s magazine could not rely on the support of advertisers as a significant source of revenue. In December of 1921 when THE BROWNIES’ BOOK printed its final issue, Child Life: The Children’s Own Magazine distributed its first. Child Life boasted advertisements from toy train producer American Flyer, Chicago furniture dealer John M. Smythe, publishers A. C. McClurg, the Santa Fe Railroad, and the children’s clothing manufacturer Bradley Knitting Company. THE BROWNIES’ BOOK, on the other hand, rarely published advertisements. From January through May of 1920, only three businesses other than The Crisis advertised in a given issue of THE BROWNIES’ BOOK, with only two advertisements appearing at a time.

Carriebel Cole of Washington, DC promoted a booklet for dance instruction; Berry &
Ross, Inc. sold colored dolls; and the Stenographers' Institute of Philadelphia advertised summer classes. The June, July, and August issues of 1920 of the magazine contained no commercial announcements with the exception of one advertisement for a calendar featuring African American heroes who fought in the Great War or World War I, available from *The Crisis*.

From September of 1920 through February of 1921, *The Brownies' Book* advertised for only one agency. The Madam C. J. Walker Mfg. Co. promoted hair and skin products. Clearly, advertisers for *The Brownies' Book* were limited in number. Unable to depend on advertisers, Du Bois, Dill, and Fauset appealed to subscribers regarding the costs of printing *The Brownies' Book*:

*Subscribers—Have you any idea how extremely expensive it is to publish a magazine? Paper—and you know we use a good quality—is high; the price of cuts for reproducing photographs is soaring; the printer’s bill is tremendous. Yet with 12,000 subscribers we would be able to put THE BROWNIES’ BOOK on a self-supporting basis.*

Years later, Du Bois commented on the difficulty that *The Crisis* had securing advertisers and subscribers, a challenge that *The Brownies' Book* may have also faced. He described a downward slope in *The Crisis*’s circulation that occurred nearly five years after the magazine hit its peak in 1919 with sales of 100,000 copies and an income of $77,000:

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55 See *The Brownies' Book* 1, no. 1-5 (January-May 1920).
56 See *The Brownies' Book* 1, no. 6-8 (June-August 1920).
57 See *The Brownies' Book* 1, no. 9-12 (September-December 1920) and *The Brownies' Book* 2, no. 1-2 (January-February 1921). See also *The Brownies' Book* 2, no. 3-5 (March-May 1921); no. 8-10 (August-October 1921); no. 12 (December 1921).
The reading public is not used to paying for the cost of the periodicals which they read; often they do not pay for most of the costs and advertisers buy space in periodicals which circulate widely among well-to-do persons able to buy the wares offered. The CRISIS was known to circulate among Negro workers of low income.\footnote{See Wilson, ed., \textit{The Crisis Reader}, xxx.}

Although blacks represented the majority of \textit{The Crisis}'s readership and were responsible for most of its content, “liberal whites,” too, read the magazine.\footnote{See Kirschke, \textit{Art in Crisis}, 8 and 206. According to Hutchinson, \textit{The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White}, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), 157, by 1940 whites represented the majority of \textit{The Crisis}'s readers.} Still, circulation declined.

Advertisers, on the other hand, based their decisions about whether or not to buy space in a magazine on supply and demand. If a widely read magazine like \textit{The Crisis} could not garner enough advertisers to defray the bulk of printing costs a few years after hitting its peak, certainly a children’s magazine whose primary audience may have included the dependent children of the economically-challenged black workers that Du Bois identified as primary readers of \textit{The Crisis} could not appeal to advertisers. In addition, Du Bois explained that most of the advertisers the NAACP magazine served were black businesses that the magazine could be certain were not fraudulent. He also noted that the most financially secure advertisers declined, invoking “the rule not to patronize ‘propaganda’ periodicals.”\footnote{See Wilson, ed., \textit{The Crisis Reader}, xxx.} It is possible that the children’s magazine, although “an entirely separate publication,” was viewed as a propaganda periodical

\footnote{See Wilson, ed., \textit{The Crisis Reader}, xxx.}
because it was established “in co-operation with THE CRISIS.” In any event, the scarcity of advertisers and subscribers forced the magazine to close prematurely.

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LETTER’S TO THE EDITORS: INSIGHTS INTO BLACK CHILDHOOD

Letters published in THE BROWNIES’ BOOK’s monthly column “The Jury” provide insight into children’s inner thoughts and intellectual lives in the segregated society of the early twentieth century U.S., and they provide an invaluable resource to scholars’ efforts to reconstruct black childhood experiences. In “Narratives of Literacy,” Beth Daniell argues that little narratives of literacy can be found in examples of people reading and writing “for specific purposes” such as “for personal growth, for identity formation, for community . . . for political empowerment of oneself or of one’s group.”63 In response to Daniell’s observation, my examination of these letters revealed a little narrative of black children’s literacy as fostered by Du Bois, Dill, and Fauset through their invitation to children to contribute to the magazine’s authorship by writing and submitting letters for publication in “The Jury.”64

Wenonah Bond’s letter, published in the magazine’s first issue, suggests that early twentieth-century African American children were enthusiastic about a magazine designed with them in mind:

Our Crisis came a few days ago, and I was very glad to see the advertisement of

THE BROWNIES’ BOOK. I had just been talking to mother about giving me a subscription to some children’s magazine and was delighted to know that we shall

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63 See Beth Daniell, “Narratives of Literacy: Connecting Composition to Culture,” in College Composition and Communication 50.3 (Feb 1999): 404.
soon have one of our very own.\textsuperscript{65}

Bond’s reference to \textit{The Brownies’ Book} as one of “our very own” suggests that African American children wanted a magazine designed for them. Some might argue that the tone of Bond’s letter, specifically her use of the word “delighted,” suggests the presence of an adult voice in her writing. However, Alexander provides an example of Bond’s thought process at an early age when her family migrated from Alabama to Washington, DC in 1917 and moved into their first Washington home:

Eleven-year-old Wenonah was relieved that they had secured such a pleasant domicile in the war-clogged city. She also, however, felt profound conflicts, knowing that another family, perhaps much like her own, had been ousted from their residence because they were German-born aliens, and the federal government—yielding to the virulence of “spy fever”—had deprived them of rights and property when, almost overnight, they became seditious “Krauts,” and “the enemy.”\textsuperscript{66}

Bond’s memory of her empathy for a displaced family she had never met at age eleven suggests that she was capable of articulating her feelings by age thirteen. Alexander confirms that Bond independently “sold subscriptions, penned letters to the editor, even sent personal photos, and mourned when \textit{The Brownies’ Book} folded.”\textsuperscript{67} Other black children shared Bond’s enthusiasm about \textit{The Brownies’ Book} as a magazine of their very own. John White of New York used money he earned performing odd jobs around the neighborhood to purchase his issues of \textit{The Brownies’ Book}. In Fairmont,

\textsuperscript{65} See Bond’s letter in \textit{The Brownies’ Book} 1, no. 1 (January 1920): 15.
\textsuperscript{66} See Alexander, \textit{Homelands and Waterways}, 432. Bond reflected on this event in conversations with Alexander. Alexander indicates that Bond was born in December 1906, which would have made her approximately thirteen when her letter was published in January 1920. See page 324.
\textsuperscript{67} See Alexander, 461.
Pennsylvania, Willie Brown sold lemonade to buy a year’s subscription. He wrote: “I think The Brownies’ Book is just fine! I like the stories about the colored heroes most.” Marion Lee of Buckley, Georgia shared Brown’s opinion: “I’ve kept each copy of my Brownies’ Book. I just wait and wait and wait, it seems, and when it arrives, I am so glad!” Lee considered the magazine so valuable that her father had a year’s issues “all bound together.”

The Brownies’ Book provided black children with positive texts and images. Du Bois, Fauset, and Dill engaged children with fiction and poetry contributed by adults and children, biographies of black mentors, and life-like photographs of African Americans rarely included in other publications of the magazine’s time period. They included illustrations, games, and songs for children’s entertainment. Readers anticipated the monthly segments: “Little People of the Month,” “The Judge,” “As the Crow Flies,” and “The Jury.” Furthermore, the magazine’s incorporation of the reading and writing of children’s letters to the editors as integral parts of its content reshaped standard literacy practices for the black children who comprised the magazine’s targeted audience, relocating them from the periphery to the center of focus. Bond’s letter indicates black children’s willingness to write letters to the editors of The Brownies’ Book: “I see that you want letters from the children. I shall be glad if you will tell me what kind of a letter you want.” Perhaps it was this kind of request the publishing team responded to when they encouraged “colored children” to share “their interests, their difficulties, the way

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68 See White and Brown’s letters in The Brownies’ Book 2, no. 7 (July 1921): 208.
69 See Lee’s letter in The Brownies’ Book 2, no. 7 (July 1921): 208.
they live and the places they live in” with each other through submission of letters to “The Jury.”

Letters published in “The Jury” are recorded perspectives on early twentieth-century, black childhood. They epitomize Charles Schuster’s definition of literacy: “the power to be able to make oneself heard and felt, to signify.” “Literacy is the way in which we make ourselves meaningful not only to others but through others to ourselves,” Schuster continues. Through their letters, children made their voices heard and gave meaning to their identities and their experiences in their early twentieth-century U.S. environment. By printing children’s letters in a monthly column, *The Brownies’ Book* team fostered the children’s positive self-representation. According to Anne Ruggles Gere and Sarah R. Robbins, this pattern was modeled by turn-of-the-century African American women’s clubs in their preservation of letters, papers, petitions, and meeting minutes as groups’ standard literacy practices. Through the publication of children’s letters in “The Jury,” the creators of *The Brownies’ Book* shared the authoring of the magazine with children whose literacy was marginalized in the racially polarized climate of the 1920s.

*The Brownies’ Book* provided content that differed from other children’s periodicals of its era, especially where African American children were concerned. Dianne Johnson indicates that black children were often belittled and ridiculed in texts with derogatory language and offensive illustrations in popular children’s periodicals

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73 Ibid.
such as *St. Nicholas*. Johnson sites an article by Elinor Sinnette that provides an example of *St. Nicholas*’s publication of the poem “Ten Little Niggers” in the early 1920s. The poem began with the following stanza: “‘Ten little nigger boys went out to dine/ One choked his little self and then/ there were nine.’”

Because such mass-produced publications like *St. Nicholas* presented African American children so derisively, Du Bois, Fauset, and Dill held the African American children who comprised the majority of *The Brownies’ Book*’s audience in high esteem. The editors invited them to share in the magazine’s authorship. As they solicited letters from their readers, the editors continued traditions of implementing “black oral interaction into writing and black discourse.” Miller and Vander Lei explain: “In some forms of black oral interaction, the author collaborates not merely with another writer but with the audience of the discourse; as a result, the role of the author blurs with the role of audience.” Such was the case with the children whose letters were published in “The Jury.” Their roles as audience members blended with their roles as contributing authors to the magazine’s content. The result was the creation of a collaborative community in which the editors, other authors and artists published in the magazine, and children submitting letters joined together to create the magazine and share in its success. Fifteen-

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76 See Keith D. Miller and Elizabeth A. Vander Lei, “Collaboration, Collaborative Communities, and Black Folk Culture,” in *The Right to Literacy*. 51.

77 Miller and Vander Lei, 51.
year-old Dorothy M. Parratt confirmed her role in *The Brownies’ Book*’s shared authorship when she described her letter as her “first publication in a book.”

**Designating Seats by Land or Sea**

Letters published in “The Jury” demonstrate that African American childhood during the 1920s often meant living within the boundaries outlined by segregation. Segregation or Jim Crow laws replaced Reconstruction to curtail progress made by African Americans after Emancipation and to deny their rights to citizenship. They impacted life in the South as well as in other parts of the country. Black children’s extracurricular activities, including national clubs, were no exception. Organizations like the Boy Scouts of America and Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) were generally segregated. As a result of exclusion from youth culture in white America, African Americans created a rich recreational framework for their children. In 1905 an African American YWCA was formed, opening the service organization to black girls like those pictured in a photograph of New York’s YWCA in *The Brownies’ Book*’s first issue. The national Y did not form on an interracial basis until 1946. The first black Boy Scout troop formed in 1911 in Elizabeth City, North Carolina. By 1926, 248 “all-Black troops” existed in the U.S., including the African American Boy Scout troop of Philadelphia pictured in the first issue of *The Brownies’ Book*. Despite the Boy Scouts of America (BSA)’s incorporation of Inter-Racial outreach programs, Jim Crow

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78 See *The Brownies’ Book* 1, no. 6 (June 1920): 178.
80 See Weisenfeld.
constrained black Boy Scouts, often prohibiting them from wearing BSA uniforms. The black Boy Scout Troop of Philadelphia, photographed in uniforms, may have been an exception. Black children who did not participate in such organizations engaged in other activities. John Eastman of Reading, Pennsylvania played baseball and hockey. Altoona Jones of Wenatchee, Washington attended Sunday School and participated in Sunday School clubs. In Connecticut, Lillian V. Stone took music lessons. Others visited libraries.

Mary Perkins’s letter offered a different perspective. Perkins described ways in which segregation confined her access to leisure activities in a rural area:

In the country where I live, it is very dull. There is a movie in the next town, but you have to sit in one corner. And, anyhow, it is too far away for little girls. And there’s not many books. I make pennies by sewing rags into carpets and I am going to buy *The Brownies’ Book*, which I am very glad to hear of.

Perkins had to be conscious of both race and sex. Race in the early twentieth century often translated into sitting in designated seats in public places. Furthermore, her gender limited her ability to go and come as she pleased. Perkins did not identify where she lived, but we know that it was somewhere in the U.S. where Jim Crow was enforced. In addition, images of this little girl piecing rags together in hopes of splurging on a copy of *The Brownies’ Book* paint a picture of the poverty some Americans faced in the 1920s.

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82 See *The Brownies’ Book* 1, no. 1 (January 1920): 8.
Class shaped and diversified early twentieth-century, African American childhood experiences. Black children who wrote letters to the editors of *The Brownies' Book* alluded to their class in descriptions of their routine activities. While Perkins worked diligently pulling needles through rough cloth to earn enough pennies to purchase the prized children's magazine, ten-year-old Stone received piano lessons from "a very strict French teacher" and had her first public performance in December of 1920. Fourteen-year-old James Alpheus Butler, Jr., son of a physician and a music teacher, began playing the violin at age six. He played piano, clarinet, and cello as well. In Pittsburg, Kansas, twelve-year-old Neva Col took piano lessons and aspired to become a musician. Yet, Alexander demonstrates that even black children like Bond, who was fortunate enough to take ballet lessons, felt Jim Crow's impact: "Because segregation kept them from trying on shoes at shops in Washington," Bond and her classmates commuted to Howard University where an outlet representative took precise measurements of their feet for custom-ordered slippers that were delivered via mail. Nevertheless, class privileged these black children with extracurricular activities that cultivated an appreciation for music and the arts and, in some cases, enabled them to benefit from better education.

Eleven-year-old Bruce Marx Ganey Bowens, whose original letter was hand-written on his father's personalized stationery, reserved a copy of the magazine as a Christmas present for his seven-year-old brother and inquired about a yearly subscription. Bowens, whose parents and uncle were readers of *The Crisis*, explained: "As I am thinking of giving my little brother a Xmas gift, I would like to have a copy of your

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86 See Alexander, *Homelands and Waterways*, 464.
journal, *THE BROWNIES' BOOK* . . . I thought your journal for little folks would be just the thing."87 Bowens had access to discretionary funds that allowed him to make gift purchases. He also wrote his letter to the editors on his father's stationery, which was pre-printed with the family's Norfolk, Virginia address. Bowens provided insight into the relationship between race, class, and educational opportunities when he requested that his order be mailed to an alternative address. Bowens wrote: "Do not send it to the given address, but please send it to Springfield, Mass., 19 Catherine Street, where mother and brother and I are during the winter on account of school."88 The Bowens family's economic and class status permitted them to migrate North for educational purposes while still maintaining their primary residence in Virginia.

Scholars have written about institutional efforts to inscribe inequality in public education.89 Diane Ravitch's "A Different Kind of Education for Black Children" is an example of such scholarship.90 Ravitch provides an insightful historical perspective on the educational disparities between the northern and southern black school systems in the early 1900s that prompted parents such as the Bowens to secure an education for their children outside segregation. According to Ravitch, in 1917 the U.S. Bureau of Education collaborated with the Phelps-Stokes Fund to conduct a federal survey entitled *Negro Education*. Blacks had been denied education during slavery, and ninety percent of them remained in the South. The two-volume report maintained that emancipated blacks would

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87 See Bowens's letter in *THE BROWNIES' BOOK* 1, no. 2 (February 1920): 52.
88 Ibid.
most benefit from an education that would guarantee their positions in what Ravitch
characterized as "their preordained roles in society and their likely destinations as
domestic servants, farmhands, and blacksmiths."91 This 1917 report mirrored Virginia's
Hampton Institute's model for the industrial education of blacks in normal schools, the
same foundation on which Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute was modeled and
against which Du Bois took a noted stand.92

The depleted economy that persisted at the end of the Civil War postponed the
creation of a public school system for the South and that once 1,238 schools were
operational, only 64 of them were for black children. Despite the report's findings that
only 58 percent of black children aged six to fourteen attended school of any kind,
Thomas Jesse Jones, avid supporter of an industrial education system, denied southern
blacks public schools for their children. Instead, Jones advocated for normal school
education at primary and secondary levels in which academics would be replaced by
lessons in hygiene, agriculture, and training for manual labor. Ravitch described the
southern school system's deficits and the resulting challenges faced by southern blacks:

Unable to demand a fair share of public funds, black schools suffered from severe
inequities. In counties where 50 percent or more of the school population was
black, only $1.77 was spent per capita for black children, while six to 12 times as
much was spent for white students. Many communities, lacking a school building

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91 See Ravitch, 98.
92 Ravitch, 98. See Booker T. Washington's industrial educational philosophy in Up From Slavery: An
Du Bois's liberal arts educational philosophy in The Souls of Black Folk, (New York: Library of America,
for black children, borrowed a makeshift building from a church, lodge, or other benefactor. 93

However, resources and facilities for black students varied across the South. Whereas some African American children seeking education in the early twentieth-century South were forced to meet in borrowed spaces, Joshella Brown and Luke Dixon of Corydon, Kentucky attended a school that had five rooms. 94 Fearing the consequences that such a poor educational system would afford their children, some parents joined the thousands of African Americans migrating from the South to the North between 1900 and 1930 in search of better economic and educational opportunities in industry. Industries' doors opened wide to African Americans once the influx of immigrants came to a halt during World War I. 95 The Bowens, however, apparently migrated only temporarily to improve their children's education.

African American children who were able to attend public schools in the North avoided some of the inequities that their southern counterparts experienced in segregated schools. In Brooklyn, New York, Dorothy M. Parratt thrived in classrooms that promoted a liberal arts educational philosophy while African American children attending public schools in the South were often forced to prepare for the lifestyles that an industrial educational curriculum could provide. Furthermore, northern education afforded children like fifteen-year-old Parratt the benefit of numerous teachers while segregated education in the South meant that students received only a fraction of the funding allotted for white

93 See Ravitch, 99.
94 See Brown's and Dixon's letters in The Brownies' Book 1, no. 8 (August 1920): 256.
students. Parratt wrote: “We have departmental work so instead of having one teacher I have five, one for every two studies. My studies are as follows: History, grammar, arithmetic, music, geography, cooking, spelling, recreation, sewing, and physical training. I take a delight in every one, especially music.” From Indianapolis, Indiana, eleven-year-old Flora Summers indicated a similar experience as she described her history class’s Americanization and Literary Clubs. Families that could manage to do so, such as the Bowens, made provisions for their children to escape the insufficiencies of segregated schools to attend schools in the North where blacks had access to better alternatives for public education.

Yet, letters from black southerners refuted stereotypes about education in the South. H. Viola Lott, from Waco, Texas, contended that the inequities that overwhelmed many African American schools in the South in the early twentieth century were not indicative of all southern public school systems. She painted a more positive image of southern education:

We have schools in nearly all of the rural districts, which teach from the primer grades to the seventh and eighth grades. We also have from five to six schools in some of the cities. . . . Our high schools teach the primer to the eleventh and twelfth grades. . . . we are taught domestic art, domestic science, music . . . sewing and many other useful things.

Although a southerner and apparently aware of limited resources endured by many of her contemporaries, Lott raised Texas public schools for emulation by others.

96 See Dorothy Parratt’s letter in *The Brownies’ Book*, 1, no. 6 (June 1920): 178.
On the other hand, Claudia Moore acknowledged some similarities between her northern public school experience in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and those of children in the South when she wrote:

I get so tired of hearing only of white heroes and celebrating holidays in their honor. I think every year we ought to have parades or some sort of big time on Douglass’ birthday and on the anniversary of Crispus Attacks’ death. . . . All the colored girls in my class said they wished so too when I told them I was going to write you. 99

Even in an integrated school system, Moore’s history as an African American in the racially polarized U.S. was not reflected in her schooling. Likewise, African Americans living under segregation were expected to simultaneously remain conscious of their race and to deny their need for community. Writing to a specific audience with whom she shared a history and commonalities, Moore exercised a degree of freedom in her speech. Her frustration was apparent in her tone as she listed her grievances. Moore addressed a familiar audience—those who shared her place along society’s margins, whether as students or within their communities.

Vološinov provides a framework for understanding the significance of Moore’s sharing her thoughts first with classmates and later with readers of THE BROWNIES’ BOOK. He contends:

The word is oriented toward an addressee, toward who that addressee might

99 See Moore’s letter in THE BROWNIES’ BOOK 1, no. 3 (March 1920): 83.
be . . . the word is a two-sided act. It is determined equally by whose word it is and for whom it is meant. As word, it is precisely the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addressee and addressee.¹⁰⁰

Moore reached out to African American children facing the challenges of attending predominantly white schools and to those attending segregated schools. In a call-and-response fashion, she identified with black children and allowed them to identify with her. Although the school Moore attended was integrated, her letter suggests that her educational experience was not. Between 1915 and 1920, approximately 500,000 African Americans migrated north, and by 1920 about forty percent of all blacks in the North were concentrated in eight cities: New York, Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Columbus, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh.¹⁰¹ According to Davison Douglas: “Studies of the Great Migration show that a very high percentage of migrant children quickly found their way into the public schools.”¹⁰² Black migration to the North amplified racial tensions and the racial separation that had preceded it.¹⁰³ This was evident in the increase in “urban residential segregation” in northern cities, including Pittsburgh.¹⁰⁴ Tensions were also apparent in northern school systems. Judy Jolly Mohraz contends that Philadelphia’s public school system operated under “de facto segregation” in which some black children had to pass white schools to separate but unequal schools.¹⁰⁵ Others attended “mixed schools” where they were physically separated from their white peers in

¹⁰² See Davidson, 133.
¹⁰³ See Davidson, 134.
¹⁰⁴ See Davidson, 136.
classrooms as well as in recreational settings. African American students attending integrated schools were sometimes demoted to separate classrooms where an individual teacher divided her attention between many students of various grade levels. Pittsburgh schools, where Moore attended, did not hire their first African American teachers until the late 1930s and confined them to teaching music and physical education until the 1950s. Readers may credit Moore’s frustration with celebrating “white heroes” to the exclusion of black ones to inequities in her educational experience or to deteriorated race relations in the North. To address such concerns, Carter G. Woodson, who co-founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History in 1915 and established The Journal of Negro History in 1916, implemented Negro History Week in 1926. The observation later extended from one week to one month. Moore recognized that she addressed a predominantly African American audience and may have known that her audience shared her disappointment in social, economic, and political disparities. As a result, Moore adapted her language for her audience, perhaps with an expectation that children reading her letter in “The Jury” would respond to her and with her.

Rather than restricting their effects to education, the limited choices constructed by racism in general and segregation in particular pervaded other areas of black children’s lives. A reaction from Carter Murray of Trenton, New Jersey to a biographical

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106 See Mohraz, The Separate Problem, 91.
107 Ibid.
sketch about Captain Paul Cuffee published in *THE BROWINES' BOOK* revealed segregation’s ability to limit children’s aspirations. Murray explained:

I have always liked the water. One summer we were in the country. I was only about seven years old. . . . I made a raft and poled my way about three miles down the Delaware River. When they found me, I was lying on the bank asleep, with tears on my cheeks. . . . If there were any chance of getting into the Navy, I’d enlist when I get through school.

The reality of Murray’s place as an African American male in the 1920s attempted to curtail his vision of becoming a sailor like Captain Cuffee. In 1920, opportunities for African Americans to serve in the U.S. Navy were still twenty years away from coming to fruition, a result of efforts to maintain distances between blacks and whites on land as well as at sea. Yet, Murray was determined to have a career that would allow him to follow in Cuffee’s footsteps and travel the world with or without the Navy.

**Making a Living or Living to Make It**

While some African American children focused their attention on preparation for future careers, a number of others found that work began long before adulthood. John Eastman spent his summers in Reading, Pennsylvania working to prepare for the next school year: “Our preacher says I’m the handy man of the neighborhood. I sell papers, run errands, cut the grass and sometimes write letters. This year I made enough money to buy myself a new suit and a pair of shoes and I have $5.00 left.” Whether or not his family’s economic circumstances required him to do so, Eastman worked and clothed

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110 See biographical sketch of Paul Cuffee in *THE BROWINES' BOOK* 1, no. 2 (February 1920): 38. See Murray’s letter in *THE BROWINES' BOOK* 1, no. 4 (April 1920): 256.
111 See Murray’s letter in *THE BROWINES' BOOK* 1, no. 4 (April 1920): 111.
112 See Eastman’s letter in *THE BROWINES' BOOK* 1, no. 10 (October 1920): 308.
himself. In a similar vein, Luke Dixon of Corydon, Kentucky discussed his farm work before any mention of academics, suggesting that he valued his work with the land above that in school. Dixon wrote: "Last year my brother and I raised two acres of tobacco. I am in the third grade. I like to study at school. . . . I like to play at school." Eastman and Dixon were examples of the ideals of "productive manliness" valued by the Prince Hall Freemasons and Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). According to historian Martin Summers: "Men within both organizations placed an emphasis on the productive character of manhood. The centrality of the marketplace, the importance of character and respectability, and the indispensability of producer values lay at the heart of an idealized Victorian manhood to which these men aspired." "Productive manliness" was a defining feature of African American conceptions of citizenship. Production was also essential to the formation of gender identities among Prince Hall Freemasons, and it appears to have been to Eastman and Dixon as well. In addition, the pride that Dixon took in farming may be attributed to the influence of Washington's Tuskegee model, which encouraged African Americans to learn industrial trades and thereby become "economically self-sufficient" and which Garvey and the early UNIA supported. While young people like Eastman and Dixon took pride in working, others were victims of circumstances that made working mandatory for basic needs. As a result, they sacrificed education.

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113 See Dixon's letter in THE BROWINES' BOOK 1, no. 8 (August 1920): 256.
115 See Summers, 8.
117 See Summers, 67.
A sixteen-year-old who wrote anonymously from Fairmont, West Virginia, provided a glimpse into the economic disparities faced by children in the 1920s:

I am an orphan, . . . My mother has been dead eleven years and my father four years. White people have kept me,—that is, I have worked for them to earn my living. Realizing that I did not always want to be scrub girl, I have tried to educate myself, as I could not go to school. . . . Do you think I could through *THE BROWNIES*’ *BOOK* get a home among a good Christian family? . . . I want to be among MY people, and have a chance for an education.118

Socioeconomic circumstances prevented this teenager from educating herself and labeled her a “scrub girl.” Jacqueline Jones provided perspective on the teenager’s lot through a middle-aged domestic worker’s description of her employment by whites as a child domestic: “’[I]t was a white woman who had me crawling around her apartment before I was thirteen years old, cleaning places she would never think of cleaning with a toothbrush and toothpick!’”119 In the adolescent’s reality, domestic skills made her more marketable even when searching for parents. Her ability to work was key to her survival of a life from which she could only hope to be delivered by education. She petitioned for adoptive parents anywhere where she could attend “good public schools.”120 Nonetheless, an aspiration for education was insufficient to attract prospective parents. She added: “I can do any kind of work and am a good cook and housekeeper.”121

118 See this letter in *THE BROWNIES*’ *BOOK* 1, no. 2 (February 1920): 52.
120 See the anonymous letter in *THE BROWNIES*’ *BOOK* 1, no. 2 (February 1920): 52.
121 Ibid.
Nurturing Aspirations

Some African American children spent their childhoods contemplating their futures as writers, publishers, and world travelers. For children such as fourteen-year-old Selma Ford of Camden, New Jersey, THE BROWINES’ BOOK was an opportunity to publish their work, a forum reserved for their voices. Ford explained: “I like to write stories, but I had no hopes of ever seeing them in print. Now, perhaps, if I write a very good one, you will let it appear in your magazine. I’m going to try.”¹²² Eleven-year-old Hannah Maude Barnes of Richmond, Virginia also wanted to write; she appealed to the magazine’s editors for advice. She wrote: “I want to be an author. Would you tell me how you went about it? Did you write a book first, or did you just send your writings to the magazines? How do you get into the magazines to start with?”¹²³ Hattie Porter from San Francisco retold stories she read in THE BROWINES’ BOOK to her mother, who was a willing listener as she was too busy to read the magazine herself. Like many readers of the magazine, Porter was determined to write a story worthy of publication in THE BROWINES’ BOOK, one that she could present to her mother and exclaim, “‘See what I did!’”¹²⁴ Porter’s mother was not alone in her interest in the children’s magazine. Viola Murray of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania described her mother and uncle as fans of the magazine as well.¹²⁵

While others imagined what they might accomplish, some African American youths’ plans were well underway. James Alpheus Butler, Jr., a fourteen-year-old Florida A&M student and accomplished violinist, planned to be a writer. He maintained an office space at home that was complete with “a 5 X 8 hand printing press, a sectional bookcase,

¹²² See Ford’s letter in THE BROWINES’ BOOK 1, no. 3 (March 1920): 83.
¹²³ See Barnes’s letter in THE BROWINES’ BOOK 1, no. 3 (March 1920): 83.
¹²⁴ See Porter’s letter in THE BROWINES’ BOOK 1, no. 10 (October 1920): 308.
¹²⁵ See Murray’s letter in THE BROWINES’ BOOK 2, no. 4 (April 1921): 121.
a desk, colored light oak, a typewriter and a trunk-like box where" he kept his
"'miscellanies.'"\textsuperscript{126} Butler's possessions and the pride he took in owning them suggest
that he valued writing. Butler also loved to read. His favorite authors were Du Bois, Paul
Lawrence Dunbar, Charles Chestnut, literary critic William Stanley Braithwaite, James
Weldon Johnson, Edgar Allan Poe, Tarkington, Stevenson, Mark Twain, Scott, Dickens,
Kipling, Doyle, Barbour, Hugo, VanDyke and Roosevelt.\textsuperscript{127} In addition, Butler read a
variety of magazines, \textit{The Crisis} included. Butler epitomized the realization of Du Bois's
Utopian ideal: "a world where men know, where men create, where they realize
themselves and where they enjoy life. . . . a world we want to create for ourselves and for
all America."\textsuperscript{128} He was cultured, well read, and college-educated with an unselfish
vision for his future: "I wish to be a writer and give to the world that intense feeling of
altruism that is ever and anon tugging at my heart."\textsuperscript{129} Butler ended his letter with
confidence:

My aim is placed clearly before me and already, although I have yet to see my
15\textsuperscript{th} birthday, I'm striving to reach it. I know it'll be a long hard struggle to the
top for men of experience have said so in their books. But if grit and unwavering
determination are all that's needed—well, I may be over-confident, but I've really
no thoughts of failure.\textsuperscript{130}

Readers like Butler may have identified with the closing lines of H. Viola Lott's
letter. Lott wrote: "We have also learned that we must work in the present in order to
perfect or accomplish something in the future. I count it our time to grasp the

\textsuperscript{126} See Butler's letter in \textit{THE BROWINES’ BOOK 1}, no. 7 (July 1920): 215.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{128} See Hutchinson, \textit{The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White}, 153.
\textsuperscript{129} See Butler's letter in \textit{THE BROWINES’ BOOK 1}, no. 7 (July 1920): 215.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.
opportunities as they come before us.”\textsuperscript{131} Lott may have adopted a position learned from adults in her environment or from print culture. Perhaps she had read similar ideology in magazines such as \textit{The Crisis}. Fifteen-year-old Pearl Staple, of Charlottesville, Virginia, described herself as “a constant reader of \textit{The Crisis}” and illustrated the impact that the magazine’s content had on young readers. She wrote: “I read something in \textit{The Crisis} about a mother sitting alone in despair, thinking about her children long ago lost to her. And it reminds me of another mother, our mother country, Africa, and it was that thought which forced me to write the enclosed poem, “Africa.”\textsuperscript{132} If Staple was moved to write poetry after drawing a parallel between one mother’s loss and Africa’s, Lott, too, may have been inspired by something she heard or read. In any case, by 1920 taking advantage of opportunities as they became available had become a key principle for African Americans. Steven Hahn provides examples of such values and practices.\textsuperscript{133}

During the Civil War, enslaved and free African Americans disseminated political ideology they cultivated inside and outside of Union camps, on abandoned land, and in pre and post-emancipation conventions through communication networks.\textsuperscript{134} Foreshadowing Lott, they seized every opportunity. Newly enfranchised black males mobilized their communities and served in offices across the South until disfranchisement began and Jim Crow was imposed.\textsuperscript{135} Still, there may be another way to interpret Lott’s 1921 statement: “I count it our time to grasp the opportunities as they come before us.” For African American migrants arriving in the North in the early

\textsuperscript{131} See Lott’s letter in \textit{THE BROWINES’ BOOK} 2, no. 2 (February 1921): 62.
\textsuperscript{132} See Staple’s letter in \textit{THE BROWINES’ BOOK} 1, no. 4 (April 1920): 111.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{135} See discussion of disfranchisement in chapter 8 “Of Ballots and Biracialism” in Hahn, \textit{A Nation Under Our Feet}: 364-411.
twentieth century, the probability for economic success increased once the influx of immigrants came to a halt during World War I.\textsuperscript{136} African American children who read the words of Butler, Lott, and others may have understood the value of working in the present for a future return. In fact, some of them seized opportunities to implement social change through letters published in "The Jury."

LETTER WRITERS PUBLICIZE AND POLITICIZE THEIR THOUGHTS

Letters printed in "The Jury" demonstrate that children identified with others based on shared experiences and, as a result of publicizing and politicizing their thoughts, empowered themselves and others. Bakhtin suggests that one first becomes fully aware of oneself through others, defined by their "words, forms, and tonalities," so that one’s consciousness awakens as a result of being “wrapped in another’s consciousness.”

Franklin Lewis’s letter illustrates one child’s use of written affirmation to redefine his place in the segregated U.S. and to challenge society’s pre-assigned seat for him and African Americans in general. Lewis wrote from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania:

I was watching some men building houses, and I said to a boy there, “When I grow up, I am going to draw a lot of houses like that and have men build them.”

The boy was a white boy, and he looked at me and laughed and said, “Colored boys don’t draw houses.”

Why don’t they, Mr. Editor?

Determined to become an architect, Lewis resisted the signs of segregation apparent in his white counterpart’s response. Once the editing staff read Lewis’s words, printed them in the magazine, and thousands of children representative of various regions and experiences perused them, mere words became utterances. Schuster explains:

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[The] quality of social interaction, of shared consciousness, is what distinguishes an utterance from a sentence. . . . An utterance necessarily exists within a social setting. An utterance creates and completes a meaning that is oriented toward another individual or socially constructed reality. . . . Sentences are inert; utterances are interactive, intertextual, transformative.\textsuperscript{139}

As Lewis addressed his letter to an audience, many of whom shared his predicament in a segregated society and some of whom stood outside his experience, his words took on meaning and exerted influence. As a result, Lewis received the power to make himself “heard and felt,” declaring himself meaningful not only to those who read his thoughts but to himself as well.\textsuperscript{140} If illiteracy is marked by the absence of an audience capable of response, as Schuster suggests, Lewis became literate once he was able to express his concerns in writing to readers of \textit{The Brownies' Book}, even if that response was imagined.\textsuperscript{141} Prior to the magazine’s creation, African American children like Lewis had been socially, politically, and economically excluded from the dominant culture and without an audience for their concerns. In the absence of an audience, children were denied response, the ability to influence, and to signify and were consequently illiterate.\textsuperscript{142} Until the letter writers voiced their experiences to an audience capable of

\textsuperscript{140} See Schuster, 227.
\textsuperscript{141} Schuster discusses his writing of “The Ideology of Illiteracy” in which he created an addressee by imagining readers who shared his interest, himself interacting with them, and his audience responding to him. “This constructed address was, for me, enabling: it allowed me to choose words that were framed within utterances, not sentences, for those words were engaged responsively with a reader even before I wrote them.” See 230.
\textsuperscript{142} See Schuster, 229.
creating meaning from it, an audience that existed beyond their individual communities, their words were powerless.\textsuperscript{143}

Gere and Robbins might characterize Lewis’s words as political in a social sense because, once published, his views influenced other readers, both children and adults.\textsuperscript{144} As he opened himself to the response of others, the broadening effect of his words on his audience, Lewis redefined himself and freed himself to give voice to his identity. Lewis closed his letter with: “My mother says you will explain all this to me in your magazine and will tell me where to learn how to draw a house, for that is what I certainly mean to do.”\textsuperscript{145} From Gere’s and Robbins’s perspective, Lewis contributed discourse as “politicized representation” capable of both reinforcing and challenging “received value/meaning systems.”\textsuperscript{146} Setting his words down on paper and sharing them through publication may have given Lewis new meaning. At the very least, writing his letter provided Lewis with a forum for making his voice heard, what the editors of the magazine hoped to accomplish as they urged children to write.\textsuperscript{147} When Lewis’s audience read the defiant words in his letter, their places may have been redefined as well. Michael Fultz argues that the African American press of the early twentieth century defined African Americans to African Americans.\textsuperscript{148} As a result of periodicals such as \textit{The Brownies' Book}, individual members of the race shared in the suffering, pain, and injustices of infinite numbers of other members of the race even outside of their

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\textsuperscript{143} See Schuster, 229.
\textsuperscript{144} See Anne Ruggles Gere and Sarah Robbins, “Gendered Literacy in Black and White,” 652.
\textsuperscript{145} See Lewis’s letter in \textit{The Brownies' Book} 1, no. 1 (January 1920): 15.
\textsuperscript{146} See Gere and Robbins, “Gendered Literacy in Black and White,” 652.
\textsuperscript{147} See the magazine’s appeal for letters in See “The Grown-Ups Corner” in \textit{The Brownies' Book} 2, no. 1 (January 1921): 25.
\end{flushright}
immediate communities.\textsuperscript{149} Lewis became a vocal activist as his identity and his community’s was affirmed in the multiplying effects of print. Children who read Lewis’s letter in "The Jury" could perceive themselves for who they were, validated voices capable of making themselves heard.

Before the creation of \textit{THE BROWIES' BOOK}, Lewis and others like him tolerated the absence of a forum for the articulation of their opinions regarding Jim Crow and its pervading effects. For African Americans navigating the segregated U.S., Jim Crow signs both literal and implied instructed Lewis and others about where they could and could not go with regard to public facilities, housing, schools, transportation, medical care, employment, and more. Figure 2 is representative of segregation signs routinely observed and adhered to by African Americans living in much of the early twentieth-century U.S. African Americans read segregation signs and obeyed them silently as instructions that were enforced by law with no real recourse for voicing their grievances. Scholars have

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{segregation_sign.png}
\caption{Figure 2\textsuperscript{150}}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{149} See Fultz, 142.
revisited the signs of segregation that pervaded nearly every facet of public life in the U.S. until the mid-1960s, clarifying their objectives. It has been noted that: “In order to maintain dominance, whites needed more than the statutes and signs that specified ‘whites’ and ‘blacks’ only; they had to assert and reiterate black inferiority with every word and gesture, in every aspect of both public and private life.”151 Lewis’s experience with the young white boy who challenged his right to enter a particular profession represented an attempt to assert the notion of African American inferiority. Prior to writing his letter, Lewis’s literacy limited him to following the signs of segregation. Politicizing his thoughts in print, however, allowed Lewis to redefine his place in segregated America. Consequently, he challenged society’s pre-assigned seat for him as well as for all African Americans. As Lewis’s letter reached new audiences, the empowering effects of his experience were multiplied.

Fostering a Community of Support

A letter from a fifteen-year-old girl “still in graded school” demonstrates how black children who read and wrote letters to the editors of _The Brownies’ Book_ from individual communities envisioned themselves as members of one body affected by racism and its results.152 Refuting stereotypes often used to characterize members of her race, the teenager requested information about financial assistance to attend boarding school and expressed willingness to work to help finance her education. She wrote: “I have tried and tried to do something in Seattle, but the people are very down on the


152 See the anonymous letter in _The Brownies’ Book_ 1, no. 1 (January 1920): 15.
Negro race. In some schools they do not want colored children."¹⁵³ Isolated from the national community until her words were published in the children’s magazine, a forum reserved for her expression, the teenager wrote imagining a reader within her words, as Schuster explained.¹⁵⁴ The young girl affirmed her worth and that of others who shared in her predicament with a postscript that read, “Please help me, and maybe someday I can help you.”¹⁵⁵ Others had rejected the writer: “I have not been able to get anyone to help me in my little plan.”¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless, she believed that the listeners provided within the magazine’s circulation would reciprocate as she appealed to them.¹⁵⁷ Even without evidence of a response from her immediate audience, the unnamed teenager may have been empowered and her self-esteem increased, giving her hope. As a result of her letter, other children who faced similar challenges and read her words may have been empowered to effect change in their lives as well. Gere and Robbins discuss examples of the power of printed texts as agents for promoting and representing political change in turn-of-the-century club women: “Club women who read printed texts composed by other club women could, despite separations of time and distance, imagine themselves as part of a larger federation of women’s clubs.”¹⁵⁸ Like club women, African American children reading the experiences of others with whom they identified and writing letters from different perspectives and regions came together in the magazine to promote change. Within their individual reading experiences, readers of THE BROWNIES’ BOOK could share

¹⁵³ See the anonymous letter in THE BROWNIES’ BOOK 1, no. 1 (January 1920): 15.
¹⁵⁵ See the anonymous letter in THE BROWNIES’ BOOK 1, no. 1 (January 1920): 15.
¹⁵⁶ Ibid.
¹⁵⁷ See Schuster, 228.
¹⁵⁸ See Gere and Robbins, 658.
personal experiences in a social and political context that reflected larger and collective experiences.

**Validating *The Brownies’ Book***

The power of the words written by children whose letters were published in “The Jury” became magnified as their words linked one with another through the social interaction that took place as they were read. Before perceiving, engaging, and responding to texts that focused on their culture and history as well as that written by other children, the readers of *The Brownies’ Book* stood outside of their larger community and, to some extent, themselves, unable to effectively communicate. Bakhtin contends that a word in a dictionary or in a sentence appears to be a word but is absent of body or spirit. Likewise, words printed on a page are merely illusions until engaged with, perceived, and responded to by an addressee.\(^{159}\) Publication of children’s letters in the magazine reflected goals similar to those held by nineteenth-century African American literary societies. Elizabeth McHenry argues that “[T]hrough their reading and writing, the members of these literary societies sought effective avenues of public access as well as ways to voice their demands for full citizenship and equal participation in the life of the nation.”\(^{160}\) In similar fashion, Eleanor Holland ended her letter voicing her opposition to segregation: “I hope some day that all detestable ‘Jim Crow’ cars will be wiped out of existence, along with all prejudice, segregation, etc.”\(^{161}\) Although Holland was in Wilberforce, Ohio when she submitted her letter, her familiarity with Jim Crow was gleaned in Covington, Kentucky where she attended school. Like Lewis, Holland’s

\(^{159}\) See Schuster, 229-230.


\(^{161}\) See Holland’s letter in *The Brownies’ Book* 1, no. 1 (February 1920): 15.
published letter allowed her to challenge readers to join her in the battle against segregation and affirmed her right to full American citizenship.

Intriguingly, the excerpt printed in THE BROWNIES’ BOOK’S first issue represents only a portion of Holland’s letter, which was submitted to The Crisis prior to the children’s magazine’s debut. Words omitted from the pages of the children’s publication attested to the need for an African American presence in early twentieth-century American children’s literature. Du Bois reported earlier in “The True Brownies” that a twelve-year-old girl, whose name he chose not to identify, represented an important motivation for his creation of an African American children’s magazine:

But in the problem of our children we black folk are sorely puzzled. For example, a little girl writes us . . .—“I want to learn more about my race, so I want to begin early . . . .  I hate the white man just as much as he hates me and probably more!”

Later, Du Bois and Fauset erred on the side of caution and omitted the heated sentence from Holland’s letter for “The Jury.” Whether the twelve-year-old’s anger resulted from the frustration of segregated streetcars or the perusal of lynching photographs reprinted in the pages of The Crisis, Holland’s words urged a response. Du Bois, Dill, and Fauset responded with THE BROWNIES’ BOOK. At the very least, the emotions of children like Holland inspired two of their objectives: to teach black children “a code of honor and action in their relations with white children” and to inspire love rather than hatred for other races.163

An Alternative Source for Visual Culture

For children such as Ada Simpson of New Jersey, *The Brownies' Book* represented a source for African American role models. Simpson described a scrapbook made of sheets of brown paper tied together with string in which she preserved photographs of noted African Americans: "In it I keep all the pictures I can find of interesting colored people and the interesting things they do. I have pictures of Frederick Douglass, Bishop Allen, Harriet Tubman, Paul Lawrence Dunbar . . . I like the pictures especially." If Simpson was interested in the people, history, and events concerning African Americans, other children were also.

According to Dianne Johnson, "Cartoons, misrepresentations, and stereotypes of the Negro" abounded in popular newspapers and magazines like *St. Nicholas* during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Recall Smith's caution that conclusions drawn from photographs and art depend upon the circumstances under which subjects are captured. One must consider which images are focused upon, selected for display, and how; what is included; what is excluded; and what narratives or statements are made. The messages in art that misrepresented blacks and were prevalent in early twentieth-century popular print attached greatness, heroism, and beauty to whiteness. With their visual literacy defined by negative images of blackness, African American children challenged by Jim Crow and bombarded by its signs found it difficult to envision themselves in a positive light. Children like Simpson may have read messages in photographs as effectively as they read those in texts. At *The Crisis*, Du Bois recognized

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164 See *The Brownies' Book* 1, no. 4 (April 1920): 111.
166 See Smith, *Photography on the Color Line*. 

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“the power of an image, be it cartoon, drawing, or photograph” to “address the needs” of a “marginalized black society and question traditional white constructs of authority and power.”167 His vision extended to *THE BROWNIES’ BOOK*. Like texts given life, photographs of historical African American figures narrated the stories of their subjects. Because the subjects photographed were African American, readers of *THE BROWNIES’ BOOK* could form connections with those pictured and conceive possibilities for their own futures. Images of Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and other symbols evidenced a history of strength and solidarity for Simpson and others. During segregation, children may have found solace in the examples of perseverance in spite of adversity revealed in photographs. Du Bois, Fauset, and Dill attempted to inform black children’s visual literacy. Simpson painted a picture of their success:

But now that I am reading *THE BROWNIES’ BOOK*, I see there must be a lot of important colored people that I didn't know about. I’d love to see pictures of Katy Ferguson and Captain Cuffee. If you have them, won’t you print them, so I can cut them out and put them in my book?168

**Empowering Self-Image**

In addition to exposure to positive representations of blacks in text and images, African American children who read *THE BROWNIES’ BOOK* also gained a sense of self-worth. Sixth-grader Annie Elizabeth McAden expressed the gratification she felt as a result of reading the magazine: “PLEASE allow me space in your paper to tell how I enjoy reading *THE BROWNIES’ BOOK*. I have received three copies and they are the most interesting books that I ever read, and I love them because they tell about my own

"169 THE BROWNIES’ BOOK represented a voice for African American children in the spirit advocated by Paulo Freire. Beth Daniell summarizes Freire’s philosophy, which marries concepts from Christianity with Marxism:

Being treated as if one is worthy, as if one’s life is important, as if what one has to say is significant and deserving attention, as if one is—yes—a fellow child of God, allows some people, even the most silenced, to “come to voice,” to use bell hooks’ term, and, in so doing, to see the world and themselves differently. 170

THE BROWNIES’ BOOK educated children about their history and people who created that history. Children could use the knowledge as a foundation for rebuilding an identity that had been distorted by the effects of racial discrimination. Brought from the periphery to the center of attention in literature, African American children could envision themselves in a new light and use their words to empower themselves and to promote change. They addressed the magazine’s editors and the active audience of its readership, politicizing their words in publication. 171 By providing space and a responsive audience for children, Du Bois, Dill, and Fauset altered the lives of black children living in the segregated U.S. With a forum for their expression, African American children were free to speak of the effects of segregation on their lives.

Reconsider Mary Perkins’s brief letter in the magazine’s first issue and her description of one African American child’s experience with segregation in an undisclosed small town: “There is a movie in the next town, but you have to sit in one

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169 See McAden’s letter in THE BROWNIES’ BOOK 2, no. 4 (April 1921): 121. McAden was from Reidsville, North Carolina.
171 Gere and Robbins provide similar examples in “Gendered Literacy in Black and White,” 652.
corner.”¹⁷² Although she used the second person to refer to those who were banished to the corner of the movie theater, Perkins unquestionably described African Americans. Once published in *The Brownies’ Book*, Perkins’s testimony before “The Jury” became a political statement and broke her silence. Images of African Americans expelled to the edges of American life left the small town where Perkins resided and became imprinted in the minds of the magazine’s readers across the world, evoking responses and encouraging social change.

**Evoking Response**

Although the editors of *The Brownies’ Book* invited children to submit and publish replies to other children’s letters, direct responses to children’s letters did not routinely appear in “The Jury” column.¹⁷³ As suggested by David Bleich, readers may have shared their reactions to letters within their families, schools, and communities. Bleich explains:

> The term “response” refers not only to what a person says or writes after reading a written text, but to a social system of answering the language initiatives of other people. In this way, we are shifting our attention from the individual focus of “what a person says” to the social focus of “what people say to one another.”¹⁷⁴

As children gave voice to their experiences and published their words in the magazine, they evoked responses from other readers who connected with the experience and in turn responded with similar accounts.¹⁷⁵ While readers may not have articulated reactions to the children’s published letters in writing, members of *The Brownies’ Book*’s audience

¹⁷³ See the editors’ note in the February 1921 issue.
may have discussed what they read and what they thought about the letters with fellow classmates at school, children in their neighborhoods or at church, and family members. Individual subscriptions often served multiple readers in clubs, school, and churches.\textsuperscript{176} Opportunities for exchanging responses could have arisen as readers shared copies of the magazine. In Brooklyn, New York, Susan Pollard received her first copy of the magazine from a friend one Sunday.\textsuperscript{177} Lillian V. Stone obtained her first copy of \textit{THE BROWNIES' BOOK} from her minister.\textsuperscript{178} As readers met and discussed the meaning or ideas contained in “The Jury” letters, an individual response may have resulted in multiple responses to each writer's politicized representation of a shared text. Consequently, seeds of change may have been sown in individual readers and in the communities with whom they shared their reactions.

As their value was reaffirmed with every publication in “The Jury,” letter writers may have gained confidence in their own ability to encourage change beginning with how others viewed them. Eleazer Parratt's letter seemed to redefine the image of African American males. From Brooklyn, Parratt wrote: “I am very fond of reading, and also of geography, history, spelling, singing, and 'mathematics. I fancy athletics, tennis, baseball and the like. I can make a good stroke at tennis. I am the best speller and historian in my grade."\textsuperscript{179} In his succinct letter, this intelligent, fifth-grader refuted the images of ignorance and an inherent inability to learn that permeated dominant views of African Americans during the early twentieth century. Instead, Parratt’s was the epitome of an ideal future, if given the opportunity. Once his letter was published, Parratt’s true identity

\textsuperscript{176} See \textit{THE BROWNIES' BOOK} 1, no. 10 (October 1920) and \textit{THE BROWNIES' BOOK} 1, no. 7 (July 1920).
\textsuperscript{177} See Pollard's letter in \textit{THE BROWNIES' BOOK} 1, no. 8 (August 1920): 256.
\textsuperscript{178} See Stone's letter in \textit{THE BROWNIES' BOOK} 2, no. 2 (February 1921): 62.
\textsuperscript{179} See \textit{THE BROWNIES' BOOK} 1, no. 6 (June 1920): 178.
was reaffirmed, denouncing the substandard position that society attempted to attach to him. His letter served as proof that he and other African Americans would not remain in pre-assigned seats indefinitely. As the magazine’s four thousand readers shared his message as well as reactions to his writing with children at school, church, home, and in their communities, according to Bleich’s social system of answering language, Parratt’s utterances evoked multiple responses.

Following Parratt’s lead, Thomas R. Reid, Jr. of Key West, Florida published his rebuttal to negative perceptions of African Americans. Contesting images of laziness and inferiority, Reid wrote:

I finished High School last term and am planning to enter college at the approaching term. After a strong college course, if nothing prevents I shall study medicine and surgery. I am going to study medicine not so much for the sake of just making a living out of it, but it is my earnest desire to make some lasting contribution to medical science.180

Similar to James Butler, Jr., a college student at age fourteen, Reid was an example of Du Bois’s Utopian ideal, well educated and more focused on contributing to society than receiving monetary gain. He addressed his letter to those who considered African Americans members of an innately unintelligent race without merit or promise and therefore unworthy of citizenship. With eloquence, Reid declared his determination to claim the social, economic, and political rights due him as an American citizen through education and hard work, the sum of the philosophy Du bois illustrated in The Souls of

180 See Reid’s letter in THE BROWNIES’ BOOK 1, no. 10 (October 1920): 308.
Black Folk.\textsuperscript{181} Akin to Susan Paul's motivation for writing \textit{Memoir of James Jackson}, Reid offered his letter as proof that African Americans were not inferior.\textsuperscript{182} According to Lois Brown, Paul hoped her book would "counter charges that African Americans were neither interested in education nor able to educate themselves."\textsuperscript{183} Nearly one hundred years later, Reid fought the same battle.

\textsuperscript{183} Ibid, 22.
CONCLUSION

Regardless of the subject each addressed, Franklin Lewis, Eleanor Holland, Claudia Moore, Ada Simpson, Annie Elizabeth McAden, Mary Perkins, Eleazer Parratt, Thomas Reid, and others wrote their way into their own effective literacy. They gave voice to their experiences as members of a disenfranchised race through their letters. The contributing child authors took themselves outside of their local communities to form connections with a genuine listening audience on a national and international scale. As their politicized messages evoked responses from the perceptions of individual readers and those each reader affected, a race and its nation underwent what was potentially social change.

Authors of letters published in “The Jury” living in the largely segregated, early twentieth-century U.S. identified themselves through the politicization of their writing. As Fultz contended of the African American press in general, children’s letters to the magazine’s editors arguably defined other blacks, empowering them to relinquish the subservient positions offered to them by society and encouraging them to secure the rights and privileges of full American citizenship. With each letter’s publication, contributing child authors stepped forward and affirmed: “I am an American citizen,” the words printed above the photograph of a bust of an African American boy on the cover of the magazine’s February 1920 issue. See figure 3. With their voices reverberating in print, children called out to readers and to all influenced by them, evoking response.
Figure 3 “Bust of a Negro Child,” by Paolo S. Abbate. Photograph by International Film Service. Appeared on the cover of the February 1920 issue of *The Brownies’ Book.*

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