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When They See Us in the Pages: The Representation of Black and Brown Males in Children's Literature

Quintin R. Bostic II
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ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, WHEN THEY SEE US IN THE PAGES: THE REPRESENTATION OF BLACK AND BROWN MALES IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE, by QUINTIN R. BOSTIC II, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Philosophy, in the College of Education & Human Development, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chairperson, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty.

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WHEN THEY SEE US IN THE PAGES: THE REPRESENTATION OF BLACK AND BROWN MALES IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

By **QUINTIN R. BOSTIC II**

Under the Direction of Drs. Laura May & Stacey French-Lee

ABSTRACT

This study seeks to explore ways in which Black and Brown males are depicted in picturebooks. This study is guided by the concept of cultural code-meshing-—"the blending and concurrent use" (Young, 2009, p. 50) of all the cultural languages that are mine (e.g., rap quotes, artistic media, and academic writing). The following question guided this study: How are race, racism, and power depicted in *Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut* and *Windows*? The theoretical framework that guides the study is Critical Race Theory (CRT), which aids in understanding how ideas of race, racism, and power are operationalized in various spaces. The sample consists of two picturebooks, *Windows* authored by Julia Denos and illustrated by E.B. Goodale, and *Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut,* authored by Derrick Barnes and illustrated by Gordon C. James. I use the critical content analysis approach as it is effective for understanding how various forms of privilege and oppression exist in society. I use textual and visual analysis to make visible various discourses operating through the print text and visual imagery within the two picturebooks. Through a deductive approach, I observe data from both books and analyze the data through the tenets of CRT to understand how race, racism, and power are communicated through print text and visual imagery. Of the six tenets of CRT, there were four tenets found operationalized in the study: *counter storytelling/unique voices of color, race as a social construction, permanence of racism,* and the *critique of colorblindness*. Exploring the representation of Black and Brown males in children's literature will contribute to the field of

education—and by extension the role of children's book publishing in education—by advancing conversations around the selection and utilization by adults of picturebooks for young children. Understanding how messages surrounding Black and Brown males are communicated through the words and images within picturebooks can inform the ways in which future picturebooks are created, published, awarded, selected, and used in various spaces, including classrooms.

INDEX WORDS: Children's Literature, Representation

WHEN THEY SEE US IN THE PAGES: THE REPRESENTATION OF BLACK AND BROWN MALES IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

by
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A DISSERTATION

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DEDICATION

To my tribe. I dedicate my dissertation work to my family and many friends. A special sense of gratitude to my loving, caring, and ride-or-die parents, Monique and Quintin Bostic. Thanks for being a shoulder for me to cry on throughout the many years of working through this degree. To my dope ass little brothers, Myles and Logan, thanks for always being there for me and listening to me vent. As you create your own pathway in life, always remember, GIVE THEM HELL.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my many friends who have supported me throughout this process. I appreciate all the empowering conversations, venti coffees, and late nights working together. You all are the real MVPs.

I dedicate this work to the many Black and Brown lives lost to police violence and racism throughout our countries painful history: David McAtee, Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, Dreasjon Reed, Michael Ramos, Breonna Taylor, Manuel Ellis, Atatiana Jefferson, Emantic Bradford Jr., Charles Roundtree Jr., Botham Jean, Antwon Rose Jr., Stephon Clark, Aaron Bailey, Charleena Lyles, Korryn Gaines, Philando Castile, Alton Sterling, Bettie Jones, Sandra Bland, Brendon Glenn, Freddie Gray Jr., Tamir Rice, Michael Brown Jr., Eric Garner, Jordan Baker, Andy Lopez, Chavis Carter, Shantel Davis, Tamon Robinson, Trayvon Martin, Dante' Price, Raheim Brown, Jr., Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson, Carol Denise McNair, and Emmett Till.

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> Detective Carter (Chris Tucker): Do you understand the words that are coming out of my mouth?
>
> —Ross LaManna and Jim Kouf, *Rush Hour*

There have been many conversations surrounding how teachers and schools should respond to the use of the variety of student's languages and dialects in the classroom (Baker-Bell, 2013, 2020a; Conference on College Composition and Communication, 1974; Lee & Handsfield, 2018; Young, 2009). All students, ranging from preschool to college should have the right to use their own languages, including their specific dialects, within the academic space for a variety of reasons. In their 1974 position statement on student's rights to their own language, Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) declared:

> We affirm the students' right to their own patterns and varieties of language -- the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style. Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and writers, and immoral advice for humans. (p. 1)

This means that educators should uphold and encourage students' right to use their own languages and dialects in the learning environment. This form of support is not only used to foster their identity development, but it can also be used as a form of liberation and freedom.

Many scholars of color have continued to promote the idea of student's rights to their own languages but have placed an emphasis on how these rights specifically impact the lives and liberation of Black and Brown children (Baker-Bell, 2020b; Smitherman, 1977). For example,

Baker-Bell (2020b) constructed the Anti-Black Linguistic Racism framework that names and captures the linguistic racism, discrimination, dehumanization, and disregard that Black Language-speakers go through when using their language and dialect in schools. She states that "We cannot continue to push respectability language pedagogies that require Black students to project a white middle class identity to avoid anti-blackness, especially when they are growing up amidst Black liberation movements" (Baker-Bell, 2020b, p. 31). This means that the direct force of Black and Brown students to use White Mainstream English (WME) in their scholarly work in school can be seen as a direct form of anti-blackness. Antiblackness is racism. It is imperative that we as an educational community continue to move toward Black linguistic justice and liberation that purposefully and unapologetically promotes the linguistic, cultural, racial/ethnic, brilliance, and social needs of Black and Brown students. If we as an educational community want to continue to promote the ideas of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion across classrooms and curriculums, then we must ensure that students have the space and opportunity to use of all their languages and dialects in their pursuit of academic achievement. In doing this, we as an education community will advance the agenda for promoting justice and liberation for those who have been most marginalized. We all should have the right to unapologetically use all *our* languages without challenge.

This dissertation is a way for me to embrace this feeling of being unapologetic, fully embracing my Black boy magic. For me, it all started a few years ago when I learned about the scholar, artist, and teacher Dr. Vershawn Ashanti Young. Besides the fact that he's a Black male Ph.D. (yeah, that's super rare; #goals), he talks about this dope idea of code-*meshing*. Never heard of it? Me either until I got into this Ph.D. program. Well, according to all these books and articles, *code-meshing* is "the blending and concurrent use of American English dialects in

formal, discursive products, such as political speeches, student papers, and media interviews" (Young, 2009, p. 50), whereas *code-switching* promotes the isolated use of various English dialects (Baker-Bell, 2013; Baker-Bell, 2020; Young, 2009). Many scholars that I respect the most utilize the idea of code-meshing in their scholarly work, including Drs.Vershawn Ashanti Young, Bettina Love, and Geneva Smitherman. For example, code-meshing is utilized in the title of Dr. Love's (2012) scholarly book, *Hip Hop's Li'l Sistas Speak: Negotiating Hip Hop Identities and Politics in the New South*. In this case, code-meshing is incorporated when Love uses "Li'l" in place of "little." Put it this way, many Black and Brown children whose home language is African American English (AAE) are not afforded the opportunity of biliterate instruction, speaking, and writing but are taught and encouraged to use WME rather than AAE in their oral and written work at school, even if the language the student is most comfortable using is AAE. Why is this? Because mainstream American schooling privileges White people and White culture. Many Black and Brown people are taught to code switch and turn off their "Blackness" and turn on their "Whiteness" from birth. It's a way of survival, and as Dr. Love (2019) asserts, we want to do more than survive because a life of survival is not really living.

I remember growing up as a lil boy and hearing all kinds of survival tactics, specific to my racial identity: When you walk in the store make sure you don't put your hands in your pockets. If/when you get pulled over by the cops, keep your hands on the steering wheel and do everything that you are told. I was even provided with language survival tactics to help me navigate in society. Here are a few of my favorites: Put on your White voice at the interview so you can get that job. Make sure you got your White boy outfit on, so they won't assume you're a thug. Make sure you say yes sir and yes ma'am to the White folks to show you were raised like you got some sense. That's too much to remember for me. "Whiteness" has historically been

used as a measurement of success, achievement, and a way of being to survive. It's not like I can just wash the Brown off my skin, or stop using my AAE, or disconnect myself from Black culture. I could code switch, but like Dr. Young, I ain't with it. (My computer is even trying to get me to change "ain't" to "isn't" and "aren't"). Even the small things such as spell check promote WME and not AAE. Bottom line; promoting Whiteness. Why do I need to switch up my swag, hide my biliteracy, to succeed and be happy? Code switching is another way to tell these White folks that the way we talk ain't good enough to be used outside of our houses. Y'all got me messed up.

As you're reading this, you might be wondering why I decided to incorporate elements of code-meshing in this dissertation—an academic genre if there ever was one--versus the more status quo style of writing often referred to as academic language. Well, the status quo style of writing in the academy is not my language. It's based on Whiteness (Barnett, 2000). I primarily use AAE (African American English) or what is also known as Ebonics. My language is not the status quo, and often in the academy, using *my* language in scholarly work is not widely accepted. Barnett states:

> As we have seen in recent debates about Ebonics, even perceived challenges to the linguistic status quo are quickly brought to public attention and held up to judgement by a majority unwilling to see its own ways of speaking, writing, and knowing as anything but naturalized norms. The most obvious result of such majority confirmation is to make standard rhetorical and grammatical norms appear 'objectively' correct. (p. 22)

This means that any other language outside of the mainstream norm, such as AAE, *my* language, can be scrutinized and viewed as incorrect in various spaces, such as the academy. If scholars like myself, Dr. Young and Dr. Love do not push against the misconception that *our* language

cannot be scholarly, the academy will continue to perpetuate the idea that some languages are more correct and suitable—more *normal*—than others.

I have cited the work of a few other scholars as examples to highlight the usefulness and strength of code-meshing in scholarly research and practice. I join these scholars and utilize code-meshing as a framework for how this dissertation is constructed. As you read, you'll see that I am using all my languages—both academic and nonacademic—to bring my thinking to this work. But I go beyond just the use of AAE grammatical structures and vocabulary. I draw from the deep richness of the cultural pool of my life to inform my thinking. From the lyrics spoken by rap artists to the terminology embraced by Black and Brown academics to the quotes I pull from film and literature, in this dissertation I engage in what I'm terming cultural code-meshing—"the blending and concurrent use" (Young, 2009, p. 50) of *all* the languages that are mine. When you read the interludes that separate each chapter, you'll see cultural code-meshing at work, sometimes in its most raw and urgent form as I, a Black man, use the languages in my personal diary and ongoing reflections to make sense of my world. In Chapter 4, my findings chapter, you'll see an intentional interplay of my languages as I rely on cultural code-meshing to communicate my analysis. My position in this scholarly work is that my academic and nonacademic languages can be unified to tell a story that needs to be told *for* us, and *by* us.

But telling this story using AAE and the status quo language has been a tremendously difficult challenge. I remember reaching out to Dr. Gholdy Muhammad one day and telling her that I was ready to give up on writing the dissertation. I told her that I was stuck. I couldn't pull the words from my brain and translate them onto paper. It was so frustrating. I was giving up. I felt like my words, the way that I used them weren't good enough – and would never be good enough for a dissertation. I felt this way not because my advisors were not supportive (they

always supported my use of code-meshing), but because of the mental work it takes to write a dissertation through a biliterate lens. As the tears began to pour from my eyes, Dr. Muhammad made a statement that would change me forever. She told me that I had to fall so in love with my languages (my literacies) that no one could ever tell me how to use them. When she said that, I completely stopped–frozen. I've been asked a few times in the past about the things that I love. Never has my response to that question been my languages. I began to ask myself: do I really love my languages? After my conversation with Dr. Muhammad, I decided to step away from my dissertation to take a break, just to breath, to recenter myself, and really reflect on who I am, my languages and my literacies. After a few days of thinking, it hit me. I do love my languages—they show up in everything that I do and they're the reason that I am the person that I am today.

I want this dissertation to be a true reflection of not only my scholarly thinking, but I want it to prove that my literacies are just as academic as the status quo. "We're now in the period of a new paradigm shift, from a provincial, more narrowly conceived focus to a broader internationalist perspective. We thus are being forced to address the issue of multiple linguistic voices, not only here, but in the global family" (Smitherman, 1995, p. 26). This means that because of the increased awareness surrounding student's rights to their own languages (in K-12 and higher education), educators are now forced to reconsider ways that multiple languages and dialects can be used as catalysts to promote equity in student voice. I want this dissertation to be an example for other scholars who use AAE to embrace it, lean into it, and use it in spaces where it is not considered the status quo. I want this dissertation to help at least one other scholar who is stuck trying to translate their language onto paper. I want this dissertation to be a solid example for *us*. To prove that our AAE is just as academic as the status quo and can be used to change the

world. So yeah, that means you'll be seeing me use terms like, ain't, lil', and a few curse words. Yeah, I said it—curse words. They are referenced throughout this dissertation, especially in some of the rap quotes I use. And yes, I know that some may think cursing is inappropriate for a dissertation, but for me, it isn't.

In addition, there's research that has looked at the ways that Black people, especially Black males (and millennials), use curse words in *our* daily conversations (Finn, 2017; Garner, 1999; O'Malley, 1997). For example, Garner explored why Black males use profanity in the way that *we* do. Results showed that there were multiple reasons why *we* use profanity, ranging from using it to show power, elaborating on a topic, expressing feelings, and even rapping. "The historical position of subordination, oppression, and loss of power have been shown to influence both Black males' use of profanity" (Garner, 1999, p. iv). This means that because of the long history of oppression that Black males have faced throughout history, using profanity in *our* oral conversations and writings is used to show *our* power, express our thoughts, and express our feelings. If profanity can be used in ways that allows authors to express their ideas and feelings, then it should also be used in the academy to help scholars convey their ideas and beliefs.

So yes, I am using and referencing profanity throughout this dissertation to show power--the power that *our* language has to communicate ideas, beliefs, and knowledge about *us*. So, when you read this dissertation and come across a few curse words, just know I'm not being offensive, but I'm elaborating on and expressing *my* feelings about the need for the critical examination of the ways that Black and Brown males are represented in children's literature. Now let's be clear, I am not advocating that children be encouraged to use profanity in the classroom, but I am advocating for the use and reference of it as needed in the academy as it can be used as a method to share stories.

Filmmaker Ava DuVernay has built her career on telling the stories of people of color, notably her television series titled *When They See Us* (2019). Paying homage to and continuing her ideas, whether it is in the media, newspapers, movies, picturebooks, or magazines, the stories that society needs to see about *us* must not continue to depict us as thugs and monsters but portray us as individuals with our own personal stories, our own narratives. *When they see us*, let them not only see our pains and our struggles, but let them see the beauty, power, language, and joy that Black and Brown males have inside *us*.

INTERLUDE: TELL THE WHOLE DAMN STORY

While writing this dissertation I've watch Black people be brutally murdered by police. On May 25, 2020, I sat on my couch watching the news about the murder of George Floyd—suffocated and brutally murdered in public. On February 23, 2021, I heard news about a Black man named Ahmaud Arbery, murdered while out for a run, something I do every day. On June 12, 2021, I scrolled through my Instagram timeline seeing reports about the murder of Rayshard Brooks--murdered at a Wendy's here in Atlanta, not too far from my home. Marvin Scott III, Dominique Williams, James Lionel Johnson, Daunte Wright, Matthew Williams, Ma'Khia Bryant and countless others were brutally murdered while I wrote this dissertation (*#Say Their Names*, n.d.).

In the midst of this, I'm looking at a children's picturebook, where I see a Black kid is walking down the street, at night, with his hood on. In the book, he walks past the corner store. I think of Trayvon—of going to the corner store for Skittles and then, pop-pop-pop, another Black boy gone from being killed by a racist. But unlike Trayvon, this Black kid makes it home safe to his mother's arms. Is this what we're doing now? Telling Black boys from a very early age through kids' books that they can walk down the street at night with their hoods on and still come home safe to their mom? You see where I'm coming from now?

Look, we need to tell all these kids, the White ones, the Brown ones, all of them, that when Black and Brown boys walk down the street at night with their hoods on, they might get murdered and the person that murders them will get away with it. **If you going to tell the story, tell the whole damn story!** Tell the kids that Black and Brown boys have always been handed the shortest spoon! We're constantly treated like trash and that's all that many racist White men and White women want people to know about us! Look at the news, look at the tv, and look at these kids' books. I'm tired! I'm sick and tired. **You didn't even tell the whole damn story!**

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

> Cops are killing people with they arms up / And your main focus is tryna harm us? / And you think you 'bout to starve us? / Niggas ain't about to starve us / Nah, I'm charged up.
>
> —Drake, *Charged Up*

It is the Saturday before Thanksgiving, and I'm sitting on my living room floor with papers and picturebooks scattered all around me. I've just started this writing/research process, and this is already getting on my nerves. I've been conducting a research analysis on how diversity is represented across a particular set of books that've captured my interest. As I read, I find myself pickin' up a beautifully illustrated picturebook titled *Windows*. On the front cover is a melanated character wearing a hood. Other illustrations show the character smooth, dark brown skin and dark tight curly hair. Just like me. I say to myself, "This is awesome. A book with a boy that has some melanin as the main character! This is rare." Hopeful, I continue reading. As I pour through the pages, I find my stomach tightening, anxiety levels rising, hands sweating, anger increasing, and I'm questioning the text and images more than enjoying the story. My main thought becomes, "A melanated boy with a hood on walking down the street at night by himself? Past the corner store? With his hood on? Bruh. You got to be kidding me. This is Trayvon Martin ALL DAY."

As I make my way to the end of *Windows*, all I can ask is, "Who would write a book like this knowing the impact it could have on Black boys--Black boys like me?" Then I pause. Is the character Black? Or does the character just feel Black? As I pour through the pages, I do not see any explicit mentioning of the main character's race/ethnicity. There is no explicit mentioning of any of the characters' race or ethnicity. As a reader, it is up to me to construct the racial/ethnic identity of the main character and the characters depicted in the background illustrations. I notice the main character's dark melanated skin (like mine) and dark tight curly hair (like mine). Because

of this, I believe the character is just like me, a Black male. So now this book has me questioning, what did the author and illustrator of the book want us to believe about the character's race/ethnicity? Some of y'all might say it doesn't matter (and if you do, you're practicing colorblindness), but it does! So, guess what I do? I go to the Library of Congress catalog and do a search for the book. Under the "other subjects" labels assigned to the book I find the label "JUVENILE FICTION/People & Places/ United States / Hispanic & Latino" (Librarianship Studies & Information Technology, 2017).

This piece of data leads me to more questions: How is the race or ethnicity of characters depicted, through both images and words, in picturebooks? What happens when a child picks up a book and decides to see themselves in a character, regardless of what the writer, illustrator, and/or publisher intended? What about the social and cultural context in which a child reads a book—how do we as adults who put books in the hands of children think about that? When they published this book in 2017, did the creators of this book realize that Trayvon Martin was one of many Black boys and men who were killed for doing just what this character was doing, walking alone through the neighborhood in the evening?

Right then my relationship to children's literature changed. Now I take every single picturebook I get my hands on and analyze it through a critical lens. I read with the conviction that the way Black male characters are depicted in children's literature matters to Black males. No matter their race/ethnicity, children should be able to see authentic representations of their racial/ethnic background in the books that they read, and for Black children, authentic representations include an understanding of the social and cultural contexts in which we as Black males live. Also, no matter their race, children should be able to see authentic representations of

racial/ethnic backgrounds other than their own in the books they read. Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) stated:

> Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection, we can see our own lives and experiences as part of a larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books. (p. 9)

Because children's books serve as vehicles of knowledge and most importantly self-affirmation, picturebooks that depict Black and Brown boys must be critically analyzed to ensure that potentially harmful narratives *about us* that have been consistently perpetuated through the words and images within children's literature come to an end (Bishop, 1990, 2012; Crisp et al., 2016; Larrick, 1965; Tschida et al., 2014). The representation of Black and Brown males in all aspects of media (e.g., movies and children's literature) matters. In this study, I will engage in an in-depth analysis of two well-lauded children's picturebooks to gain understanding about the depictions of Black and Brown boys in literature created for children. Throughout this paper, you will notice that I use the term *us*. When I use this term, I refer to *us who are Black and Brown males, who look like me, who are darker than White people and less privileged than White people*. I refer to us, a group of Black and Brown males whose dreams and potential are harder to obtain because of our gender and the hue of our skin. That is why I continue to ask teachers,

families and caregivers, researchers, authors, illustrators, publishers, and literary award organizations, "What do readers come to believe *when they see us* in children's literature?"

Statement of the Problem

> Conversations that unpack and challenge ideas about race, class, privilege, meritocracy, religion, sexuality, sexism, and power are critical to the everyday lives of dark children. (Love, 2019, p. 131)

As Dr. Bettina Love stresses, for the sake of Black and Brown children, it's imperative that we engage in courageous conversations that help to understand and confront ideas about various marginalized identities (e.g., Black people), which is why these words serve as the fabric of this study. My goal is for this study to serve as a connection and extension to the conversation addressing the challenges surrounding the representation of Black and Brown boys and men in children's literature. I also want this study to serve as an example of what it means to code-mesh within an academic genre, and the freedom and power that comes when we can use our language. In this section, I argue that it is imperative for educators, including teachers and media specialists; children's book creators, including authors, illustrators, editors, and publishers; and literary award organizations to develop a critical awareness of how the depiction of Black males in children's literature impacts the lived experiences of young readers regarding race, racism, and power. To make this argument, I look at examples of policies, initiatives, and practices that currently impact this vibrant conversation. I first focus on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a United Nations resolution establishing a blueprint for governmental policies and principles that, if implemented, would directly impact the type of media and messages children are exposed to, specifically regarding race and racism. Next, I look at different national campaigns and initiatives focused on eradicating racial injustices and promoting diversity in

children's literature. Following that, I look at existing research on the depiction of Black males in media, including children's literature.

Convention on the Rights of the Child

Developed under the auspices of the United Nations, The Convention on the Rights of the Child is a human rights treaty in which different nations from across the world came together to develop and agree on the social, political, economic, cultural, health, and civil rights of children (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), 1989). These rights are like the rights of adults and include ideas such as a child's right to freedom of speech, protection of privacy, and protection from sexual abuse. Although the United States played a key role in outlining and preparing the convention (Mehta, 2015; Minasyan, 2018) and signed the document on February 16, 1995 (United Nations Treaty Collection (UNTC), 1989), it is still the only country that has not ratified it. This failure to ratify means that although the United States has signed the document, they've not sanctioned it and made it official in the U.S.

There are many different beliefs as to why the U.S. has not ratified the CRC. According to Minasyan (2018), fear of government interference into families underlies the United States' resistance to ratifying the CRC; however, supporters argue that the policy would be beneficial to children. For example, Article 1 of the treaty states that no child should be discriminated against or treated unfairly for any reason, especially based on race, ability, gender, religion, etc. (UNICEF, 1989). If CRC were ratified, it then would make it illegal for police officers to racially profile, stop, and frisk Black and Brown children based on their appearance. (This happens all the time. I've experienced it several times). Many of these unlawful searches have resulted in the wrongful incarceration of Black and Brown males who make up most of the prison population in the U.S. (DuVernay, 2016; Rizer III, 2002). Article 22 of the treaty states that children who are

refugees have the same rights and protections as children born in the United States whether unaccompanied or accompanied by their parents (UNICEF, 1989). In 2018, child migrants were found caged in harsh conditions due to U.S. migrant separation policy (Domonoske & Gonzales, 2018). If CRC were ratified, it would then make locking up children who are refugees unlawful. With the ratification of the CRC, actions such as those mentioned above will not be allowed in the U.S., thus shifting various privileges and oppressions within society.

Of particular importance to this study, Article 17 of the CRC states that children have the right to access information from a wide variety of mass media resources (UNICEF, 1989), which specifically includes children's books. Section A of Article 17 calls for mass media to be encouraged to "disseminate information and material of social and cultural benefit to the child," meaning that materials, including books, are encouraged to be developed to promote the well-being and welfare of all children with the spirit of article 29. Section E of this article calls for the protection of children from information and material injurious to their well-being. It says that "States Parties shall encourage the development of appropriate guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her well-being" (UNICEF, 1989, para. 52). This implies that it's our duty as the adults, guardians, and knowledgeable guides (e.g., educators, authors, illustrators, publishers, and literary award organizations) within children's lives to critique the information children are exposed to through various forms of mass media (e.g., children's literature) to protect their health and prosperity and not to cause them harm. Although under this document it is Black and Brown male children's right to be exposed to information that promotes their social and cultural well-being, many media sources, including books that depict Black and Brown males specifically, continue to advance the common, untrue,

and harmful narratives about *us* that have existed for years (Brown & Brown, 2015; Falkner, 2018; Frisby, 2016; Love, 2014).

Organizations Advocating for Diverse Children's Literature

The need for increased focus on the representation of Black males in literature is reflected in the growth of organizations and initiatives striving to diversify children's literature and thus impact critical conversations around race, racism, and power in media directed at young readers. We Need Diverse Books (WNDB) is a large-scale nonprofit organization that advocates and supports crucial changes in the publishing industry. One of its main goals as an organization is to produce and encourage literature that reflects and honors the lives of all young children (WNDB, 2020). WNBD has developed several programs to increase diversity in the publishing industry, such as The Walter Dean Myers Grant, which provides financial support to diverse authors and illustrators who are currently unpublished. WNDB in the Classroom is an initiative that serves students around the country by bringing diverse books (e.g., parallel cultures) and authors to their local schools.

In addition to WNDB, Lee & Low Books is a minority-owned multicultural children's literature publisher that focuses on publishing diverse stories that emphasize modern day culture. To increase diversity in children's literature, the publisher "pledged to make a special effort to work with unpublished authors and illustrators of color" (Lee & Low Books, 2020). Lee & Low Books has also continued to show its efforts in increasing diversity in children's literature by creating several initiatives, such as the New Voices Award, which is given to unpublished authors who are minorities for a picturebook manuscript, and the New Visions Award, which is given to authors who are minorities for a middle grade or young adult novel.

Similarly, The Brown Bookshelf is an African American operated organization that promotes and advocates for more diverse children's books, especially those that depict African American characters written and illustrated by African American artists. The Brown Bookshelf also has developed an initiative, 28 Days Later, "a month-long showcase of the best in Picture Books, Middle Grade and Young Adult novels written and illustrated by African Americans to help parents, teachers, librarians and booksellers recommend good reads" (Brown Bookshelf, n.d., para. 2).

Despite all the efforts of WNDB, Lee & Low Books, The Brown Bookshelf, and other organizations, the disproportionate representation of race/ethnicity in children's literature, specifically as it relates to the publication of children's books written/illustrated by people of color, continues as an issue. Ongoing research by The Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) points to the persistent underrepresentation of published children's books written by African American authors and depicting African Americans. Each year since 1985, the CCBC has produced reports that show publishing data on children and young adult books about and by people of color (Crisp et al., 2016). Books within the yearly samples are children's and young adult literature that have been sent in from various sources, such as publishers. Although CCBC acknowledges that they could have missed some books in the past, they state that their data is improving; many publishers outside of traditional trade books are now sending in books because they are aware that CCBC is continuing to produce these reports and document statistics surrounding books about and by people of color. Results from these yearly investigations have been used by scholars and researchers over the years to address issues of diversity in children's literature (Crisp et al., 2016). Data from the CCBC report shows that although there has been an

increase in the percentage of books by African Americans and about African Americans, this change has been very small.

Table 1.1

Select CCBC Publishing Statistics on Children's/YA Books (1998-2020)

Year	Books Received by CCBC	Books by African Americans	Books about African Americans
	n	%	%
1998	5,000	1.9	3.8
1999	5,000	1.6	3
2000	5,000-5,500	1.8 - 1.9	2.7 - 2.9
2001	5,000-5,500	1.8 - 2	3.8 - 4
2002	3,150	2.2	5.3
2003	3,200	2.5	5.3
2004	2,800	3.5	5.1
2005	2,800	2.7	5.3
2006	3,000	2.9	5.1
2007	3,000	2.6	5.0
2008	3,000	2.8	5.7
2009	3,000	2.8	5.2
2010	3,400	3	4.6
2011	3,400	2.3	3.6
2012	3,600	1.9	3.3
2013	3,200	2.2	2.9
2014	3,500	2.4	5.2
2015	3,400	3.2	8
2016	3,400	2.8	8.4
2017	3,700	3.6	9.6
2018	3,682	5.81	11
2019	4,035	5.75	11.7
2020	3,299	7.64	12.1

Note. Data retrieved from CCBC (2019).

In 1998 when CCBC analyzed its set of children and young adult books received (n=5000), 3.8% of the books were *about* African Americans, and 1.9% of the books were authored/illustrated *by* African Americans. In other words, out of the 5000 books received, only 188 books were *about* African Americans and 96 of the books were written *by* African Americans. In 2007, with n=3,000, CCBC found that 5% of the books were *about* African Americans, and 2.6% of the books were *by* African Americans, or out of the 3,000 children and

young adult books received, 150 were *about* African Americans and 77 of those books were *by* African Americans. In the set of children and young adult books analyzed by CCBC in 2018 (n=3,653), 11.1% of the books were *about* African Americans, and 5.5% were *by* African Americans. This means that out of the 3,653 books within the set, only 405 books were about African Americans, and 201 books were by African Americans. In the most recent set of children and young adult books received by the CCBC in 2019 (n=4,034), 11.7% were *about* African Americans, and 5.4% were *by* African Americans. This shows that 472 books were *about* African Americans, and 218 books were *by* African Americans. Keeping in consideration that the number of books received per year fluctuates and impacts overall percentages, the data in Table 1 shows that although there has been an increase in stories *about* and *by* African Americans, there is still a disproportionate number of books depicting Black and Brown children in comparison to White children. Additionally, many of these stories depicting Black and Brown children are not authored and illustrated *by* those who are a part of Black and Brown cultures. While many of these children and YA books mentioned above may show positive examples of Black and Brown children, analysis is needed to understand how and if racialized and stereotypical portrayals may also operate in these texts.

When They See Us: The Idea of the Black Male

> Cops give a damn about a negro / Pull the trigger kill a nigga he's a hero / Give the crack to the kids who the hell cares / One less hungry mouth on the welfare / I see no changes all I see is racist faces / Misplaced hate makes disgrace to races / We under I wonder what it takes to make this / One better place, let's erase the wasted.
>
> 2Pac, *Changes*

> In our courts, when it's a white man's word against a black man's, the white man always wins. They're ugly, but those are the facts of life… As you grow older, you'll see white men cheat black men every day of your life, but let me tell you something and don't you forget it— whenever a white man does that to a black man, no matter who he is, how rich he is, or how fine a family he comes from, that white man is trash.
>
> Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*

While children's literature is a prevalent genre informing how children of all races and ethnicities understand the world, it is by no means the only genre. The discriminatory, harmful, and demeaning narratives in various forms of media about Black and Brown males have been consistent throughout history (Dancy, 2014; Du Bois, 1903; Hill, 2016; K. A. Johnson & Johnson, 2014; Love, 2014; Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). To be clear, not all narratives about Black and Brown males within the media depict *us* as being thuggish or violent, but many of these narratives surrounding *us* are harmful, and ultimately lead to *our* discrimination, incarceration, bloodshed, or worse, *our* death. Why? Because *when they* (e.g., those who are not Black and Brown males) *see us* and *we* are racialized as criminals and delinquents in the media, including children's literature, people within society will only learn to believe that *we* are just that. This type of conceptual understanding of Black and Brown males can cause great harm to *us*.

From 2015-2019, Black people made up 12% of the population, however, during these same years, they accounted for 26.4% of the victims that were killed by police (Beer, 2020). In other words, Black people are the victims of the deadly use of force at almost twice the rate than the general population. When visiting his relatives in 1955, Emmett Till, a 14-year-old Black male, was heartlessly murdered and his body thrown into the Tallahatchie River by two White males in Mississippi after being falsely accused of offending a White woman. Even with all the

evidence, an all-White male jury found the two White males not guilty (Whitfield, 1991). In 1990, five Black and Hispanic teens, Kevin Richardson, 14, Raymond Santana, 14, Antron McCray, 15, Yusef Salaam, 15, and Korey Wise, 16, (first known as the Central Park Five and then the Exonerated Five) were wrongly found guilty in the gruesome rape of a White woman. Although there was no substantial physical evidence that linked any of the five Black and Brown males to the rape, they each were incarcerated between five to fifteen years. In 2012, Trayvon Martin, an unarmed 17-year-old Black male, was shot and killed while walking home from a convenience store by a neighborhood watch member. The police initially decided not to arrest the shooter, which caused the case to ignite national protest demonstrations and debates about racial profiling and self-defense laws. The man who killed Trayvon was later acquitted of all charges. And I say "the man" because he does not deserve the respect to even be mentioned in this paper.

In 2014, Tamir Rice, a 12-year-old Black boy, was fatally shot and killed by a White police officer outside a local recreational center after a 911 call stating there was someone at the location waving a gun. The police officer who killed Tamir was not indicted but fired from his job, not due to the killing of Tamir, but due to a lie on his job application (Vera, 2018). According to the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI), 2020), Ahmaud Arbery, a 25-year-old Black male jogging in a neighborhood, was confronted by two White men and cold-bloodedly killed by one of them after he wrongly profiled Ahmuad as a suspect in several break-ins in the area. Days prior to the arrest of both men, a video recording of Ahmaud being shot and killed, recorded by a third suspect, emerged in the media, and went viral. After a massive community uproar, the three men have been charged with the murder of Ahmaud. Recently, the former Georgia district attorney for the area was charged after allegedly

interfering with the arrest of the men involved in the killing of Ahmaud. She has since been indicted on charges of breaking her oath as a public officer and obstructing a police officer (Savidge & Barajas, 2021).

As Black and Brown males have been persistently stereotyped, persecuted, wrongly accused, and killed, the media, including children's literature, continues to racialize and support cruel and harmful narratives surrounding Black and Brown males (Bishop, 2012; Broderick, 1973; Brown & Brown, 2015; Falkner, 2018; Harris, 1993; Larrick, 1965; Woodson, 1933). Even well-known children's books depicting Black and Brown lives and communities bear scrutiny. Falkner (2018) explored the neighborhood scenes in the books of award-winning author Ezra Jack Keats' and discovered that these books racialized the neighborhood space of Black and Brown characters, their interactions, and the physical representation of the setting. Black critics asserted that although Keats' characters may appear Black, they do not exhibit the cultural authenticity that other books have (Bishop, 1991; Falkner, 2018). The idea of the delinquent Black male is prevalent in literature as well (Brown, 2011; Falkner, 2018). For example, Falkner also found that with the Keats books studied, the author depicted Peter, the main character, as a "wandering and delinquent Black boy." Even with research that discusses the detrimental narrative surrounding *us* in children's literature, books are still being created that perpetuate damaging narratives that ultimately harm the well-being of Black and Brown males (Falkner, 2018; Harris, 2019; Rodriguez & Braden, 2018).

Through Section A of Article 17 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the publishing of information and material of social and cultural benefit to the child means that books *about* Black and Brown culture should be published, and when they are published, be of value and benefit to children. The problem is that not only are books that depict Black and

Brown males rarely published (Larrick, 1965; Park Dahlen, 2019), when they are, there are images and text within the books that construct damaging and problematic ideas about *us* (Falkner, 2018). Racist and stereotypical discourses in children's books about Black and Brown males have helped to normalize and hold on to the anti-Black Male narrative that is perpetuated in society (Woodson, 1933). The racist and problematic narratives in these books (Falkner, 2018; Woodson, 1933) go against Article 17 of The Convention on the Rights of the Child that the United States directly played a key role in preparing. It is urgent, for the sake of *our* lives, that awareness is increased, and efforts are made to ensure that Black and Brown males are not racialized through children's picturebooks, and that authentic, complex, and rich representations are promoted and valued. Families, caregivers, teachers, authors, teachers, researchers, publishers, librarians, and book award committees all could benefit from tools that critique picturebooks for their depiction of characters and cultures before they are placed in the hands of children.

Purpose of the Study

If young readers are exposed to racist and stereotypical narratives about Black males through children's books, they may develop limited and problematic conceptualizations of Black and Brown males in general. The purpose of this study is to explore two children's picturebooks for messages of race, racism, and power as they relate to Black and Brown males: the Ezra Jack Keats Book Award winner, *Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut* (2017), authored by Derrick Barnes and illustrated by Gordon C. James, and the Ezra Jack Keats Honor book, *Windows* (2017), authored by Julia Denos and illustrated by E.B. Goodale. The following question will guide this critical content analysis: How are race, racism, and power depicted in *Crown* and *Windows*? Using the lens and tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT), I explore how (1) *counter*

storytelling/unique voices of color (2) *race as a social construction*, (3) *permanence of racism* (4) *interest convergence* and (5) the *critique of colorblindness* and (6) *whiteness as a property* are operationalized through the text, images, and dust jacket of both picturebooks.

Significance of the Study

One of the greatest injustices being forced upon Black and Brown children in the United States is the lack of authentic, joyful, and liberating representations in children's literature. Children's literature has the power to influence young minds and thoughts. Depending on what books are utilized in classrooms, children's literature can both perpetuate or dismantle racism, stereotypes, and other inequities. Although there has been an increase in the depiction of Black and Brown children in children's literature (CCBC, 2019), many teachers still use the same highly awarded and recognized classics without analyzing them for harmful narratives surrounding the lives of Black and Brown families. The use of Black and Brown children's literature in preschool and elementary learning spaces can counter the damaging and stereotypical narratives surrounding Black and Brown people seen historically in children's literature while helping *our* children develop self-confidence, cultural pride, support sociopolitical consciousness, and promote academic achievement.

A review of the literature shows the significance of the need to provide an accurate narrative that surrounds Black and Brown males in various forms of media (Bishop, 2012; Broderick, 1973; Brown & Brown, 2015; Frisby, 2016; Harris, 2019; Horning, 2016; Larrick, 1965; Love, 2014; Pescosolido et al., 1997; Woodson, 1933), especially within children's literature (Falkner, 2018; Woodson, 1933). Brown (2011) explored three decades of discourses in qualitative, quantitative, and conceptual research studies that were found in books, journal articles, and policy reports surrounding Black males and the implications of these narratives

within society. Results showed that four significant discourses were at work: Black males are "(1) absent and wandering, (2) impotent and powerless, (3) soulful and adaptive, and (4) endangered and in crisis" (Brown, 2011, p. 2048). Brown's results proved that these narratives are problematic and that many of the discourses surrounding Black males contribute to false understandings of who *we* are. Children's literature, specifically picturebooks, can communicate racial narratives and knowledge through the words and images that are deeply connected and rooted to racist ideologies (Broderick, 1973; Falkner, 2018; Harris, 1990; Woodson, 1933). Although there has been critical analysis on the depiction of race, racism, and power in picturebooks that depict Black characters (Broderick, 1973; Falkner, 2018; Harris, 1990; Larrick, 1965; Woodson, 1933), more empirical analysis of the depiction of Black and Brown males is needed, specifically within picturebooks. Hence, the significance of this study.

Children's literature plays a key role in learning and the socialization of children in early learning environments. From a child's first time sitting next to their teacher reading a book, to the first time they scroll through an eBook on their school tablet, children are being exposed to information about the world and people around them. From the text and visual imagery in these books, not only are they learning about their positioning in society, but whether those around them, including their peers, value them as a caring, joyful, and loving human beings. Therefore, a systematic exploration, such as this study, can help to demonstrate the function and role that children's literature plays in the promotion of justice and the liberation of Black and Brown people. Before we as an educational community can make any significant advancements towards the emancipation of students who have been/are marginalized in society, we must understand the substantial sociopolitical function of children's literature. This study has the potential to show that when picturebooks are created that reflect the lived experiences of Black and Brown

students in joyful and culturally authentic ways through the text and visual imagery within them, not only can they push against harmful stereotypes, but they can also serve as important pedagogical tools that promote academic achievement and the liberation of Black and Brown children.

Definitions

The following words and phrases are salient to the study and are used throughout.

Black and Brown. A socially constructed category for a group of humans based on their observable phenotypic features (e.g., skin with melanin) and cultural connections (e.g., ancestral connection to Africa or South America).

Critical content analysis. An approach to examining preexisting textual or visual data that can be used as an effective method in understanding the social relations and practices related to race, racism, and power that exist in various forms throughout society.

Picturebook. A term combining the two words "picture book" used to recognize "the integral unity of text and illustrations in such books, as well as highlighting that they are cohesive aesthetic wholes." (Sipe, 2015, p. 381).

Power. A term that refers to social relationships that are "rooted deep in social nexus" (Foucault, 1982, p. 791) and one's connectedness to a certain group or groups. Within the context of the United States, these social connections and direct relationships historically have privileged and oppressed certain cultural groups.

Race. The socially constructed categories of humans based on their observable phenotypic features such as hair texture and eye color.

Racism. The discrimination or prejudice against a person or group of people based on their race.

Summary

In this chapter, I sketched out the problem that guided this study and the significance of this research. In Chapter Two, I examine the literature related to race in society, Black males in society, and Black males in children's literature. In Chapter Three I focus on defining the methodology (e.g., conceptual framework) of the study. For this analysis, I chose a deductive method to allow for a more focused inquiry through the lens of Critical Race Theory. In Chapter Four, I present the findings of the analysis, and finally, in Chapter Five, I provide implications of the study, limitations, and suggestions for further research. I end with a reflective vignette.

INTERLUDE: CAUSE I SAID SO

Dissertation Committee: The significance of the study is an important piece of your dissertation. You will have to be able to explain what makes your study so important. Why is your study so significant?

Me: *in my head* Cause I said so.

I'm holding a picturebook in my hands. I feel like I can't even think. I step back. I'm trying to move away from this book to the larger problem of unexamined texts. The specific book isn't the problem. It's that books are not fully considered with an awareness of the lived lives of the children who will read them and the contexts of their experiences. I try to step back, but it's hard. It feels like I can't breathe. I feel pissed. I feel sad. I feel pain and I feel anxiety. I'm furious. Can you imagine Trayvon Martin's mother, Sybrina Fulton, picking up this book and reading it? Can you imagine how she would feel knowing that her Black son was also walking down the street with his hood on just like this kid in the book and was killed? Can you imagine how many parents of Black and Brown children will read this book and must explain to them that although the character is walking around the neighborhood street fearlessly with his hood on, in real life Black and Brown males do not have that same privilege? How do you think I felt as a Black teacher during the time of this killing and my Black and Brown boys coming into the classroom with their hoods on? They are comfortable! Just chilling. But they can be killed for doing just that. How hard do you think it was trying to navigate this conversation with these boys when they asked why the police killed Trayvon'? Hell, even my White students were asking. They are 4 and 5 years old! Pre-K kids! And already aware of what was happening around them. It was everywhere. They saw it through social media, the news, heard their parents talk about it. Siblings. All that. My family stayed on my ass about knowing I was a Black man and what that meant for me in society. I knew from day one, as a young boy, that being Black would be beautiful but being Black would also be painful…. every day.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

> Black children need to see their lives reflected in the books they read. If they don't, they won't feel welcomed in the world of literature. The lives of African Americans are rich and diverse, and the books our children read should reflect that.
>
> —Valerie Wilson-Wesley, Interview with *TheBrownBookshelf.com*

> Only see the truth when I'm staring in the mirror.
>
> Drake, *Used To*

Like Drake, the only time that I see the truth about who I am, a Black male, is when I am looking in the mirror. Why? Because the mirror is one of the only places that I can truly see myself. I rarely see myself in a vast amount of the children's books I pick up. I rarely see myself in the vast number of television shows I see daily. I rarely see myself in many forms of media: award-winning films, high fashion editorials, even opera headliners. But there are instances where I do see myself. I see my melanated skin, my dark black curly hair my, my AAE, all that. But sometimes when I do see myself, the depictions are racialized. For example, in 2008, American basketball player and businessman Lebron James covered *Vogue* magazine alongside Brazilian supermodel Gisele Bündchen. This was the first time a Black man was featured on the cover of *Vogue* (Desai, 2010). The magazine cover depicts James in an all-black outfit, bouncing a basketball while having a tight grip around Gisele's waist and mouth open wide. Gisele is depicted in a bright teal color dress while smiling. From an initial glance, one may not think about how this image is a direct reflection of the poster, "Destroy This Mad Brute," which depicts King Kong (an enormous gorilla positioned as a film monster) ferociously carrying a White woman (Chun, 2016). If images like this are created that depict Black men as reflections of monsters, the world will only know *us* to be just that: monsters.

It is time for all people to see that you cannot and will not judge me without knowing my story, or the multiple stories about *us.* You may think you know *our* stories, but you do not. Therefore, this study is my way of getting at these stories—through the language I use, the literature and research I amplify, the history I tell, and the children's books I selected to critically analyze the representation of Black and Brown males in children's literature. Although there has been a variety of research describing the portrayal of Black and Brown males within children's literature (e.g. Falkner, 2018; V. J. Harris, 1990) there is still a space for more critical research concentrated on the visual and textual depiction of Black and Brown males in picturebooks. This analysis—including the following literature review—is my way of sharing a story about *us*, with the hope that one day more of *our* stories will be shared, heard, and acted upon.

In this chapter I provide a comprehensive literature review of (1) the theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory, (2) discourses of race and racism in society and media, (3) racialization of Black and Brown people in society and media, (4) racialization of Black and Brown males in society and media, (5) the depiction of Black and Brown males in children's literature, and (6) the dominant awards and prizing of children's literature.

Theoretical Framework

Like many other movements such as critical legal studies and radical feminism, Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a mindset and approach that has consistently been used to combat systemic forms of race, racism, and power in various disciplines, including political science, women's studies, American studies, and sociology (Bell, 1995; Butler & Walter, 1991; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Solorzano, 1997). CRT questions the power of traditional legal approaches in providing justice (e.g., socially, politically, and economically) and demands legal strategies that take race into account. CRT acknowledges that to transform culture, there must be a thorough

evaluation of the various macro and microstructures that are in place that impact race, racism, and power in society (Bell, 1995). “Critical Race Theory questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 3). This means that CRT questions and examines the long-standing norms, mores, and logics that undergird social systems, specifically legal systems, that contribute to racism and oppression in society. Although Derrick Bell is considered the movement’s intellectual father, other scholars such as Richard Delgado, Jean Stefancic, Gloria Ladson-Billings, and Kimberlé Crenshaw have helped shape the way we understand CRT and the various tenets it is built on.

Critical Race Theory is grounded in several major beliefs or tenets that impact the way in which critical race theorists think about the world. Different critical race scholars interpret the theory’s tenets in different ways. Grounded in the perspectives of Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2001), Derrick Bell (1980, 1992, 1995) and Kimberlé Crenshaw (1987, 1991), for the purpose of this paper I will use the following tenets: (1) critique of colorblindness, (2) permanence of racism, (3) interest convergence, (4) race as a social construction, (5) counter storytelling, and (6) whiteness as property. These six principles serve as a premise for understanding how race, racism, and power influence various systems that are in place. My intent with this study is to use the tenets of CRT as a framework and as a deductive analysis tool to examine two picturebooks and discover what can be said about messages of race, racism, and power that may be conveyed through the text and visual representations within the two books.

Each tenet of CRT helps provide a different way of thinking about race, racism, and power in society. The first idea, *the critique of colorblindness*, challenges and pushes against the stance that beliefs, actions, and laws are not influenced by racial prejudice or distinction of

phenotypic features (Crenshaw, 1988; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Graham et al., 2009). Colorblindness asserts that one is unable to see/recognize color or race. This means that those who are colorblind believe that racism no longer exists, and everyone, no matter their race, has equal opportunities. Many individuals who claim colorblindness see themselves as liberals (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Graham et al. (2009) argue that liberalism is grounded in the idea of acknowledging and accepting new or different ideas or behaviors with the willingness to discard traditional morals and values. This position, however, is problematic when liberalism merges with colorblindness because "colorblind conceptions of equality, expressed in rules that insist only on treatment that is the same across the board, can thus remedy only the most blatant forms of discrimination" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 7). When someone does not see color, they do not *see us* (Golden & Christensen, 2008). For example, Husband and Lee (2018) state that teachers often choose books for their classrooms based on awards the books have received, such as the Caldecott Medal. Although research into books awarded the Caldecott Medal has consistently shown a disproportion in the portrayal of White and Black characters in the books that are awarded (Husband & Lee, 2018), teachers still use this award list to select books for their classrooms. When a teacher ignores and overlooks the race/ethnicity of characters in a book based on the type of award it receives, they are performing in a way that can be described as colorblind. CRT's critique of colorblindness pushes the idea that you cannot ignore race. Race exists, and it impacts those of color—and for that matter, White people, even though they may not understand it or acknowledge it--every day.

The second tenet, *the permanence of racism*, is the idea that racism (deliberately or unintentionally) is deeply embedded in the different beliefs, policies, events, and decisions made historically and currently in society (Bell, 1992, 1995). Although Black and Brown people are no

longer legally enslaved since the abolishment of slavery in 1865, many Black and Brown people are confined to other forms of bondage and lynching (e.g., police brutality). For example, in the film *13th*, Ava DuVernay (2016) examined the historical and current intersection of race and prisons in the United States. The film revealed that the racial representation of prisoners in the United States is disproportionate, with most jail cells being filled by Black men (DuVernay, 2019; Twidell, 2017). It is known that Black people in the United States are no longer enslaved in a way that would be recognizable in a 19th century context, but racism and various forms of enslavement nevertheless have evolved (e.g., prison industrial complex and voter suppression efforts) (Alexander, 2020).

The next tenet of CRT, *interest convergence*, refers to the idea that those who are in power (e.g., White males in leadership positions) will support the objective for others when there is some incentive or benefit to their own privilege and/or positioning (Bell, 1980, Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Privilege is the function of various forms of identity (e.g., race and gender) that grant special advantages and/or exemptions to a particular person or group of people (Akintunde, 1999; Bell, 1980). If one person or group of people in power understand that they can make racially biased systematic decisions that will ultimately enhance their own personal agenda or privileges, the consequences can be negative. An important example of interest convergence is *Brown v. Board of Education*. In this 1954 landmark civil rights case, the United States Supreme Court ruled that the segregation of public schools was a direct violation of the 14th amendment. Derrick Bell (1980) proposed that this decision was only made because it served the best interest of White people. “Civil rights advances for Blacks always coincided with changing economic conditions and the self-interest of elite whites” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 18). For example, in 1953, the Korean War had just ended, and the United States was beginning to recover from the

ending of World War II in 1945. Black and Brown people were vital in the success of both wars. "It would ill serve the U.S. interest if the world press continued to carry stories of lynchings, racist sheriffs, or murders like that of Emmett Till," write Delgado and Stefancic (p. 19). They argue that the *Brown* Supreme Court decision operated as a convergence of White and Black interests to influence world opinion of the U.S. at a time when it needed addressing. "It was time for the United States to soften its stance toward domestic minorities. The interests of whites and blacks, for a brief moment, converged" (p. 19). Although interest converged for some time and there seemed to be more developing standards of social decency and ethics towards Black and Brown people, racism and injustices evolved into more complex forms of oppression (e.g., systemic, institutional).

The fourth tenet, *race as a social construction*, refers to the socially constructed race/ethnicity categories that are commonly used in American society (e.g., White, African American/Black, American Indian, Asian, Pacific Islander) (Bell, 1995; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Tatum, 2007; U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). Everyone carries their own identity, and it may shift as the individual deems fit. Social constructs are ideas and beliefs that have been fabricated and believed by people within a general population or society (e.g., race and sexual orientation). For example, the legal meaning for the 20th century socially constructed racial terms *White* and *Colored* were greatly molded when U.S. courts decided who had the privilege of living and having rights in the country based on the color of their skin. With the ratification of the 15th Amendment in 1870, men of color were granted the right to vote. Fifty years later in 1920, the 19th Amendment was ratified granting women of color the right to vote (Hodes, 1970). Prior to the ratification of both laws, those who were Black and Brown did not have access to voting and selecting political officials who could serve in their best interest, thus

perpetuating systemic racism. When race is used as something to privilege a certain group of people, those who do not share those same racial characteristics as those who are privileged will suffer the most.

The next belief of CRT is *counter storytelling*, also referred to as *unique voices of color*. This tenet states that those with different intersections of oppression (e.g., Black woman, Black Men with Autism, and Latinx trans women) can analyze, challenge, and communicate narratives that their White counterparts are not likely to know (e.g., the use of bonnets and durags). These counter-narratives can be used to promote the liberation of those who are racially systematically oppressed. For example, Black men are stereotyped to be dangerous, aggressive, and lawbreaking (Falkner, 2018; Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). If a Black man is in a space in which he can share a counter-narrative to this story, their White counterpart may develop a different conceptualization of Black men at large. If more voices of color can provide counter stories to the harmful and misleading narratives about marginalized cultures in the media, the outcome can be powerful and have a society-wide changing impact.

Lastly, Whiteness as property can be described as a person who is White using their race for social and economic privilege and protection. Historically and currently in American society, being White automatically ensures higher social and economic profits in the short term, as well as greater economic, political, and social protection in the long run. (Harris, 1990). “In protecting the property interest in Whiteness, property is assumed to be no more than the right to prohibit infringement on settled expectations, ignoring countervailing equitable claims that are predicated on a right to inclusion” (Harris, 1993, p. 1791). This means that Whiteness and the socially constructed expectations for interacting with those who are White can be used to *protect* White people and White privilege. For example, on May 25, 2020, a White woman, Amy Cooper, lied

and falsely accused a Black male, Christian Cooper (no relation), of threatening her life after he confronted her about violating a park rule (Vera, 2020). During the confrontation, Amy was video recorded saying, “I'm taking a picture and calling the cops. I'm going to tell them there's an African American man threatening my life" (para 1.). This episode falls in line with a history of situations in America in which White women value Whiteness more than Blackness/Brownness and use their Whiteness for protection and falsely accuse Black and Brown men of transgressive actions or crimes—sometimes with deadly results (e.g., Emmett Till).

Because of these tenets and its goal of placing race at the center of research, Critical Race Theory can be used as an effective framework for studying the ways that race, racism, and power are represented in children’s literature. “CRT is not only a valuable tool for studying children’s literature, but can also be used to help teacher educators understand that as social and cultural constructs, children’s literature is not free of cultural phenomena such as racism” (Hughes-Hassell et al., 2009, p. 7). In other words, if teachers, families, caregivers, publishers, and book award committees use CRT to examine children’s books, then they may uncover that some of these books convey messages surrounding racism and discrimination. If children’s books that communicate messages about racism and discrimination (consciously and unconsciously) are constantly used at the forefront of teaching and learning, then children will learn that these racist beliefs and actions are normal and just.

Race and Racism in Society and Media

> The only reason you say that race was not an issue is because you wish it was not. We all wish it was not. But it's a lie. I came from a country where race was not an issue; I did not think of myself as black and I only became black when I came to America. But we don't say any of this stuff.
>
> Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *We Should All Be Feminists*

Race can be defined as the socially constructed categories of humans based on their observable phenotypic features such as hair texture, eye color, and skin color (K. Crenshaw et al., 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). According to the U.S. Census, the different races represented on the survey are White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). Information from the U.S. Census is used for redistricting, federal funding, and business decisions. If data about race support decisions regarding public matters, such as funding for education, it is vital that those who are in positions of authority consider how constructs of race can have a direct impact on minorities within different spaces.

Different from the categorization of people by race, racism is a belief system that has consistently been used to justify oppression and discrimination against various groups within society based on their race (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; Goldberg, 1990a). Racism is expressed through attitudes, policies, and actions on various macro and micro levels, including internalized, interpersonal, institutional, and structural levels (Felder, 2020). According to Felder (2020) internalized racism is when one has harmful and damaging ideas about their own culture (para 3.). For example, a Black or Brown person may see White culture as superior based on their personal experiences within society. Interpersonal racism is when someone has a negative

mindset about a different race and does racist actions such as microaggressions (para 4). An example of this would be a White person telling a Black and Brown person, “I am not a racist. I have plenty of Black friends,” suggesting that this White person believes he/she is immune to racism because of their personal relationships. Institutional racism refers to organized, official, and cultural practices that perpetuate racial inequality (para 5). For example, on June 28, 1978, in the case of *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, the Supreme Court decided that the use of racial quotas in the university's admission process was unconstitutional. Still, the university's use of affirmative action to accept minority students was legal. This means that having a quota for the number of minority students a university wants to accept is unconstitutional, but the race of a student is still a factor that can be considered in the college acceptance process by way of affirmative actions. Structural racism is the various ways that multiple institutions work together to produce racialized outcomes, intentionally or unintentionally. For example, the United States and its Constitution were built on racism, and although new policies have emerged that demand inclusion, many of these policies still carry racist dispositions (Chaney & Robertson, 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). This structural racism can be seen in the Jim Crow “separate but equal” era in which Black and Brown people would be prosecuted for going to White-Only facilities and spaces (e.g., restaurants, front of the city bus, schools) or in the New Jim Crow era in which intricate jail and prison systems deploy legal and educational structures with the result being the incarceration of large numbers of Black and Brown people (Alexander, 2020).

Racism is even more disturbing when one understands how it leads to racial stereotyping, prejudices, privileges, and murder that can be seen in various forms throughout society, including in the media. Media refers to the tools and systems that are used to communicate

messages and ideas, including the Internet, publishing, and broadcasting (Bittner, 1977; Chauvin, 2003). As such, media is a leading purveyor of a society's hegemonic stances, including stances of racism. For example, the stereotype of Blacks being criminals and lawbreakers is a narrative consistently present on television news channels, newspapers, and other avenues that disseminate current events and ideas. This negative conception of Blacks is so prevalent in media and throughout society that terms such as "criminal predator," "thug," and "gangsta" are used to describe Black males in particular (Welch, 2007). According to Welch, "This common stereotype has erroneously served as a subtle rationale for the unofficial policy and practice of racial profiling by criminal justice practitioners" (p. 276). Stereotypes about socioeconomic status and positioning within society are also prevalent in the media (Goldberg, 1990) where low status can be conveyed by casting African Americans as workers and athletes. An example of this can be seen in the movies *Draft Day* (2014) and *Undefeated* (2011) where the bosses and coaches are depicted as White, and the majority of the players are Black. If most of the messages that are communicated in the media depict Black culture as low status and law-breaking but portray White culture as more privileged and better than all others, then people will only grow to learn just that.

Racialization of Black and Brown People in Society and Media

Families of Black and Brown children are faced with the honor and responsibility of fostering their children with cultural values and beliefs that prepare them to engage in a globally diverse society (French-Lee, 2018; Gaskin, 2015). For example, a parent may buy their child books with Black and Brown characters as leaders to help them to see themselves as a leader in society. Unfortunately, parents of Black and Brown children also must teach their children how to navigate a society that perpetuates narratives that are damaging to them as well, for example, a

parent and child watching the news about a Black man being falsely accused of a crime and being depicted as a thug. “Parents often must counteract messages their youth receive from broader society including the media, and the judicial, educational and health systems, to name a few” (Gaskin, 2015, para. 1). This means that although Black and Brown families are teaching their children about positive cultural values and beliefs, sometimes, the messages about Black and Brown people, especially in children’s literature, do the exact opposite and provide stereotypical narratives about Black and Brown culture that are harmful, ultimately leading to a threat of *our* survival in society. If Black and Brown people are negatively racialized in various forms of media that children are exposed to, including children’s literature, then the efforts of Black families in helping their children build cultural pride and understanding will be in vain.

Stereotyping in various forms of media does more than support false and distorted narratives about minorities. It also contributes to the way children are racialized in society. Racialization refers to the social process of assigning identities and characteristics to a racial group that can be beneficial or detrimental depending on the race and the attribute assigned (Adamson, 2016). This means that ideas and beliefs about a particular race of people, such as the hobbies they engage in or the abilities they display, are applied to every person who identifies with that race no matter their intersecting identities or individual experiences. For example, the narratives surrounding Black women in society have been problematic for many years (Collins, 2002; K. Crenshaw, 1991). Littlefield (2008) stated that:

> Beginning with the welfare queen image during the Reagan administration and moving to the porno chick represented in current videos, society views a daily discourse on race, gender, and class that continues to reproduce dominant and distorted views of African American womanhood and sexuality. (p. 675)

These prevailing and persistent depictions can have pernicious effects that potentially limit Black women's vision of themselves as doctors, scientists, businesswomen, and so much more.

Another example of this type of racialization is the use of statistics in the media to depict families of low socioeconomic status. "Black families represent 59% of the poor in news and opinion media but make up just 27% of the poor, while White families represent 17% of the poor in news and opinion media but make up 66% of the poor" (Dixon, 2017, para. 1). One may argue that the data itself does not impact socioeconomic status; still, one must consider that it is a factor, among other variables (e.g., employment discrimination based on race) that affect Black people in achieving their socioeconomic goals. If Black children come to see themselves as inherently prone to be poverty-stricken, they will not be able to see how socioeconomically successful they can be—or even be able to consider how the construct of "poverty-stricken" is used to situate them politically and socially in detrimental ways.

Black and Brown Males in Society and Media

> The frequency with which Black men specifically have been the target of mistakenly placed police aggression speaks to the undeniable role that race plays in false assumptions of danger and criminality. (Oliver, 2003, p. 3)
>
> A project minded individual, criminal tactics / Us black kids born with birth defects, we hyperactive / Mentally sex-crazed, dysfunctional, they describe us / They liars, at the end of the day, we're fuckin' survivors.
>
> —Nas, *Triple Beam Dreams*

Like Nas said, we're some survivors, but that's not what many of the stories in the media say about *us.* Many stories surrounding Black and Brown males in various forms of media depict *us* as being criminalistic, poverty-stricken, dangerous, and aggressive (Falkner, 2018; Smiley &

Fakunle, 2016). When these types of images are portrayed through the media, various members of society may develop false and misconstrued ideas about Black and Brown males that directly impact *our* health, well-being, and even our safety in society. For example, at this moment, as I write, protests are happening across the nation in response to the shootings and killings of Black and Brown boys and men (e.g., Jacob Blake, David McAtee, George Floyd, Michael Ramos, Charles Roundtree, Chinedu Okobi, Antwon Rose Jr., Stephon Clark, Aaron Bailey). These protests unquestionably point back to similar, earlier tragedies, such as the death of Trayvon Martin. On February 26, 2012, an investigation began into the fatal shooting of the Black male teen by a neighborhood watchman. At roughly 7:00pm, a neighborhood watch captain, called 9-1-1 dispatch to report a suspicious individual in a gated community. After he notified the dispatcher that he followed the individual, the dispatcher told him, "We don't need you to do that" (CNN Wire Staff, 2012). Reports show that Martin was returning from a local convenience store. Even though instructed not to follow, the watchman continued to pursue the 17-teen year old until he reported that he lost sight of him. According to CNN roughly between 7:09pm – 7:16pm, Martin was shot and killed. At the time of his murder, the teenager was unarmed and carried a small amount of money, a bag of Skittles candy, and a can of iced tea. The United States Department of Justice (2015) reported that after the investigation into all the facts and evidence surrounding Martin's killing, there was not enough evidence to prove beyond reasonable doubt that he violated any federal criminal statutes. Sadly, Black men such as Oscar Grant (22-years-old), Michael Brown (18-years-old), Botham Jean (26-years-old), Freddie Gray (25-years-old), George Floyd (46-years-old), and many others have been victims of aggressive and questionable law-enforcement actions, resulting in death. If the narratives surrounding Black and Brown males in the media are consistently criminalistic, dangerous, and suspicious, then we

will only be known as just that. When these types of negative attitudes are racially applied to all Black and Brown males, the consequences are perilous and can even lead to death. Consider Ahmaud Arbery; he was chased, shot, and brutally murdered near his neighborhood by two White men who misidentified him as a burglar. Officials later discovered that these White men lied about the burglaries to justify their position (Villafranca, 2019).

The wrongful racialization of Black and Brown males as being possibly dangerous or suspicious is also a consistent misconception in society as well (Falkner, 2018; Jones, 2005; Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). The case of the Central Park Five, renamed the Exonerated Five, whose story was transformed into an award-winning limited series titled *When They See Us* (DuVernay, 2019) is an example of how teenage Black and Brown males are placed at danger because of how society portrays them. On April 19, 1989, Trisha Meili, a 28-year-old White woman, was jogging through New York's Central Park when she was brutally assaulted (History.com Editors, 2021). After recovering from her head injuries, Meili was unable to recall anything from the assault. Elizabeth Lederer, who was the lead prosecutor, and Linda Fairstein, who was the head of the sex crimes unit of the Manhattan District Attorney's office, were two of many people who falsely accused the five Black teenagers of the attack. Following multiple prolonged periods of intense interrogation and maltreatment, Yusef Salaam (15-years-old), Kevin Richardson (14-years-old), Antron McCray (15-years-old), Raymond Santana (14-years-old) and Korey Wise (16-years-old) admitted to the attack. After years of further investigation, "on December 19, 2002, on the recommendation of the Manhattan District Attorney, the convictions of the five men were overturned" (The National Registry of Exonerations, 2014). Ultimately, Raymond Santana served 5 years, Kevin Richardson served over 5 years, Antron McCray served 6 years, Yusef Salaam served over 6 years, and Korey Wise served over 11 years

for crimes they did not commit, but for which their race fit a dominant cultural narrative (History.com Editors, 2021).

Because Black men are hegemonically depicted as criminals, impoverished, threatening, and hostile within the media, society continues to racialize all Black men as such. These racializations can lead to racism, fears, and stereotypes that ultimately impact Black and Brown males in detrimental and deadly ways. It is critical, for the sake of Black and Brown males, that more research is done on the representation and depiction of Black and Brown males in various forms of media (e.g., films, news, and children's literature). With its focus on children's literature, this study intends to do just that.

Black and Brown Males in Children's Literature

> Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign. But stories can also be used to empower, and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people. But stories can also repair that broken dignity.
>
> Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *The Danger of a Single Story*

> A wide variety of communicative channels, modalities, and meanings helps to expand the stories that get told, circulated, and remixed, thereby challenging single stories about individuals and groups, and opening up interpretive space for multiple possible meanings. (Thomas, 2019, p. 3)

Stories matter, and for decades, scholars and researchers have explored the stories and depictions of Black and Brown characters in children's literature (Bishop, 1982; Broderick, 1973; Brooks & McNair, 2009; V. J. Harris, 1990; Larrick, 1965; Thomas, 2019). Crippen (2012) states:

> Children's literature is important because it provides students with opportunities to respond to literature; it gives students appreciation about their own cultural heritage as well as those of others; it helps students develop emotional intelligence and creativity; it nurtures growth and development of the student's personality and social skills; and it transmits important literature and themes from one generation to the next. (para. 1)

This means that books that depict Black and Brown culture are significant because not only do they give children chances to engage with the book, but it also helps them to build pride, understanding, and the skills needed to navigate society. By understanding the collective results and findings of research studies surrounding the representation of Black and Brown culture in children's literature, researchers will be better positioned to understand how change can take place on various levels (internal, interpersonal, institutional, structural) to ensure that Black and Brown people are positively represented in children's books. For example, Brooks and McNair (2009) offer a synthesis of research on the representation of African Americans in children's literature. One of the questions from the study asked what is known about how readers in kindergarten through grade 12 respond to and understand African American children's literature. One study in the synthesis focused on the responses of African American children to books featuring African American characters. The study showed that, "participants reportedly enjoyed and identified with large portions of the stories, but at the same time, they felt uncomfortable, embarrassed, and offended by stylistic elements such as the usage of African American Vernacular English (AAVE)" (p.135). This means that although the readers (who identified as African American) did find some type of joy in reading books that depicted Black and Brown characters, they were still humiliated and insulted by some of the elements of the books. In addition to this study, Barchas (1971) explored 219 fifth grade students' interest in various

fictional stories. Results showed that students who identified as being a person of color expressed a high degree of interest in titles and topics relating to their own ethnic group and their own immediate environment. This means that if these books that reflect students of color can be used to grab the attention of students, then they can also be used to help students build literary understanding, cultural consciousness, and joy in who they are.

Unfortunately, the visual and textual representations in many books depicting Black and Brown culture are detrimental to Black and Brown people. Harris (1990) stated that the picturebook, *The Story of Little Black Sambo*, which was published in 1899, is highly recognized as being a popular book for the racist and stereotypical images within it. “Illustrations show Black people as simian-like or with protruding eyes and large, red lips, extremely dark skin, and, in the case of males, long, gangly arms" (Harris, 1990, p. 542). In the 20th century, Nancy Larrick (1965) explored 5,206 children's trade books produced within a three-year period by 63 different publishers. Not only did the study show that there was an overwhelming disproportion in the representation of characters (e.g., more depiction of White characters than Black and Brown characters), very few of the books reflected the contemporary Black child of the 1960s; the vast majority were stories of slavery or African folk tales. Bishop (1982) explored 150 books and looked at (1) modern-day realistic fiction about Black and Brown people in a socio-cultural and historical context, (2) social conscience books written mainly to help White people understand the condition of Black and Brown people in the United States, (3) melting pot books written for Black, Brown, and White people on the assumption that they all need to know that Black and Brown children are exactly like other American children--except for the color of their skin, and (4) culturally conscious books written for Black and Brown readers that try to reflect the individuality and the general humaneness of Black and Brown experiences from the

perspective of a Black and Brown child or family. Results showed that many of the books (1) see the world through a colorblind perspective, (2) do not reflect Black and Brown people as being members of general American culture, and (3) promote and advance racist and stereotypical portrayals of Black and Brown children. Sims (1984) examined the book, *A Girl Called Boy* (1982), which depicted a Black character. Results found that the book lacked cultural authenticity, perpetuated stereotypes, and even depicted scenes of kindness towards slave owners and indecisive feelings towards them.

In the 21st century, scholarly research surrounding the stories and depictions of Black and Brown characters in children's literature continued (Falkner, 2018; Kurz, 2012; Winograd, 2011). Winograd (2011) explored children's books that depicted African American professional football players. "After a textual analysis of eight popular biographies, the study found that these children's books tend to reflect the racism in the form of colorblindness, in which the cultural and racial experience of African American football players is dismissed and ignored" (Winograd, 2011, p. 331). Kurz (2012) studied 112 South Carolina Picture Book Award nominees that had at least one human character. In the end, he concluded that "when the books with African American characters are taken as a set, racism and oppression are seen only in historical settings, as problems African Americans had to overcome, but essentially in the past" (Kurz, 2012, p. 142). In 2018, Falkner explored a set of books that depicted the neighborhood spaces in Ezra Jack Keats books. Results showed that the author depicted Peter, the main character, as a "wandering and delinquent Black boy." The problem is that when Black children are consistently depicted as wandering and delinquent in children's literature, those who are exposed to these books will grow to learn that Black and Brown males are just that.

The results of these studies are alarming in many ways. If children from a very young age--no matter their race/ethnicity--are exposed to representations (e.g., visual and text) of Black and Brown males that depict them as delinquent and menacing or that depict racism as a thing of the past, then children will begin to racialize and think about all Black men as delinquent and threatening and not make connections between present-day oppression and the images they see in media. With this consistent and continuous narrative in society at large and in children's literature, young readers (e.g., preschool-aged children) will learn to believe that Black and Brown males have only one story; that they are aggressive, disorderly, wandering, and a lesser part of society. It is crucial, for the sake of Black and Brown males, that more critical research is done on the representation and depiction of Black and Brown males in children's literature and the impact that these depictions have on various readers.

Thomas (2019) stated that her "emerging critical consciousness as a reader, creative writer, and fangirl were soon on a collision course with my [her] experiences as a teacher, scholar, and critic" (p. 2). These words also serve as a fabric to this study as my own personal critical consciousness and awareness as a reader, writer, and lover of children's literature too collided with my experiences as a teacher, coach, and researcher. By studying the past and current research surrounding the representation of Black and Brown people in children's literature, scholars will be equipped with the knowledge and understanding to support efforts to positively depict Black and Brown culture in children's literature.

Prizing Children's Literature

Prizing and awarding practices within the world of children's media in the U.S., specifically children's literature, has a long history and has been an ongoing topic of discussion (Allen, 2019; Bostic III, 2019; Fitzsimmons, 2017; Kidd, 2007; Kidd & Thomas, 2016; Williams

& Broadway, 1995; Zeece, 1999). Prizing can be described as the understanding, confirming, and promotion of media, such as movies and books, based on one or a combination of its various qualities such as visual, moral, educational, financial, cultural, or some combination thereof by the organization(s) who award them (Bostic, 2019; Fitzsimmons, 2017; Kidd & Thomas, 2017). There are over 300 awards for English-language children's literature, such as the Caldecott Medal, Belpré Medal, Odyssey Award, and Ezra Jack Keats Award. These awards arguably increase the value of books as they become merchandising tools to influence the purchasing decisions of readers (Kidd & Thomas, 2017; Williams & Broadway, 1995). The influence of these awards is substantial.

Specifically, there are three awards that I would like to highlight: The Newbery Medal, the Caldecott Medal, and the Ezra Jack Keats Book Awards because of their distinction and values they promote. The John Newbery Medal was created in 1922 by Frederic G. Melcher, making it the first children's book award in the world (American Library Association (ALA), n.d.a). The award honors the author with the most prominent contribution to American literature for young children. The purpose of the medal is to (1) inspire unique original literary work in the field of children's literature, (2) to highlight and share with the public that contributions to literature for children deserve the same acknowledgment that films, novels, plays, or other works of art get, and (3) to give librarians a chance to encourage esteemed and respected writings in the field of children's literature. After the establishment of the Newbery Medal, concerns were raised about the prizing of visuals in children's books, with proponents stressing that illustrators also make major contributions to the creation of picturebooks and are just as deserving of an award. To answer that critique, the Caldecott Medal was created in 1937 in honor of 19th century illustrator, Randolph Caldecott. The award honors the illustrator with the most distinguished

contributions to American picturebooks (ALA, n.d.b). The Ezra Jack Keats New Writer Award created in 1985 and the Ezra Jack Keats New Illustrator Award established in 2001 by the Ezra Jack Keats Foundation boosts new and emerging talent in the world of children's literature (de Grummond Children's Literature Collection, n.d.) Books selected for the award "highlight the universal qualities of childhood and the strength of the family, reflect the multicultural nature of our world, avoid stereotypes, and [are] respectful of the child's intelligence, sensitivity, curiosity, and love of learning" (De Grummond Collection, n.d.).

Despite their positive intent, there are some challenges and limitations surrounding the Newberry, Caldecott, and Ezra Jack Keats awards. Since the creation of the Newbery Medal in 1922 and the Caldecott Medal in 1937, a persistent debate has surrounded the role of awarding, the value of prizing, and the beliefs that influence the selection of award-winning children's books (Kidd & Thomas, 2017; Williams & Broadway, 1995). One of the biggest tensions is the role of the award committee in the selection of and awarding of books (Kidd & Thomas, 2017). If there is a lack of diversity in the representation of committee members from various cultural backgrounds, the books selected may not reflect the diversity and multiple experiences of all children in society. "More particularly, critics worry that prizing affirms and secures social privilege, favoring white male authors over female minority authors, for instance" (Kidd & Thomas, 2017, p. 3). Although many prizes claim to be international, many of them tend to encourage the ideas and beliefs of a specific country, language, and culture (Kidd & Thomas, 2017). "Prizing obviously works by exclusion, no matter how much it eschews the language of failure; for every winner there are countless losers" (p. 3).

This question of winners and losers takes on pertinence when one thinks about the goals of a prize in relation to its readers. For example, given that Black and Brown children are among

the readers of Ezra Jack Keats award-winners, the prized books, by the Foundation's own description, should not contain any stereotypical, harmful, or racialized images of different cultural backgrounds. Unfortunately, as for many awards, this is not the case (Falkner, 2018; Pescosolido et al., 1997). The problem is that when books are prized for being nonstereotypical and respectful of a child's intelligence, those who use them, such as librarians and teachers, may automatically endorse these books in various spaces without critically examining the text and illustrations (Kidd & Thomas, 2017). If these texts are not critically examined by those who use them, endorse them, and prize them, they can be deployed to describe, confirm, and promote racialized and stereotypical stories that ultimately harm Black and Brown children for generations to come.

Summary

This chapter provided a literature review of race and Black men in media and society. The chapter began by discussing how Critical Race Theory can be effective in supporting the critical analysis through the lens of its six tenets: (1) the critique of colorblindness, (2) permanence of racism, (3) interest convergence, (4) race as a social construction, (5) counter storytelling, and (6) whiteness as property. Using this theoretical frame, I hope the results from this study help to shape the way authors, illustrators, publishers, teachers, and the world of prizing children's literature understand how messages about race, racism, power, and Black and Brown males are communicated through picturebooks. The chapter ended by exploring various children's literature prizes, the value of prizing, and the beliefs that influence the choice of award-winning picturebooks. Additionally, I hope that this dissertation provides support to teachers by providing them with a lens through which they may choose children's picturebooks that positively portray the lived experiences of Black and Brown boys. My stance is that if the

texts and images of these prized books are not critically examined, they can continue to promote racist and stereotypical narratives about Black and Brown males in society and leave unexamined messages about race, racism, and power.

INTERLUDE: CROWN

So imma just say this. When I first started the Ph.D. program, I had no clue what I wanted to research, but I would get asked, “What do you want to research?” every day. Like bruh, I don’t even know the difference between qualitative and quantitative research right now and you sittin’ up here asking me bout what I want to study. Hell. Idk. Do you know what you want to study?! So I'm going along in this journey of trying to figure out what I want to research, and I stumble upon a professor whose work revolves around children’s literature. And to be honest, I like kids' books too. When I taught at my unversity’s preschool, books were the easiest thing for me to pick up and connect to children with. I use to act out the characters, be dramatic, act a plum fool with books. But the kids' loved it, I loved it, and it made me happy. So why not study something that made me happy? I remember this same professor telling me about the lack of presentation of Black character’s in children’s literature, and any book that I can get my hands on with a Black character in it, BUY IT. So a few years later, I attended the National Council of Teachers of English Conference (NCTE). If you don’t know, it’s a super dope conference with so many amazing people. ELA teachers, professors, authors, illustrators, everyone who I could possibly think of was at this conference. Lord behold one day I'm walking through the convention center and see this long line of people. Of course, I'm thinking who are these folks waiting for!? Is it Beyoncé? Michelle Obama? Barack? So I walk in, and it’s a Black dude sitting at a small table and behind him I see a poster with a book titled *Crown: An Ode to a Fresh Cut.* I never heard of the book, but I do remember the professor telling me to get my hands on every book that I can with a Black character in it, BUY IT. So at this point I'm thrilled – a book with a Black kid on the cover?? I thought to myself that this could also be a dope book to study – the text, the illustrations – so much could come out of a study of this book. So I contemplated – stay in this long line, buy a book, and have this dude sign it, or jump out of line and attend a session. Guess what I did? Bought that book.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

You better open your mind to read between the lines.

—Aaliyah, *Read Between the Lines*

As I described in Chapter 1, the purpose of this study is to explore two children's picturebooks for messages of race, racism, and power as they relate to Black males: the Ezra Jack Keats Book Award winner, *Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut*, authored by Derrick Barnes and illustrated by Gordon C. James, and the Ezra Jack Keats Honor book, *Windows*, authored by Julia Denos and illustrated by E.B. Goodale. This study is guided by the following research question: How are race, racism, and power depicted in *Crown* and *Windows*? In this chapter, I first detail the design of the study, which includes textual and visual analysis and critical content analysis. Next, I describe my sample, data sources, data collection, and analysis. Finally, I address measures that I implemented to safeguard trustworthiness.

Research Design

My inquiry was framed through the lens of Critical Race Theory. Therefore, in designing my study, I chose to utilize methods that provided me with the opportunity to describe the relationship between the tenets of CRT and the two books included in the sample. These methods are described in the subsections that follow.

Content Analysis vs. Critical Content Analysis

In the following section, I will describe both content analysis and critical content analysis. Although both methods can be used to understand the presence of certain themes or concepts in documents, such as representation of diversity, there are distinct differences between the two. In determining the best method to use to address my research question of how race,

racism, and power are depicted in the two picturebooks, I considered the differences between content analysis and critical content analysis.

Content Analysis.

Because of its highly flexible research approach in studying a wide variety of documents (e.g., research studies, interviews, legislative records, legal forms, media texts), content analysis has been commonly used in library and information science studies for varying research purposes (Krippendorff, 1989; Mayring, 2010; White & Marsh, 2006). Content analysis is a structured coding and categorizing method that can be used to explore existing qualitative or quantitative data (large or small data sets) in order to discover the trends and patterns used, the rate in which these patterns occurred, their relationships, structures, contexts, and discourses of communication (Krippendorff, 1989). This means that content analysis can be used as a systematic approach to examine pre-existing textual and visual data such as books, interviews, videotapes, and documents to understand meanings and relationships of images, words, themes, or discourses (Krippendorff, 1989; Mayring, 2004;). Through this method, researchers can make inferences about the messages within the data. Further, the method is adaptable, in that content analysis gives researchers the ability to decide on the content that they would like to investigate, thus giving them the opportunity to construct ideas that may be meaningful to society in various ways (Krippendorff, 1989).

Although content analysis has proven to be impactful, such as in addressing the need for more diversity in children's literature (Crisp et. al, 2016), the method does not critically question, specifically, how various ideologies such as race, racism, and power are represented throughout various media. This means that this approach for analyzing data will not sufficiently support the need for understanding how the text and images within a picturebook explicitly or implicitly

portray ideas of race, racism, and power that contribute to the negative racialization surrounding Black and Brown people. If content analysis does not adequately and critically interrogate how ideas of race, racism, and power can be communicated through various forms of media, such as picturebooks, then it will not sufficiently be able to support me in identifying how race, racism, and power are communicated through the text and visual imagery in my sample of books. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, I rely on critical content analysis.

Critical Content Analysis.

Perspectives and implementations of critical theory have ranged throughout history (e.g., critical legal studies, critical theory of technology, psychoanalysis, Critical Race Theory) (Apple et al., 2010; Beach et al., 2009; Bogdan & Biklen, 1997; Harney, 2014; H. Johnson et al., 2016). Critical theory, an approach traced back to the Frankfurt School, is a philosophy that names and actively challenges injustices in various social, political, and economic structures, institutions, and organizations. This constant questioning and interrogation of these systems can be used to understand privileges and disadvantages within society (Apple, Au, & Gandin, 2009; Bogdan & Biklen, 1997; Harney, 2014). The basic premise of critical theory includes uncovering current methods of power and oppression and presenting alternative possibilities that liberate those who were once and still are oppressed (Harney, 2014). This means that a "critical theorist would rather benefit those who are marginalized in the society because they believe that the current way society is organized is unjust" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997, p. 21). For instance, feminist theory is the stance of believing in the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes (Adichie, 2014). Although feminist theory helps to understand the privileges and oppressions that women faced and still face, Black feminist theory aids in understanding the privileges and oppressions that Black and Brown women specifically face (Collins, 2002; hooks, 2000). Black feminist

scholars and advocates such as bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, and Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw are critical theorists who use Black feminist thought to help them think about how race and sex intersect together to create issues surrounding Black and Brown women. Another example of critical theory is critical multiculturalism. "Critical multiculturalism gives priority to structural analysis of unequal power relationships, analyzing the role of institutionalized inequities, including but not necessarily limited to racism" (May & Sleeter, 2010, p. 10). While multiculturalism has helped scholars to think about the representation of various cultural identities in various spaces, critical multiculturalism pays special attention to the inequities of power within societal relationships that relate to all cultural identities such as race, gender, ability, sexual orientation, social class and more. If critical theories, such as critical content analysis, can be used to understand, name, and actively challenge racism and other forms of injustices in children's literature, then it can be an effective method for understanding how race, racism, and power are communicated through the text and visual imagery in the books in my sample.

Comparisons Between CA and CCA.

Though connected, content analysis and critical content analysis differ in significant ways (Hardy et al., 2004; Hererra & Braumoeller, 2004). Hardy et. al (2004) states that content analysis assumes that meaning is static and reflects reality in ways that can be learned by using systematic methods. In comparison, critical content analysis believes that meaning is fluid and that reality is constructed in ways that can be theorized through the use of a specific lens or lenses. This means that content analysis maintains that truth can be defined based on a specific occurrence, whereas with critical content analysis, truth varies and is based on the theoretical lens or perspective that one is thinking with, in, and across (Hardy et al,, 2004). Content also

plays different roles within content analysis and critical content analysis. Content analysis does not necessarily link text and images to context (e.g., circumstances for specific events that take place) (Hardy et al., 2004). In contrast, critical content analysis does connect text to context, but only within the theoretical/philosophical framework(s) used. Therefore, although content analysis may not always provide an explicit connection between the data and larger societal ideas, critical content analysis does. If critical content analysis can be used as a sufficient method in exploring the connection between data in various samples and societal ideas, then it can be effective in helping me to understand the connection between data from the picturebooks in my sample and societal ideas such as race, racism, and power.

Reliability is also another difference between the two methods. Reliability refers to the "consistency between the data you collect and report and the empirical world you are studying" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997, pg. 265). Reliability relates more to the accuracy of the researcher's explanation and account of the subject of research (e.g., picturebook) than with their interpretation of the findings and how these findings connect to other research and theory (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997). In content analysis, "formal measures of intercoder reliability are crucial for measurement purposes; differences in interpretation are problematic and risk nullifying any results" (Hardy et al., 2004, p. 21). This means that with intercoder reliability, there are systems in place that make sure that when multiple researchers code a set of data, they all come to the same result or conclusion (e.g., researchers identifying the quantity of a certain occurrence taking place during an observation). If these results differ, this can be problematic because it can be inferred that the analysis is not valid and that there is no shared judgement amongst the research team. In critical content analysis researchers maintain that differences in understanding amongst members of a research team can also serve as sources of data. For

example, if a team of researchers was to examine a children's book and specifically look at how race, racism, and power are represented, the ways in which they see these ideas represented may differ depending on that researcher's perspective. With CCA each of these differences in understanding can serve as data points. As Hardy et al. (2004) stated, meaning and interpretation are fluid and one's truth is constructed through not only the use of a specific theoretical lens but also through one's histories and experiences (e.g., a Black man thinking about police brutality in America in comparison to a White man). These differences in interpretation can serve as sources of data, especially when exploring counter-narratives (a tenet of CRT). Since critical content analysis supports the idea that differences in understanding can serve as sources of data, it can be used when helping me to examine how race, racism, and power are represented in the two picturebooks in my sample.

Ultimately, critical content analysis is an effective approach for understanding various forms of privilege and oppression in society because it is a method that focuses on how different concepts are represented in various social, political, and economic spaces, such as children's literature. For this study, critical content analysis allowed me to read deeply within the Critical Race Theory framework and think about various ways that the tenets are represented throughout the books in the sample. Critical content analysis also helped me to examine and consider the sociohistorical and cultural context of not only the text in the books but of the visual imagery as well. While doing this, I read related research studies and examined how these tenets were represented within their samples. I considered my own positionality, perspective, and beliefs related to the research purpose and documented these thoughts via memos. I used the tenets of CRT as the lens through which I explored issues of race, racism, and power across the sample. As I continued to do close readings of the text using the analytical tools created (described

below), I also engaged in monthly conversations with a peer reviewer (colleague) and weekly conversations with expert debriefers (Ph.D. advisors) to help expand my thinking and consider ways in which these tenets operated throughout the sample. Therefore, critical content analysis proved to be an effective method for understanding various forms of privilege and oppression in society and how these ideas are operationalized in the books examined in this study.

Textual and Visual Analysis

Textual and visual analysis are both inquiry processes that can be used to yield information about various data sets (Dines, 1998; Fairclough, 2003; Flener, 2008; McKee, 2003; Ricle-Mayorga, 2007; Schroeder, 2006; Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001; Vincent, 2004). "When we perform textual analysis on a text, we make an educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of that text" (McKee, 2003). This means that the interpretation of various texts, such as newspapers, magazines, and books, helps researchers to understand the ways in which people understand the world (Fairclough, 2003; McKee, 2003). Since textual and visual analysis can both be used to question data, then they can be used to question data related to picturebooks.

An example of how textual analysis can be used to illuminate understandings of the world can be seen in Flener (2008) when the researcher explored national media statements surrounding actions at the Superdome, Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, and New Orleans International Airport, before, throughout, and after Hurricane Katrina. Results from the textual analysis showed that (1) reports described numerous people in New Orleans as extremely poor, and (2) reports did not mention why many people did not leave New Orleans before, during, or after the hurricane. Information from an analysis like this "may prompt government officials to act quicker before a disaster strikes to help those who cannot help themselves." (p. 54). Another

example of textual analysis and its benefits can be noted in Vincent (2004) in which the investigator examined British newspaper coverage of female and male tennis players in the 2000 Wimbledon Championships through the lens of gender and its intersection with race. Results showed that mostly male reporters commonly devalued the accomplishments of female tennis players through the use of cultural and racial stereotypes and sexual insinuations, making them seem less important. The results of this study revealed that the newspaper coverage was filled with "hegemonic masculinity that intersected with discourses of race and class in ways that served to produce striking contrasts between tennis players of the two genders and to reproduce and legitimize the gender order" (Vincent, 2004, p. 452). Furthermore, Daly (2018) used textual analysis to explore the linguistic landscape of over 200 picturebooks that used dual languages (Spanish and English). Researchers discovered that most of the books in the sample included both languages on the same page but were often separated using various visual cues (p. 562). Additionally, the translations from English to Spanish were the same in many instances, but in some, these translations differed. For example, researchers found in the book, "Is this your ball? No, our ball is a tennis ball' and '¿Es esta tu pelota? No, la nuestra pelota es una pelota de basket' [Is this your ball? No, our ball is a basketball]" (p. 563). This direct use of textual analysis helped to show not only how language is represented in picturebooks, but also how problematic translations from one language to another can be. In the current study, textual analysis allowed me to connect the texts used in the sample to broader social, political, and cultural contexts. In this study, textual analysis helped me to look at word choices, location of text on pages, the type of language used (e.g., Black English Vernacular), and the relationship of the text with other texts or cultural references to better understand how race, racism, and power are articulated through children's picturebooks.

Similarly, visual analysis can be explained as a method for understanding, describing, and explaining various forms of art (e.g., paintings, sculptures, drawings) by paying special attention to the art's visual features such as style, color, lines, textures, space, composition, and scale (Dines, 1998; Ricle Mayorga, 2007; Schroeder, 2006; Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001). "Visual analysis can also recognize the choices that an artist made in creating the artwork, as well as to better understand how the formal properties of an artwork communicate ideas, content, or meaning" (Herbert Johnson Museum of Art, n.d., p. 1). This process can be illustrated in Ricle Mayorga (2007) when the researcher examined the visual representations of females in two different magazines, *Latina* and *Glamour*. Results showed that *Latina* depicted the diversity of the community, pushed against stereotyping and constructed a pan-ethnic Hispanic/Latino identity. On the other hand, *Glamour* depicted women in stereotypical home settings more than *Latina*, and focused on love, sex, and relationships more than *Latina.* Another illustration of visual analysis is when Dines (1998) explored the depiction of Black men in a mass dispersed pornography magazine, *Hustler*. Results from the study show that Black men were overly sexually objectified and depicted in the magazine as being infatuated with the size of their penis, draining White men's access to women, and having money status. This contrasted with the representation of White men, who were depicted as seeking out penis enlargers, lacking access to women because of Black men, and as "working-class, middle-aged men whose flabby body is no match for the muscular, enormous Black body" (Dines, 1998, p. 300). This idea of the hypersexualized Black and Brown person is also supported in Kendi (2016), who states that even as early as the 16th century, Black and Brown people were tied "to hypersexuality, to animals, and to the lack of reason" (p. 29). Additionally, Gultekin and May (2020) used visual analysis to explore how Middle Eastern Muslims were represented using words and images in picturebooks.

The researchers used visual analysis to analyze the book *Mirror,* a book that shows the comparison of the lives of two boys, one who lives in a rural area in Morocco, and the other in a large-scale Australian city. “The depiction of the two boys’ families eating breakfast shows the Western family loading a dishwasher and typing on a computer while eating cereal; the Middle Eastern family is shown milking a cow and cooking in a clay oven” (p. 632). This direct use of visual analysis helped to show how problematic stereotypes are represented visually.

In this study, visual analysis allowed me to connect the visuals used in the sample to a broader social, political, and cultural context. Textual and visual analysis can both be used to make visible the various discourses operating through the text and images of picturebooks (Fairclough, 2003). Discourses within picturebooks represent real or imagined worlds that can be used to shift the minds and worlds of children in certain directions. “Discourses constitute part of the resources which people deploy in relating to one another – keeping separate from one another, cooperating, competing, dominating – and in seeking to change the ways in which they relate to one another” (Fairclough, 2003, p.124). In relation to the discourses operating in books, textual and visual analysis can be used to describe the content, format, and roles of the books’ messages and can provide valuable information regarding different cultures and histories. In this study, textual and visual analysis helped me to think about the ways that the ideas of race, racism, and power are communicated through the text and visual imagery of the book. For example, I was able to ask myself not only how racism is depicted through the images used within the books, but also if there were forms of linguistic racism conveyed through the text as well. Linguistic racism can be described as the discrimination and oppression of people based upon their use of language (e.g., characteristics of speech, accent, syntax, vocabulary) (De Costa, 2020; Young et al., 2018). Linguistic racism is detrimental not only because it generates tensions

between those who have different ways of speaking, but it also oppresses those whose language is considered "other" which can lead to cultural misunderstanding and further inequities. Therefore, textual and visual analysis are effective methods that can be used when examining picturebooks for ideas of race, racism, and power.

Deductive Analysis

I used a deductive thematic approach for data analysis in this study. Specifically, I relied on Clarke and Braun's (2012) thematic analysis, which I will explore in more detail later in this chapter. Deductive analysis is a data approach that helps researchers understand and interpret various forms of data while conducting different types of content analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997; Braun & Clarke, 2012; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Mayring, 2010). Deductive analysis, or deductive coding, is when researchers choose to collect, analyze, and interpret data through predeveloped themes, categories, and codes that are derived from various theoretical frameworks (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Mayring, 2004). "Deductive content analysis is used when the structure of analysis is operationalized on the basis of previous knowledge" (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008, p. 107). Therefore, when researchers analyze data through the deductive process, themes, categories, and codes are predetermined based on specific philosophical frameworks or previous research. For example, Crisp et al. (2016) conducted a deductive content analysis on 21 classroom libraries. Children's books were coded based on multiple previous researchers' ideologies, previous tools created for related types of research, and multicultural identities such as parallel cultures, socioeconomic statuses, abilities, sexual identities, religions, and genders. This means that the researchers were able to use their selected choice of theoretical framework, themes, categories, and codes through a systematic process that yielded results that pushed the agenda for the need for more diverse children's literature.

Since a deductive thematic approach, such as the thematic process proposed by Braun and Clarke (2012), can be used to collect, analyze, and interpret data, then it can be used in various studies to understand how the tenets of various theoretical frameworks are operationalized in picturebooks. Another example of a deductive approach can be seen in the Sciurba (2020) study in which the researcher explored five different children's books that discuss acts of White supremacy and hate and are written as a first-person narrative. Through a deductive approach, the researcher used Critical Race Theory, critical whiteness studies, and critical multicultural theory to analyze the books. Because the researcher approached the study through specific lenses, the researcher was able to develop and test their hypotheses based on the tenets of each theory. Results from this study showed that with the books that did address ideas of White supremacy, they had a tendency to include narratives about White police officers shooting and killing Black and Brown people. These books also included uprisings and protests that followed the killings of Black and Brown people. Additionally, there was variation within the sample related to the explicit explanation about the racist incidents that took place, naming of the White perpetrator(s), and the description of how these occurrences are deeply rooted in White supremacy. This shows that the researchers were able to effectively apply the tenets of Critical Race Theory to help them understand how messages of race, racism, and power are communicated through the text and visual imagery in the book. Similarly, to Sciurba, the theoretical framework that I used for deductive analysis in this study is Critical Race Theory, which I describe next through a review of research studies applying CRT to children's literature.

CRT in Children's Literature

Critical content analysis of children's literature has helped to further conversations surrounding various forms of privilege and oppression represented in children's literature (Beach

et al., 2009; Johnson et al., 2016). In addition to Sciurba (2020) mentioned above, an illustration of this can be seen when Acevedo (2017) took a deductive approach and used the lenses of postcolonial theory and Critical Race Theory to study 20 modern, realistic picturebooks that were published between 2000-2016 and depict Puerto Rican culture. Not only did the results show a lack of African and/or Afro-Puerto Rican identity represented in the sample, but there were also counter stories that push against the assumption that Latinx parents do not value education. This critical analysis of the sample books' text and visual imagery through the lens of CRT enabled the researchers to notice the underrepresentation of African and/or Afro-Puerto Rican culture, as well as recognize various counter-narratives about Latinx culture. When African and/or Afro-Puerto Rican culture is continuously underrepresented in books, children from the culture may never have the opportunity to see themselves in literature. At the same time, when books do provide counter-narratives about Latinx culture, they help to dismantle harmful stereotypes that can have negative impacts on Latinx culture.

Critical Race Theory has helped researchers understand counter-narratives and the privileging of the English language and monolingual readers as well. Using a deductive approach, Rodrigues and Braden (2018) looked at issues of power when they explored 13 children's picturebooks published between the years of 2010 and 2016 that portray Latinx immigration experiences within the United States. Results showed that three of the main narratives within the set of picturebooks included (1) adjusting the everyday life and routines within the context of the United States, (2) missing the country that the character was born and/or raised in, and (3) challenges around acquiring a new language, spoken and written. CRT helped the researchers to understand Latinx immigration experiences in picturebooks while thinking through the lens of intersectionality and understanding counter-narratives. For example,

when considering the intersection of age and gender, the study found that in one of the books examined, a young girl seemed oblivious and lacked awareness about immigration throughout the entire story, thus showing there was no counter-narrative that pushed against this stereotypical narrative represented in the books. Critical content analysis of the text and visual imagery of the sample books helped researchers to understand the underrepresentation of counter-narratives, a tenet of CRT, in the books that they explored.

Rodriguez and Kim (2018) took a similar approach in their examination of 21 children's picturebooks that depict Asian and/or Asian American main characters within the U.S. setting. Results showed that not only are more complex narratives of Asian immigration needed for young children to develop a deeper understanding of the range of immigrant experiences, but more attention needs to be paid to cultural authenticity and truthfulness in books depicting Asian American culture. In this study, CRT helped the researchers to understand different ideas such as Asianization and strategic (anti)essentialism and how to combat them. The researchers looked specifically at the representation of various Asian American cultural and ethnic groups. They found that of the 21 books in the study, 67% of them depicted stories of East Asian Americans (specifically Japanese American and Chinese American), which shows that there is special attention directed towards these groups. "The continued overrepresentation of East Asian Americans may perpetuate students' equation of the term Asian American with East Asian American" (p. 22). Furthermore, the use of CRT helped the researchers recognize that "more complex stories of Asian immigration, rather than triumphant tales of language acquisition and acculturation, are needed for children to better understand the spectrum of immigrant experiences" (p. 26). This study argues that those who select books for children should select books that represent a wide range of Asian American experiences over time.

Because of the criticality of the analysis, especially through the lens of CRT, results and information from studies like those mentioned above can be used to shift the ways in which the media depicts various marginalized cultures (e.g., Rodrigues & Braden, 2018; Rodriquez & Kim, 2018) via picturebooks. Each of these studies show that critical theories such as CRT can be effective in helping to understand race, racism, and power in children's literature. Because I am interested in how messages about race, racism, and power are communicated through the words and images of the picturebooks *Crown* and *Windows*, conducting a critical content analysis through the lens of CRT provided a structured and systematic approach for me to discover how these ideas are represented throughout the texts.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is the action of looking at oneself as a researcher and the relationship with the research (Dowling, 2006; McCabe & Holmes, 2009). "Reflexivity is often thought of as a focused reflection on one's relative ability to be unbiased while also recognizing and considering the effect of one's existing biases on the research" (McCabe & Holmes, 2009, p. 1520). Reflexivity in qualitative research can be used as a method to address a researcher's biases and functions as signposts for readers about what is taking place throughout the research process (Primeau, 2003). For example, after the consistent killings of Black and Brown men by White police officers, a Black male researcher studying racism in society may develop a negative attitude towards White people, thus influencing the ways he sees racism evidenced within the data. Not only can these types of reflections be documented in a researcher's notes or reflection entries, but they can be connected to findings from the study and can serve as comments or reflections that a researcher has throughout the analysis process. They can also serve as points of self-reflection and critique as the researcher considers and reconsiders his biases and the role

they play in his analysis. Additionally, these reflections can contribute to a researcher's thinking about what additional data points or ideas can be used to help create and tell the story of the findings (Finlay, 2002; Watt, 2007). For critical content analysis, reflexivity is highly recommended because the researcher is deeply involved in the construction of meaning; researchers' histories, lenses, and experiences (old and new) come together and influence the way researchers interpret and construct conclusions from the data (Rogers & Christian, 2007). Reflexivity is an effective process for documenting these experiences for both researchers and readers. If reflexivity can be documented and can be connected to findings from my study, then it can serve as data points that can be used to help create and tell the story of the findings from the books in my sample.

For this study, I embrace my identity and experiences as they serve as points of reference in constructing meaning. I understand that acknowledging and leaning into my identity and experiences will create biases in this study. In order to address this, I wrote memos and discussed the memos with my debriefers. Memos can be theoretical notes that analyze the thinking process of doing research. "Memoing one's hunches and presuppositions, rather than attempting to stifle them in the name of objectivity or immersion, may free the researcher to engage more extensively with the raw data" (Tufford & Newman, 2012, p. 7). For the purposes of this study, I took memos that documented my guesses, suspicions, and ideas. I also used these memos to reflect on my own identity and experiences and thought critically about ways that my identity and experiences impacted my interpretation of the data. To process my memoing, I met with my debriefers and engaged in conversations such as identifying assumptions in how an idea, symbol, or problem is understood and discussing different perspectives. I identify as a Black man who was born and raised in the United States of America in the state of Georgia. I have many years of

experience in the field of education, beginning my career as a Pre-Kindergarten teacher, then a language and literacy training facilitator; at the time of the study, I served, among many roles, as an instructional designer, Ph.D. student, university instructor, educational partnerships manager, and content manager. During my undergraduate career, I studied Birth to Five Education with a focus on language and literacy. I earned my M.Ed. degree in urban education with an emphasis on leadership. This current study was conducted in fulfillment of the requirements towards a Ph.D. in early childhood and elementary education. In many of these roles, not only have I noticed a disproportion in the representation of Black and Brown children in children's literature, but I have also observed unacceptable racist and stereotypical narratives in books about Black and Brown children. As a researcher, I must acknowledge that it is a possibility that the findings from this study could impact my beliefs and instructional practices. For example, in my memos, I noted that after reading through *Crown* several times, I wrote "I'm here for the durag. They did that."

I am conscious that my life experiences as a Black man in the southern region of the United States have and will influence my data analysis. As a Black researcher, I lean into and embrace this way of thinking. As part of my researcher stance, I recognize that I am a Black man who, as a child, read children's picturebooks that influenced my developing identity. I also recognize that as a teacher of Black and Brown children, I have made and continue to make choices about the books I introduce to them that will influence their sense of self. These life experiences cannot be excised from the analysis process. Throughout the systematic research process, I recorded and analyzed my thoughts in my research journal with the intention of frequently reflecting on all possible biases that I may hold. While I understand that there is no

way to eliminate my biases or erase my lived experiences, the journal served as a reflection piece throughout the study, thus demonstrating reflexivity.

Throughout the course of this study, my awareness of various forms of racism increased. For example, while writing this paper, I vividly remember the killing of Ahmaud Arbery, who was shot by two White men while jogging. As a person who is a runner, I began to fear even running through my own neighborhood because of the possibility of me being mistaken for a burglar and killed. This made me think about the character in *Windows* and how he simply was walking through his neighborhood. Me and the character in the book *Windows* could have been a victim of a racially motivated murder while simply taking a stroll through our neighborhoods. I could not shake off the idea that a picturebook for children could be published outside of the awareness that racism exists and that a Black and Brown child walking through their neighborhood could possibly not return home alive. Relatedly, when reading *Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut,* I memoed about an illustration depicting the main character proudly exiting the barbershop with his new haircut, "I wonder if this kid is leaving the barbershop by himself?", indicating my awareness that safety cannot be assumed for Black children. Since these reflections that are documented in my memos can be connected to findings from my study, they can serve as data points that can be used to help tell the story of the findings from the two books in my sample.

Trustworthiness

While designing this study, I constantly reflected on issues of trustworthiness and reflexivity. I used criteria associated with qualitative research to safeguard trustworthiness in this study. Trustworthiness can be defined as the level of confidence in data, explanation of the data, and the methods used to ensure the quality of the research study (Anney, 2014; Connelly, 2016;

Guba, 1981; Shenton, 2004). According to various scholars, there are four major ways to address trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba, 1981; Shenton, 2004). Credibility can be described as the truth of the study (Connelly, 2016). There are various ways that a researcher can establish credibility in a study, such as adopting well-recognized research methods like critical content analysis. "The specific procedures employed, such as the line of questioning pursued in the data gathering sessions and the methods of data analysis, should be derived, where possible, from those that have been successfully utilized in previous comparable projects" (Shenton, 2004, p. 64). Being that critical content analysis has been successfully used in other studies (Rodriguez & Kim, 2018; Rodriguez & Braden, 2018; Sciurba, 2020), it served as an effective method for exploring my samples. Additionally, I engaged in debriefing sessions with a peer debriefer and two expert debriefers. If trustworthiness can be established by utilizing tried processes such as using peer debriefers, transferability, and dependability, then these strategies can be used to increase the level of confidence and explanation of the data in this study.

I had one peer debriefer and two expert debriefers to provide critical feedback during data meetings, which helps to establish trustworthiness of the study (Figg et al., 2009). Through debriefings (monthly with a peer reviewer and weekly with expert debriefers), I was able to explore my research design, data collection process, and data analysis. Through these conversations, I was able to expand my thinking as a researcher and hear the experiences and different perspectives of these debriefers surrounding my thinking. "Such collaborative sessions can be used by the researcher to discuss alternative approaches, and others who are responsible for the work in a more supervisory capacity may draw attention to flaws in the proposed course of action" (Sheton, 2004, p. 63). These debriefing sessions also provided me with opportunities

to share my findings and interpretation of these findings prior to sharing them with a larger audience (e.g., dissertation defense).

Next, transferability can be referred to as the scope in which the findings from the study can be used and applied to other settings and situations (Connelly, 2016). There are different ways that transferability can be established, such as considering a "provision of background data to establish context of study and detailed description of phenomenon in question to allow comparisons to be made" (Shenton, 2004, p. 73). For this study, I completed a detailed literature review (Chapter 2) on the representation of Black and Brown males in children's literature, which helps in establishing the context of the study. I did this by researching various scholarly research databases, such as Google Scholar, and created folders related to search terms and phrases such as "Race Racism and Power in Children's Literature," "Picturebooks + Black and Brown," and "Diversity in Children's Literature." I also created detailed notes about the observations and analyses I made so they can be compared to research mentioned in the literature review.

Dependability can be described as the strength of the data over time and over the circumstances of the study. "It is similar to reliability in quantitative research, but with the understanding stability of conditions depends on the nature of the study" (Connelly, 2016, p. 435). Dependability can be established in many ways, including developing a detailed methodological log that shows what I have done (Shenton, 2004). For my study, I provide an in-depth methodological description of my methods along with tables and other data collection tools that I used for the analysis (e.g., Table 3.2 and Table 3.3). Lastly, while I recognize that replication of the results of a qualitative study is not always the goal, in Chapter 4 I describe my findings to such a degree that my argument, supported by my analysis of the data, constructs an

argument using data and theory to support my claims that compare and contrast the two picturebooks in the sample through the lens of CRT. I, therefore, maintain that this study meets the requirements of trustworthiness.

Sample/Data Collection

In order to understand the ways in which race, racism, and power are represented in picturebooks depicting Black and Brown males, I conducted a critical content analysis on picturebooks through the lens of Critical Race Theory. I came to the sample of books in an admittedly personal way. It started with my reading of the award-winning book *Windows* during a course I took in my Ph.D. program. After becoming concerned with the content of the text, I began to explore other books that depicted Black and Brown characters and that had been an honoree of an Ezra Jack Keats award in the same year as *Windows*, which was in 2018. This brought me a list of nine books. Because of my goal of doing an intensive study with a small sample of books, I decided to also look at what books on that list were published in 2017, the same year *Windows* was published. This brought me a list of four books: *Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut, Muddy: The Story of Blues Legend Muddy Waters, The One Day House,* and *Windows.* During this time, I met with a scholar and shared my initial thinking around both of these books. The reason that she was a great resource for me in this study is because of her work focuses on Black pedagogy. She encouraged me to explore these books in-depth as they might be two interesting books to study together. Furthermore, both books were labeled as Black, African American, or Latinx in the Library of Congress catalog. Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) is the list of headings maintained by the United States Library of Congress. "LCSH is a multidisciplinary vocabulary that includes headings in all subjects, from science to religion, to history, social science, education, literature, and philosophy. It also includes headings for

geographic features, ethnic groups, historical events, building names, etc." (Librarianship Studies & Information Technology, 2017, para. 2). This information is used by librarians, teachers, and scholars to search for books that connect to certain topics. With the focus on books readily obtainable in United States classrooms and various library collections, I included books published by major trade publishers in the United States. Moving forward with my study, I selected these two picturebooks because (a) they depict a Black or Brown male as the main character, (b) have been an honoree of either the Ezra Jack Keats Writer Award, Ezra Jack Keats Illustrator Award, or Ezra Jack Keats Honor Book, (c) they were both published in 2017, (d) they are labeled as Black, African American, or Latinx in the Library of Congress catalog, and (e) doing a comparison of two books would allow me the opportunity for an in depth comparison. Ultimately, two books met my criteria and are included in this study. The final book list can be found in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Identified Picturebooks

Title	Author	Illustrator	EJK Award Year and Type	Library of Congress Label
Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut	Derrick Barnes	Gordon C. James	2018 - Writer 2018 - Illustrator	African Americans
Windows	Julia Denos	E. B. Goodale	2018 - Illustrator	Hispanic & Latino

Data Analysis

For the purposes of this study, I analyzed the books *Windows* and *Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut.* As it relates to my analysis process, I initially read both books three times from beginning to end to gain familiarity with the text and visual imagery. This re-reading encompassed the dust jackets, front cover of each book, and back cover of each book. I read

through the books multiple times for several weeks and documented my thoughts, assumptions, and ideas in my memos. For example, when first reading the book *Windows*, I noticed that there was a black cat that appeared consistently throughout the book. When first seeing this, I drew upon my own understanding of black cats being a common Western sign/symbol of bad luck and was curious about its recurrence in the images. I took note of this in my memos. Turning to the illustrator's website (Goodale, 2021), I learned that the illustrator had a black cat while growing up. This attention to the symbolic function of the cat spurred me to think about how cultural symbols function in picturebooks to convey various messages to the reader, regardless of author intent. This was also documented in my memos. During this initial re-reading process, I took general notes as they related to the language and imagery throughout the books. Additionally, I met with my expert debriefers weekly and my peer debriefer monthly to discuss my observations and to ensure that I maintained a CRT lens. After my initial readings of each book, I worked through the phases of the textual and visual analysis, which is an adapted version from Newbold's (2015) five-step visual analysis process. (See Table 3.2 for an overview).

Table 3.2

Phases of Textual and Visual Analysis

Phase	Related Questions
1. Choose an Artifact	A. What part of the book have you selected? (e.g., dust jacket, Artifact #1, Artifact #14) B. Is there text on the Artifact? C. Is there visual imagery on the Artifact?
	Related Questions for both text and visual imagery:
2. Consider the context in which the Artifact was created	A. Who created this Artifact? B. Who did the creator(s) make this Artifact for? C. What else have they created? D. What seems to be the creators' attitude toward the subject?

Phase	Related Questions
	E. What makes it special or important? F. What historical and cultural events were occurring in the same time period? G. Where is the Artifact constructed? H. When was this Artifact created? I. Why was this Artifact created?
3. Review the rhetorical means of persuasion	A. What makes it believable? B. Is it well-designed or poorly constructed? C. Who created it? D. Who supports it or uses it? E. Does the Artifact employ devices (colors, images, words, grammatical structures) that cause an emotional reaction to it? F. Are those devices cultural, historical, political, or idiosyncratic? G. What specific emotions are meant to be evoked and is the Artifact successful in evoking them? H. Is there an argument being made? I. Are there facts, statistics, or historical references present (either implicitly or explicitly).
4. Evaluate the design principles employed	A. Which of the following design principles are being used? Why? What effect do they have? (Typography, color, shapes, contrast, alignment, mnemonic device, metaphor, highlighting, proximity, symmetry, grouping, legibility.) B. What type of grammatical structures are used? C. What word choice/vocabulary is used to what effect?
Develop an argument about the artifacts impact	A. How does it make you feel, think, and react? B. How does it contribute to, affect, or reflect upon society or communities?

Note: 5-Step textual and visual analysis process adapted from Newbold (2015).

As Table 3.2 reflects, I started the process of textual and visual analysis by selecting the Artifact that I was studying (e.g., Artifact #1). For the purposes of this study, an Artifact is a set of pages (typically two) that can be viewed when opening the books. I decided to adopt this

approach of using artifacts instead of individual pages because many of the images in the books overlapped across multiple pages. Each Artifact was labeled with a number. Additionally, when using the word text, I am referring to print (e.g., words) on the cover, jacket, and pages of the book. After I selected the Artifact, I took note of if there was any text or visual imagery on the Artifact. Once I determined whether or not there was text or visual imagery present (or both), I proceeded to the next step, which was considering the context in which the Artifact was created.

While considering the context in which the Artifact was created, I started by first looking at the visual imagery. After I analyzed the visual imagery, I then moved to analyzing the text. During this step, using an adaptation of Newbold's (2015) analysis process, I asked myself questions like, who created this Artifact? Who did the creator(s) make this Artifact for? When was this Artifact created? Why was this Artifact created? Continuing with the example of the dust jacket of *Windows*, I took note that the book was published in 2017 (textual) and there is a Black and Brown character on the dust jacket wearing a red jacket with a hood and seems to be walking in the street (visual). After taking notes on all other textual and visual data, I reviewed the rhetorical means of persuasion.

When reviewing the rhetorical means of persuasion, I asked myself questions including Was the Artifact created at an appropriate moment? If it was created and presented at another time, would it still have the same effect? I asked myself these questions and documented my thinking in my memos as I looked at the textual and visual data. In this process, I did not bracket out the knowledge I brought to the analysis, which allowed me to make connections across my cultural experiences. For example, when I looked at *Crown*, I documented that the character as having a halo around his head. This made me wonder if the illustrator had any intention on

conveying the idea that the character is a deity or God. After I took notes on the rhetorical means of persuasion, I then moved on to evaluate the dust jacket design principles.

While evaluating the design principles employed, I asked myself questions such as 1) What types of layout/formatting, colors, shapes do the creators use? 2) Are there visual and textual metaphors used? 3) Are there anthropomorphic forms? 4) What language or grammatical structures are used? While looking at the dust jacket of *Crown*, I documented that there are gold crowns surrounding the character's head on the cover of the book. I also took note of the language, such as “swagger.”

After I took notes on the design principles used, I then moved on to develop an argument about the dust jacket (e.g., Which of the following design principles are being used? Why? What effect do they have? What type of grammatical structures are used? What word choice/vocabulary is used to what effect?) During this step, I argued that the creators of this book used a variety of textual and visual representations that could lead readers to believe that the character on the dust jacket of the book is a Black male. This process was repeated for every part of the book (e.g., Artifact 1) for both *Windows* and *Crown*.

When reading and analyzing the books using the 5-Step textual and visual analysis process adapted from Newbold (2015), I realized that many of the questions became redundant after a while. For example, when considering the context in which the Artifact was created, one of the essential questions is “When was this Artifact created?” Although both books were published in 2017 and this had bearing on my thinking, asking this question became redundant. Therefore, some of the essential questions stemming from Newbold’s analysis process were not consistently used when analyzing each Artifact in the books (e.g., What else have they created? Who did the creator(s) make this Artifact for?) After multiple analyses of both books using

Newbold's visual and textual analysis process, I deductively examined the data (the artifacts) through the lens of CRT tenets (one book at a time). "A deductive approach to data coding and analysis is a top-down approach, where the researcher brings to the data a series of concepts, ideas, or topics that they use to code and interpret the data" (Braun & Clark, 2012, p. 58). This means that, for the purposes of this study, the tenets of CRT served as codes for analyzing the data. By developing a codebook with the CRT codes (tenets), I read through the data and assigned codes to the data (See Table 3.3). In some instances, multiple codes were assigned to a single piece of data.

Table 3.3

Codes Applied from Critical Race Theory Tenets (Deductive Analysis)

Code	Label	Definition
1	Critique of colorblindness	asserts that one is unable to see/recognize color or race
2	Interest Convergence	support the objective for others when there is some incentive or benefit to their own privilege and/or positioning
3	Race as a social construction	socially created race/ethnicity categories for humans that are commonly used and owned
4	Whiteness as property	person who is White using their race for social and economic privilege and protection
5	Permanence of racism	racism (deliberately or unintentionally) is deeply embedded in the different beliefs, policies, events, and decisions made historically and currently in society
6	Counter storytelling/unique voices of color	unique voices of color or voice of thesis. This tenet states that those with different intersections of oppression can analyze, challenge, and communicate narratives that their White counterparts are not likely to know

After reading and analyzing the books using the 5-Step textual and visual analysis process adapted from Newbold (2015), I worked through the phases of thematic analysis, which

is an adapted version from Braun and Clark (2006) (See Table 3.4 for overview). It is important to note the recursive nature of how I employed each of these steps. I went through the process and completed every step, but I went back and did some of the steps over and over again between both books (e.g., making notes on the digital copies of the book and documenting my assumptions about what I saw in handwritten memos; see Figure 3.1 for an example).

Table 3.4

Steps to Thematic Analysis and How I Carried Out Each Step

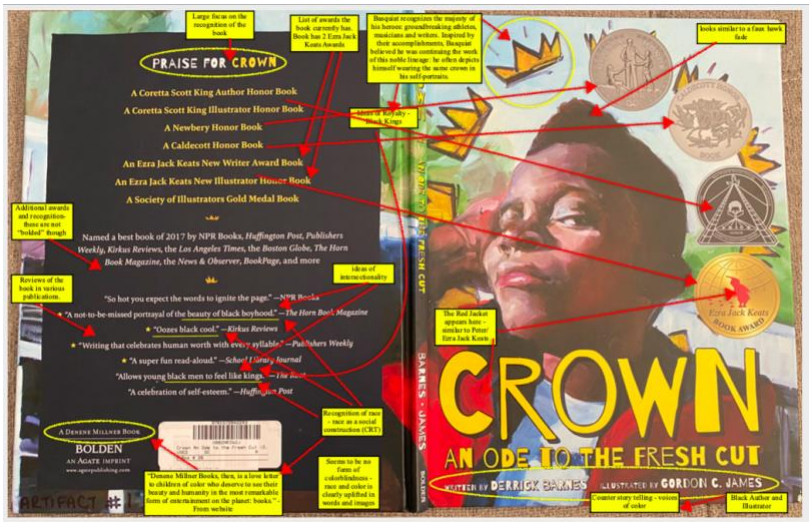
Steps	Action I took
Step 1: Become familiar with the data	● Immersed myself in the data ○ Multiple readings of hard and digital copies of books ○ Weekly discussions with advisors about books ● Made notes on the data ○ Added circles, lines, and short notes to digital copies to capture what I saw (e.g., the cat in *Windows*, repeated patterns in *Crown*) ○ Documented my assumptions about what I saw in handwritten memos.
Step 2: Search for tenets	● Searched for tenets of CRT in the data ○ Weekly discussions with advisors about CRT in relation to the books ○ Discussion with debriefers about CRT in relation to the book ○ Continued reading of CRT-related articles ○ Documented my expanded thinking in handwritten memos
Step 3: Review tenets	● Checked the themes/tenets of CRT against the data and explore whether the theme works in relation to the data. ○ Weekly discussions with advisors about CRT in relation to the books ○ Continued reading of CRT-related articles. ○ Created the table of themes in Table 4

Steps	Action I took
	○ Documented my expanded thinking in handwritten memos
Step 4: Define themes	● Because I used deductive analysis during this stage, and the themes were therefore defined (CRT tenets) I continued to: ○ Weekly discussions with advisors about CRT in relation to the books ○ Continued reading of CRT-related articles. ○ Created definitions in Table 4 ○ Documented my expanded thinking in handwritten memos
Step 5: Write-up	● Create a compelling story about the data based on analysis. ○ Creation of narrative in this dissertation document ○ Consulted other studies for findings

Note: 5-Step thematic analysis process adapted from Braun and Clark (2006).

Figure 3.1

Artifact 1—Notes on Digital Copy of Book



As table 2.3 reflects, I started the five steps to thematic analysis process by becoming familiar with the data. During this step, I immersed myself in the data by conducting multiple

readings of the hard and digital copies of both books. Additionally, I engaged in monthly meetings with a peer reviewer and weekly meetings with expert debriefers/advisors. Furthermore, as can be seen in Figure 3.1, I made notes on the data by adding circles, lines, arrows, and short notes to the digital copies of the books to capture what I saw (e.g., the cat in *Windows*, repeated patterns in *Crown*). I documented my assumptions about what I saw in handwritten memos.

Next, I searched for tenets of CRT in the data. Not only did I do this through the close and careful analysis of the data, but I also engaged in repeated debriefing sessions. For example, when looking at the book *Crown* and how the tenet *counter storytelling/unique voices of color* was operationalized, I started by looking at the notes on the first Artifact that I examined (text and visual imagery in the cover). This CRT tenet asserts that those with different intersections of oppression can analyze, challenge, and communicate narratives that their White counterparts are not likely to know. Using Newbold's (2015) textual and visual analysis process, I asked myself questions like 1) Are the author and the illustrator people of color? 2) Is there a dedication or commentary about the book on the dust jacket, front cover or back cover from a person of color? To answer the question of whether the author or illustrator are people of color, I needed to see what information was available in the text. During one of the data debriefing meetings with my advisors, I was encouraged to not simply assume the author's and illustrator's race/ethnicity based on images of them but to explore media where the author or illustrator might self-identify as Black. After research (e.g., exploring posted interviews and websites), I discovered that the author and illustrator are people of color. This process and information were also noted in my memos. This information led me to believe that *counter storytelling/unique voices of color* are represented on the dust jacket, so it was labeled as such. Additionally, there is a statement on the

back cover of the book that states that this book "Allows young black men to feel like kings." This is a counter-narrative to the way that Black and Brown men are typically viewed and depicted in children's literature, media, and society (R. S. Bishop, 1982; Broderick, 1973; Falkner, 2018; V. J. Harris, 1990; Larrick, 1965; Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). This process was repeated for every part of the book (e.g., Artifact #2, etc.) through the lens of each individual CRT tenet (e.g., *critique of colorblindness*, the *permanence of racism*). This exact analysis process was used to examine both books. During this step, I also continued doing various readings of CRT as it helped me to build additional knowledge about the theory itself and how the tenets of CRT have been applied in various studies. I documented my expanded thinking in handwritten memos that serve as data points in telling the story of the results.

After searching for the tenets of CRT in the data, I reviewed the tenets. During this process, I checked the themes/tenets of CRT against the data and explored whether the theme works in relation to the data. I asked myself questions such as, Am I missing anything? Are these themes actually present in the data? What can I change and shift to make the themes work better? For example, I reread various studies that used CRT while exploring the representation of race, racism, and power in children's literature (e.g., Acevedo, 2017; Rodrigues and Braden, 2018; Sciurba, 2020). Information used from these studies helped me to think about not only CRT as a theory, but how it can be applied to various forms of data. With this information, I brought these ideas to my weekly data meetings with advisors and my monthly meetings with my peer debriefer and discussed how the tenets of CRT are indicated in the books in my sample. As I continued the process of reviewing the tenets and continued reading of CRT-related articles, I documented my expanded thinking in my memos. I took note of these reflections and shifts in thinking in my handwritten memos.

Next, I considered defining the themes. Defining themes involves creating what we mean by each tenet of the theory used and figuring out how it helps us understand the data. Because I used deductive analysis during this stage, the themes were defined (CRT tenets: *critique of colorblindness*, the *permanence of racism*, *interest convergence*, *race as a social construction*, *whiteness as property*, and *counter storytelling/unique voices of color*). Similar to the previous stage, I continued to engage in weekly discussions with my advisors about CRT and monthly meetings with my peer debriefer. I continued reading CRT-related articles, reviewed definitions in Table 4, and documented my expanded thinking about the tenets in handwritten memos. Through this process, I was able to see how each tenet of CRT was operationalized in the sample and figured out how it helped me understand the data.

Finally, I wrote up the results. When writing up the results in the finding portion of a study, researchers should address each tenet of the theory used to examine the data. For example, in my results section, I describe how often the tenets of CRT occur and how they were operationalized in the books. This includes providing examples from the data as evidence. Additionally, this step helped me to explain the main takeaways and showed how the analysis answered the research question. For example, in my study, I argue that the CRT tenet *permanence of racism* can be seen through the gentrification of the neighborhood in the book *Windows*. Several indicators of gentrification are present in the book including the refurbishing/renovation of older apartments and homes (Glaser et al., 2018; Hyra et al., 2020; Olito, 2019; Urban Displacement Project, 2021). Gentrification can be seen in several artifacts as the construction workers are depicted renovating/working on one of the homes in the neighborhood, as well as specialty stores/shops, such as yoga studios. This step helped me to create a compelling story about the data collected based on analysis. Overall, the 5-Step thematic

analysis process adapted from Braun and Clark (2006), was an effective way for understanding how the tenets of CRT are represented in the books in my sample.

Summary

In this chapter, I described in detail the research methodology that I used for this study. I started by explaining the difference between content analysis and critical content analysis. For the purposes of this study, I used the critical content analysis method through the lens of Critical Race Theory to understand the representation of race, racism, and power in the two children's picturebooks I examined. I described my process for ensuring trustworthiness and reflexivity. Following this, I discussed my data collection and analysis process. I provided a sample of the analysis chart that I used to examine each book, the codes that I used, and the key ideas surrounding these codes. In the next chapter, I plan to discuss the findings of the study, followed by a discussion.

INTERLUDE: MENTAL MIDDLE FINDERS

Since I first put my hands on the books *Windows* and *Crown*, I can't seem to let them go, literally. I remember consistently bringing both books to a children's literature course that I took in which I was learning how to look at children's books through various critical lenses. Those who know me know I love to debate. I'm a passionate conversation starter, but I also love discussions where parties agree to disagree. I vividly remember me and one of my course instructors going back and forth, throwing sarcastic responses, mental middle fingers, and a whole lot of "Well how do you knows?" The conversation was about the race/ethnicity of the characters in the books. My argument: They Black. He's colored in Brown so that's how the world is going to see him. Black. His Argument: How do you know? Just because they are colored in Brown doesn't mean they are Black. Me: They Black. Colored in Brown or not. They Black and I'm sticking to it. His response: How do you know? Ultimately, I've been sitting with these books for a minute, and I've really been thinking about how race/ethnicity is represented in both.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

As previously mentioned, the structure of this chapter is unique compared to the others. This chapter fully embraces the true meaning of what I conceptualize as cultural code-meshing—"the blending and concurrent use" (Young, 2009, p. 50) of all the languages that are mine. You may have noticed that previously, the interludes served as "mental bookends" to the chapters. "Bookending is a story-telling device that takes a main or central narrative, and 'wraps' it (begins and ends it) with a separate short story. The short story is entirely different from the main narrative, yet supports the overall piece" (Green, 2017). This means that these bookends can be used as a powerful method to not only show emotion and understanding, but they can also be used to begin and end certain chapters in this paper. For this chapter, I wanted lean even more into cultural code-meshing as a way of showing that my language can be used as a powerful method to share my perspective and *our* stories. In this chapter, you will find the blending and concurrent use of all of languages through interludes and cultural references to share the findings of this study. The purpose of this study is to explore two children's picturebooks for messages of race, racism, and power as they relate to Black males: the Ezra Jack Keats Book Award winner, *Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut*, authored by Derrick Barnes and illustrated by Gordon C. James, and the Ezra Jack Keats Honor book, *Windows*, authored by Julia Denos and illustrated by E.B. Goodale. The following question guided this critical content analysis.

As described in chapter 3, I sought to answer the research question using a deductive thematic approach to critical content analysis incorporating visual and textual analysis: How are race, racism, and power depicted in *Crown* and *Windows*? I deductively analyzed the two award-winning picturebooks depicting Black and Brown characters through the tenets of Critical Race Theory. For the purposes of this study, I specifically looked at how ideas of race, racism, and

power circulated around the main character in the stories *Windows* and *Crown*. The deductive themes that I used to code the data are the tenets of Critical Race Theory are *critique of colorblindness, permanence of racism, interest convergence, race as a social construction, counter storytelling/unique voices of color,* and *whiteness as a property*. In this chapter, I describe the results of the study. Below you can find a snapshot of these results (Table 4.1). To provide organization to my findings, I include separate sections for each book.

Table 4.1

Deductive Analysis of Instances of Operationalization of CRT Tenets

Tenets	*Crown*	*Windows*
Counter storytelling/unique voices of color	17	0
Race as a social construction	4	0
Permanence of racism	2	7
Interest convergence	0	0
Critique of colorblindness	0	12
Whiteness as a property	0	0

INTERLUDE: PAT'S BARBERSHOP

One thing about it and two things for sure, when you get up out of the chair at the barbershop from getting that fresh ass haircut, you feel like a whole new person. Your confidence goes through the roof, your swag comes out more, and "feeling yourself" becomes a real thing. That's what it felt like every time I got up out of the chair at Pat's Barbershop when I was growing up. Mr. Pat was my barber, and boy was he like the local celebrity. Not only could he make sure that you were fresh for the weekend, but he would also give you life tips for any situation that you were in. In the Black community, the barbershop and hair salon are much more than places where you can simply get a fresh cut. It's a place of family, love, wisdom, and learning. It's a place where we come together, connect, share, learn, laugh, cry, express anger, and gain a strong sense of belonging to our community--the Black community. For many of us, it is a space to learn how to have debates (especially over sports games and politics). A place where we learn how to talk trash. A place where friendships can be made. But more importantly, it's a safe space. I learned so much about myself, my community, and my culture by just sitting in the chair of my barber. It was a place and an experience I sought after often, and still seek after. For Black people, barbershops and hair salons are much more than they seem. They are a significant part of our cultural experience.

INTERLUDE: BEYONCÉ, DRAKE, GUCCI, ARIANA, NICKI, & MONEY BAGG

When I work, I have to have some type of noise in the background playing. Most of the time it's trap music. I love a good beat with some lyrics that talk about getting rich and going to the club. My type of music. While writing this dissertation, I had music videos playing on the TV in the background. I'm watching and listening to Beyoncé, Drake, Gucci Mane, Ariana Grande, Nicki Minaj, Moneybagg Yo, and so many other people. Little did I know that these music videos playing in the background while writing this dissertation would impact the way that I saw things in the analysis. For example, when looking at one of the pages in *Crown*, I noticed that the character had a crown, something a God or Goddess would wear on their head. Tell me why at the same time Ariana Grande's video, *God is a Woman*, pops on the screen. Of course, at first, I'm like, sis stole Beyoncé idea (Beyoncé's 2017 Grammy's performance), but then I thought, I was like wait...the whole idea of this halo thing could be to make the connection that Beyoncé, Ariana, and the character in the book are deities, higher beings, royalty, kings, queens. Yeah...that sounds a little dramatic but check this. How often do you see Black kings depicted in the media? In books? In children's books? Well for me, the answer to that is not much. But what if in these creative and artistic ways, Beyoncé, Ariana, the author, and illustrator of this book used their voices to provide a counter-narrative?

Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut

The book *Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut* is authored by Derrick Barnes and illustrated by Gordon C. James. The book is about a boy's experience in a barbershop and the feelings and emotions that come when getting a haircut. I found 17 instances of *counter storytelling/unique voices of color*, four instances of *race as a social construction*, and three instances of the *permanence of racism*. There was an absence of *interest convergence* and *critique of colorblindness* (Table 4.2). Because there are no page numbers in the book, I used the term artifacts to account for the instances in which the tenet was operationalized in order to help locate results (Table 4.3). I show how these instances break down I will begin by sharing my findings as they relate to the *counter storytelling/unique voices of color* in the book *Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut* (Figure 4.1).

Table 4.2

Deductive Analysis of Instances of Operationalization of CRT Tenets in Crown

Tenets	Number of Instances Depicted
Counter storytelling/unique voices of color	17
Race as a Social Construction	4
Permanence of Racism	3
Interest Convergence	0
Critique of Colorblindness	0
Whiteness as a Property	0

Table 4.3

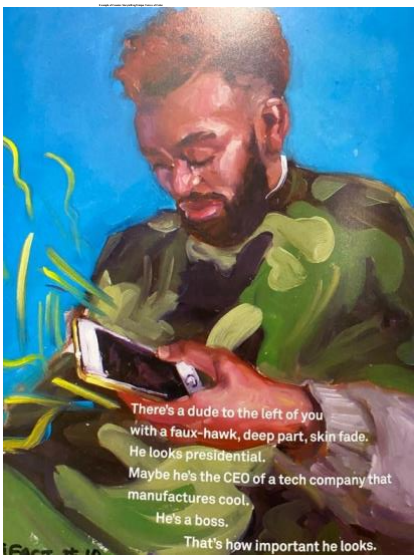
Location of Artifacts in Crown

Artifact	Location
1	Outside cover of the book
2	Blank Yellow Spread (front of book)
3	Title Page Spread
4	Library of Congress Cataloguing Spread
5	Page 1 - Page 2
6	Page 2 - Page 3
7	Page 4 - Page 5
8	Page 6 - Page 7
9	Page 8 - Page 9
10	Page 10 - Page 11
11	Page 11 - Page 12
12	Page 13 - Page 14
13	Page 15 - Page 16
14	Page 17 - Page 18
15	Page 19 - Page 20
16	Page 21 - Page 22
17	Page 23 - Page 24
18	Page 25 - Page 26
19	A Note from the Author
20	Blank Yellow Spread (back of book)

Figure 4.1 is an example of *counter storytelling/unique voices of color,* which asserts those with different intersections of oppression can analyze, challenge, and communicate narratives that their White counterparts are not likely to know. For example, a Black man speaking against the assumption that Black men cannot be CEOs.

Figure 4.1

*Example of Counter Storytelling/Unique Voices of Color (*Crown *Artifact 10)*



There were three main ideas surrounding *counter storytelling/unique voices of color* within the book *Crown*. The first relates to the fact that both author and illustrator of the book explicitly identify as Black men (artifacts 1 and 4-19). Many marginalized people's voices and stories, such as those of Black and Brown people, have been historically silenced and ignored throughout history (Adichie, 2009; Bishop, 2012; De Costa, 2020). The CRT tenet *counter storytelling/unique voices of color* states that those with different intersections of oppression can analyze, challenge, and communicate narratives that their White counterparts are not likely to know (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). This means that those with different intersections of oppression, (e.g., Black women, men with Down Syndrome, those who are Catholic and gender fluid) can share stories and narratives through various forms, such as writing and illustrating, to counter the dangerous narratives surrounding Black and Brown people. Because both author and illustrator are Black men, they are able to communicate through the text and visual imagery

narratives that the White community are not likely to know (e.g., some Black women go to the barbershop, too).

Because both author and illustrator are Black men, they depict the main character, a Black boy, in a way that is a counter-narrative to the negative narrative surrounding Black and Brown boys and men in society (Artifacts 4, 6, 7, 10, 11, 13, 15, 18, and 19). For example, the idea that Black and Brown men are not dedicated or committed to their children, especially their sons, is contradicted when reading the dedication from the author and illustrator to their sons (Artifact 4). In the body of the story, additional notions of counter-narratives to stereotypes surrounding Black and Brown boys are depicted as well. For example, the author writes that the barber will "drape you like royalty with that cape to keep the fine hairs off of your neck and your princely robes" (Artifact 6). This counters the idea that Black boys and men cannot be royalty, like a prince or king. These ideas continue when the character is depicted as being an intellectual and a deity. The text states, "You might just smash that geography exam tomorrow and rearrange that entire principal's honor roll. A fresh cut does something to your brain, right? It hooks up your intellectual" (Artifact 7, Figure 4.2). This text is then paired with visual imagery of the character as a deity with a halo crown surrounding his head. This halo crown is significant to note. "It [the halo] has been conjectured that it could have originally been a type of crown motif. Alternatively, it may have been a symbol of a divine aura emanating from the mind of a deity" (Wilson, 2021, para. 4). From this, it can be interpreted that the illustrator wants readers to know that not only can Black and Brown boys achieve academic success, but they can also be connected to divinity or royalty.

Figure 4.2

*Example of Counter Storytelling/Unique Voices of Color (*Crown *Artifact 7)*

Through the voice and illustrations of both author and illustrator, counter stories surrounding Black and Brown males in society (Brown, 2011; Falkner, 2018; Oliver, 2003) continue throughout the book. For example, the text states, “There’s a dude to the left of you with a faux-hawk, deep part, skin fade. He looks presidential. Maybe he’s the CEO of a tech company that manufactures cool. He’s a boss” (Artifact 10). Not only does this go against the narrative that Black and Brown men cannot be CEOs of companies, but it also pushes against the stereotype of Black and Brown males not being involved in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) industry. Furthermore, the author describes one of the Black men in the barbershop by stating that he “looks like he owns a few acres of land on Saturn” (Artifact 11). This counters the narrative that Black and Brown men do not have the ability to own property – yet *we* can. As the text and illustrations from both Black author and illustrator continue throughout the book (Artifact 12), the counter-narratives to stereotypes about Black boys and men continue. For example, the text states that after your haircut and you look in the mirror, “You’ll smile a really big smile. That’s the you that you love the most. That’s you that

wins--everything. That's the gold medal you" (Artifact 13). This counters the stereotype that Black and Brown boys are not winners and achievers. Through the text, the author also mentions that the look and feel that the character will have after getting a haircut is like "the look your teacher gives you when she hands you your last test with a bright red 97 slapped on it" (Artifact 15), going against the narrative that Black and Brown males are not academically successful. As the text and illustrations from both Black author and illustrator continue towards the final few pages of the book (Artifact 16 and Artifact 17), one of the final images is the main character leaving the barbershop paired with the text, "You'll leave out of 'the shop' every single time, feeling the exact same way… Magnificent. Flawless. Like royalty" (Artifact 18, Figure 4.3), again underscoring the elevated position of Black and Brown boys in contrast to common portrayals of them as "impotent and powerless" (Brown, 2011, p. 2048). The idea of *counter storytelling* continues on the final page of the book in the author's note. Not only is the note written by the Black author, but he also hints at stereotypes surrounding Black and Brown men when he states, "Other than the church, the experience of getting a haircut is pretty much the only place in the Black community where a Black boy is 'tended to' – treated like royalty" (Artifact 19).

The third main idea surrounds the use of African American English (AAE), a dialect that is commonly not represented in children's picturebooks (Artifact 8). "AAE is primarily a morphosyntactic set of rule-governed variations from Standard American English (SAE)" (Craig & Washington, 2002, p. 60). This means that although AAE is based on SAE, or White mainstream English (WME) the language has its own set of rules that are different than WME. This use of AAE in the book acts as a form of voices of color because it reflects the morphosyntactic structure of language that is not considered the status quo used in publishing –

the language used by *us*. Examples of AAE in the text include the use of such phrases as “that's my word,” which means “I promise you” (Artifact 6). Further, the idea of *counter storytelling/unique voices of color* continues through the use of AAE when phrases like “He looks that FRESH” (Artifact 11) and words like “swagger” (Artifact 8). This continues when the author states that, “Every person in the shop will rise to their feet and give you a round of applause for being so FLY!” Not only can the AAE phrases such as “so FLY” be seen textually, but the round of applause is also represented as well (Figure 4.3). It can be interpreted that because the author and illustrator are Black men, counter-narratives were represented, incorporating the use of specific culturally connected words and phrases; therefore, the tenet of *counter storytelling/unique voices of color* is depicted in this book.

Figure 4.3

*Examples of Counter Storytelling/Unique Voices of Color (*Crown *Artifacts 11 and 8)*

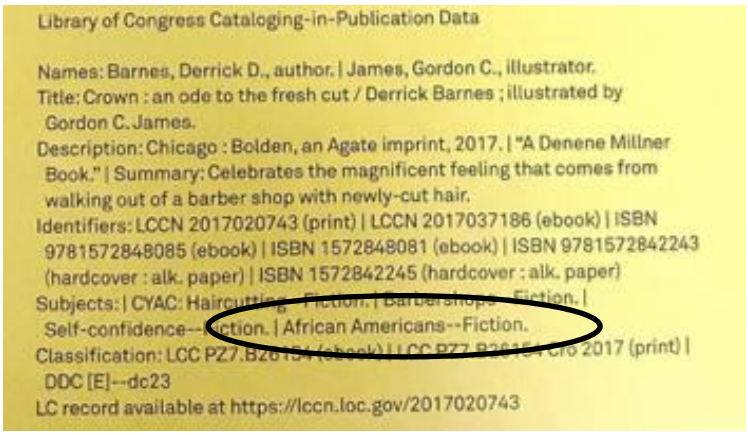
Race as a Social Construction

Image 4.4 is one of the four times the tenet of race as a social construction was identified. The tenet asserts that there is a use of socially created race/ethnicity categories for humans that are

commonly used to identify self and others *(*e.g., White, African American/Black, American Indian, Asian, Pacific Islander). For example, one may check on the U.S. Census that they identify as Asian.

Figure 4.4

*Example of Race as a Social Construction (*Crown *Artifact 4)*



Since the development of the 1997 Office of Management and Budget (OMB) standards on race and ethnicity, the United States Census Bureau has begun using questions surrounding race that capture demographic information. “The racial categories included in the census questionnaire generally reflect a social definition of race recognized in this country and not an attempt to define race biologically, anthropologically, or genetically” (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d., para. 10). The naming (terminology used) of these categories includes Black or African American, White, American Indian, or Alaska Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. This means that racial/ethnic categories that are recognized by the United States Census Bureau, or these social constructions, can be seen through the terminology (text) used to reflect a social definition of race. For the purposes of this study, I have limited the analysis of race as a social construction to the naming or racial categories textually. Historically, these naming conventions/words have often been used in the world of children’s literature as well

(Librarianship Studies & Information Technology, 2017). In the text of *Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut*, the racial/ethnic naming terminology, Black, was represented textually on multiple occasions. For example, the endorsements printed on the cover point to the presence of race as a social construction: the book is described as "Oozes Black Cool," "Allows young Black men to feel like kings," and "A not-to-be-missed portrayal of the Black boyhood" (Artifact 1). This intentional mentioning of the racial category Black/African American continues in the very beginning of the book. Under the Library of Congress-Cataloguing-in-Publication Data, the identifier "African American" is used under the subjects heading area (Figure 4.4).

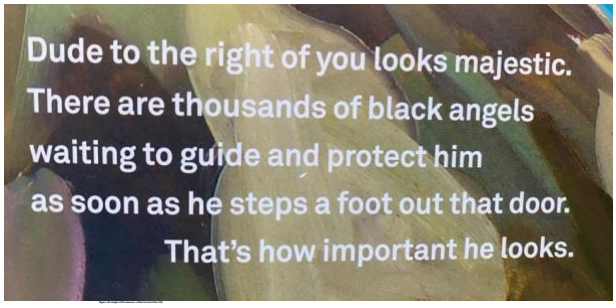
The *social construction of race* through categorization continues throughout the story when the author talks about Black angels. The text reads, "There are thousands of Black angels waiting to guide and protect him as soon as he steps foot out of that door" (Artifact 10). Furthermore, the *social construction of race* can also be seen in the author's note, when the author states that the book "focuses on the humanity, the beautiful, raw, smart, perceptive, assured humanity of Black boys/sons/brothers/nephews/grandsons, and how they see themselves when they highly approve of their reflections in the mirror" (Artifact 19). Because the term Black and African American were used throughout the story textually, it can be interpreted that *race as a social construction* is operationalized in the text.

Permanence of Racism

Figure 4.5 is an example of the tenant *permanence of racism*. The tenet was identified three different times in the text and asserts that racism (deliberately or unintentionally) is deeply embedded in the different beliefs, policies, events, and decisions made historically and currently in society. An example of the permanence of racism is the banning of natural Black hairstyles in the workplace/schools are ordinary, not aberrational.

Figure 4.5

*Example of Permanence of Racism (*Crown *Artifact 10)*



As previously mentioned, racism has had a long and continuous history in the United States and is still being preserved through various institutions and in different ways (Alexander, 2021; Bell, 1995; DuVernay, 2016; Kendi, 2017). The tenet permanence of racism states that racism (deliberately or unintentionally) is deeply embedded in the different beliefs, policies, events, and decisions made historically and currently in society. In my analysis, I found the theme represented in the book *Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut* in three instances. As mentioned in the previous section, the author states through the text that, "there are thousands of Black angels waiting to guide and protect him as soon as he steps foot out of that door" (Artifact 10). Black angles waiting to guide and protect the Black boy when he leaves the barbershop can be interpreted as the author understanding the dangers and potential mistreatment that he could face based on racism, past, and current events surrounding the harm of Black and Brown males in our society. Additionally, in the author's notes, the author states. "Deep down inside, they [Black males] wish that everyone could see what they see: a real-life, breathing, compassionate, thoughtful, brilliant, limitless soul that matters – that desperately matters. We've always mattered" (Artifact 19). Black males wishing that everyone could see what they see can be understood as the author understanding the misconceptions and stereotypes that are placed upon Black boys that ultimately lead to the hurt and mistreatment of *us*. The word "always" implies

the historical persistence of such perceptions. For example, “The brute image of Black men became significant moving into the early 20th century when fear was reinforced with depictions of Black men as harmful. The result was Blackness becoming closely associated with criminalization” (Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). When Blackness is continuously associated with criminalization, this misconception will continue to remain the prominent narrative in our society about *us*.

The *permanence of racism* can also be observed in the lack of the character having a voice and not speaking throughout the story. “Any discussion of silencing the voices of people of color must be included within the rubric of racism. CRT focuses on race but also described the importance of the use of narrative.” (Esquivel et al., 2002, p. 208). This means that through the lens of CRT, the silencing of Black and Brown voices is a form of racism. The narrative in *Crown* is presented in an ambiguous second-person singular voice (you)—it could be read as representing an omniscient narrator telling the story or a first-person narrator talking to himself. Since the audience for this book is young children, I chose to interpret the voice as an omniscient narrator. For the purposes of this study, I looked for various explicit indicators of first-person narrative including words that describe point of view such as “I,” “Us,” “Our,” and “Ourselves.” There were no instances in which these terms were used. While acknowledging the ambiguity of the narrator, I interpreted this lack of direct first-person pronouns as instances of voicelessness for the main character. If books continue to silence Black and Brown characters, then we will continue to maintain the long and deep history of racism through the silencing of Black and Brown voices.

There were three tenets that I did not observe being operationalized in the book - *interest convergence*, *critique of colorblindness*, and *whiteness as a property*. When looking for *interest*

convergence, I looked for places where Black and Brown people were depicted achieving civil rights victories when their interests converge with the interests of White people (e.g., integration of schools). I did not observe any instances of this. Additionally, I did not observe *critique of colorblindness* being used in the book. When looking for critique of colorblindness, I looked for the assertion that one is unable to see/recognize color or race. For example, one might say that they do not see color and treat everyone the same. In the book, there were multiple instances in which race was mentioned. Therefore, color/race is recognized. Furthermore, I did not observe any instances of *whiteness as a property*. I looked for occurrences in which a White person used their whiteness to oppress a person of color. This was not observed.

Overall, there were 17 instances in which I observed *counter storytelling/unique voices of color*, four instances of *race as a social construction*, three instances of *permanence of racism*, and no instances of *interest convergence*, *critique of colorblindness*, and *whiteness as a property* operationalized within the book *Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut*. As it relates to *counter storytelling/unique voices of color*, because the author and illustrator identify as Black men (there is an underrepresentation of Black and Brown male children's books authors and illustrators), they have the ability to share and communicate through the text and visual imagery narratives that their White and female counterparts are not likely to know, for example, the experience of a Black boy in the barbershop. As it relates to *race as a social construction*, the term Black, which is a common socially and legally created race/ethnicity category for humans, was used throughout the book. Lastly, there were two instances that connected to the *permanence of racism* in which the book addresses how racism is deeply embedded in the different beliefs that currently exist in society (e.g., the stereotype that Black boys are not

compassionate; Artifact 19). The tenets of *interest convergence*, *critique of colorblindness*, and *whiteness as property* were not observed.

INTERLUDE: THE WEST END

So, it's weird for me. Like, growing up, I heard about gentrification, I knew what it was, and what it looked like. But I never had the specific words or "academic language" to describe what it was. All I know…and what I know for sure…is gentrification is when certain neighborhoods like those in the West End are sought out because of the opportunity for financial benefit. And most of the time this gentrification hurts the people who already live there. Contractors and investors start throwing up these new boujee apartments, yoga studios, coffee shops, cute little "make a bag with your initials on it" stores, and all other kinds of things. Kinds of stores Black kids like me never experienced when growing up. Yeah, I might like a lil yoga studio stretch, but I also like the fried chicken and mac and cheese from the moms and pops restaurant at the corner too that these investors and contractors are trying to buy out and take away from our community. Gentrification takes away all that originality, history, and culture. For example, when I first moved to Atlanta, I was always in the West End visiting friends who went to Morehouse, Spelman, and Clark Atlanta. We would often walk around to the local mom-and-pop restaurants, grab food, kick it outside on the block, and even go to one of the local games at the Georgia Dome when it was discounted for college students. Flash forward to a few years later, it's a completely different place due to gentrification. There are brand new grocery stores, newly built apartment buildings, and a new stadium, which we refer to as the Mercedes Benz Stadium now, and the block we use to sit on is now a major intersection with traffic lights. Yeah, we have all this new stuff, but what about the people and spaces that were already there before this new stuff? Our memories? It's all gone—homes that have been in generations of families, restaurants that have fed generations of families. They are all gone. Why? Because of gentrification.

Windows

Windows is a picturebook authored by Julia Denos and illustrated by E.B. Goodale. The story is about a young boy walking his dog in his neighborhood during the evening in autumn. During his walk, the boy observes the different lives of people by looking through their windows. My deductive analysis of *Windows*, its cover, and dust jacket confirmed the presence of tenets of Critical Race Theory as shown in the tables and figures included in this chapter. In the following sections, I describe the tenets of CRT that comprised the deductive themes I used for data analysis. I then provide a brief description of how these themes are operationalized in the text. In *Windows,* I found 12 instances of *critique of colorblindness* and eight instances of *permanence of racism* represented in the book. I did not find instances of *interest convergence*, *race as a social construction*, *counter storytelling/unique voices of color*, and whiteness as a property (Table 4.4). Because there are no page numbers in the book, I used the term artifacts to account for the instances in which the tenet was operationalized in order to help locate results (Table 4.5).

Table 4.4

Deductive Analysis of Instances of Operationalization of CRT Tenets in Windows

Tenets	Number of Instances Depicted
Critique of colorblindness	12
Permanence of racism	8
Interest convergence	0
Race as a social construction	0
Counter storytelling/unique voices of color	0
Whiteness as a property	0

Table 4.5

Location of Artifacts in Windows

Artifact	Location
1	Dust Jacket of Book
2	Outside Cover of the Book (Sunset)
3	Neighborhood Sky View (Sunrise)
4	Library of Congress Cataloguing and Title Page Spread
5	Page 1 - Page 2
6	Page 2 - Page 3
7	Page 4 - Page 5
8	Page 6 - Page 7
9	Page 8 - Page 9
10	Page 10 - Page 11
11	Page 12 - Page 13
12	Page 14 - Page 15
13	Page 16 - Page 17
14	Page 18 - Page 19
15	Page 20 - Page 21
16	Page 22 - Page 23
17	Page 18 - Page 19 (Sundown)

Figure 4.6 displays one example of the 12 instances of *critique of colorblindness*. The tenet asserts that one is unable to see/recognize color or race. For example, one might say, “I do not see color. I treat everyone the same.”

The refusal to recognize race often connects with a desire to not discuss racial inequalities (Bell, 1995; Sims, 1982). In the story *Windows*, the character’s race/ethnicity is never explicitly mentioned in any of the artifacts, yet the main character in the story is depicted shaded in brown, resembling melanated skin. With the inexplicit mentioning of the character’s race/ethnicity in the book via text or illustrations, it is up to the reader to interpret this information. The ambiguity around race/ethnicity is threaded throughout the book. In this case, I interpret ambiguity as *colorblindness*. Books that have this racial ambiguity of characters in books have been referred to as “melting pot” books. Bishop (2012) states:

> The primary characteristic of the melting pot books, almost all of which are picture books, is that they choose to ignore anything, other than skin color, that might identify the characters as Black. Therefore, only the illustrations indicate whether the characters are Black or not. They tend to place Black and White characters on an equal footing socially or, in books with all Black characters, to portray them as having life experiences similar to many, if not most, White American middle-class children. On the other hand, the refusal to acknowledge cultural differences may be a hint that such differences are undesirable or, at best, to be ignored. Like the social conscience books, most of the melting pot books were written by White authors. (p. 7)

This means that books that have racially/ethnically ambiguous characters and fail to explicitly mention race/ethnicity do not acknowledge the cultural differences between people of color and those who are not, which is a direct form of colorblindness. In this section, I include photos and provide a discussion of each Artifact that is listed in Table 4.5, including how the artifacts support how the tenet is operationalized in the Artifact.

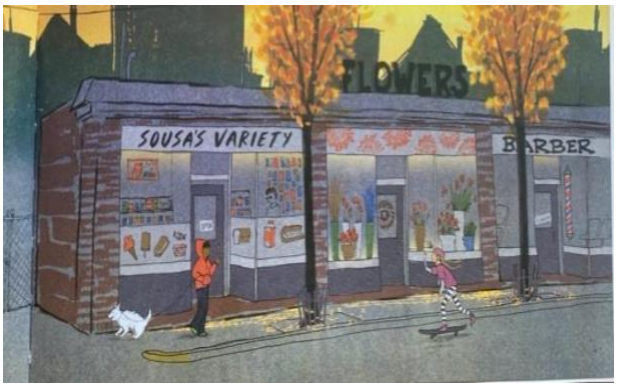
Figure 4.6

Artifact 1

In Artifact 1, the book's front cover, the main character, whose race is never explicitly mentioned is colored brown and wears a red hoodie as he walks his dog in the early evening. In the body of the book, the main character looks out of the window with his dog (Artifact 4) and puts on his red hoodie (Artifact 5). After the main character takes a final look through the window (Artifact 6), he makes his way outside and puts the leash on his dog (Artifact 7). As the main character, colored in brown, continues to walk through the neighborhood in the evening with his hoodie on, he waves at other background characters, including a light complexioned girl with yellow braids, in front of a variety store, flower shop, and barbershop (Artifact 9 as seen in Figure 4.7).

Figure 4.7

Artifact 9



As the time of day in the illustrations shifts more into the night, the main character is depicted playing with his dog in a park (Artifact 12). After leaving the park, he can be seen with his hoodie on walking down the street while looking into the windows of different homes (Artifact 13) and is also shown stopping and staring into a dark abandoned house in the neighborhood (Artifact 14). As the main character returns home (Artifact 15), he is depicted reading and cuddling, his hoodie pulled down, with a mother-like character, who is also colored in brown (Artifact 16 and seen in Figure 4.8).

Figure 4.8

Artifact 16

As the results show, there is no explicit mentioning of the main character's race/ethnicity (textually and visually) throughout the entire book. Although there is no recognition of the character's race/ethnicity in the book, the Library of Congress catalog lists the identifier "Hispanic & Latino" under the subject's heading section. As previously mentioned, these headings are used by librarians, teachers, and scholars to search for books that connect to certain topics. In this case, race/ethnicity has been denoted through the Library of Congress catalog, and not explicitly recognized textually or visually in the book itself. This matters because when the race/ethnicity of the character is explicitly stated, those engaging with the book (e.g., children, families, teachers) who identify with the character will have a greater opportunity to make cultural connections to the book. In addition, these books can act as windows (Bishop, 1990), which can offer views of cultures that may be unfamiliar to some readers.

While the main character's race/ethnicity is not explicitly mentioned in the book, there are several symbols that point to nationality. Symbols are visual expressions of culture that have the power to connect to and influence human life and experiences. "They are the language of religion, of magic and of cultural expression, as the art and the literature, being deeply linked to the socio-cultural context that produces them" (Pizzimenti, 2013, p. 49). In *Windows*, there are

multiple visual symbols that connected to Brazilian nationality. For example, in Artifact Five, on the floor is a soccer ball similar to the Brazilian flag in color (blue, green, and yellow). There are also shoes and a doormat that are green and yellow (Figure 4.9). The doormat is also visible in Artifact 5.

Figure 4.9

Artifact 5

Although green and yellow can be connected to Brazil, there is no direct mention of Brazil, leaving room for ambiguity of the character's nationality. This lack of specification of the character's race, ethnicity, and nationality can be interpreted as the author and illustrator not wanting to specifically recognize the character's identities, leaving the interpretation of the character's race/ethnicity up to the reader. Like melting pot books (Bishop, 2012), the refusal to recognize cultural differences in children's literature can be interpreted as such differences are disadvantageous or, at best, can be ignored.

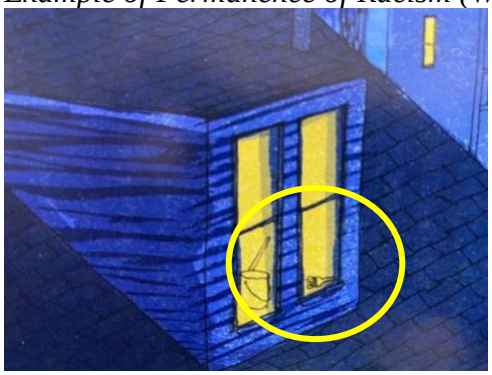
Permanence of Racism

Figure 4.10 shows one example of the eight ways *permanence of racism* was operationalized. The tenant asserts that racism (deliberately or unintentionally) is deeply embedded in the different beliefs, policies, events, and decisions made historically and currently

in society. For example, racist policies such as the banning of natural Black hairstyles in the workplace/schools are ordinary, not aberrational.

Figure 4.10

Example of Permanence of Racism (Windows Artifact 17)



Racism has had a long history in America and is still being perpetuated structurally in many institutions and in many ways (Alexander, 2020; Bell, 1995; DuVernay, 2016; Kendi, 2017). Unfortunately, the reality is that we actively live and engage in a society where racism has been internalized (consciously and unconsciously) and institutionalized (e.g., redlining and prisons). The tenet *permanence of racism* states that racism (deliberately or unintentionally) is deeply embedded in the different beliefs, policies, events, and decisions made historically and currently in society. In my analysis, I found the deductive theme represented in the book *Windows* through the concept of gentrification.

Many scholars, researchers, and communities define and understand gentrification in various ways (Glaser et al., 2018; Hyra et al., 2020; Olito, 2019; Urban Displacement Project, 2021). Some scholars define gentrification through the identification of different measures or factors including the increase in median income, increase in the levels of education held by those in the community, increase in housing prices, changes in racial/ethnic makeup of the community, types of business, and much more (Hyra et al., 2020). Visually, gentrification can look like the

renovation of properties, increased investment in community amenities such as public transit and parks, and changes in how land is used, such as industrial land being converted to restaurants, storefronts, specialty stores, and multi-use buildings (Urban Displacement Project, 2021). Although increased investment in a neighborhood and community can be positive, gentrification is frequently connected to displacement (Drew, 2012). This means that in some communities in which gentrification is taking place, long-term residents will not be able to continue to live in the neighborhood and benefit from new the investments in housing, public transportation, and businesses due to the increase in pricing. "Gentrification mirrors westward expansion, in which the middle class encroaches upon and eventually takes land from the already existing groups, usually members of the lower classes and disproportionately people of color" (Drew, 2012, p. 100). This means that historically in American society, gentrification has been used to take land of those who are Black and Brown, eventually displacing *us*. Racism is permeated through gentrification, and in American society, gentrification is so common and normal that for many, the perpetuation of racism through the gentrification process is overlooked. "Displacement of the poor is gentrification's calling card. Gentrification's changes to the urban landscape are for the benefit of new residents of middle- and upper-income and the developers and investors of the project" (Yeom & Mikelbank, 2013, p. 83). Gentrification has the power to displace those who are financially challenged from their own homes and communities. When decisions are made in society, such as developers and investors creating new luxury office buildings and multi-unit living spaces, those who have been historically most marginalized, such as Black and Brown people, will suffer the most.

In the neighborhood and different areas depicted in the book, there are several different types of housing and business developments including stand-alone homes and multi-unit housing

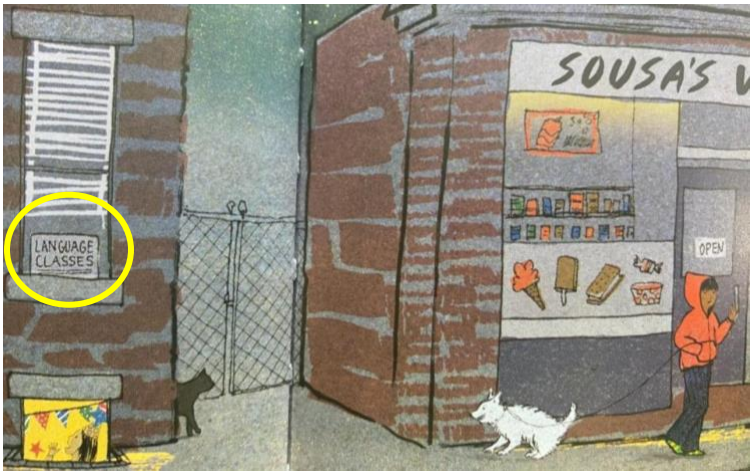
such as apartments (Artifact 3). For example, there are remodeling projects that are improving existing properties, such as roofing and painting (Artifact 3). All these different redevelopments and remodeling improve the living environment and community, and they also shift the many attributes of communities (Yeom & Mikelbank, 2013). One could ask if these signs (redevelopment and remodeling) can be considered signs of gentrification. "What stands out about gentrification, among the various development and redevelopment activities, is its effect on the low-income population. Indeed, the critical problem of gentrification is the displacement of the low-income population" (Yeom & Mikelbank, 2019, p. 80). This means that although on the surface, the redevelopments and remodeling can be viewed as not being significant indictors of gentrification; they could be indicators of a flourishing community. But when one thinks critically about how these changes shift attributes of communities, a closer look is required. Historically when these shifts happen, Black and Brown people suffer the most. Therefore, if the images in a book can be interpreted as indicators of gentrification, then the gentrification depicted can be viewed as a form of racism.

In the story *Windows*, several indicators of gentrification are threaded throughout the book including the refurbishing/renovation of older apartments and homes, abandoned homes in neighborhoods with newly renovated homes, and specialty shops/stores in neighborhoods where renovations are happening, and a neighborhood depicting cultural diversity (Glaser et al., 2018; Hyra et al., 2020; Olito, 2019; Urban Displacement Project, 2021). For example, construction workers (hard hats and matching shirts) are depicted working on the roofing of one of the homes (Artifact 3). If you look through the windows, you can find paint cans and brushes that are being used to renovate the home (Artifact 3 and Artifact 17). Similarly, a background character is depicted in white painter's overalls moving ladders outside of a multi-unit home with multiple

mailboxes (Artifact 7). The neighborhood is also culturally diverse. Through the windows of the different homes, there is a variety of races/ethnicities, ages, and genders (Artifact 11). As the story continues, indicators of gentrification (Glaser et al., 2018; Hyra et al., 2020; Olito, 2019; Urban Displacement Project, 2021) including specialty stores such as a variety store and a flower shop can be seen right next door to a multi-unit building that is being used for multiple purposes such as living and language classes (Artifact 9, Figure 4.12). Through the windows of the multi-use building, a variety of observations are noted, such as a character looking at a computer screen, a character holding a baby, a character reading, a party, and even language classes.

Figure 4.11

Artifact 9. Language Classes



To support this idea, a sign with the words “LANGUAGE CLASSES” sits in the window of a multi-unit building. The presence of language classes could speak to the diversity of languages spoken in the community, but it could also point to an indicator of gentrification; dual language programs in schools, for example, have been directly connected to gentrification (Stein, 2018). Similarly, specialty areas such as dog parks can be found between homes (Artifact 12); a yoga studio is located next door to a multi-unit home (Artifact 13). Text supports this idea: a sign reading “YOGA” identifies the studio. Elaborating more on the idea of gentrification, the book

depicts a dark abandoned home in the neighborhood, which the text notes is “empty and leave[s] you to fill them up with stories”. As the book comes to an end, through the windows of the home in which the construction workers are working (Artifact 3), there is a paint tin and painting materials, indicators of renovation. From these examples it can be interpreted that the permanence of racism can be seen through the indicators of gentrification in the neighborhood (e.g., renovations). Any one sign can be isolated and considered not being a direct indication gentrification, but the culmination of all these indicators coming together perpetuates the ideas of gentrification. I argue that all of these different variables at play can be assumed to be indicators of gentrification.

In addition to the permanence of racism being perpetuated through the idea of gentrification in *Windows*, this idea can also be seen in the lack of the character’s voice in the story. There were no instances observed in the book in which the character spoke or used his voice. Historically, Black and Brown voices have been marginalized, especially in the classroom (Esquivel et al., 2002). This silencing of Black and Brown voices dates to slavery. Through this observation, it can be interpreted as the silencing of the character’s voice in the story as being a form of racism.

There were four tenets that I did not observe being operationalized in the book: *interest convergence, race as a social construction, counter storytelling/unique voices of color, whiteness as property*. When looking for interest convergence, I looked for places where Black and Brown people were depicted achieving civil rights victories when their interests converge with the interest of White people (e.g., integration of schools). I did not observe any instances of this. Additionally, I did not observe *race as a social construction* being used in the book. When looking for *race as a social construction*, I looked for the socially constructed categories for race

that are often assigned to or adopted by certain people (e.g., seeing if terms like *Black, Asian, White* were used). I did not note any instances of these socially constructed categories used throughout the book. Furthermore, I did not notice any instances of *counter storytelling/unique voices of color*. When looking for this tenet, I looked for instances in which different individuals or communities provide narratives or stories that push against a dominant narrative about a group of people. For example, when analyzing the cover of the book, I noted the names of the author and illustrator, and sought out media where they may have identified with race, ethnicity, or nationality. I searched their websites, bios, and video interviews, and could not locate the information. Because there was no explicit mentioning of their race, ethnicity, or nationality, I could not claim evidence of *counter storytelling/unique voices of color* and *whiteness as a property*.

Overall, there were 12 instances in which I observed *critique of colorblindness, seven instances of permanence of racism,* and no *instances of interest convergence, race as a social construction, counter storytelling/unique voices of color,* or *whiteness as a property* being operationalized within the book *Windows*.

Summary

Given the definitions of the tenets of CRT as described in the literature review and as I applied them, the findings presented in this chapter confirmed that there are several instances depicted in the books *Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut* and *Windows* surrounding the representation of race, racism, and power, some positive and some negative. In *Crown*, there were 17 instances of *counter storytelling/unique voices of color*, four instances of *race as a social construction*, two instances of *permanence of racism*, and no instances of *interest convergence*, *critique of colorblindness*, or *whiteness as a property*. In *Windows*, there were 12

instances of *critique of colorblindness*, seven instances of *permanence of racism*, and no instances of *interest convergence* or *whiteness as a property*. In the next section, I will discuss conclusions and recommendations.

INTERLUDE: CRISTAL WITH CHRISTAL

Man, this dissertation really wore me out. Like literally - physically, mentally, emotionally, but not so much so socially. Why is that? Well, it's because of my "tribe," my amazing and loving group of family and friends. Imma super social person. I love people. I thrive off people and their energy, so being social, and being around people is essential to my happiness. My tribe is one of the main reasons that I kept my sanity throughout this Ph.D. program (plus my therapist). I remember one night, me and a good friend of mine, Christal, aka Chrissy, decided to close our computers and head out for a quick night of fun in the Atlanta streets. "Cristal with Christal" was always something I looked forward to - especially on Sunday Funday. Chrissy was also in the Ph.D. program with me, so we were able to really support each other in some of the many struggles of navigating the program, such as what it means to be a Black scholar in higher education, managing a full-time job while in school, and trying to survive a health pandemic - all taking place at the same time. One of the conversations that we constantly had surrounded the struggle of writing in White Mainstream English (WME). Yup. It's not just me that struggled (and still struggles) with this type of writing. It seemed to be something that was common amongst all my Black and Brown friends. That same night, I remember telling Chrissy that the academy was so Whitewashed and I refused to write in WME for my dissertation. How the hell am I out here doing work for Black and Brown people, for *us,* and out here telling our stories in WME? Somebody make it make sense cause it don't. That night, Chrissy said one of the realest things ever. She said, "Yeah. I have the same problem, too. One thing that helps me the most is literally just writing it out. All the words that come to mind, how they sound, how they feel, write it out in a way that makes sense to you. Once you do that, then translate it into WME. That's how I'm surviving." Although it may seem simple, this idea

was revolutionary to me. I later learned that that approach can be closely connected to translingualism. Chrissy's words helped me to realize that although there are differences in AAE and WME, these differences should not be viewed as barriers. Rather, these differences should be viewed as opportunities to explore how various words and phrases operate in different languages and dialects.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The underrepresentation and misrepresentation of Black and Brown males in children's literature has resulted in numerous research efforts throughout the United States. Many researchers have looked at the ways that race, racism, and power are circulated through the text and visual imagery in picturebooks and have sought to identify ways in which these inequities can be addressed. For over a century, Black and Brown scholars have pushed against books that depict racialized and stereotypical depictions of Black and Brown people in children's literature (Bishop, 1991; Broderick, 1973; Du Bois, 1903). The underrepresentation and misrepresentation of Black and Brown males in children's literature, including in picturebooks, has continuously perpetuated the stereotypes that Black and Brown boys and men are dangerous, wandering, and less than (Brown, 2011; Falkner, 2018; Oliver, 2003).

This chapter brings closure to my study by reflecting on the demand for more stories about Black and Brown people that are written by cultural insiders (e.g., Black and Brown authors and illustrators), the need for direct mentioning of characters' races/ethnicities in children's books, and the need for more children's books that specifically discuss race, racism, and power from multiple perspectives. Although both books used in the study are award winners, the representation of race, racism, and power varied. Some of the ways in which these ideas were represented were explicit, and in other ways they were more covert. As stated earlier, this study was guided by the following research question: How are race, racism, and power depicted in *Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut* and *Windows*? In this chapter, I fold together implications of this study with discussion of its findings as I argue for researchers, educators, parents, caregivers, books creators, and award committees to consider their roles and responsibilities in producing and selecting literature through which children make sense of their worlds.

Discussion and Implications

The findings from this study have implications for future literature researchers, as well as for children, families, educators, book creators (authors, illustrators, and publishers), and book award committees. In this section, I will discuss the implications of these findings, starting with the usefulness of CRT as a theoretical lens and following how various stakeholders in children's lives and education might take up critical analysis of children's literature.

Need for CRT and other Critical Studies of Children's Literature

There is a need for the use of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in the examination of children's literature. Recently CRT and those who use it have received backlash (George, 2021). For example, in September 2020, President Trump issued an order to stop the use of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in schools (George, 2021). To be explicit, there is little evidence that teachers are teaching CRT in their classrooms, but it is useful as a way of thinking about planning their classrooms (e.g., selecting books, creating the classroom environments, interactions with kids', etc.) (Crenshaw et al., 1995; George, 2021). CRT as a theory was never designed to be used in elementary schools; it's a legal theory designed to analyze systemic racism and how it is operationalized in different spaces (Crenshaw et al., 1995). The banning of topics related to diversity and Critical Race Theory can be interpreted as being racist. If concepts like Critical Race Theory are being excluded as tools for thinking in various learning spaces, then there is a greater opportunity that various forms of privilege and oppression will continue in our society.

Specifically, and in the case of this study, critical theories like Critical Race Theory can be used to examine the representation of various forms of privilege and oppression in picturebooks. Through CRT's various tenets, (e.g., *the critique of colorblindness, interest*

convergence, race as a social construction, whiteness as property, the permanence of racism, and *counter storytelling/unique voices of color*), researchers can uncover how racial inequities are represented through the text or visual imagery in children's literature. For example, by applying the tenet *permanence of racism* to a picturebook, researchers can argue that illustrations that might be interpreted as depicting economic growth and prosperity (e.g., houses under renovation) can also be interpreted as evidence of the role picturebooks play in normalizing the disruption of communities through gentrification. As another example, by applying the tenet *race as a social construction*, researchers can point to the intentional naming of racial categories within the story and paratext of a book as strategies on the part of book creators and publishers to situate a book for a particular audience, thus opening further questions about how picturebooks are understood and used by children as they make sense of the world.

It is my stance that CRT provides tools for analysis that are not necessarily available through other theories. The Theory of Multicultural Education is a case in point. Multicultural education is a framework that promotes the advancement of equality, and it creates the reality of diverse topics being brought into the classroom (e.g., through books) (Banks, 2014). One of the goals of the Theory of Multicultural Education is "to help individuals gain greater self-understanding by viewing themselves from the perspectives of other cultures. Multicultural education assumes that with acquaintance and understanding, respect may follow" (Banks, 2014, p. 3). This means that one of the main principles of this framework is to help students learn more about themselves and their identities by understanding how other cultures perceive them. While there is much that is productive with this approach, it can also be limiting and may not get at some of the insights CRT can provide. Specifically, CRT can be used to help explore notions of power. Critical Race Theory therefore can be used to help educators think about how race and

racism are operationalized in the classroom and to uncover the various systems of power (e.g., privilege and oppression) related to race as well.

In addition to using CRT, this study points to the general need for more critical studies of children's literature with the aim of helping teachers, families, caregivers, publishers, and book award committees select books that reflect the lived experiences of Black and Brown males in society. If there are more critical studies of children's literature, then researchers will be better equipped with the knowledge and data to support identity development work that is taking place in the classroom.

To this end, methods of textual and visual analysis can be used to make interpretations of various children's books, which can be used to help researchers understand the ways in which authors and illustrators understand the world. For example, both books in this study depict Black and Brown characters who are surrounded by race, racism, and power in different ways (e.g., *Windows*' depiction of gentrification and *Crown's* explicit counters to misconceptions about Black boys in society). If Critical Race Theory can be used in textual and visual analysis to understand how race, racism, and power are communicated through the picturebooks explored in this study, then it can also be used to explore these same ideas in other samples of books as well.

Need for More Cultural Insiders: For Us, By Us (FUBU)

There is a need for the unapologetic creation of stories that reflect the lived experiences of Black and Brown males in society. "When students are able to see their own lives in a text, they are more likely to identify critical encounters in their reading outside the classroom" (DeNicolo & Franquiz, 2006, p. 168). This means that when children are exposed to the uncensored history and truth about race, racism, and power through children's literature, they will be able to identify different forms of privileges and oppressions in society and take action.

In the book *Windows,* there was a lack of recognition of the lived experience of Black and Brown males in society. The book depicts the main character walking through his neighborhood in the evening and returning safely home. I argue that this depiction conveys a taken-for-granted assumption on the part of White culture that walking outside is safe. The book lacks awareness that, in incident after incident, Black males--children and adults--have found peril in doing what the main character is depicted as unproblematically doing. In *Crown: An Ode to Fresh Cut*, there was recognition of the experience of Black and Brown males in society. The book discussed the need for Black angels to protect Black and Brown males outside of the barbershop, and the desire for people in society to see Black and Brown boys as beings that matter. It can be asserted that author and illustrator's status as cultural insiders provides them the cultural competence to share authentic stories of Black and Brown men in society and to understand that Black men can be killed due to racism when outside of safe spaces, such as the barbershop. Woodson (1998) further explains this idea by stating:

> As a Black person, it is easy to tell who has and who has not been inside "my house". Some say there is a move by people of color to keep Whites from writing about us, but this isn't true. This movement isn't about White people; it's about people of color. We want the chance to tell our own stories, to tell them honestly and openly (p. 45)

It is important that Black and Brown people have greater opportunities to share *our* stories because not only can this increase the representation of Black and Brown characters in children's books, but when they are created, there will be a greater chance of children being exposed to more authentic stories from Black and Brown people in society. If students are not exposed to books that discuss ideas of race, racism, and power from the perspective of those historically

oppressed, they may develop a mindset and understanding that can ultimately be harmful to Black and Brown people.

Need for Direct Mentioning of Characters' Races/Ethnicities

A CRT analysis points to the importance of explicitly naming or indicating characters' race/ethnicities. The lack of recognition of a character's race/ethnicity can be seen as a form of microinvalidation, which is a direct form of racial microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007). The authors state that:

> Microinvalidations are characterized by communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color. When Blacks are told that "I don't see color" or "We are all human beings," the effect is to negate their experiences as racial/cultural beings. (p. 274)

When a character's race/ethnicity is not identified in a book, it can be interpreted as being a way of invalidating and diminishing the experiences and histories of the character's racial/ethnic identity. In the book *Windows*, while the character's race/ethnicity is explicitly stated in the Library of Congress catalog (e.g., Hispanic & Latino), this information is not readily available to children as part of their book-reading practices. The study found a lack of recognition of the main character's racial/ethnic identity in the story itself. The racial/ethnic ambiguity of being colored in brown is not the same as directly recognizing a character's racial/ethnic identity. Although it can be interpreted that there were clues related to nationality (e.g., Brazilian flag and soccer ball), the character's race/ethnicity was not explicitly depicted, leaving room for readers to create their own interpretation. From this, the conclusion can be drawn that the story *Windows* engages in nullifying children's identities through microinvalidations. In comparison, in *Crown*, there was explicit recognition of the character's race/ethnicity both in the Library of Congress

Catalogue (e.g., African American) and throughout the story itself. When Black and Brown children see characters in stories that look like them, yet their race/ethnicity is not identified, these young readers may learn that their racial/ethnic identity is not worth mentioning, potentially diminishing their confidence and pride in their identity and cultural histories. Alternatively, young readers may interpret a character as sharing their racial/ethnic identity, potentially experiencing a book differently from how the creators imagined (for example, my identification of the main character in *Windows* as Black and my connections with Trayvon Martin). Furthermore, this nullification of racial/ethnic identity denies all children, no matter their race, the opportunity to learn about experiences that are similar or different from their own. It is important that all children have the opportunity to see the amplification of various racial/ethnic identities in all aspects of learning, especially reading. If children are not exposed to the explicit and clear recognition of characters' races/ethnicities in children's picturebooks, then they may learn to nullify racial/ethnic identities, which is a direct form of racial oppression.

Need for More Children's Book Discussing Race, Racism, and Power

Often it is believed that children, particularly young children, should not be exposed to or have the ability to talk about race, racism and power (Derman-Sparks et al., 1980; George, 2021). This way of thinking assumes that not only are children not capable of learning about complex ideas such as race, but it also assumes that only adults possess the power to have these types of conversations. According to Derman-Sparks et al., research shows that children, even very young children, differentiate between racial differences, and that "they learn the prevailing social attitudes toward these differences whether or not they are in direct contact with people different from themselves" (p. 2). This work points to the power of picturebooks as a tool for racial awareness and cultural understanding for young readers. Through books, children can

develop positive and negative mindsets about various people based on their physical and cultural attributes. Therefore, children should be explicitly provided with opportunities to talk about race, racism, and power through children's literature. In the book *Windows*, there was a lack of discussion surrounding race, racism, and power in the book in comparison to *Crown*, which openly did. When children have the chance to explicitly talk about race, racism, and power in society through multiple perspectives, there will be a greater chance of them developing a positive and knowledgeable perspective on various racial/ethnic identities that are similar and different than their own. If children can be provided with multiple opportunities to learn about and discuss the ideas of race, racism, and power through children's literature, then they will have the chance to gain knowledge and understanding on how to deal with and challenge various racial inequities in society.

Implications for Teachers, Children, and Stakeholders

There is a need for more books that depict Black and Brown families from multiple perspectives. Scholars have agreed that negative stereotypes surrounding Black and Brown people are still being communicated in the 21st century through the text and visual imagery in media such as picturebooks, magazines, novels, and films (Dancy, 2014; Hill, 2016; K. A. Johnson & Johnson, 2014; Love, 2014; Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). For all children to dissociate from these negative and racialized assumptions about Black and Brown people, they must be exposed to texts and visual imagery that contain counternarratives presented by Black and Brown people themselves. When Black and Brown children see themselves, their families, and communities mirrored in picturebooks that reflect them in positive ways, they will begin to build confidence and self-identity. According to Muhammad (2020), "Identity matters. Identity was one of the first things to be stripped from enslaved Africans, thus it became key for people of

color to know themselves so they could tell their own stories" (p. 64). Picturebooks provide a means for Black and Brown children to not only gain knowledge and build confidence in their many identities, but they also provide a means for students, as Muhammad states, to cultivate their genius:

> Genius is the brilliance, intellect, ability, cleverness, and artistry that have been flowing through their minds and spirits across the generations. This cultivation calls for reaching back into students' histories and deeply knowing them and their ancestries to teach in ways that raise, grow, and develop their existing genius (p.13).

When children are provided with multiple opportunities to cultivate their genius through the use of children's literature, we can help them to gain the knowledge, power, and confidence that they need to change the world.

Research has shown a lack in the depiction of Black and Brown males as main characters in stories (Harris, 2019). Thus, many classroom libraries may not have books that depict Black and Brown boys as main characters (Bulatowicz, 2017). Addressing the lack of the authentic representation of Black and Brown males as main characters in children's books is necessary because "such texts might allow the children to see themselves in the pages, and thereby improve their motivation to read, amount of time spent reading, and their reading performance" (Harris, 2019, p. 47). One way to address this issue is by supporting teachers in selecting books that portray Black and Brown males in their classrooms. I hope this study offers support to teachers by providing a lens through which they may choose children's picturebooks that positively depict Black and Brown boys and their experiences.

Parents, families, and caregivers need support in the selection and use of children's books so they can engage their children in conversations surrounding race, racism, and power.

“Research shows that not all caregivers discuss race, identity, and racism. Some avoid the topic altogether. There are significant repercussions when we do not provide space for these formative conversations. Silence allows stereotypes, biases, and racism to be reinforced” (Lingras, 2021, p. 9). Even if parents and families select books that do not portray stereotypical and racialized narratives surrounding Black and Brown people, they still need the skills, knowledge, and support to navigate having antiracist conversations with their young children. There are several organizations, such as The American Psychological Association's (APA), that help parents, families, and caregivers in using picturebooks as an entry point to talk about race, racism, and power. Some of the tips include various types of questions that can be asked to children about race, racism, and power including while engaging with books such as, “Do you notice similarities or differences between the characters (and yourself)?” There are also questions children may ask, such as “What is the dark skin vs. light skin (i.e., colorism) debate? Where did it come from?” (APA, 2019). Parents, families, and caregivers have a major role and responsibility in engaging their children in conversations surrounding race, racism, and power in society. If parents, families, and caregivers are not equipped with the skills and support to select and use picturebooks to talk about these ideas, then they risk the possibility of reinforcing stereotypes, biases, and racist ideas.

This type of support could look many different ways. One organization that is currently doing this work is Teaching for Change. Teaching for Change (2021) offers teachers and parents tools and resources to create schools where students learn to read, write, and become change agents in society. They offer professional development support and resources to teachers and families ranging from topics such as civil rights, challenging Islamophobia, and anti-bias education. If more organizations supported families in learning about ways in which to discuss

race, identity, and racism with young children, then they will be better equipped with the skills to have these types of conversations with children from an early age.

More professional development could support teachers in building knowledge surrounding the selection and utilization of children's literature in the classroom. "Literature that reflects students' lived realities offers additional benefits to the language arts classroom because it raises questions about literature and teaching as a racially neutral process." (DeNicolo & Franquiz, 2006, p. 168). If teachers are equipped with the strategies that help them to select books that reflect the lived realities of Black and Brown children and are equipped with the techniques to engage in critical conversations, then they will become better at preparing children to participate in and affect a globally diverse society. For instance, many teachers tend to place a direct focus on the stories of Black and Brown people during Black History Month. During this time, teachers select and use books that depict Black and Brown characters in various ways. They may choose these books based on awards, merits, or recognition. If teachers do not have strategies in place that will help them to select books, then children may miss the opportunity to develop consciousness and cultural competence surrounding the experiences of Black and Brown people in society. Additionally, if teachers are not equipped with methods for using books, such as engaging students in critical conversations surrounding race, racism, and power, then teachers will not be able to provide children with opportunities to engage in critical conversations, reflections, and actions that ultimately lead to transforming society.

Implications for Librarians (Library of Congress)

There is a need for the critical reflection in the ways that the Library of Congress creates, assigns, and utilizes the different racial/ethnicity subject headings for children's books. The labeling system organized by the Library of Congress (LC) is broadly used in many libraries but

has some disadvantages, especially as it relates to communities that have historically been marginalized such as communities of color and the LGBTQ+ community. (Howard & Knowlton, 2018) “Persistent bias in the language used for subject headings, as well as the hierarchy of classification for books in these fields, continues to ‘other’ the peoples and topics that populate these titles” (Howard & Knowlton, 2018, p. 74). In addition, due to the inconsistency in racial/ethnic labels, finding books surrounding specific races/ethnicities can be challenging. Ultimately, this means that not only are there biases and various classification orders in the organizational system created by the Library of Congress, but the inconsistency in the language (e.g., Black, African American) also makes it even more challenging for users of the system to find books about Black and Brown people. If the labeling system organized by the Library of Congress presents challenges when seeking books about Black and Brown people, then there should be a reconstruction of the system to eliminate these inequities.

Book Award Committees

This study, and many others, show that there is a need for deeper reflection in the ways books are prized and selected as notable books. “Organizations that sponsor prizes and select notable books can use information from these essays [research articles] to think critically (and possibly reevaluate) their selection processes and criteria” (Bostic, 2019, p. 342). When prizing and award committees come together to select books for prizing, systems should be in place that allows committees to specifically look at the ways that race, racism, and power, as well as other hegemonic forms of oppression are communicated through the text and visual imagery in the books. The use of CRT tenets as demonstrated in this study is one way in which organizations can analyze books for how they perpetuate existing structures; however, other frameworks would be beneficial as well (e.g., Disability Studies to evaluate for ableism, DisCrit to evaluate for

racism and ableism, Queer Theory to evaluate for heteronormativity). If organizations that sponsor prizes and select notable books do not consider the ways power and systemic oppression are depicted in books, then they risk prizing and awarding books that convey racist and oppressive ideas surrounding the lives of Black and Brown children.

Recontextualizing the Work of Ezra Jack Keats

The work of Ezra Jack Keats has been monumental in the field of children's literature. Early on, the work of Keats, specifically the depiction of Peter in *Snowy Day* in 1962, was one of the few instances in which a Black character was featured in a book and was the first time in which a children's book that depicted a Black character won the Caldecott Award (Martin, 2020). "The high-profile nature of the Caldecott Medal means that the book still has wide distribution, outlasting many of its contemporaries. To this day, nearly every American library that houses children's books buys at least one copy of *The Snowy Day*" (Martin, 2020, par. 6). Although the depiction of Peter in many of the Ezra Jack Keats books was pivotal in bringing greater awareness to the representation of Black and Brown characters in children's literature, there is a need to recontextualize the depiction of Peter in these books and the messages that can be conveyed through the text and visual imagery in the books. For example, in *Snowy Day,* Peter can be seen wearing a red hoodie throughout the story. This red hoodie can also be seen as a symbol on the Ezra Jack Keats Book Award emblem. Furthermore, this red hoodie can also be seen in books like *Windows*, in which the creators of the book share how the book was inspired by the work of Keats. Although the context of the red hoodie in 1962 when *Snowy Day* was published may have had less of a significance, the idea of a Black male wearing a hoodie in current society has shifted. Myers (2013) stated:

> Years ago I stopped wearing hoodies. I found that particular article of clothing would often run me afoul of authorities and had women in elevators clutching their purses ever tighter. But I have found that even when I am not wearing this supposedly threatening piece of clothing, I still wear it metaphorically." (para. 13)

This means that Myers, a Black man, understood that meaning and symbolism of the red hoodie in American society has shifted over time. The hoodie now carries the connotation of be violent and a threat. Black and Brown boys have never been safe, but what constitutes danger has changed. At one time, danger for Black and Brown boys was looking at a White woman (e.g., Emmett Till), but now it is wearing a hoodie (e.g., Trayvon Martin). At the time in which Keats wrote the books including Peter, the theoretical framework that I used in this study was not available to analyze the text and illustrations. Because of this, there is a need to recontextualize the depiction of Black and Brown characters in Ezra Jack Keats books through new critical frameworks that help to uncover how ideas of race, racism, and power are depicted in children's literature. If books, such as *Snowy Day*, are critically examined using more recent epistemologies, the selection and use of these books in early childhood spaces may shift.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Additional questions emerged during the research process that could be explored in future studies. My research design was bounded by a particular focus—on books that depicted Black and Brown male main characters and received recognition in a certain year by the Ezra Jack Keats foundation. By design, therefore, this study intentionally excluded books featuring Black and Brown girls, women, and characters who are gender fluid. In my analysis, I made notes about the representation of female characters, particularly in *Crown*, as well as indications of heteronormativity, but those observations were outside the scope of this study. The design of the

study also points to the fact that a different sample of picturebooks could provide a different perspective. It would be interesting to examine the depiction and representation of males in a different sample of award-winning books, such as picturebooks that received the Coretta Scott King Award. Samples could include notable picturebooks recommended by other literary groups (e.g., Children's Literature Assembly), picturebooks that did not receive awards, books collaboratively authored by authors from multiple races (e.g., *Something Happened in Our Town,* 2018), or a specific book genre. In addition, in this study, I limited race as a social construction to words, leaving out how race might also be constructed through images. It would be interesting to see how race as a social construction is depicted visually in the books.

Another potential study that was recorded in my research journal involved exploring the intersection of race/ethnicity and others forms of identity (e.g., ability, sexual orientation, religion). Due to the use of Critical Race Theory, my research design focused on the representation of race, racism, and power, which deliberately excluded identities related to dis/abilities, nationality, gender expression, political affiliation, and much more. Using a different theoretical framework, such as Intersectionality, Black Critical Theory (BlackCrit), or DisCrit, could provide different viewpoints. For example, "BlackCrit in education helps us to more incisively analyze how the specificity of (anti)blackness matters in explaining how Black bodies become marginalized, disregarded and disdained in schools and other spaces of education" (Dumas & ross, 2016, p. 416). Like Critical Race Theory, BlackCrit can help researchers understand the permanence of racism and whiteness as property. But Critical Race Theory does not specifically address how antiblackness informs and cultivates racist beliefs and practices, which is what BlackCrit does. "BlackCrit helps to explain precisely how Black bodies become marginalized, disregarded, and disdained, even in their highly visible place within

celebratory discourses on race and diversity" (Dumas & Ross, 2016, p. 417). This means that BlackCrit can provide information on how the ideas of racism and antiblackness inform the ways that children's books are created (e.g., why certain images are used in books). If other theories/frameworks are used to explore the same two books in this study, then researchers will have additional perspectives on how and why ideas of racism, racism, and power are communicated through the text and visual imagery in the books.

Inductive Approach

Using an inductive approach to analyzing the books could also yield different results. Although the deductive approach has many advantages, such as being able to test a hypothesis and showing the relationship between different themes and variables (e.g., tenets of CRT), it can be argued that the deductive approach limits differences in thinking. The inductive approach is a flexible approach to analyzing data in which themes are generated from the data itself and allows for the creation of new theories and ideas. Through an inductive approach ideas surrounding gender, gender roles, sexual orientation, and ability could be constructed. For example, in *Crown* although there is an explicit recognition of male and female characters, there is a lack of explicit acknowledgment of transgender or genderqueer characters (if they even exist in the book). Furthermore, female characters can be seen lusting after male characters with words paired with the images such as, "Girllllll...he's so fine!" (Artifact 8). This means that not only will children who identify as transgender or genderqueer not see themselves in the book, but the stereotypical gender roles that are assigned to the genders depicted can also lead to negative self-perception.

In addition to gender, ideas surrounding sexual orientation could be constructed in both books. For example, in *Windows*, while there were depictions of various identities (e.g., genders, ages) (Artifact 6), there was an absence of the recognition of various sexual orientations in the

book (e.g., those who identify as gay). From this, it can be implied that although children who may see their race/ethnicity and gender represented in the book, those who may have a historically marginalized sexual identity and do not see it openly and directly represented in the book may choose to suppress it, thus leading to a decrease in self-confidence and esteem. When thinking about abilities, in both books, ideas of ableism are conveyed throughout the text and visual imagery. For example, both main characters are depicted as having the ability to walk and are not depicted as having any type of condition that impacts their emotions, thinking, and behavior. This means that children who have any type of disability (physical or mental) will not see themselves truly represented in either book and may develop negative mindsets about their overall abilities. If an inductive approach is used to explore the same books in this study, then ideas related to the representation of other identities such as gender, sexual orientation, ability, nationality, and religion could be constructed.

CONCLUSION: YOUR AVERAGE NIGGA & THE NEED FOR CODE MESHIN'

I remember when I first started the Ph.D. program, I struggled with becoming the "academic writer" in ways that are typically associated with academia and that therefore some people in my department wanted me to be. The style and process of academic writing was so foreign compared to the language that I used in my everyday life. I felt myself becoming "less Black" as I attempted to use my language less and use more Whitewashed academic language so that I could be successful in the program. Thank God for happy hours with my Black and Brown friends because we all shared this same experience. That's when I learned about Vershawn Ashanti Young and his book, *Your Average Nigga: Performing Race, Literacy, and Masculinity* (2007). First off, the title blew me away. I thought to myself, if a dope ass scholar like Dr. Young can use the word nigga in his book, then I could do it too. I could use my language, every piece of it, to write the stories that I want to write—to do the work that I want to do—using my own words. This is why I put all my faith in Black and Brown folx like Vershawn Ashanti Young.

Writing this dissertation has by far been one of the hardest and most exhausting things that I have ever had to do in my life. Not only am I having to do the analysis, write it up, and follow this raggedy and confusing ass APA format, but I also have to do this thing my advisors want me to do: "Bring yourself into the writing more. Lean into it." Like wtf does that mean? I lean any further into this computer imma be in the screen. But yeah, I get it. They want to see ME, who I am, more represented in this writing. But here is the problem, how am I supposed to lean more into my style and way of writing when the formalities in which I am told by some people--or expected to write in by some people--are being pushed upon me while writing this dissertation. Some people will say, "follow the dissertation structure" but my way of thinking and sharing ideas do not come out the best in this traditional style of writing a dissertation. Some people will say, "Make sure you use correct grammar, spell check, and get it edited." But what if my language is not considered to be correct grammar? Do I have to use "other people's english? aka. Standard American White folks' language? Man, it's just wild. I aint doing this again. EVER. Am I proud of myself? Yeah. Did I cry? Yeah. All the time. Did I want to quit?

Yeah…and had I not been this far along I probably would have. I mean, even as I'm writing this, I'm questioning myself. Do I even want to go into the academy and teach? I can't deal with this type of writing and it restricts a lot of who I truly am. This type of restriction does not showcase my work the way I see fit and it does not give me the opportunity to cultivate my true genius.

But that right there…that statement is the reason I should go into academy. Because there are going to be so many other Black and Brown students in college who may feel the same way and need help cultivating their gifts. That's why I used cultural code-meshing—all my languages--throughout the dissertation. I want other people who read this to know that you can be successful, unapologetic, and stay true to who we are in the academy. The long history of oppression that Black males have faced throughout history can be reflected in the profanity that we use in *our* oral conversations and writings. We use it to show *our* power, our thoughts, and feelings. Profanity can be used in ways that allows writers to express their ideas and feelings. So again, yes, I used and referenced profanity in this dissertation to show power-- the power that *our* language has. For teachers, I am not advocating that children be encouraged to use profanity in the classroom, but I am advocating for the use and reference of it as needed in the academy as it can used as a method to share stories.

I want the academy to stop whitewashing the voices and writings of Black and Brown scholars like me. Just because you can't speak or understand my language doesn't mean that I have to conform to your way of speaking and writing. So to Dr. Young, thank you. You opened the door, and I'm walking straight through.

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