Transmitting Whiteness: Librarians, Children, and Race, 1900-1930s

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TRANSMITTING WHITENESS: LIBRARIANS, CHILDREN, AND RACE, 1900 – 1930s

by

Shane Hand

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degrees of Master of Arts and
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ABSTRACT

TRANSMITTING WHITENESS:

LIBRARIANS, CHILDREN, AND RACE, 1900-1930s

by Shane Clinton Hand

August 2011

In the wake of the public library movement in the southern United States during the early twentieth century, local librarians began providing library services for those whom they deemed to be their most valuable resources, children. Representatives of a new profession, children’s librarians campaigned for better tomorrows by collecting good books specifically for young readers while providing safe, comfortable spaces that encouraged an atmosphere of instructive entertainment.

Supplemental to the development of a unique children’s department, library administrators sought strong working relationships with the city’s various public schools. The public cooperative that developed between libraries and schools brought thousands of children into the library as well as furthered the institution’s commitment to community activity. As librarians struggled to shape a body politic worthy of the nation’s democratic heritage, they inevitably constructed a culture of children’s literacy and readership. Through the development of collections, the maintenance of segregated spaces, and community involvement, children’s librarians inevitably contributed to transmitting an aggressive white racial ideology. This study Focuses on the New Orleans Public Library’s experience from 1900 - 1930s, and relies heavily on the library’s Annual Reports. However, contemporary professional articles from the Library Journal place the
Annual Reports within a broader picture of regional and national public librarianship during the early 1900s which enhance the historical value of this study.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Following the U. S. Supreme Court’s decision in Brown vs. Board of Education, Topeka, KS, in 1954, the South embroiled itself within a vicious contest of white aggressive resistance against African Americans’ non-violent protest for freedom, equality, and dignity. American memory would be scarred for years to come with images of bombings, beatings, and general white brutality exhibited during the modern Civil Rights Movement. In retrospect, however, the U. S. historian faces an inevitable, yet disturbingly difficult task of unraveling how white Americans overwhelmed themselves with such a vindictive hate for black America.

Part of the answer may be hidden within the history of America’s free public library. The advent of the public library movement was imbued with the lofty objective of shaping a body politic worthy of democratic rule; however, a residual racial bias grew out of the late nineteenth century into the public library’s bourgeoning culture of literacy and readership. By the early 1900s, children’s librarians had taken up the noble charge of shaping a better tomorrow by guiding a child’s reading. However, as local librarians developed collections, maintained segregated spaces, and cooperated with the community, they inevitably fostered the transmission of a racial ideology based on white superiority, privilege, and black subservience.

Libraries have long been cited as evidence of developed and civilized societies, though they remain a relatively new phenomenon within the history of the United States. The institution’s traditional meta-narrative trotted along with (or perhaps it allowed the furthering of) the development of Western Civilization. Stemming out of Egypt, scholars
trace the evidence of impressive libraries into the gymnasiums, bathhouses, and personal
collections of the Greco-Roman world. Following Rome’s fall, libraries persisted beyond
late antiquity into the medieval period via Europe’s monastic tradition and continued to
hold a place of prominence during the Renaissance and Industrial Revolution. Finally,
from the shores of the New World, Benjamin Franklin heralded the first colonial library
that he termed “mother,” The Library Company of Philadelphia. Yet, library
development within the United States remained the privilege of a cultural elite able to
afford subscription costs - until 1854.

Marketing itself as “the first large free municipal library in the United States,” the
Boston Public Library opened its collection of over 16,000 volumes to the public in
March 1854. However, the ensuing popularity of the public library movement, beginning
around 1876, did not develop within a cultural vacuum. The materials collected,
catalogued, and circulated by public librarians were intended to meet local needs. The
public, in turn, provided the local library with its staff, placing the librarian in a unique,
familiar relationship with the patron. The common culture shared by public librarians and
library patrons enhanced the librarian’s ability to meet the ever-evolving institutional
objective of providing local user-communities with the intellectual materials requisite for
the public’s personal enlightenment, education, and entertainment. Thus, public libraries
never operated as a neutral zone free from their unique socio-political cultures. Rather,

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1 Michael H. Harris, Histories of Libraries in the Western World, 4th Ed. (Lanham, MD & London: The
2 Margaret Barton Korty, “Benjamin Franklin and Eighteenth-Century American Libraries,” Transactions
Franklin: A Life of Service,” The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography 55, 3 (1931): 196.
3 “A Brief History and Description,” Boston Public Library, accessed on 14 June 2011
4 Henry M. Gill, Librarian’s Annual Report: New Orleans Public Library, Simon Hernsheim and Fisk
the library would be encumbered with its respective community values and social mores through the library staff, policies, and within the collections’ content.

While the public library movement gained popularity throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the southern United States suffered significant delays in developing free public libraries. These delays were attributed to the financial, material, and human devastation resulting from the U. S. Civil War. However, by the early 1900s, some Southern cities were offering remarkable public library services for their communities which proved to be quite popular. For example, the New Orleans Public Library (NOPL) began providing free library access to New Orleans citizens as early as 1907; and, on Halloween in 1908, the library unveiled a branch system that included a central building, three neighborhood branches, and a children’s department. Henry M., Gill, the city’s head librarian, described the grand opening of the library’s new Central Building as “an occasion of unusual interest. The building was brilliantly lighted, handsomely decorated, and a large audience filled the great reading room to the doors.”

In fact, the grand opening for each branch attracted large crowds with the exception of the Napoleon Branch because of “a steady downpour of rain.” However, in spite of the city’s impressive branch system, fully operational by 1908, the library did not grant access to African-Americans until late in 1915.

Closely shadowing the South’s celebration of public libraries emerged a new national literature written with the exclusive purpose of instructing children with amusing stories. Librarians responded to the needs of an expanding readership; and, as a greater number of children’s departments opened, the young readers proved themselves to be

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lovers of books. Thus the children’s department, complete with specially trained
children’s librarians, was established alongside the region’s newest peculiar institution,
the public library. The growing interest in children as readers, driven by a vision of the
child as tomorrow’s hope, expanded the role of the virtuous Mother and it thrust her out
of the home into a socially accepted professional role within the library to care for the
new child patron.

Complicating library progress down South was a virulent form of racism among
the South’s white population who were still reeling from the Emancipation of their ex-
slaves. As the city’s library became an obvious venue for public discourse and
socialization, the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) allied with local libraries,
and launched a literacy campaign to vindicate the South while preserving its heritage of
white supremacy.\(^7\) As this white racial ideology found its way into the regional and
national literature, it soon revealed itself within the new genre of literature being written
for children readers and collected in libraries. Southern librarians developed collections
peculiar to their user populations, maintained segregated spaces, and aligned themselves
ideologically with community activists to ferment a cultural revolution of literacy,
readership, and open access to information for children. However, in doing so, they
fostered the transmission of a stubborn, yet aggressive, racial ideology of white
superiority, privilege, and black subservience.

In that the public library is a predominately local community institution, the New
Orleans Public Library serves as an excellent focal point for historical inquiry. The city
of New Orleans wholeheartedly embraced the Southern public library movement in the

\(^7\) Karen Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of
early twentieth century, and with a keen attention to detail, the staff preserved valuable internal reports, minutes of meetings, and correspondence which make this project feasible. In addition to the NOPL’s archive of internal documentation and records, the fundamental objective of the library to provide “every book to its reader” required these library professionals to engage in demographic studies, termed a community assessment. The community assessments were regularly employed by the librarians, and they utilized multiple methods of inquiry which reveal important details about the early twentieth century New Orleans citizenry, such as their reading preference, values, and customs. However, these continual assessments of the New Orleans Public Library user community also serves as a powerful tool for the historian in evaluating to what degree, if any, the NOPL was successful in effecting social change by “preaching its gospel of good books and public libraries.”

As the public library solidified its permanence in America’s urban and rural landscape, it functioned as a powerful catalyst for social change in the southern United States. Writing the New Orleans’ Public Library’s twenty-fifth *Annual Report*, Gill predicted that “the historian of the future will find in this present day library movement one of the main currents of American life.” This project endeavors to uncover that force by examining the continued oppression of black Americans.

The breadth of this argument encompasses multiple historiographical threads, including: Southern history; the Public Library Movement; and, Children’s librarianship which are viewed through the bi-focaled lens of gender and race. Yet, absorbing this project through purpose, theme, and argument lays the development of Whiteness in the

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twentieth-century United States. Whiteness studies have proved remarkably significant thread of U.S. Historiography feeding the historical questions driving this study. As such, David R. Roediger’s *The Wages of Whiteness* not only offers a perfectly shrewd example of analytical history, but his focus on the white laborer’s use of language in the early nineteenth century delineates class relations as much as he sorts through race relations.¹⁰

Two scholars trace the origins of modern white racism back to the era of Jim Crow. For example, in *Making Whiteness*, Elizabeth Grace Hale brings the discussion of Whiteness much closer into modern times. Hale examines a consumer culture that muddied the color line while simultaneously advocating racial distinctions. Jennifer Ritterhouse’s *In Growing Up Jim Crow* also looks at the segregated South to found her argument. While she contends that the transmission of white racism was taught to children, it nonetheless remained an unobserved, unwritten lesson promulgated by parents. However this project, based on the idea that a racial ideology was taught to children, turns to the era’s public librarians, who were not only educators but the most disciplined in archiving their institutional records.

In Chapter II, I examine the culture of literacy that New Orleans public librarians tended from 1900 – 1930s. By gearing their energy towards the city’s children, they attempted to shape a progressive moral economy by guiding the reading interests of their youngest, most malleable of readers. Chapter III looks to New Orleans’ bifurcated communities to reveal the era’s unabashed white racial ideology. This ideal not only permeated the city’s laws, customs, and social norms, it inevitably colored the white local librarians’ certain disposition against the black community.

In the fourth chapter, I examine representative examples of early twentieth century children’s books, including picture books and materials collected for both younger and juvenile readers. The picture book extended the genre’s potential impact on children who were too young to read, as well as those who had never learned. The NOPL defined the younger reader as being less than fifteen-years old. Third, the juvenile reader ties the project together. Written for older children, these didactic examples clearly expressed the basic tenants of the Lost Cause which were boisterously espoused by the UDC in their work with children. Meanwhile, librarians successfully molded the cast of mind for two generations of American children, by developing peculiar collections for their local community, maintaining segregated spaces, and aligning their institutional focus on children with the Daughters’ fierce community activism. Children’s librarians, although driven by an egalitarian, progressive ideology of literacy and readership, ironically fostered the cultural transmission of a nineteenth century white racial ideology memorialized within books sitting on the library shelf.
CHAPTER II
SOUTHERN LITERATURE
AND CHILDREN’S LIBRARIANSHIP

“Childhood is a tender thing and easily wrought into any shape. Yea, and the very souls of children readily receive the impressions of those things that are dropped into them while they are yet but soft; but when they grow older, they will, as all hard things are, be more difficult to be wrought upon.”
-Plutarch,
from Olcott, Frances J. *The Children’s Reading*, 1912 & 1927

Public librarians in the Southern United States struggled to foment a cultural revolution of literacy, readership, and open access to information amongst their communities’ most precious natural resources: children. Following closely in the wake of the Southern public library movement during the early 1900s, librarians began developing collections, spaces, and services for their cities’ youngest readers. While the definitions of both children’s literature and the children’s department varied from library to library, most librarians tended to separate their young patrons into two groups. The first group, and the one more commonly associated with children’s literature consisted of children in the seventh grade and below. Older children above the eighth grade tended to be regarded as juvenile readers. Children’s librarians targeted both groups of children in their mission to create a better or more civilized world for tomorrow by inculcating their community’s children with collections and spaces specially designed for their use and that would appeal to their interests. By tapping into children’s curiosity and the Southern region’s impressive literacy rates in the early twentieth century, children’s librarians
began shaping their communities by developing special collections and reading lists that would not only shape a child’s reading habits but would form the child’s worldview.¹

The South’s literacy rate is commonly perceived as inferior because the public school system was not introduced until Reconstruction. Thus, there is reason to question whether librarians and their collections had any real potential to shape a region suffering from supposedly high rates of white illiteracy. Unfortunately, little work has been done on the topic and Southern illiteracy remains the common assumption. However, the evidence suggests that Southern literacy rates ran much higher than historians tend to assume.²

Writing for the Confederate Veteran in 1928, D. W. Dyer, Ph.D., in “White Illiteracy in the South,” argues, “the character of the white illiterates of the South has been grossly misrepresented and is much understood.”³ While Dyer admits that the South was behind the North in the early twentieth century, he faults the War Between the States as destroying the South’s efforts at public education in the second half of the nineteenth century. For example, Dyer states that “in 1860 there were 27,582 public schools in the Southern states with an enrollment of 954,728.”⁴ Yet, even with the setbacks from war, Dyer claims that “in the towns and cities of Virginia in 1900 there was only one white man out of every 42 who could neither read nor write.”⁵ Unfortunately, Dyer’s article comes with a heavy prejudice against the North. He believed that the South’s highest illiteracy rates were found in the region’s mountainous

⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid.
and sparsely populated areas, and argued that the towns people were more intelligent and progressive, and “as a rule joined the Confederacy.” The profound illiteracy of the approximately 35,000 Unionists in Tennessee becomes for Dyer the reason for their not supporting the Confederate South. Fortunately, less biased and more recent work on Southern literacy rates during the antebellum era give credence to Dyer’s claims of a literate South.

Economic historian John E. Murray argues in “Family, Literacy, and Skill Training in the Antebellum South: Historical-Longitudinal Evidence from Charleston” that literacy rates for Southern Whites in the antebellum period were much higher than previously thought. Murray draws his conclusion from what he qualifies as a unique source of data related to “apprenticeship indentures.” Based on this data, Murray claims that even the poorest mothers in Charleston taught their children not only how to read, but how to write. He said parents naturally showed a strong interest in their child’s education due to a strong positive correlation between literacy and wealth.

Murray prefaces his study by noting there is no question of the North’s higher literacy rate, but he claims that large percentages of literate Whites in the North in combination with a general lack of public education in the South created the misconception that illiteracy abounded in the South. Interestingly, Murray’s study of the poorest White children in Charleston reveals that White literacy levels in the South were comparable to corresponding levels in the North.

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8 Ibid., 796.
9 Ibid., 774.
10 Ibid., 773-774.
11 Ibid., 796.
Unfortunately no one has analyzed literacy rates for the first fifty years of the twentieth century; however, the United States Census Bureau began collecting illiteracy statistics in the 1870 census. Subsequent censuses show a general trend of comparable improvement in the North and the South through the 1950 census; however, variations exist within the census data which must be accounted for. To be specific, literacy rates vary between the different classes, races, genders, and regions in the United States’ population. In order to draw a meaningful conclusion, a control group must be isolated.\(^{12}\) Whiteness, regardless of gender, class, or regional differences, is isolated in this study because the racialized books being collected by local librarians to effect cultural change were written by White authors for White children. While African American children would have likely read such books, the literacy rates relevant to early twentieth century librarians, and hence this study, are those of the white population.

A gradual rise in national literacy levels begins after the 1880 census. In fact, the national level of literacy increased by ten percent from 1880 to 1910. The data suggest the increase resulted from comparable improvements in literacy attainment in the North and the South.\(^{13}\) Isolating Whiteness in the population reveals how close the literacy levels were for the two regions. The U.S. Census Bureau identifies only 4.3 % of the entire Northern population as being illiterate by 1910. The Southern rate is shockingly lower with 15.6 % of the entire population qualified as illiterate; however, isolating Whiteness drops the Southern rate to 7.7 % bringing it within four percent of its Northern counterpart. This means more than 92% of White Americans in both the South and North


\(^{13}\) Ibid., 1187.
qualified as literate by the end of the twentieth century’s first decade. Twenty years later the total percentage of the illiterate Northern populace remained close to three percent while the total Southern percentage had only decreased four tenths of a percent. Yet, isolating the White population reveals that North and South literacy rates were above 96% for both regions. Finally, the census data compliments Murray’s claim that Southern mothers were responsible for their region’s remarkably high literacy rates.

Although the U.S. Census Bureau did not collect literacy data before the Civil War, the censuses following the war through the 1950 census show an interesting trend when the gender qualification is isolated. Regardless of a person’s race, geographical location, or class status, the difference between female and male literacy is not significant.

The booming national business of producing children’s books in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also hints at a significantly literate population of children in the Southern states. In *Minders of Make-Believe: Idealists, Entrepreneurs, and the Shaping of American Children’s Literature*, Leonard Marcus traces the rise of the major publishing houses in the early twentieth century from their nineteenth century roots. Children’s literature emerged as a respected genre of American literature in the 1830s. Marcus begins his study by noting the didactic nature of children’s literature written before 1860. Concentrating on the interrelationship between librarians, educators, and the publishing houses, Marcus argues that by 1830 the production of children’s literature was recognized for its potential profitability, but the American public would soon learn to value the amusing books written for children because of their potential to

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instruct. The volume of the books being published significantly increased following the Civil War. The nation’s first public library was established in 1852, but only twenty years later there were 2,500 libraries representing a total collection of over 12 million titles. The number of libraries doubled and the number of titles tripled by the close of the century.\textsuperscript{16} The first children’s literature association was started in 1887, and in 1895 the American Library Association (ALA) formally recognized the title of children’s librarian as a specific specialization of librarianship.

Children’s librarians were enjoying a new era of professional respectability and prestige by the end of the 1920s. A New England bookseller, Frederic G. Melcher, proposed at the 1921 ALA Conference that “the time had come for children’s literature to have its own Pulitzer Prize.”\textsuperscript{17} The bookseller’s proposal was met with overwhelming support at the conference, and in the following year the ALA recognized excellence in children’s literature with their new John Newberry Medal.\textsuperscript{18} Turow notes that the major publishing houses noticed an increasing demand for children’s books along with the literature’s notable prestige. MacMillan was the first of many publishers to create a separate and autonomous department specifically for publishing children’s literature.\textsuperscript{19}

The Great Depression slowed the genre’s growth only slightly during the 1930s. New book production dropped by fifty percent from 1931 to 1933;\textsuperscript{20} however, Marcus notes that most children’s literature departments experienced a marked improvement as

\textsuperscript{16} Marcus, \textit{Minders of Make-Believe}, 64.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 85-86.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 79.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 110.
early as 1935. Following the return to profitability, the Caldecott Medal was created in 1937 to honor excellence in picture books herald the profession’s coming of age.

Public librarians in the early twentieth century often spoke and wrote of the library and their profession as fundamental to a healthy society. To strengthen their arguments, librarians colored their rhetoric and scholarship with religious vocabulary and concepts. At the American Library Association’s (ALA) annual conference in 1923, the association’s president, George B. Utley, loaded his speech with spiritual language in order to express not only the necessity of public library services but to convey their society’s imminent and pressing need for the librarian who “assumes the halo of a holy office.” Yet, ALA President Utley relied on more than religious imagery for conveying America’s need of library services to his attentive army of public librarians who overwhelmingly believed that “the most civilized gesture that it is possible” to make is to offer free library services. Utley, employing a rhetoric informed by the nation’s wartime experience, empathically stated their situation: “Again, it is the war. Communities have not, as a rule, clamored for libraries and for books to read.” Thus, according to Utley, American communities needed proactive librarians to begin “preaching the gospel of good books and public libraries.” But one may ask why librarians in the early twentieth-century felt so strongly about the value and necessity of a public library as well as their drive to invent local, regional, and national literary cultures?

Marcus, Minders of Make-Believe, 123.

Ibid., 135.


Ibid.
Librarians define their institution, not as a place, but as a space that fosters an intellectual and abstract exchange of ideas. One can see entrenched within the ALA’s 1939 definition of a library evidence of the librarian’s ethical values: “all libraries are forums for information and ideas.” In other words, the library can be thought of as a part of the public discourse. Thus, censorship becomes nothing less than a limitation or restriction on public conversation and understanding. To censor materials from the library’s user community, therefore constitutes an egregious attack on the fundamental structuring of a democratic society’s reliance on an informed public. In light of such firm beliefs regarding the importance of a library as a fundamental and necessary component of a free, democratic, and high society, it certainly follows that early twentieth-century librarians raised the status of their profession to a “holy office.”

As the public library movement spread throughout the United States with greater speed at the turn of the twentieth century, it did not take long for librarians to begin preaching their gospel of readership and literacy for their community’s most precious resource: children. Jill Lepore, in “The Lion and the Mouse: The Battle that Reshaped Children’s Literature,” returns to the traditional moment of what many today consider the birth of the modern children’s librarian. Examining the work of Anne Carol Moore, the undisputed pioneer of children’s librarianship, Lepore identifies librarians’ new emphasis on children as beginning during the second decade of the twentieth century, “After the [NYPL] library opened in 1911, its children’s room became a pint-sized paradise.”

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Donnarae MacCann in *The Child’s First Books: A Critical Study of Pictures and Texts* describes children as “quick in sensing and accepting” information with instinctive responses to a book’s text and pictures. MacCann argues that children easily receive and construct new information into what becomes “some of the most important human characteristics.” Likewise, author Lillian Smith in *The Unreluctant Years* contends that a child’s underdeveloped reasoning skills prevent the children from adequately analyzing the value of a story’s lessons. Smith describes the sense of “wonder and question” exhibited by children; however, she notes they are “uncritical in judging literature.”

Acknowledging the impressionability of children is not new, Children’s librarians in the early 1900s were well aware of the child’s highly impressionable nature and that the books a child read would significantly affect his or her development and perception of the world. The moralistic and didactic quality of American children’s literature before 1860 illustrates a long use of books by Americans to teach their children important cultural values and moral lessons. While explicit moral piety gradually disappeared from the American genre following the Civil War; new works emerged with themes focused on “social problems” that were delivered within a narrative intended to entertain the child reader. Smith notes the genre “now has value as social history” because of the loaded messages that persisted well into the twentieth century.

Early twentieth century librarians believed it was both their moral and professional duty to guide their young readers. For example, Anne Carol Moore’s protégé

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33 Smith, *The Unreluctant Years*, 34.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid., 146.
(who eventually replaced Moore as the head of the New York Public Library services for children) forcefully declared that, “I hope for that day when we shall be called the belligerent profession; a profession that is informed, illuminated, and radiated by a fierce and beautiful love of books – a love so overwhelming that it makes the culture of our time distinctive, individual, creative, and truly of the spirit.”  

Anna P. Mason (1923), librarian of the St. Louis Public Library, in her article “The Children’s Librarian in the Community,” wrote that she was “bursting” with excitement over the importance of the library to its community for fostering “intelligent citizenship.” Regarding how the individual librarian should structure their efforts, she advised her professional and scholarly audience to place their “emphasis upon the reader rather than the book, and the institution of work with children as a specialized department is the most fundamental evidence and demonstration of this conception. All consideration of plans for the reorganization of society begins with the children.”

The New York Public Library (NOPL) and the work of Ann Carol Moore remain central themes to historical scholarship examining the efforts of children’s librarians in shaping their communities. Yet, as the public library movement spread throughout the southern half of the United States, librarians quickly established children’s departments in their communities’ libraries as well.

Southern librarians were very sensitive of the South’s failure to maintain the pace of public library development in the Northern States. The librarian of the Carnegie Library of Nashville, Tennessee, argued that the South’s slower pace was due to the Civil

War that “left the South impoverished” and not to be erroneously blamed on “a lack of sufficient culture or a non-appreciation of the value of literature and the advantages of its general dissemination. Causes of a peculiar character have operated to retard library growth in the South.”

Although the South’s public library movement lagged behind the North’s by approximately twenty-five years, the same cannot be said for the South’s development of separate library collections, spaces, and services for children readers. In fact, as early as 1908 the NOPL first began providing separate collections, spaces, and services for the city’s children. Surprisingly, historians often ignore the role of the public library in their studies of the past. Librarian Christine E. Jenkins, Ph.D., professor of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, states that “in considering the historiography of youth services librarianship, one is struck by how often a call for further research in this area has been sounded and how limited the response to that call has been.”

Henry M. Gill, the head librarian and director of the New Orleans Public Library (NOPL) from 1906 – 1927, left a remarkably detailed record of the library’s emphasis on children. In 1907, after receiving a $250,000 gift from philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, Gill noted that the money would be gratefully employed in one of the library’s three critical, and official, objectives: towards expanding the library’s scope and usefulness; increasing the NOPL’s dignity and importance in the eyes of its user community; and,

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increasing the recognition of the library as being a “handmaid to our excellent public school system.” As the quote implies, Gill and the NOPL were working with children indirectly through the public school system in 1907 before the librarian officially opened a children’s department. However, it would not be long before Gill and his fellow librarians realized, with greater depth, the importance of their work with children as the young readers demonstrated their love for books and learning. In fact, by the close of the century’s first decade, the city’s children would outgrow the space allotted for their use within less than a year’s time.

It is hard to overemphasize the New Orleans Public Library’s concern with the quality of literacy of the children in their city. In his first annual library report for the NOPL in 1907, librarian and director Henry M. Gill insisted the library was fundamental for social progress and that directing the reading habits of children was essential to their institutional mission. He wrote: “It is our belief that progress can be made and that the advancement of civilization is possible only through the culture of the moral and intellectual powers of the people at large . . . and the public library labors with this same noble purpose . . . [The Library] is indeed, second only to the church and the school in strengthening the mind and character of our fellow men.”

Even while operating without a catalogue of any kind or being able to spare the necessary staff to devote to such a project as cataloging the library’s collection, Gill made sufficient appropriations from a limited annual budget to send one of the few librarians to the New York Public Library for “acquainting herself with work in children’s libraries.” It is all the more significant that with such a low operating budget and a limited number of competent staff Gill

42 Gill, Annual Report for 1907, 8.
43 Ibid., 18.
44 Ibid., 12, 14.
managed to send a librarian to New York City for specialist training in working with children.

Considering the significant labor and financial investment devoted to sending the New Orleans librarian to New York, it is not surprising that the children’s department the NOPL revealed to the public in November of 1908, bore a striking resemblance to the recommendations made by Anne Carol Moore only five years before. Writing for the Library Journal in 1903, Moore prescribed one of the earliest recipes for what she contended to be the essential components “for the work of the children’s library.” The NOPL closely followed Moore’s advice. By 1908, New Orleans’ public librarians had created a children’s department that was unique unto itself; a trained librarian was selecting new children’s books; duplicates of popular titles were purchased; the children’s librarian’s visited other children’s departments to foster professionalization; and, finally, funds were made available to improve both the aesthetics and comfort of the environment as well as the quality of the collection.

Moore’s 1903 Library Journal article bears further consideration for a couple of reasons. First, while writing at the beginning of what would become an important and lengthy career, Moore described their profession in the early 1900s “at the end of an experimental stage of a work which has been of such recent and such rapid growth.” She intended her article to both encourage new interest in children’s librarianship as a legitimate profession and to cite recent improvement in the field. While Moore admitted that the prospects of a children’s librarian paled to that of a public school teacher, “they

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46 Ibid., 163-164.
47 Ibid., 160.
are very much brighter than they were in 1896, when none of the children’s librarians of my acquaintance were receiving more than $600 annually.”

By 1928, children’s librarians could hope to earn between $1,200 and $2,400 annually.

The second significance of Moore’s 1903 article concerns the gender specific role of the children’s librarian who was female. In every primary source article reviewed for this project, including Moore’s, the children’s librarian is overwhelmingly assumed to be a female. In fact, Moore used the children’s department to enhance the significance, education, and reputability of the female in the workplace. Moore wrote, “While the children’s librarian may be virtually free to develop her own work in her own way, she is much stronger and more valuable assistant if she is made directly responsible to the chief librarian for the development of her work.”

Twenty years later in 1923, the gendered selection of children’s librarians showed no signs of diminishing. Librarian Anna P. Mason of the St. Louis Public Library, in describing the importance of the children’s librarian for the community, claimed that:

As the office of the children’s librarian becomes an increasingly respected one in the eyes of the public, as her position grows in dignity, there are larger opportunities for her own personal development and for those compensations which are so essential to the heart and soul of womanhood. I think that we may say that, if the financial side is properly met, the outlook for the interest in this field of library service is very bright, for the growth of work with young people has created an enlarged field of dignified service which calls for the best qualities of womanhood and a higher order of intelligence and education.

By tying the ideal of the virtuous Mother as the guardian of the home to the community’s need for children’s librarians, Mason ably demonstrates the means by which women

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assumed a respectable public role in furthering their professional opportunities.

Furthermore, that Mason wrote of the woman’s importance to children’s librarianship only twenty years after Moore first called for the position to improve women’s public and professional opportunities reveals the speed of women’s increasing success at professionalization.

Figure 1. The Children’s Reading Room at the New Orleans Public Library. The library provided tables and chairs specifically constructed for younger readers with the ends of the tables rounded off to prevent unnecessary injury to the children if they were to fall. A great deal of time and consideration was devoted by the New Orleans librarians in creating library space for their young readers.  

In addition to the main library, the City of New Orleans had three fully functioning branch libraries in 1908. The city’s branch libraries provide further evidence of the NOPL’s desire to shape the reading habits of their city’s children. Although the library operated without an official children’s department (until late in 1908) Gill made

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new policies specifically for the branch libraries to ensure they reached as many children in the city as possible.

In the branches particular attention will be paid to the children. A large percent of the books is for their use, tables and chairs especially designed for the little ones have been placed in each building, picture bulletins are liberally employed to stimulate the desire to read and to direct their reading to certain channels.  

Yet, by the fall of the following year the NOPL relegated a separate collection and space in the new central library for their children readers. Less than one year after Henry M. Gill assumed the responsibilities of head librarian for the City of New Orleans the children’s department was established. Opening in November of 1908, the books selected for the department’s collection were at a seventh-grade reading level or less.  
The department boasted a children’s collection of 4,340 works with a circulation during its first two months in existence, November and December of 1908, of 5,885. The total circulation after only one year of service amounted to almost 60,000. Gill and the librarians at the New Orleans Public library had tapped into what seems to be a preexisting desire of the children to read and learn. This impressive beginning speaks to city’s and the South’s impressive literacy rates for children at the turn of the century. But, the children of New Orleans quickly outgrew their allotted space and Gill was soon expanding the space, collection, and services for their young readers. “We are confronted with the serious problem of finding at least half again as much space as it occupies at present,” he wrote in 1909.

53 Gill, Annual Report for 1907, 16.
54 Gill, Annual Report for 1908, 18.
55 Ibid., 18.
56 Gill, Annual Report for 1909, 8.
57 Ibid., 14.
Figure 2. The Royal Branch of the New Orleans Public Library. Library director Henry M. Gill arranged for most of the branch’s books and space to be for the children. Each of the branch libraries purchased the smaller chairs and tables for the comfort of their younger readers.  

By 1910, only three years after making the library’s services available for children, it can safely be said that the NOPL’s children department had come of age. The library was busying itself extending its services and responsibilities to the city’s children. For example, Gill worked hard to align the library’s work with children to the city’s public education system. A special library card, called a teacher’s Card, was created to allow for special borrowing privileges for instructors in the city school system. \(^{59}\) The teacher’s card allowed educational professionals to borrow a greater number of materials for the purpose of facilitating classroom instruction. As the library improved its relationship with the city’s public school system, teachers began bringing entire classes to the library.

\(^{58}\) Gill, Annual Report for 1910, 25.  
\(^{59}\) Ibid., 7.
As the children’s department continued to grow in popularity after 1910, Gill began listing the books most frequently checked out for children in his annual reports. The list included the top twenty-five works for boys as well as girls for each year. Furthermore, story hour had become a regular feature of the children’s department. Readers would often structure their story to leave the children in a state of climax to increase their desire to read more books. One of the more popular activities, “Chalk Talk,” was given by a Mr. Charles Beard. While telling a story Mr. Beard would draw a picture with chalk and give it to a lucky child at the end of the story.\textsuperscript{60} The Boy Scouts were involved as well. In 1910, Boy Scout leaders developed a camping exhibit that was immensely popular with the children. The children’s department was a certified success by 1910.

By the close of the twentieth century’s first decade, public librarians in Southern cities had made monumental progress in substantiating children’s librarianship as a permanent component or function of the public library as well as a legitimate profession within librarianship. Children’s librarians, by tapping into a preexisting regional network of white literacy while harnessing the child’s natural curiosity, had created a new public forum for cooperating with local schools to increase their influence upon the city’s children. However, while librarians increased their children’s collections along with the space allotted for their use, these professionals began looking at other community and local institutions outside the library and school system to supplement their work and influence. One such group that worked with the New Orleans Public Library’s mission to the city’s children was the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC).

\textsuperscript{60} Gill, \textit{Annual Report for 1910}, 11.
CHAPTER III

MOBILIZING A LITERARY COMMUNITY
AND WHITENING THE COLLECTION

Introduction

The southern librarian’s ideological commitment to the goal of sustaining an intelligent body politic worthy of a democratic heritage undeniably entangled the local institution’s progressive values with a conservative tradition of white superiority. As librarians in New Orleans furthered this progressive campaign of fostering a culture of literacy and readership, they pursued a bifurcated strategy on two opposing fronts: the white and black communities. The child remained a primary objective in the NOPL’s work in the white Community, and most of the effort expended outside of the library’s walls focused on the local schools. However, the notable effort New Orleans afforded its black community was limited to a single branch.

Mobilizing the White Community

New Orleans librarians made significant strides in developing local children’s interest in the library, yet their effort often contributed to the region’s anti-black sentiment, even if it occurred indirectly by simply enticing children to become library patrons. For example, the NOPL began creating special collections as early as 1909. But these were not the special collections found in modern archives. Rather, staff members scoured the newspapers every day for important stories, events, and news to create a temporary collection of books that were “conspicuously placed and furnish a ready and fairly full source of information upon all important contemporaneous events.”¹

It is hard to over stress the NOPL’s focus on instructing the children as a means of creating a better future for the city. For example, the city’s librarians began creating picture bulletins and reading lists that would not only entice the child to read, but direct and shape the “quality” of reading as well. By 1915, New Orleans librarians were creating about forty picture bulletins, plus reading lists, books puzzles, and exhibits every year. Often these reading advisories directed children towards certain regional “heroes.” The history of Confederate generals, battles, and life consistently resurfaced throughout the period as a popular subject of interest “devised to amuse and instruct.”2 In 1909, two of the library’s most popular picture bulletins emphasized the heroics of two Confederate Generals, Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson.3 Also, in 1912, Robert E. Lee emerged as the subject of “a school prize essay.”4

The NOPL’s drive to increase readership amongst New Orleans children took its limited staff outside the confines of its institutional housing into the local community as well. The most significant objective of the library’s literacy campaign focused on the various public schools. In the library’s early years, with the cooperation of the school system superintendent, teachers brought their students to the library for instruction on the use of the library.5 However, head librarian Henry Gill was more pleased with invitations the library received to visit the schools because it reflected a greater interest in libraries on the part of the school administrators and teachers. He devoted energy to building the libraries relationship with the local school system. For example, working with a staff of only fifty-three workers in 1927, the NOPL managed 336 school visits, created multiple

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3 Gill, Annual Report for 1909, 11.
4 Gill, Annual Report for 1912, 8.
reading lists for faculty, and distributed 49,500 texts to the schools for the younger readers. But public librarians were not the only local professionals exploiting the access to the city’s children by maintaining a consistent presence in the schools.

The United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC), founded in 1894, are known for their dual themed polemic of White Supremacy and States Rights. They also orchestrated a campaign designed to revise the “histories taught in the schools, calling attention to errors where possible.” In *Dixie’s Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture*, historian Karen Cox furthers the current historiography of the UDC by examining women’s role in vindicating the Confederate tradition. Cox claims that the Daughters operated an aggressive campaign focused primarily on the re-education of the South’s white children. They were driven by a fear “that textbooks with a Northern bias had already accomplished irreparable damage, fear that their ancestors might never be vindicated, and fear those future generations of White Southerners may never know the sacrifices made by their Confederate ancestors.” Cox describes the UDC’s work with children as “Confederate Motherhood;” she differentiates this from its late eighteenth-century predecessors, the Republican Mother, by its fear driven impulse to vindicate the Confederacy. One Georgian Daughter appealed for donations to establish and equip schools because advancement, she insisted, “must begin

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9 Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters*, 123.
10 Ibid., 122.
with the child, the girl child especially, for it is the woman in the home that influences it for good or evil.”

The Daughters “maintained a constant presence in the South’s white public schools between 1894 and 1914,” and they developed a closer relationship with libraries. In fact, and quite ironically, they pointed to their financial and material support of libraries as proof of their progressiveness, even as the Daughters inculcated “children with conservative values.” For example, a Confederate Veteran article proclaimed in 1908 that the daughters “are progressive, too, as evidenced by the plan of the California State Division, U. D. C., for a Traveling Library.” Mrs. Victor Montgomery, a

Figure 3. One of Dixie’s Children, Ruth Taber Porter. Taber charmed Southern audiences with oral recitations of “Lee to the Rear” and “My Suit of Confederate Gray.”

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13 Cox, Dixie’s Daughters, 129
transplanted Southerner residing in California, had worriedly informed her local UDC chapter that “we are so far removed from the field of action, and necessarily out of touch with the sentiment of the South, that my children did not know and appreciate that sentiment.” Mrs. Montgomery’s fear that her children would fail to appreciate Southern history was central to the Daughters’ objective to vindicate the South’s Confederate past, and UDC members responded generously to her call for intellectual aid.

The New Orleans Public Library, through common agenda and proximity, facilitated the Daughters’ indoctrination of the city’s children. The library’s cooperation with the city’s public schools, believed to be critical for the expansion of the NOPL’s children’s department, brought the Daughters into a closer working relationship with the city’s librarian. The first record of the UDC exploiting the library’s collection occurred in 1920. Over “1,200 pupils of the public and parochial schools” frequented the library to study for the Daughter’s annual essay contest. However, the Daughters had likely sponsored such contests with the New Orleans Public Library well before 1920 as Gill referred to it as their “usual” essay contest. While the history lessons and textbooks proffered by the UDC was embraced by the NOPL, as Cox poignantly makes clear, “There was nothing innocuous about imparting the Lost Cause narrative to a younger generation, as that narrative was replete with racial stereotypes, emphasized the inferiority of blacks, and exaggerated the benefits of slave ownership.”

The work of the children’s librarian proved to be varied and extensive during its experimental stage during the early 1900s. As New Orleans librarians broadened their

17 Ibid.
18 Cox, Dixie’s Daughters, 122.
mission to reach children they simultaneously increased the variable methods of
inculcating young readers with the community’s traditional values of white superiority,
privilege, and black subservience. Through reading lists, exhibits, picture bulletins, and
puzzles, all occasionally served, whether directly or indirectly, to reinforce the child’s
racial prerogative for whiteness and its respective disdain for blackness. However, the
library reflected its local community as much as it shaped it, particularly regarding the
segregation of public spaces.

Containing the Black Community

While New Orleans librarians fervently cooperated with community organizations
such as the local schools and the United Daughters of the Confederacy, public librarians
struggled in a second contest that would contain African-American readers within the
segregated space of the city’s Colored Branch. Scholars have only recently combined
their histories of American libraries with the nation’s age old problem of race. Steven R.
Harris, Ph.D., in “Civil Rights and the Louisiana Library Association: Stumbling toward
Integration,” addresses the impact of the civil rights movement for Louisiana libraries
during the modern because the topic “has not been well documented, and the relationship
between regional and national professional organizations during this time even less so.”

Harris, by focusing on the Louisiana Library Association’s (LLA) relationship to the
American Library Association (ALA) and Southern libraries, offers fascinating insight
into the nature of Louisiana and Southern Librarianship in the mid-twentieth century.

Evidence abounds of the LLA’s position on African Americans. Harris claims that
while Louisiana librarians overwhelmingly supported the idea of uplifting African

19 Steven R. Harris, “Civil Rights and the Louisiana Library Association: Stumbling toward Integration,”
Americans with library services, this “did not, of course, mean that the white librarians could rise above the influence of southern attitudes about race.”\textsuperscript{20} For example, the question of integrating the LLA did not arise until the 1940s, and even then it was dismissed out of hand.\textsuperscript{21}

In his sweeping analysis of the state institution, Harris reveals that a library’s type speaks to the likelihood of a librarian being progressive or conservative. According to Harris, the state’s more liberal and progressive-minded librarians were more likely to be found working in academic libraries and remained overwhelmingly disinterested in working with the Black population. Meanwhile, local librarians engaged the black community, but they possessed little personal power to change local customs, tradition, or law because as civil servants “librarians served at the pleasure of their elected officials and, by extension, at the pleasure of public opinion.”\textsuperscript{22} The implication here is that a public librarian in Louisiana would be unlikely to attempt progressive racial reform in their local library due to the fear of losing funding or their job.

New Orleans’ early experience with public libraries certainly demonstrates that Harris is correct to cite the positive correlation between a librarian’s place of employment and that librarian’s educational attainment and political values. New Orleans public librarians built an impressive free library system in the first decade of operation. By 1915 the city could boast that it had four branches and a central building that may be “one of the most handsomest in the country.”\textsuperscript{23} More importantly, the city library’s monumental achievement in service, professionalization, and expansion was done with insufficient

\textsuperscript{20} Harris, “Civil Rights and the LLA,” 324.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 326.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 322.
\textsuperscript{23} Gill, \textit{Annual Report for 1914-15}, 5.
funding. Gill rarely missed an opportunity in one of his annual reports to compare the NOPL with contemporary large public libraries. For example, writing towards the end of his tenure with the library in 1927, he stated that while most large municipalities afforded their libraries “about seventy cents per capita. . . the New Orleans Public Library after having been for many years under ten cents per capita is still today under twenty cents per capita.”24 The city’s difficulty in appropriating the sufficient funds directly contributed to the inability of the library to hire staff members specifically trained in librarianship. Thus, according to Harris’s study, accompanying the library’s high staff turnover rate would be a deficiency of progressive values among the public institution’s staff.

Library work for African Americans proved to be a sensitive issue in early twentieth century library discourse. Harris notes the markedly racist attitudes among the white librarians dedicated to working with Louisiana’s Black population. For example, the LLA ran a column for several years in its Bulletin of the Louisiana Library Association titled “Libraries for Negroes.” In 1938, a white librarian working in a New Orleans Black academic library, Margaret Burke, “sent out a plea for more information about negro libraries” for which she received no response.25 Frustrated by what she perceived to be a lack of interest in libraries and literacy amongst the local Black population, Burke complained that “it would seem that the librarians are either too occupied to send in even one small news item or too – say it we must – lazy to cooperate in putting negro libraries on the map.”26

26 Ibid.
When Burke sent out her plea in 1938, the NOPL’s Dryades Branch had been operational for twenty-three years and staffed by African-American women. In fact, the city’s “Colored Branch” reflected the community’s vibrant interest in libraries.\textsuperscript{27} It seems then, that the black community’s alleged deficient interest in libraries resulted from a failure in communication between the segregated black and white populations in New Orleans, and not, as Burke argued, due to lazy “negroes.”

Although historians and library scholars have been slow to link the history of American public libraries with the nation’s history of racial tension, the New Orleans public librarians left behind an impressive amount of internal data stored in their archives which is ripe for historical analysis. Unfortunately, the annual reports, professional articles, newspaper clippings, and pictures used for this project mostly focus on the New Orleans white community. However, this, in itself, provides further evidence of oppressive racial bias because library services for blacks were a reality during the early 1900s. Yet, whether Gill remained disinterested in the African-American community, or more likely, preferred not to antagonize the local white animosity towards blacks, the NOPL records from 1900-1930s generally disregard the black community.

**Dryades Branch**

Inconspicuously embedded in the *1914-15 NOPL Annual Report* is a statement that the city began providing the black population with free access to a segregated public library facility in October 1915. The new branch had a total collection of 5,649 volumes.\textsuperscript{28} However, one should not be misled by what appears to be a generous nod towards the city’s black community encouraging literacy, readership, and open access to

\textsuperscript{27} New Orleans Public Library, *Annual Report for 1944*, 15.

information. A closer look at the city’s “Colored Branch,” named the Dryades Branch, reveals the enmity Southern whites nursed against black efforts toward citizenship and equality. To be sure, it was not a local egalitarian spirit that drove the construction of the city’s newest branch library for the exclusive use of African Americans. Rather, it was Andrew Carnegie’s stipulation that money donated by him for the construction of a public library be made available to the entire public. Thus, the library services provided to blacks were an underlying requisite predicating enhanced literacy and readership among whites in New Orleans – and the records reflect it.

The opening of the Dryades Branch in 1915 reveals the lack of white interest in black literacy and readership. Yet, due to the failure of Gill to include detailed information on the segregated branch within the library’s Annual Reports, the production and maintenance of the “Colored Branch” must be evaluated in light of providing library services for the city’s white population.

Gill consistently excluded significant detail regarding the black community’s library which speaks strongly of the insufficient care invested into the Dryades branch. For example, when the report first mentioned the Dryades Branch’s prospective opening, the remarkable news was contained to a single sentence that was merely intended to acknowledge Andrew Carnegie’s gift of $25,000 for constructing the branch. Yet, even with Carnegie’s gift it took New Orleans three years to open a single segregated building. This may not seem especially striking unless compared with the opening of the city’s central building and first three branches in 1908. Gill described the massive logistical effort required to move the collection and administrative resources into their new building as occurring with “remarkable rapidity”:

Seventy seven thousand books were moved, arranged on the shelves and made ready for circulation in six days. In spite of the rapidity with which we transferred the books, so skillfully and carefully were they handled that not a book was lost, and not a half dozen damaged.\footnote{Gill, Annual Report for 1908, 6.}

The only note accompanying the brief announcement of the Dryades Branch’s opening concerns the financial drain it imposed on the NOPL system that resulted in the suspension of several library services, including the \textit{Annual Report for 1914}.

The library services New Orleans provided for its black community, not surprisingly, reflected the racist attitudes of white Americans during the early twentieth century. Complementing the tendency of whites to ignore New Orleans’s black community lays the South’s policy of segregated public spaces. Segregated library spaces encompassed more than constructing separate facilities. For example, the library’s operating hours mirrored the trend in some Southern cities when the “white folks made it a habit to attend to business early and get off the streets [for] Negro’s Day.”\footnote{Federal Writers’ Project of the Works Progress Administration, \textit{Mississippi: The WPA Guide to the Magnolia State} (Jackson & London: University Press of Mississippi, 1938; 1988), 26; The authors stated that in Mississippi “Negro’s Day” was often on Saturday; yet, the segregated library services in New Orleans was on Sunday’s. I am not saying that Sunday was “Negro’s Day” for New Orleans; rather, I am saying that the segregated library hours at the NOPL on Sunday reflected the trend throughout the South to segregate a city’s accessibility during the weekend.} On Sunday in New Orleans, library service for whites ran from 9 a.m. until 1 p.m. in the library’s main building while the “Colored Branch” opened from 2 p.m. until 6 p.m.\footnote{Gill, Annual Report for 1926, 8.} While blacks were allotted an equal four hours of library service each Sunday as the whites, the times remained segregated much like library space.

Library space and design emerged as a fundamental part of library discourse along with the expansion of free public libraries. The \textit{Library Journal} ran a series of
articles titled “Library Architecture” as early as 1903. Various contributors advised not only how to make efficient use of a library’s space, but to do so with a sense of aesthetics that spoke to the library’s important social function. In fact, the American Library Association published a book in 1924, *Library Buildings*, intended “to give more explicit help in the planning of small libraries.”

Library architecture did not elude the attention of New Orleans librarians. In fact, Gill devoted nine of his sixteen page report for 1908 to describe the grand opening of the central building and each white branch at length. He elaborated on each building’s: architectural style, architect and builder; choice of building stone and its color; and, interior dimensions of the reading rooms versus space apportioned for the collections. He went on for pages detailing domes, basements, librarian’s office, and toilet rooms. Very little escaped notice; however, Gill failed to offer the smallest hint of the “Colored Branch’s” décor, style, or spatial arrangement. He merely added, just before his annual conclusion, that:

Dryades Branch was opened in the latter part of October, 1915. It has taken the balance of the year to get it fairly into operation, and I have included no statistics from it in this report.

Fortunately, pictures of the segregated branch made it into the library’s *Annual Reports*. Considering the popularity of library architecture and design, and New Orleans’ long history of racial oppression, it is not unreasonable to conclude that the “Colored

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33 The *Library Journal* likely published articles on library architecture and design before 1903. Unfortunately, the limited scope of this project does not allow the convenience for further research stretching back into the nineteenth century. It is enough to note here that the design of libraries concerned many persons interested in these institutions as well as what their appearance said about one’s community.


Branch” was designed so blacks could maintain ideas “consistent with their condition.”

Eugene Genovese noted in *Roll Jordan Roll* that in “class-bound and caste-bound societies, the ruling class understood the importance of dress as an index of social position.”

![Image of New Orleans Public Library Central Building and Dryades Branch.](image)

**Figure 4.** The New Orleans Public Library’s Central Building and Dryades Branch. To the left is the Central Building and on the right is the Dryades Branch, which was designed and constructed for the specific use of the city’s Black community. Notice how the darkness of the Colored Branch contrasts the whiteness of the Main Branch that was positioned like a light on the top of a hill.

There are two features of the Dryades Branch which demand attention. First, the building was constructed predominately with a dark colored brick. That is not to say that the other branches consist of mainly white brick. The Napoleon Branch has a fair amount of dark brick, yet it is simply not comparable to the black face of the Dryades branch. Second, the “Colored Branch’s” ground floor is only a half floor; thus, giving the appearance of a building sinking under the weight of racial uplift while the overwhelming Whiteness of the Central Library shines from its perch on top of the hill.

The Dryades Branch of the New Orleans Public library seems to have not been a source of pride for the city. Although pictures of the entire New Orleans’ Public Library


branch system are included in the reports as early as 1907, the Dryades Branch does not appear in a single *Annual Report* until 1921, six years after the branch opened. And even then, the picture was placed two pages from the end of the report.\(^{39}\) Harris’s study of the LLA and race sheds some light on why the NOPL may have been reluctant to include photographs of the city’s “Colored Branch.” For example, the question of including the names of African Americans in the LLA’s directory arose in the 1940s; however, the association’s president, Loma Knighten noted that some members feared that “including Negroes might ‘offend some members.’”\(^{40}\) Harris explains that the idea was eventually scrapped until the Civil Rights Act of 1964 legislated integration.

Another observation, while subtle, demands attention. Remember that public librarians in the early twentieth century, including New Orleans, devoted much of their space, collection, and funds toward shaping the reading interests of the city’s children. The fundamental reason for child-centered librarianship was predicated on a central tenant of public librarianship; as Gill explained, the public library is “indeed, second only to the church and the school in strengthening the mind and character of our fellow men in exalting their reason and ennobling their heart.”\(^{41}\) As librarians saw the child as the hope for the future, the omission of black children in the *NOPL Annual Reports* bears special significance. The city’s black children were never afforded a single mention during Gill’s tenure as head librarian except within the reports’ sterile section of library statistics. However, in lieu of specific titles, these use statistics are quite revealing regarding the type of literature black children and adults were reading – non-fiction.\(^{42}\)

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\(^{40}\) Harris, “Civil Rights and the LLA,” 326.


Table 1

*Five Year Total Circulation Average, 1923-1927*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Branch Libraries</th>
<th>Adult Non-Fiction</th>
<th>Adult Fiction</th>
<th>Juvenile Non-Fiction</th>
<th>Juvenile Fiction</th>
<th>Total Non-Fiction</th>
<th>Total Fiction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Royal Branch</td>
<td>6,048</td>
<td>46,282</td>
<td>17,380</td>
<td>22,893</td>
<td>23,428</td>
<td>69,175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Algiers Branch</td>
<td>3,992</td>
<td>30,896</td>
<td>10,952</td>
<td>18,175</td>
<td>14,944</td>
<td>49,071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Napoleon Branch</td>
<td>19,721</td>
<td>79,164</td>
<td>18,536</td>
<td>25,921</td>
<td>38,257</td>
<td>105,085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Canal Branch</td>
<td>11,464</td>
<td>56,702</td>
<td>13,798</td>
<td>24,167</td>
<td>25,262</td>
<td>70,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. White Branch Average</td>
<td>10,306</td>
<td>53,261</td>
<td>15,167</td>
<td>22,789</td>
<td>25,473</td>
<td>76,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Dryades Branch</td>
<td>10,078</td>
<td>8,225</td>
<td>10,040</td>
<td>9,802</td>
<td>20,118</td>
<td>18,027</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both black adults and children read a disproportionately larger quantity of non-fiction works compared to their white counterparts. Gill even complained on occasion about the lack of interest in non-fiction works (obviously regarding white library patrons). The comparison of statistical data as a tool to measure library use becomes most helpful by the mid-1920s when the Dryades Branch began seeing sufficient activity to warrant such a contrast.

Beginning in 1923, the total use of non-fiction materials by black patrons averaged fifty-one percent of the Dryades Branch’s total circulation. On the other hand, only twenty-five percent of the material being read by white patrons was non-fiction. Two implications arise from this data. First, for a significantly illiterate population, black Americans in New Orleans proved to be quite taken with an interest in reading, education, and library use. This is not surprising giving the positive correlation between
education and social status. Second, the disproportionate focus on non-fiction reading by the black community suggests a white interest in providing blacks with an industrial education that “would prepare the black masses for efficient service in racially prescribed occupational niches.”

While the library’s use statistics sheds some light on the type of literature being read by black patrons during the first decades of the twentieth century, unfortunately no hint of specific titles can be found within the library’s reports. However, Michelle Martin’s study, *Brown Gold: Milestones of African American Children’s Picture Books, 1845-2002*, reveals that black authors did not make significant progress in writing for black readers until the 1940s: “parents who wanted to seek out good books about black life written by African Americans had almost no options at all.” Regardless of whether the few, fortunate black children in early twentieth century New Orleans read a non-fiction or fiction book, it would have invariably been written by white authors for a white audience that in the least, passively accepted ideals of white supremacy and privilege if not outright endorse them.

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CHAPTER IV
COLLECTING WHITENESS

“You gwine ter see a gent’ man’s nigger an’ a nigger gent’ man drive his Master’s kerridge to-day, an’ his wife on de driver’s seat wid him, an’ you ain’ gwine see him notice a’y a common nigger ‘twix’ heah an’ town an’ back. -Ned to Mr. Standwick” 1

The literature written, published, and collected by librarians during the early twentieth centuries reflects the increasingly anti-black prejudice that followed the emancipation of the slaves. Eugene D. Genovese’s brilliant study of Southern slave society, Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made, illustrates change in whites perceptions of blacks as well as themselves. Genovese argues that slaveholders genuinely believed and insisted that the “slaves constituted part of the family and these expressions of belief in their loyalty lay at the heart of the master’s world-view;” but this was only a self-delusion on the part of the master. 2 Genovese continues that the “defection of their most trusted and pampered slaves” served as a psychological trauma changing white attitudes about blacks. One Southerner remarked that “I am beginning to lose confidence in the whole race.” 3 Another described his slaves reaction when he attempted to maintain order noting he said that he had “talked to the slaves ‘as a father’ but they had laughed.” 4 The War, Emancipation, and the following period of Reconstruction served as the ultimate lesson hardening white opinion and attitudes against blacks. The trauma inflicted on their psyche when they realized that their slaves did not really love them convinced

3 Ibid., 99.
4 Ibid.
many Southerners of the “perfect impossibility of placing the least confidence in the Negro.”

The bitter resentment Southern whites harbored against freed blacks manifest itself in their regional literature. And, with the increasing focus on the child’s welfare in the early twentieth century, books written for children would be tainted with the same begrudging, negative depictions of blacks, and in some cases pure hatred. Yet, the racial themes, pictures, and lack of realistic black characters in children’s books was enhanced by a book market with national distribution, an exploding public library movement, and a population of literate white children interested in reading. Thus, the culture of literacy and readership, propagated by Southern librarians, allowed for the transmission of a white racial ideology. The increasingly biased children’s literature transmitted a blistering white trauma as the genuine paternal regard for slaves withered.

Scholars are increasingly devoting greater attention to the racial content found in children’s literature that originated during the nineteenth century and persisted well into the twentieth century. For example, Donnarae MacCann, in *White Supremacy in Children’s Literature: Characterizations of African Americans, 1817 – 1914*, offers a substantial analysis of the racial content shaping books written for children during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. MacCann’s synthesis of two U. S. historiographies into a single work, the evolution of a white racial ideology along with the establishment of children’s literature, provide this project with important background material. Although he study ends by 1914 much of the racial bias remained in children’s books written following the turn of the century. Furthermore, several of the notable

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6 Ibid., 111.
selections, as well as their authors, that were examined by MacCann remained popular well into the twentieth century.

MacCann begins her study by juxtaposing the progressive character of the nation’s most liberal Northern Whites against the racial bias of Southern Whites. For evidence she turns to examples of children’s literature written by both nineteenth-century anti-slave writers and authors of a pro-slavery persuasion. MacCann concludes that the individual politics were irrelevant as both groups of authors tended to use the same negative and degrading depictions of African-American characters. Her study relies heavily on works from the following well-known authors: Harriet Beecher Stowe, Jacob Abbott, Joel Chandler Harris, Mark Twain and Lydia Maria Child. In addition to citing their use of racist depictions of African Americans, MacCann extends her argument by correlating their racial bias to the sympathies the authors shared with the American Colonization Society.7

Various stock characters emerge within the genre representing the stereotypical portrayal of Blacks. Dorothy M. Broderick, in *Image of the Black in Children’s Fiction*, lists seven: “(1) The Contented slave, (2) The Wretched Freeman, (3) The Comic Negro, (4) The Brute Negro, (5) The Tragic Mulatto, (6) The Local Negro, and (7) The Negro.”8 MacCann’s work is concerned with what Brown coined as ‘The Comic Negro,’ which she refers to as the “minstrel image of Blacks.” She describes the minstrel characters as depicting mentally inferior Blacks in the nineteenth century.9 MacCann argues in *White Supremacy in Children’s Literature* that the use of the unrealistic and racist depictions of

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African Americans by White egalitarian writers actually “undermined the theme of Black emancipation.”\textsuperscript{10} She uses both individual and institutional authors to substantiate her claim. For example, to illustrate her point, she claims that although Jacob Abbot saw himself as “the quintessential liberal” and John T. Trowbridge “considered himself an energetic emancipationist,” both Abbot and Trowbridge consistently portrayed Blacks with negative and demeaning stereotypes.\textsuperscript{11} MacCann notes as well that textbook writers, who “resided overwhelmingly in the New England states,” used blatant depictions of Black inferiority.\textsuperscript{12} She contends that northern progressives writing for children did not improve the Black stock minstrel character but dehumanized Blacks with “increasing severity.”\textsuperscript{13}

In addition to identifying the prevalence of racial attitudes among White Northern progressives by examining their writings, MacCann also reveals the link between the anti-Black sentiments in children’s literature as a catalytic factor fostering the reunion of regions following the U. S. Civil War. For example, Northern federal judge, Albion W. Tourgee, summed up “the entire overall character of the national postwar literature… when he said, ‘Our literature has become not only Southern in type but distinctly Confederate in sympathy.’”\textsuperscript{14} MacCann also refers to C. Vann Woodward’s description of the postwar period in his \textit{Origins of the New South} when “Yankeeism took to its heart the lost cause.”\textsuperscript{15} She claims that this unprecedented expansion of Whiteness continued to increase in quantity and severity well into the twentieth century.

\textsuperscript{10} MacCann, \textit{White Supremacy in Children’s Literature}, 42.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 61.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 70.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 77.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 125.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 127.
Unfortunately, MacCann’s exceptional analysis of white racism within children’s literature ends by 1900. However, Michelle H. Martin, in *Brown Gold: Milestones of African American Picture Books, 1845-2002*, carries the discussion much further. Although Martin’s work mostly examines the children’s books written by black authors to be read by black children, she does devote a single chapter to those works by white authors “written for white children with the intention of – at best – patronizing blacks, or – at worst – depicting them as ugly, ignorant, simple-minded, humorous fools at whom readers were invited to laugh unabashedly.” Of the three types of children’s books available in the early twentieth century, picture books, texts for younger readers, and texts for juveniles, Martin’s chapter on picture books provide an impressive demonstration of the virulent literature being published that even three and four year old children could have processed.

Although Leonard Marcus, in *Minders of Make-Believe: Idealists, Entrepreneurs, and the Shaping of American Children’s Literature*, tends to ignores social concerns (as his focus is on the business of children’s literature and not its reception) he also refers to the period’s racial emphasis. Marcus contends that white authors continued to depict black Americans as inferior, comical, and helpless during the first half of the twentieth century, “when it came to portraying, or even to referring to people of color,” most writers did “no better than to perpetuate the worst impulses and ingrained prejudices of White American Culture.”

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Picture Books

Picture books first became available by the 1890s, and they extended the anti-black message to non-literate children and those too young to have learned to read.\(^{18}\) One such example published in New York by the McLoughlin Brothers, notable for its long publishing history from the “1860s to 1980s,” is the Mother Goose rhyme *The Ten Little Niggers.*\(^{19}\) This educational picture book taught the youngest of children to read while they developed an unhealthy opinion of black Americans. The book counts down from ten to one while each of the “little nigger boys” dies or disappear.

Ten little nigger boys went out to dine;  
One choked his little self and then there were Nine.  
Nine little nigger boys sat up very late;  
One overslept himself and then there were Eight.  
Eight little nigger boys travelling in Devon;  
One said he’d stay there and then there were Seven.  
Seven little nigger boys chopping up sticks;  
One chopped himself in halves and then there were Six.  
Six little nigger boys playing with a hive;  
A bumble bee stung one and then there were Five.  
Five little nigger boys going in for law;  
One got into Chancery and then there were Four.  
Four little nigger boys going out to sea;  
A red herring swallowed one and then there were Three.  
Three little nigger boys walking in the Zoo;  
A big bear hugged one and then there were Two.  
Two little nigger boys sitting in the sun;  
One got frizzled up and then there was One.  
One little nigger boy left all alone;  
He went out and hanged himself and then there were None.\(^{20}\)

During the 1890s, publication of *The Ten Little Niggers* with its cartoonish depictions showing the degeneration of the black male “coincided with the full triumph of

Darwinism in American thought . . . As a result, the 1890s saw an unparalleled outburst of racist speculation on the impending disappearance of the American Negro.”

Half of the boys in this story die and each death speaks to the impossibility of the African-American ability to survive in the New World. Consider the first boy who chokes to death while eating. Why did his friends not help him, after all there were nine other boys? Thus, his choking to death on dinner serves as a white indictment of the black community who were either unable or unwilling to help their friends. It becomes apparent in the first stanza that this black community is in trouble of extinction. The second boy dies a much more violent death as he cuts, or possibly works himself to death. The third child dies when he is eaten by a red herring at sea. The apparent revelation here concerns the black individual who is outside of his socially relegated role; in other words, why was he at sea? The stanza implies that destruction will follow the Emancipation of blacks. The fourth child to die was hugged by a bear; and, this stanza appears subtle and lacking meaning. But, perhaps it is an argument of the black man’s want of common sense; after all, why would he hug a bear?

The final little boy, who was “left all alone,” offers the song’s most explicit example of racism. It also offers clarity on the degenerative condition of his prior friends. All alone in a white world of Anglo-Americans, the child is at a loss at what to do. If he learned from his friends, then joining white society is out of the question because he would likely choke on the food. Nor could he return to Africa as he might be swallowed by a fish. He cannot flee into the American wilderness as he would be eaten by a bear. Tragically, as the last little black boy apparently realizes he has been “artificially...

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introduced” into the white New World, he concluded he was left with “no way of escape” and he lynched himself.\textsuperscript{22} This story in song, while first instructing the young reader how to count, is done so at the expense of black people’s integrity by mocking their social condition. And the song’s final line, “and then there were None,” illustrates the dark bitterness and resentment brewing in the minds of many whites at the turn of the century. Children reading \textit{The Ten Little Niggers} would have invariably learned that blacks were not a part of white society, while its comedic delivery would have assured the child that the black community was not a threat.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{ten_little_niggers}
\caption{Book Covers, \textit{The Ten Little Niggers}. The version on the left was published in 1875 while the book on the right was published in 1894. Michelle Martin notes that in the 1894 edition, “the ‘ten little niggers’ look much more like men than boys, Thus, demonstrating the increasing racial bias whites harbored against blacks.”\textsuperscript{23}}
\end{figure}

Michelle Martin reviews another picture book, which remains a well known title today, \textit{Little Black Sambo} by Helen Bannerman. Bannerman’s short, controversial story concerns a small black child who outwits four tigers by giving them his new clothes and

\textsuperscript{22} Fredrickson, \textit{The Black Image}, 247, 252.
\textsuperscript{23} Michelle Martin, \textit{Brown Gold}, 26.
umbrella. The tigers proceed to chase themselves in a circle, thus churning them into butter. Sambo triumphantly recovers his property and he uses the butter on pancakes that his mother makes for him.

Martin is somewhat less critical of this “‘smiling darkie’ caricature” and proposes that “while many white Americans early in the twentieth century considered black people invisible within culture, Sambo made whites acknowledge the humanity in black people.” True as that may be, the importance of historical perspective demands appropriate contextualization. Consider once more Eugene Genovese’s Roll Jordan Roll as he quotes a freed ex-slave who offered material and financial assistance to his old master during Reconstruction:

Mrs. Chestnut told of an old black man who comforted his destitute master at the end of the war: ‘When you ‘all had de power you was good to me, and I’ll protect you now. No nigger or Yankee shall touch you. If you want anything, call for Sambo. I mean, call for Mr. Samuel – that’s my name now.’

While Martin is certainly correct in identifying the varying degrees of racial content within works, the depersonalization of blacks’ humanity should not be disregarded, most importantly, because the slaves and freed blacks recognized the degradation implied by whites when they named their slaves. Thus, for the Slave, he was no longer Sambo but Mr. Samuel. Furthermore, that white children and their parents adored the cute and heroic Sambo does not make it appropriate; it remains both an a-historical interpretation of the past that allowed for the transmission of anti-black sentiment amongst white children. And Little Black Sambo was wildly popular. Martin has observed its “overwhelming reception” after publication. Bannerman’s Little Black Sambo made a regular appearance on the New Orleans Public Library booklist of most frequently circulated selections for

25 Genovese, Roll Jordan Roll, 133.
NOPL librarian Henry Gill began compiling such lists as a part of the library’s *Annual Reports* in 1910.

**Books for the Young Reader**

The second general type of children’s book available during the early twentieth century was for the young reader. The New Orleans Public Library (NOPL) actually changed their definition of the young reader over time; however, this age group rarely included those over fifteen.\(^{26}\) If there is one striking factor found in these works, beyond the glaring racial bias, it would be the terrifically grim narratives authors penned for their child readers. In other words, these stories are not composed of fairytales, rainbows, and cookie monsters; rather, they are blatantly didactic and meant to construct a world view resistant to what Southern whites would have considered dangerous progressive racial ideologies.

Louise-Clarke Pyrnelle’s *Diddie, Dumps, and Tot* is one such example; and, the second title that Pyrnelle gave her work speaks of the author’s belief in the narrative’s historicity: *Plantation Child-Life*. Consider how Pyrnelle introduces her collection of stories in the work’s preface:

> There are no more dear old “Mammies” and “Aunties” in our nurseries, no more good old “Uncles” in the workshops, to tell the children those old tales that have been told to our mothers and grandmothers for generations . . . Nor does my little book pretend to be a defence of slavery. I know whether or not it was right or wrong (there are many pros and cons on the subject); but it was the law of the land, made by statesmen from the North as well as the South, long before my day, or my father’s or grandfather’s day; and, born under that law a slave-holder, and the descendant of slave-holders, raised in the cotton section, surrounded by negroes from my earliest infancy, ‘I KNOW whereof I do speak;’ and it is of to tell of the pleasant and happy relations that existed between master and slave that I write this story of “Diddie, Dumps, and Tot.”\(^{27}\)


An undeniable hallmark of propagandist literature involves student instruction as what to think but not why. Within this single paragraph, Pyrnelle informs her little readers that whether slavery is right, wrong, evil, or good remains of no consequence because it is of a long standing tradition for the North as well as the South. She then established herself as an authority of those sublime plantation days while she packaged her tales with the language and imagery meant to ensure the transmission of white supremacy, privilege, and black subservience.

Pyrnelle preaches her revision of Southern history through the perspective of three young white girls on a family plantation. The young ladies, named Diddie, Dumps, and Tot were nine, five, and three-years old, respectively. Pyrnelle’s plot came thick with lessons over wrought with Lost Cause ideology. For instance, she portrays the slaves as being part of the family and content with their social status. “The Negroes were well clothed, well fed, and the great majority of them looked exceedingly happy.”

The author even gives considerable agency to some slaves. Consider the naming of Diddie, Dumps, and Tot as an example.

Pyrnelle states that Diddie, Dumps, and Tot were the “pet names that Mammy had given them; but they had been called by them so long that many persons forgot that Diddie’s name was Madeleine, that Dumps had been baptized Eleanor, and that Tot bore

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28 Louise-Clark Pyrnelle, *Diddie, Dumps, and Tot*, 95; This line actually describes the poor slaves being sold at auction. However, Pyrnelle used the “exceedingly happy” condition of these slaves on the auction block to reinforce the sublime condition of those slaves residing on the family plantation.

29 Historians such as Eugene Genovese in *Roll Jordan Roll* have described the limited measures of resistance employed by Southern slaves to maintain some degree of self-respect, dignity, and autonomy. But here I do not mean that Pyrnelle has imbued her slaves with a resistive agency that countered the normal production and culture of the plantation system. Rather, Pyrnelle has drawn an image of the Mammy character who demonstrates an agency that forwards the plantation mission and worldview while being respected, revered, and even loved by the white slaveholders.
her mother’s name of Eugenia.” Mammy had adorned Diddie, Dumps, and Tot with names that would be used by both friends and family, and the names even superseded those given through baptism and inheritance. This speaks volumes towards Mammy’s status and prestige within the family hierarchy as Pyrnelle taught it. Genovese wrote of this attitude when he quoted a plantation mistress, “It is the slaves who own me.”

However, Pyrnelle did not ennoble the enslaved African American; rather, she exploited, in narrative, the slave’s relegation to subservience and oppression as an opportunity to teach her young readers through an entertaining medium. One of the book’s more didactic features concerns the author’s treatment of the slave community as a foil for the wise, if parochial, Mammy character. In fact, Pyrnelle warned her readers to not be shocked by “the seeming irreverence of her book.” For example, for fun, Diddie, Dumps, and Tot would sneak off to the slave quarters to watch the slave children recite their prayers with the hope of seeing a couple of the black children punished for praying incorrectly. During the mornings, the three girls enjoyed watching “Aunt Nancy give the little darkies their ‘vermifuge,’” described as a nauseous concoction meant to supplement the slaves health and growth. Pyrnelle consistently employed her narrative to demonstrate that “the little nigs” were wicked, depraved, and ungrateful, and to show the joy the little white girls found in observing the distribution of punishment.

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30 Pyrnelle, *Diddie, Dumps, and Tot*, 15.
32 MacCann, *White Supremacy in Children’s Literature*, 95; MacCann argues that the Mammy character complemented the South’s post-bellum faithful black servant; although, she contends that Mammy often had a brutal side when dealing with slave children.
33 Pyrnelle, *Diddie, Dumps, and Tot*, vi.
34 Ibid., 17.
35 Ibid., 16, 18, 21.
Figure 6. Plantation Fun: Delight in Slave Children’s Punishment. Diddie, Dumps, and Tot watching the slave children struggle through their evening prayers. The white child giggling on the right looks to be the eldest and she must be Diddie, leaving Dumps on the far left, and Tot in the middle. The scene reveals the stark contrasts in treatment of the black children who are continually scrutinized with the threat of the switch while the white children are left to enjoy themselves.  

Within Pyrnelle’s blatant, if clumsy, attempt to instruct young readers with amusing stories lays a short tale of two “little woolly poodles.” The puppies serve as a metaphor intended to illustrate the slaves’ paradoxical status on the plantation as both members of the family and “property in man.” It is the puppies’ wooliness that identifies the figurative conjunction linking the poodles to the plantation slaves. For example, the author consistently refers to the slaves’ woolly hair or their woolly clothes to complete the correlation.

The lesson reveals itself in the debate over what the puppies should be

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36 Pyrnelle, *Diddie, Dumps, and Tot*, frontispiece.
38 Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll*, 76.
After Papa, Christopher Columbus, and Pocahontas proved unsuccessful as potential names, Diddie announced, “I think, Dumps, we had better name ‘um Cherubim an’ Seraphim, for they continually do cry.” The “puzzling question” was settled with the father’s approval and Pyrnelle concluded that the woolly and ungrateful poodles “became great pets in the household.” The puppy tale communicated three fundamental, yet interlaced, social principles from the Southern post-bellum perspective. First, the family plantation was a benevolent system; second, white southerners had willingly and joyfully accepted the burden of racial uplift; and lastly, by “continually crying” blacks demonstrated their ingratitude to their white benefactors.

_Diddie, Dumps, and Tots_’ conclusion remains faithful to Lost Cause history with its nightmarish Civil War ending. The antebellum period, along with the plantation system, were presented by authors such as Pyrnelle as being the epitome of high civilizations. Thus, the destructive Civil War left the South, as well as the book’s reader, with a sense of woe, regret, and nostalgia. By the end of _Diddie, Dumps, and Tot_, the master died, the grief stricken mistress was sent to an asylum, and the land was left “just lying there useless, worthless.” Diddie becomes a young widow, forever haunted by a vision of her Confederate husband’s dead and “cold white face, with its hair dabbled in blood.” Tot died nondescriptly before the war began. And the story ends by revealing Dumps as an old-maid caring for her traumatized mother in the asylum, following instructions from one of their long-gone faithful slaves, by “doing what Uncle Snake-bit

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39 Interestingly, the naming of the puppies by the white children reflects back to Mammy naming the white girls herself. Thus, what Pyrnelle portrays the plantation system’s interdependency within a context of mutual possession.
40 Pyrnelle, _Diddie, Dumps, and Tot_, 27.
41 Ibid., 28.
42 Ibid., 214.
43 Ibid., 213-214.
Bob told the Sunday-school children that God had made them do: for Dumps is doing
‘De Bes’ She Kin.’”\textsuperscript{44}

Pyrnelle’s \textit{Diddie, Dumps, and Tot’s} repackaged the white trauma of
Emancipation and delivered it to the twentieth century child reader. From these stories,
children learned of a Southern tradition founded on progressive notions of racial
benevolence, harmony, and interdependence. Furthermore, this fictional revision of
antebellum history was linked to the nation’s history by noting that slavery “was the law
of the land, made by statesmen from the North as well as the South, long before my
day.”\textsuperscript{45} However, the only tangible theme from this work that translates beyond the
nineteenth century is white disgust with black ungratefulness. Any remaining pretense of
paternalism or racial benevolence hinted at within the story merely explicated itself as the
great white mistake; namely, the error of whites placing any trust in the black
community’s loyalty.

\textbf{Books for the Juvenile Reader}

Donnarae MacCann’s formidable study, \textit{White Supremacy in Children’s
Literature}, ends with the close of the nineteenth century. However, white authors
continued to pen revisionist tales of a fictional antebellum era for children readers. These
were collected, catalogued, and circulated by public librarians throughout the South. The
plantation system all too often was based on familial interdependency between the noble,
gracious slaveholders and those who they believed to be their grateful “woolly pets.” One
such example is \textit{Ned: Nigger an’ Gent’ man, A Story of War and Reconstruction Days:}
often referred to as \textit{Nigger Ned}.

\textsuperscript{44} Pyrnelle, \textit{Diddie, Dumps, and Tot}, 217.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., preface.
The Texas Federal Judge Norman G. Kittrell raised the bar for children’s literature regarding the traditional theme of a North-South reunion in *Nigger Ned*, published in 1907 by the Neale Publishing Company. Kittrell offers a post-bellum defense of the South’s secession predating the U.S. Civil War. But, while Confederate apologetics served as a natural foundation for Kittrell’s thesis, he, in effect, constructed a model for social etiquette and normalcy intended for juvenile readers in the New South during the early twentieth century. The contemporary scholar and historian, Benajah H. Carroll, claimed that *Nigger Ned* “was dramatized for a time and had great success.”

Kittrell’s renewed model of Southern social relations, while complicated and full of logical leaps, epitomizes the Lost Cause Ideology promulgated by the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) as well as that seen in earlier examples of the plantation narrative. What emerges is a didactic story of children’s literature narrated by an ex-slave, Ned, who not only loves and adores his master, but despises those “mizzerbul new free niggers.”

*Ned, Nigger an’ Gent’ man* exemplifies the common model for the plantation narrative as described by MacCann. Thus, older children reading *Nigger Ned* would have learned from the affable, loyal ex-slave Ned, that blacks were simple-minded; self-depreciative in nature; happy to be slaves; and, not desirous of Lincoln’s style of

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47 “Our Sacred Cause at Dallas, Tex. – Dedication of the Grand Monument,” *Confederate Veteran* 6 (1898): 299-303; Judge Kittrell and the UDC did not only share an ideological doctrine and methodology of targeting Southern children as a means of shaping the future. The “Our Sacred Cause” article reveals that both Kittrell and the Daughters labored together. After the UDC formed in 1894, their first monument was constructed in Dallas, TX honoring: the private; Jefferson Davis; Robert E. Lee; Stonewall Jackson; and, Albert Sidney Johnston. The daughters referred to the day, 29 April 1897, as a “love-fest.” Judge Kittrell “paid a masterly tribute to. . . the gallant Albert Sidney Johnston, and the veil was drawn away by the granddaughter of Stonewall Jackson.”

Emancipation. Actually, Ned fits another aspect of MacCann’s plantation model in that he functions as both a loyal ex-slave and narrator. Kittrell ostensibly tried to enhance the truth of his fictional children’s tale by defending his beloved Southern tradition of white supremacy and black subservience with the voice and rhetoric of his faithful Ned. Whether Kittrell actually had an Uncle Ned during his own youth in the South is not certain; however, in the *Confederate Veteran* there are frequent tributes to faithful slaves, variations of Uncle Ned, who demonstrate his “fidelity to his old mistress . . . loyalty to the Confederacy . . . and his devotion to our soldiers.”

![Figure 5. Ned as the Loyal, Faithful Servant. This picture of a typical Uncle Ned found in the *Confederate Veteran* from 1900. Judge Kittrell wrote *Nigger Ned* seven years after this picture was published; whether pictures like these motivated Kittrell to write, his Ned shares the same three characteristics of fidelity, loyalty, and devotion to his mistress, the Confederacy, and the troops, respectively.](image)

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50 “Tributes to Faithful Servants,” *Confederate Veteran* 8 (1900): 399-400.
51 Ibid., 400.
The basic plot of *Nigger Ned* involves a Northern stranger travelling through the South after the Civil War. Within the first couple of pages, the stranger, Mr. Standwick, meets Ned, a slave to the wealthy Confederate Officer Colonel Marshall. Though the colonel happened to be away on business, Ned, left to care for his master’s property as though it were his own, invites the reluctant “Yankee... beneath the Rebel’s roof.” What follows are over 200 pages of Kittrell’s political discourse on the causes of the War, justifications of slavery, and textbook-styled lessons for juvenile readers on Southern customs, culture, and etiquette – all of which are inseparable from the region’s peculiar race relations.

As a justification of antebellum slavery in the Old South, Kittrell used Ned to demonstrate his contentment with being his master’s slave. For example, when Colonel Marshall offered Ned and Hester a Sunday afternoon to spend as they pleased, Ned insisted:

> We don’ keer nuttin’ bout gwine nowhars, thankee, Marster. Dar ain’t no niggers in dis toen dat Hester an’ me ‘soshates wid. Ef you please, we’d rudder set here on de steps an’ heah our white folks talk.^[53]

Thus, according to Ned, his place as servant on the family plantation is where he wanted to be. In fact, Ned cared for the Marshall family so much, that he sacrificed his own son for the Confederate cause.

However, the cynical and legal mind of Judge Kittrell utilized other means to justify the South’s cherished system of slavery. Kittrell was fond of taking Northern critiques and interpreting them in a light favorable to the South. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, well known as an abolitionist text that served as an indictment of

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^[53] Ibid., 241.
slavery’s brutality, is actually used as a defense of the South’s peculiar institution.

Kittrell claims, through the voice of Colonel Marshall’s neighbor and friend Captain Alston, that ninety-nine percent of the brutal slave owners were transplanted Northerners seeking quick riches who did not inherit their property. Thus, Northern slaveholders residing in the South lacked the paternal spirit requisite for uplifting the slave. The belief in the brutality of the Northern slaveholder rested on the contention that a master could only respect those slaves he inherited. Captain Alston instructed the malleable Mr. Standwick:

> In Colonel Marshall’s library I see a book which you have doubtless seen, one that fanned the sparks of sectional strife and bitterness into a consuming flame and ‘wrought woe’s unnumbered, ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin.’ Whether it occurred by accident or inadvertence, or whether for a purpose Mrs. Stowe so designed it, the hardest, most cruel and unworthy character in that remarkable book, Legree, was born in the North and came South and trafficked in slaves and maltreated them; while the two most lovable characters, Uncle Tom and Eva, were reared amid slavery, one having been a slave, the other his mistress.

Kittrell’s critique of Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* served two purposes. First, the work’s antagonist, Simon Legree, is identified as a transplanted Northerner seeking wealth in the South through his investment in slaves. Kittrell’s revelation of Legree’s northern origins was an attempt to support the South’s contention that its peculiar institution was really a benevolent, paternal system that benefitted the slaves both materially and spiritually. Second, the revelation of Legree’s origins enhanced another Southern argument that Northerners, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, were woefully ignorant of the true Southern condition; therefore, the War Between the States was unfounded, aggressive, and destructive.

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55 Ibid., 100.
It is important to remember that Kittrell, who was a lawyer and Federal judge, penned these nuanced arguments for juvenile readers. Thus, the southern school children reading the story of Ned would have received it as authoritative and indicative of the true history of the Confederate South and not a sly revisionist history meant to vindicate the South, justify slavery, and ennoble the Civil War. Another of Kittrell’s clever attempts to turn Northern critiques into a favorable Southern interpretation involves Colonel Marshall’s dizzying interpretation of President Abraham Lincoln, his war, and his memory. The Colonel argued that Lincoln’s death was the “darest calamity that ever befell the South” because the “force of his great character, and the extent of his influence” would have spared the South the horrors of Reconstruction.56

*Nigger Ned* conveys much more than a revision of U. S. Civil War history. Writing for the benefit of older children, Kittrell looked forward to a renewed South by instructing his young readers with lessons on Southern culture, customs, but most importantly, racial etiquette. Kittrell fondly contextualized the antebellum South’s social hierarchy as divided by class before race, and explaining his model in the terms of quality versus scrub folks. This dual standard served for whites and blacks alike throughout the work. Kittrell described Ned: “like all Negroes of his class he was an aristocrat of the aristocrats.”57 The Yankee, Mr. Standwick, learns through his tutor Ned in tandem with the twentieth-century child reader, “in the South, social distinctions do not rest on a financial basis . . . but on instinct, inheritance, and association.”58 Thus Kittrell was able

57 Ibid., 11.
58 Ibid., 240.
to claim toward the novel’s end that Ned, and his wife Hester, “by their lives and characters they set examples that even the best of whites may well imitate.”

While Colonel Marshall and his wife impress Mr. Standwick with their devotion to the welfare of their black servants, one should not be misled by this apparent demonstration of Southern progressivism. In fact, while Kittrell hoped his work would function as “an earnest, heartfelt, and appropriate plea for peace” between the North and South, the child reader would have finished this work with a reinforced notion of white superiority, privilege, and black subservience. Kittrell reinforced the South’s preferred racial divide both plainly and repeatedly:

No power in all the earth can keep the white man in subordination to the Negro. Intellectually, physically, and morally, the white man bears the divine stamp of superiority to men of every race! He is the Heaven-endowed leader of the forces of civilization and progress and Christianity; and judged by ethnological and all other tests and standards, the Negro is his inferior and can never rise to his level. There is no bridge that can span the gulf which God has placed between them.

By the end of the story, Mr. Standwick had certainly learned his ‘much’ about Southern history, and subsequently apologized to the Marshall’s for his regions “unnecessary, unjustifiable and cruel” invasion of the South. Although Kittrell’s Nigger Ned failed to enjoy a lengthy shelf life, the book certainly made its mark on both the South and the North. In fact, Kittrell’s juvenile novel was interpreted into a stage play titled The Southerner and was performed in New York City only one year after its publication.

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60 Ibid., 119.
61 Ibid.
These children’s books depicted blacks in a degrading stereotypical manner that welcomed and encouraged white children to laugh at black characters. The virtual exclusion of realistic portrayals of black Americans in books written for children was coupled with the South’s de jure styled segregation limiting white and black interaction. It then should come as no surprise that children readers, from 1900 – 1930s, would grow up with a troubling deficiency of respect for the black population. However, the role of the children’s librarians in enabling the transmission of the South’s conservative tradition of white superiority, through the new genre of literature written explicitly for children, is somewhat unexpected.

It would be difficult to believe that these titles would not have found their way into the New Orleans Public Library in the early 1900s. Demonstrating the presence of

these works in the library’s children’s department is incredibly difficult, as the library was operating without a catalogue during that time. However, *The Ten Little Niggers*, while likely a vexing example for the modern reader, could not have been denied a shelf-life at the NOPL as it was a part of the Mother Goose collection. Bannerman’s *Little Black Sambo*, on the other hand, did appear in at least one of the NOPL’s “popular reading list.”

The list of popular children’s books can only demonstrate the presence of a book in the collection and not its absence or censorship. The booklist only contained the top twenty-five circulated books for boys and girls, while the department had collected over 15,000 titles by the mid-1920s. But, these books were not simply placeholders on the library shelf. In demonstrating the children’s love for reading as well as the library’s success in mobilizing the entire collection of children’s books, Gill noted that in a single year that “on three occasions,” . . . “so many books have been issued that the shelves were swept entirely bare of books of the first, second, third, and fourth grades.”

*Diddie, Dumps, and Tot* as well as *Ned: Nigger an’ Gent’ man*, are representative of the children’s plantation story, which paralleled the revisionist history being pushed through the local school system by the UDC during the early twentieth century. That the two stories never made it on the library’s list of popular children’s book is of no consequence because the racially-biased content encouraged by the UDC certainly found asylum within the NOPL. The Daughter’s campaign for good textbooks and ‘true’ history in local schools brought the UDC’s version of history within the New Orleans Public

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Library. When any New Orleans public schools made course changes the library responded, “We have been purchasing these books as rapidly as we could.”

Children’s books like *The Ten Little Niggers; Diddie, Dumps, and Tot*; and, *Nigger an’ Gent’ man*, proved to be entertaining reads for Southern children at the turn of the twentieth century; however, as their authors had intended, these books conveyed instructive lessons of morality, etiquette, and an unabashed racial justification of white superiority, privilege, and black subservience. The white children who reading works like these would have finished reading their books with an elevated ideal of white Americans coupled by a strong bias against black Americans. With works like these filling library collections, bookstores, and classrooms, one may rightfully wonder whether children readers in the early 1900s ever had a chance in throwing off the prior generations anti-black prejudices.

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CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

As the South embraced the public library movement in the early 1900s, librarians showed themselves quite capable of effecting progressive change within their conservative southern communities. The NOPL’s relentless effort in strengthening its educational influence on children was believed to be an investment in the community’s future prosperity, security, and progress. But in founding their progressive ideology on the value of universal literacy and readership for children, public librarians facilitated the transmission of an aggressive racial ideology of white superiority, privilege, and black subservience.

Public librarianship proved to be a remarkably successful venture in the South. By the end of the 1930s, what had begun as an experiment in philanthropy and community education was touted by New Orleans librarians “as essential in the lives of our citizenry.”\(^1\) The NOPL had grown from its original building in 1896 into a sophisticated system comprised of a central building and seven branches by 1940.\(^2\) Furthermore, the library’s yearly growth in circulation speaks to the notable success of public librarians in preaching their gospel of good books. The library’s first record of its annual circulation in 1905 totaled 59,160 volumes; however, by 1930 the New Orleans Public Library boasted its first time circulation over one million titles, and its permanence as a community institution had become well established.\(^3\)

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Librarians in the New Orleans’ public library system began focusing much of their energy and resources towards the city’s local children almost simultaneously with the emergence of the public library. The NOPL aligned its institutional objective in accord with the child-centered mission of the various public schools throughout New Orleans which enhanced the symbiosis between the UDC and New Orleans librarians, who believed their institution’s educational function had “much to do with the character of the city’s future.”

The NOPL’s mission to guide and shape the reading habits of children proved to be a massive project. For example, by the end of the 1920s, the library was averaging over three hundred school visits each year; creating hundreds of suggested reading lists for teachers; and, sponsoring book weeks that brought thousands of children into the library.

Ironically, the new collections these progressively driven librarians developed for child readers, allowed a residual, bitter white racial ideology to inculcate the impressionable minds of the city’s children. And the children learned their lessons well. The often explicit white racism that colored the content of books written for children reinforced the traditional nineteenth century derogatory perspective of African Americans. More specifically, the children’s literature collected by public librarians from 1900-1930s taught children that the black man’s proper social role was in subservience to whites. However, this central theme of black subservience came with a corollary that revealed itself in different forms; though, each manifestation simply reaffirmed that a freed black was dangerous, whether to his: self, family, community, and most broadly, to the white community.

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5 Ibid., 8-9.
*The Ten Little Niggers* portrayed the freed black mostly as a potential danger to himself. Though half of the black children die in the tale, it would not have threatened the white child’s sense of security. It remained an instructional story at which white children could laugh at the ridiculousness of blacks. In contrast, *Diddie, Dumps, and Tot*, relying on a popular theme of black ingratitude and want of work ethic, manifested a significant danger to the white community. By beginning this story within the plantation setting and then progressing through Emancipation and the “horrors” of Reconstruction, the author recreated that nineteenth century white trauma for the twentieth century child. Finally, works like *Ned: Nigger an’ Gent’ man* written for juvenile readers balanced a middle way that occasionally allowed youths to laugh at the silliness of Ned, while generously using the threat of miscegenation to threaten the very permanence of the child’s whiteness.

From 1900-1930s, the South’s white children were heavily inundated with an aggressive ideology of white supremacy. Once public librarians committed themselves to developing a peculiar collection intended specifically for the white child, one may reasonable question whether congenial race relations between white and black Americans could have developed during the mid-twentieth century. In fact, the two generations of white children who were exposed to the white collections of the South’s public libraries grew up to be those white Americans who aggressively resisted the modern Civil Rights Movement following the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education*, Topeka, KS. The youngest of children who began reading the new genre of children’s literature at the turn of the twentieth century would have been in his or her mid-fifties following *Brown vs. Board of Education*, 1954. Whereas the youngest of
children who began reading at the end of this project’s historical period in the late 1930s would have been in their late teens of not early twenties by 1954. Thus, the vast majority of the South’s white adult population during the Modern Civil Rights Movement would have been a child during the first four decades of the 1900s as librarians fostered an aggressive racist ideology through their amusing yet instructive books for children.

The role children’s librarian played in transmitting white racism, while central to the process of cultural transmission, was not a solo effort nor is this project an attempt to make it so. The responsibility of racist ideology must lay with the society at large; after all, it required: thousands of authors to write the books collected by Southern librarians; publishing houses like Neale Publishing Co., and the McLoughlin Brothers willing to print such selections; public school teachers to continue instructing the principles of the Lost Cause narrative to their students; the UDC’s special commitment to vindicating the Confederacy and white superiority; book stores and vendors to sale such titles; and, parents to support their local libraries, schools, and buy these books the white folk of the early twentieth century enjoyed so much. However, in considering an equal and fair distribution of blame for the virulent racist ideology marked by white superiority, privilege, and black subservience that is peculiar to the history of the United States, it cannot be attributed to the black Americans who fought a long and seemingly hopeless struggle to demand their personal rights, dignity, and self-respect - which is long overdue them by white Americans.
APPENDIX

CIRCULATION STATISTICS

Table A1

*Annual Circulation, Branches, 1923-1927*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Branch Libraries</th>
<th>1923</th>
<th>1924</th>
<th>1925</th>
<th>1926</th>
<th>1927</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>5 Year Average</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Royal Branch</td>
<td>82,691</td>
<td>84,474</td>
<td>93,847</td>
<td>97,724</td>
<td>104,507</td>
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<td>65,708</td>
<td>68,485</td>
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<td>102,274</td>
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<td>4. Canal Branch</td>
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Table A2

*Adult Non-Fiction, Branches, 1923-1927*

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<th>Branch Libraries</th>
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<th>1925</th>
<th>1926</th>
<th>1927</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Royal Branch</td>
<td>6,298</td>
<td>6,036</td>
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<td>19,963</td>
<td>3,992</td>
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<td>3. Napoleon Branch</td>
<td>12,531</td>
<td>14,644</td>
<td>20,060</td>
<td>24,068</td>
<td>27,302</td>
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<td>4. Canal Branch</td>
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<td>5. Dryades Branch</td>
<td>8,330</td>
<td>12,940</td>
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Table A3

**Juvenile Non-Fiction, Branches, 1923-1927**

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<th>Branch Libraries</th>
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<td>4. Canal Branch</td>
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<td>5. Dryades Branch</td>
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Table A4

**Adult Fiction, Branches, 1923-1927**

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*Juvenile Fiction, Branches, 1923-1927*

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Table A6

*Total Circulation of Non-Fiction, Branches, 1923-1927*

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<th>1927</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Royal Branch</td>
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<td>22,366</td>
<td>23,690</td>
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<td>3. Napoleon Branch</td>
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<td>4. Canal Branch</td>
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*Total Circulation of Fiction, Branches, 1923-1927*

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<th>5 Year Average</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Royal Branch</td>
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<td>19,870</td>
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