IS ROSA STILL TIRED?

Revisiting Kohl’s Myths in Contemporary Picture Books

Eric Groce, M. Elizabeth Bellows, Greg McClure, and Elizabeth Daigle
Appalachian State University
Tina Heafner
University of North Carolina at Charlotte
Brandon Fox
Stephen F. Austin State University

In 1991, Herbert Kohl argued against the inaccurate and incomplete story of Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott that appeared prominently within texts and trade books of that era (Kohl 1991). He con-

Eric Groce, Email: groceec@appstate.edu; M. Elizabeth Bellows,
Email: bellowsme@appstate.edu; Greg McClave, Email: mcclaveg@appstate.edu;
Elizabeth Daigle, Email: daiglle@appstate.edu; Tina Heafner, Email:
tina.heafner@uncg.edu; Brandon Fox, Email: foxbrand@sfasu.edu.

American Educational History Journal
Volume 41, Number 2, 2014, pp. 411–429
Copyright © 2014 by Information Age Publishing
All rights of reproduction in any form reserved.
tended the biased perspective stripped Montgomery’s African American community of their courage, intelligence, and moral conviction. Kohl identified seven myths embedded within the common representation of Ms. Parks’ story in the literature and called for a more accurate representation of the events leading up to the Montgomery Bus Boycott that centers the story on deliberate, organized, and powerful efforts that led to social change. In this article, we examine how children’s literature published since Kohl’s critique has treated the story of Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott and discuss implications of our findings. At a time when the nation’s schools are intensely segregated (Orfield, Kucsera, and Siegel-Hawley 2012) and students’ voices are silenced in favor of restrictive, assessment-oriented curriculum and pedagogy, we assert that Kohl’s argument bears revisiting.

**REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE**

Learning is guided in deliberate, intentional, and purposeful ways through the use and exploration of carefully designed curriculum and standards. Learning also occurs through *unofficial* curricula, such as children’s literature, the retelling of historical narratives, and family knowledge that is passed down through generations (Apple 2004). However, predominant content learning comes from history textbooks, which “are not effective in helping children make meaningful, personal connections with the past” (Jacobs and Tunnell 2004, 116, emphasis in original). To find balance, Walter Parker (2012) suggests using textbooks as study aids and children’s literature as integrative tools to teach multiple perspectives. He asserts that using a variety of children’s literature books can help children “to see events, both historical and current, from more than one social position, more than one vantage point” (388). The narrative storytelling structure of children’s literature can provide a meaningful supplement to authoritative, one-dimensional history textbooks. Jere Brophy and Janet Alleman (2007) outline three significant purposes that well-chosen literature selections can serve in the advancement of students’ historical understanding: 1) by providing a sense of context in relating how some people thought about their worlds at the time; 2) helping students learn to take the perspective of others; and 3) exposing them to alternative interpretations of events (103–104).

Children’s literature helps children construct and reconstruct past events, and contributes to their growing epistemological knowledge about history. Denise Johnson (2012) defines quality children’s literature as a book that possesses literary merit and appeals to the reader—it “increases our awareness, compassion, and humanity; teaches us; and delights us.
an American fiction. Kohl (2009) presents an alternative representation of the genre that led to a reorientation of the genre, with interesting language and stories (4). Charles Temple, Miriam Martinez, Junko Yokota, and Alice Naylor (2002) note that as children move from preschool to the primary years, "developments in their ability to reason go hand in hand with their greater sense of seriousness about their life roles" (20), and a growing flexibility in children's reasoning skills allow them to appreciate more complex plot structures. Further, good children's books "may help children understand how they and their neighbors think through moral issues and give them important experiences in clarifying differences and building consensus" (4). Lastly, as critical literacy tools, quality children's literature also has the potential to help young students examine history with an eye toward justice and equity, what Paulo Freire and Donald Macedo (1987) called reading the world and the word.

**Historical Fiction**

The diminution of time spent on social studies in the elementary classroom has resulted in teachers' increased emphasis on more uncomplicated reproduction of content knowledge (Wills 2007), making integration of English Language Arts a common practice. Thus, trade books that depict historical events have become essential resources for engaging students in historical understandings (Holloway and Chiodo 2009). We borrow from Charlotte Huck and Barbara Kiefer's (2004) definition of historical fiction as "all realistic stories that are set in the past" (484). However, Rebecca Lukens (2003) separates the genres of historical fiction and historical realism and cautions, "To turn facts into fiction, the writer must combine imagination with fact, bringing about an integrated story with a fictional protagonist in a suspenseful plot" (17), making sure not to flaw the story by recreating the past too sentimentally or sensationally. Another goal of historical fiction is to allow readers to "perceive past events and issues as they were experienced by the people at the time" in order to experience historical empathy to develop historical understanding (Tomlinson, Tunnell, and Richgels 1993, 54).

Whether or not they are historians, writers of historical fiction have significant responsibilities (Mitchell 2005). The historical events they reference should not be sugar-coated; the setting they describe must be detailed and believable, and historical accuracy is essential (Jacobs and Tunnell 2004; Johnson 2012). Kay Vandergrift (1990) asks, "Must an author maintain absolute accuracy in the creation of an historically grounded fictional world, or are minor deviations acceptable if they serve the plot?" On the other hand, when does 'wise conjecture' about that for which there are no historical records become misrepresentation of history? (35). Concerning the narrative of Rosa Parks and the Montgomery
Bus Boycott, enough historical records exist so that authors would not have to allow "minor deviations" or "wise conjecture" in their retelling of the events in this significant event in the struggle for civil rights.

**METHOD OF INQUIRY**

This study employed a critical qualitative content analysis design (White and Marsh 2006) featuring purposive sampling to identify relevant cases within the selected picture books. We define picture books, for the purposes of this study, as children's books that "tell a story or develop an understanding of a concept through a unique combination of text and art" (Galda and Cullinan 2002, 11).

Quality measures for the study included prolonged engagement and triangulation through multiple investigators to address internal validity and the construction of an audit trail to address reliability concerns (Merriam 2009). Positioning ourselves as critical educators, we are interested in asking "how and why knowledge gets constructed the way it does, and how and why some constructions of reality are legitimated and celebrated by the dominant culture while others clearly are not" (McLaren 2009, 63). First, Beach et al. (2009) argue, "No one critical theory can ever be considered the only way in which a text or event can be interpreted; instead our reading of texts are both filtered through the theories and help us reconsider the theories themselves" (142). With this in mind, we were cognizant of our respective positionalitities as we each defined the "critical" part of this analysis in varied ways, which allowed for a thorough analysis of the picture books.

Because this study serves as a response to Kohl's (1991) argument that the story of "Rosa Parks the Tired" is an inaccurate representation of her arrest in 1955, and the bus boycott that followed, we chose books that were published at least a decade after Kohl's work on this topic. This methodological decision was intended to allow time for writers and publishers to respond to Kohl's critique. We selected only books that are still in print so that the findings can be useful to readers. After the sample was determined, reductive coding was used to identify emergent themes related to the following research questions:

1. More than twenty years after Kohl's critique of the "Rosa Parks the Tired" narrative, how do current picture books treat the story of Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott?
2. How do current picture books mention or treat a) the civil rights activism of Rosa Parks prior to her arrest in December of 1955; b)
the notion of segregation and Jim Crow laws; and c) involvement of the Montgomery community in the bus boycott.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

In his critique of the "Rosa Parks the Tired" narrative told in children's books and textbooks, Kohl (1991) identified seven myths that when perpetuated, "serve to turn a carefully planned movement for social change into a spontaneous outburst based upon frustration and anger" (2). These seven myths are summarized below:

1) Rosa Parks was a poor, tired seamstress, who lived in Montgomery, Ala., during the 1950s; 2) In those days there was still segregation in parts of the United States. That meant that African Americans and European Americans were not allowed to use the same public facilities; 3) Whenever the city buses were crowded, African Americans had to give up seats in front to European Americans and move to the back of the bus; 4) One day on her way home from work Rosa was tired and sat down in the front of the bus; 5) As the bus got crowded she was asked to give up her seat to a European American man, and she refused. The bus driver told her she had to go to the back of the bus, and she still refused to move. It was a hot day, she was tired and angry, and she became very stubborn. The driver called a policeman who arrested Rosa; 6) When other African Americans in Montgomery heard this, they became angry too, so they decided to refuse to ride the buses until everyone was allowed to ride together. They boycotted the buses; 7) The boycott, which was led by Martin Luther King, Jr., succeeded. Now African Americans can ride the buses together in Montgomery. Rosa Parks was a very brave person. (Kohl 1991, 2-6)

For the purposes of our critique, we collapsed Kohl's seven myths into three clusters of variables by which the selected picture books were coded. Each cluster is described in detail below.

First, we sought evidence of how each book highlighted Rosa Parks' *prolonged activism*. Within this cluster, we looked specifically at whether and how the books portrayed Ms. Parks' work with organized groups—such as the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and Women's Political Council (WPC)—as well as any previous disputes with bus drivers during this time. Second, we combed the books for evidence of the discussion of *segregation*. More specifically, we examined how Jim Crow laws are discussed and whether segregation is described as passive or institutionalized, whether the inequity of separate facilities were described or displayed, whether the author expressed moral judgment of the notion of segregation, whether the narrative mentioned the geographical area (e.g.,
“the South”), whether segregation was presented as an ongoing struggle, or if the book treated segregation as resolved by the end of the story, and, finally, we searched for any mention of the Montgomery bus codes (laws) that were in place at the time. Our third cluster housed evidence of greater community involvement. We looked to see if the length of the boycott was mentioned, and if the boycott was discussed in the context of long-term planning by the community. Additionally, this category helped us determine whether the books mentioned the role the church played in community gatherings: whether they mentioned affiliated groups such as the MIA, NAACP, and WPC; whether leaders other than Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks were portrayed as civil rights leaders; whether the book discussed the Brown v. Board (1956) court case; and whether there was any mention of prior bus incidents with citizens other than Rosa Parks. Using these clusters, we analyzed each trade book and attempted to authenticate its narrative by comparing the text with primary historical sources readily available to the public.

**FINDINGS**

**Prolonged Activism**

Under prolonged activism, we looked for data regarding Rosa Parks’ previous civil rights activism prior to her December 1, 1955 arrest. Only three of the eleven texts included any details of previous activism. For coding purposes, we defined activism as action or involvement as a means of achieving political or other goals within an organized group. A pair of trade books provided explicit examples of this variable. Muriel Dubois (2003) explains, “In 1943, Rosa joined the NAACP in Montgomery. Rosa became secretary of the Montgomery NAACP group. She went to meetings and took notes. She typed letters and wrote articles for the NAACP” (13). The account from Edith Hope Fine (2004) closely parallels but adds, “This group was working for freedom—for all people to be treated fairly. Rosa became secretary of the NAACP in Montgomery. She kept records of cruel treatment of Black people. She made phone calls and wrote letters for the NAACP” (16).

Without establishing a record of activism, authors lead young readers to imply that Rosa’s refusal to vacate her place was her initial resistance to the racist rhetoric and inequitable practices within her community. Inclusion of activities such as her training on school segregation at the Highlander School where “she had been stirred by messages of equality” (Hare 2005, 14), her leadership (along with Johnnie Carr) of the local NAACP Youth Council, or her brazen integration of the Freedom Train exhibit in 1947 with a group of black children could inform readers that her arrest
was predated by years of public opposition to the injustices forged by a segregationist society.

Although her previous interactions with city bus drivers has been documented (Phibbs 2009, 13; Parks 1992, 78–79), this aspect of Rosa’s story was often missing (mentioned in two of eleven) from the narrative, suggesting to readers once again that the incident was isolated and sparked the boycott by mere serendipity. In the winter of 1943, Rosa boarded a Montgomery City Lines bus, paid her fare, and, after noticing the rear section of the bus (reserved for black patrons) was crowded, she decided to walk down the aisle to a seat instead of exiting the bus and entering through the back door, as required. The driver confronted her and told her to exit and reenter at the rear entrance. Rosa refused, prompting the driver to leave his seat, grab her by the coat sleeve, and escort her to the front exit. After dropping her purse, she momentarily sat in the front seat to retrieve it. This additional act enraged the driver who yelled, “Get off my bus” (Parks 1992, 79). Rosa left through the front door but chose not to reenter the bus, and vowed never to ride with the “mean one” (Parks 1992, 79) again. From this incident, she also remembers the lack of support from other black riders but expressed, “That was the 1940s, when people took a lot without fighting back” (Parks 1992, 79), exemplifying her resistant spirit twelve years before her most recognized moment.

In one of the texts we examined, Connie Colwell Miller (2007) begins the book with the 1943 interaction, interspersing invented dialogue between narrative nonfiction text blocks. The adjoining page begins, “Twelve years later on December 1, 1955, Rosa headed home to eat dinner...” and continues the story of her arrest for several pages. The following page includes the text block, “And now she was staring right at the same bus driver who ordered her off his bus 12 years earlier,” (6) adjacent to a split illustration of the stern and steely eyed driver intent on evicting her from the seat. This juxtaposition clearly delineates the distinct but connected episodes and guides readers toward a chronology of the events. Hope Fine (2004) also describes the moment, “Rosa climbed on and paid her dime. The back doorway was jammed with riders, so she stayed on the bus. The bus driver, James Blake, ordered Rosa to step off the bus and use the other door. She refused” (17). After a description of Blake’s racist ideology, she continues, “Blake pulled Rosa’s sleeve. She warned him not to touch her” (19), signaling a consistent character trait exhibited over time.

**SEGREGATION**

In addition to looking at previous activism, we also examined the texts’ treatment of segregation, specifically if the term “Jim Crow” was used
when defining segregation, and if “separate but equal” facilities were accurately portrayed as inferior for the black community. Additionally, we looked for evidence of moral judgment, if segregation was characterized as resolved following the end of the boycott or as a continuing social issue, and, finally, if a geographical area (i.e., the South) was given when describing segregation.

Every book within the sample mentioned segregation when describing the context for Rosa’s arrest and the subsequent boycott. Some texts defined the term in developmentally appropriate language within the glossary, “to separate; to keep apart” (Chanko 2007, 16); “The policy of keeping Whites and Blacks apart,” (Hope Fine 2004, 30); and “the act of keeping people or groups apart” (Dubois 2003, 23), in addition to embedding meaning within the text, “At that time, there were laws in the South to segregate African Americans from white people. This meant they could not go to the same places, such as restaurants and waiting rooms” (Chanko 2007, 2). Use of the term “Jim Crow” when explaining segregation as a way to establish historical context was found in only three books. Jo Kittenger (2010) weaves it into the story, writing, “If Black people didn’t stand up, the bus driver could have them arrested, and they’d have to pay a fine. Those were the rules, called Jim Crow laws. That’s just the way things were,” while Andrea Davis Pinkney (2008) spells it out at the beginning of the book: “Jim Crow was segregation. Laws that said Black people and white people could not mix.” She then portrays “Jim Crow” as a menacing bird with bony wings pecking and strutting his way around Montgomery during the boycott, possibly leaving readers confused by the metaphorical representation and questioning whether Jim Crow is just another fictional element incorporated within the text. One book (Duncan Edwards 2005) failed to mention “Jim Crow” within the narrative, but included it in an illustration. A black woman is pictured wearing a sandwich board with the message “Jim Crow MUST Go,” intermingled with other citizens carrying signs advocating for integration. A suitable definition of the term is included in the “Introduction” section of the book: “Jim Crow laws and attitudes kept Black people and white people separate and made it illegal or dangerous for Black people to use the same facilities as white people,” but because the text structure is noticeably different than the story and the page lacks illustrations, readers may dismiss the “Introduction” as additional front matter and proceed to what they interpret as the “beginning” of the story, thereby missing the intended content message.

Once again, a small number of texts (four out of eleven) adequately described or gave examples of the inferior public facilities for Blacks, solidifying the myth of “separate but equal” from Plessy v. Ferguson. Illustrations and descriptions of second-rate schools were the most common example, the senter under a | organized with black | stove abo |d cold.” W | facilities | explainin | and some | vester wa | White chi | presentin | illustratio | “Colored. | A maj | moral ju | Patricia I | black pat | then ade | Giovanni | then got | rear.” Fo |zens, incl |sit in the | rode the | Mara (26 | wanted tl | “Daily. A | these law | principle | Crow” la | to inferic | noted th | of segre | plete an | possibly | children | from hist | Additi | graphica | tified the | a difficul
example. Hope Fine (2004) clearly illustrates the disparity by including the sentence “White children’s schools had plenty of books and supplies,” under a photograph of white students working at their desks in a well organized classroom adjacent to an image of a multi-aged school filled with black students cradling books in their laps facing a wood burning stove above the caption, “Schools for Black children were crowded and cold.” While many of the texts mentioned that laws mandated separate facilities for black and white citizens, they stopped short of explicitly explaining that black facilities were overwhelmingly sub-par, out-of-date, and sometimes unsafe. One book (Pingry 2008) explained, “Rosa and Sylvester walked to a one-room school that was only for Black children. White children rode the bus to a big school,” but confounds the issue by presenting another entire page dedicated to separate facilities next to an illustration of two identical water fountains; one for “Whites” and one for “Colored.”

A majority of books within the sample (eight of eleven) included a moral judgment from the narrator about segregation within the text. Patricia Pingry (2008) describes a scene where bus drivers would leave black patrons as they were walking to the rear entrance of the bus and then adds, “It was humiliating. It was mean. It was wrong.” Nikki Giovanni (2005) targeted the same practice, “As was the evil custom, she then got off the bus and went to the back door to enter the bus from the rear.” Four books described the segregation laws as unfair to black citizens, including Dubois (2003) “One unfair law made African Americans sit in the back of the buses” (15); Pamela Chanko (2007), “Every day she rode the bus to work. There were unfair laws on the bus, too” (5); Wil Mara (2007), “African Americans were angry about Rosa’s arrest. They wanted the unfair laws changed” (17); and Connie Colwell Miller (2007), “Daily, African Americans like Rosa faced unfair treatment because of these laws” (4). It is notable that so many authors chose to embed their principled stance on segregation but failed to include references to “Jim Crow” laws or adequate explanations that “separate but equal” translated to inferior facilities for black citizens. In his own experiences, Kohl (1991) noted that students might struggle to understand “the history and nature of segregation” (37). Embedding their own moral thoughts with a complete and historically accurate message would have allowed readers to possibly comprehend this historical construct with greater clarity. Instead children were faced with the challenge of separating author perspective from historically inaccurate evidence.

Additionally, six books within the sample specifically mentioned a geographical region within the context of segregation. Three instances identified the South with segregation, including Mara (2007) “The South was a difficult place for African Americans to live” (6); Patricia Pingry (2008)
“But in the South, where Rosa lived, there were special laws, called Jim Crow laws”; and Hope Fine (2004) “In the South, all the schools for white children were better than the schools for black children” (7); while another (Colwell Miller 2007) referenced the South indirectly: “Rosa, it’s time to move north to Detroit. We’ll be treated better there” (19). Kohl (1991) likens pre-civil rights South to South Africa’s apartheid system and notes that without a direct reference to the South, authors have softened the tone of “the pervasive, brutal, and total nature of segregation” inherent within the geographical region.

The last variable within the segregation group categorized books based on their perception that the American Civil Rights Movement and/or segregation was resolved at the conclusion of the bus boycott (and the Brown v. Board of Education decision) or continued past that point in history. Six texts informed the reader that the struggle for equal rights continued after the Montgomery Bus Boycott, including Dubois (2003): “Rosa continued to work for civil rights. She spoke all over the country,” and “People all over the country worked for equal rights. In 1964, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act” (19); and Chanko (2007): “But Rosa’s work was far from over,” and “She went on marches for civil rights. Finally, in 1964, a new law was passed. It said that all people had to be treated equally” (12). One of the books (Colwell Miller 2007) extended the narrative after the bus boycott to include other civil rights milestones such as the Greensboro Sit-In and the March on Washington. Explaining through text and illustrations that the arrest of Rosa Parks and the bus boycott did not end segregation allows readers to recognize the persistence and dedication within the black community to achieve the equality granted within the Constitution. Further, it validates the experiences of students of color who may experience racism and discrimination in their daily lives and can serve as a starting point for classroom discussions on equity and justice in the present (Epstein 2009).

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The final category focused on incidents/descriptions of community involvement. Specifically, we sought evidence of mentioning or describing previous bus incidents (besides Rosa Parks), the duration of the boycott, long-term planning of the boycott, church participation, affiliated leadership organizations, boycott leaders (besides Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr.) and the Brown v. Board of Education (1956) court case. Many black citizens of Montgomery had suffered humiliation and harm on the city buses prior to Rosa Parks’ arrest on December 1, 1955 (Baldwin 1992, 57; Friese 1990, 40; Harrington 2000, 56; Phibbs 2009, 4; Roberson 2005, 140).
Establishing this fact within the text allows readers to place Rosa's arrest in the context of the struggle within the black community. Namely, when readers learn the story of Claudette Colvin, Mary Louise Smith (Hoose 2009), Jo Ann Gibson Robinson (Garrow 1987) and scores of other unsung citizens who fought segregation on the buses, they are able to recognize the widespread extent of the discriminatory practice as well as the length of the resistance and activism. Without this integral knowledge, young readers are left to assume Rosa Parks was the first to fight back and fail to recognize the value and power of collective action.

Although no consensus regarding the exact length of the boycott (381 days, 382 days, 13 months, over a year, etc.) could be found within the sample, all eleven books described the length of the boycott in sufficient detail to allow the reader to understand the considerable sacrifice paid by the black community between December 1955 and January 1957. Conversely, not one book mentioned any long-term planning in preparation for the boycott. Kohl (1991) characterizes this omission in earlier books as an “insult to the intelligence and courage of the African-American community” (44-45) to suggest their “collective decision making, willed risk, and coordinated action” (45) could have been spurred instantaneously by the arrest of a “tired seamstress.” Silencing collective action diminishes this mass movement to a single event, skewing readers’ perceptions of cause-effect and agency.

After the arrest is chronicled within the texts and the boycott has begun, there is a mixed level of representation documenting the participation of churches, affiliated groups, boycott leaders (besides Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr.), and the mention of the *Brown v. Board of Education* court case that ended the boycott. The churches played a significant role within the black community during the boycott (Baldwin 1992, 15; Friese 1990, 69; Roberson 2005, 140). The predominant leadership team (The Montgomery Improvement Association, MIA) was planned and formed at two area churches, Dexter Avenue Baptist Church and Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church (Burns 1997, 10; Gray 2013, 53); the initial mass meeting to gauge community interest in continuing the boycott was held at Holt Street Baptist Church (Baldwin 1992, 52; Burns 1997, 10; Graetz 1991, 108; Gray 2013, 59-60; Roberson 2005, 144); and subsequent meetings were held throughout the boycott at a variety of churches within the black community (Baldwin 1992, 50; Freedman 2006, 52; Friese 1990, 69; Graetz 1991, 105; Phibbs 2009, 36). Pastors at black churches used the pulpit to inspire and inform parishioners and were a significant portion of the MIA because the white power structure had less influence on their economic livelihood than other black citizens (Hare 2005, 112). Only six of eleven books mentioned any kind of church participation during the boycott. Several books mentioned or included illustrations about the first mass
meeting at the Holt Street Baptist Church featuring Martin Luther King, Jr., addressing the overflow crowd. Failure to mention subsequent church participation distorts the historical narrative and silences this important facet of the story. We contend this deliberate attempt to avoid mentioning any role of religion (i.e. black churches) mirrors a taboo found in most school history texts (Loewen 2007).

Recognition of affiliated groups (four out of eleven) and boycott leaders (three out of eleven) besides Rosa Parks and Dr. King was even more limited within the sample. The MIA, Women’s Political Council (WPC), and other groups played significant roles including the creation and distribution of flyers to initiate the boycott (Frieser 1990, 57; Hare 2005, 30; Phibbs 2009, 14), meeting with civic and bus company representatives during negotiations (Phibbs 2009, 63), and coordinating the massive alternative transportation system (Freedman 2006, 51; Gray 1998, 121; Parks 1992, 144–145; Phibbs 2009, 43). When this information is missing from the majority of the stories and leaders such as Jo Ann Gibson Robinson, E.D. Nixon, and Rufus Lewis are absent, this leaves significant knowledge gaps for readers and downplays the efforts and sacrifices of over 40,000 ordinary citizens acting in an extraordinary manner. Constructing the narrative in this way favors the heroification of history, which highlights a pair of iconic historical figures. Movements need symbols, but not at the expense of making the hero or heroine all that is remembered.

Although the boycott did create a financial hardship for the bus company, the conclusion of the boycott was determined by the Supreme Court ruling of the Browder v. Gayle (1956) case. Rosa Parks did have an established record of activism and opposition to segregation, but she was not a plaintiff in the court case challenging the constitutionality of the Montgomery City codes. The five original plaintiffs (Jeanetta Reese withdrew soon after the initial filing) had all suffered from the cruel policies and inhumane actions from the drivers before Rosa Parks was arrested (Baldwin 1992, 57; Hare 2005, 87; Phibbs 2009, 65). All five women agreed to serve as plaintiffs, knowing it would cause the spotlight of discrimination to center on them and their families until a decision was made. None of the books examined mentioned the specific case or any of the plaintiffs (Aurelia Browder, Susie McDonald, Claudette Colvin, and Mary Louise Smith) within the text. Jo Kittinger (2010) did mention the case and two plaintiffs, but not until the author’s note, trusting readers to continue reading through the back matter to discover this valuable piece of the story. This exclusion silences the brave women and their legal team who fought to uphold their Fourteenth Amendment rights and leaves readers to infer that it was Rosa Parks instead who used the legal system to overturn the segregation laws.
Luther King, a quintessential church leader, is mentioned in most contexts. Boycott leaders, especially those of African descent, are often highlighted in historical accounts. In 1958, the mass movement for civil rights reached new heights, leading to significant changes in legislation and societal norms.

In one selection (Pingry 2008) an illustration of the Supreme Court building adjoins this text, "Rosa went to court. The judge said she was guilty. But the highest court in the land, the United States Supreme Court, said no one could tell African Americans, or anybody else—where to sit on a bus!" In another edition by Patricia Pingry (2007), the last section of the text concludes with "then the Supreme Court ruled that no one could tell African Americans where to sit on a bus. Rosa, and America, had won. Thank you Rosa, for your courage." Another text (Giovanni 2005) detailed the legal ruling this way:

On November 13, 1956, almost a year after the arrest of Rosa Parks, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that segregation on the buses, like segregation at schools, was illegal. Segregation was wrong. Rosa Parks said no so that the Supreme Court could remind the nation that the Constitution of the United States makes no provision for second-class citizenship. (n. p.)

These depictions of the Supreme Court ruling lead young readers to infer that Rosa took her case to the highest court and won the victory for the boycotters walking the streets of Montgomery.

**DISCUSSION**

Our analysis revealed that many of the same variables Kohl (1991) identified as areas of concern over twenty years ago continue to plague contemporary children's picture books. Under Prolonged Activism, Rosa Parks was recognized for participation in organized public support of civil rights issues in only three books. Another point of analysis within this cluster was Rosa's previous confrontation with city bus drivers over segregationist practices. The review yielded the same disappointing result, proliferating the myth that Rosa's refusal was not predicated on "her role as a community leader" in an ongoing "organized struggle for freedom" but instead is characterized as an extemporaneous "act of frustration" (Kohl 1991, 39-40). Interpretations generate misperceptions rather than building background knowledge and conceptual learning.

Within the Segregation cluster of variables, mixed results were found. Not surprisingly, every book mentioned or described segregation within the context of the story and almost all provided detailed descriptions of the Montgomery City bus code at the core of the narrative. The overwhelming presence of moral judgments (seventy-five percent of books) leaves young readers to discern opinion from fact, a skill most readers fail to recognize. Evidence becomes blurred and presentism prevails (or permeates the text).
The limited characterization of civil rights as a continuing struggle beyond the Montgomery Bus Boycott leads readers to believe that segregation was resolved. As suggested in Davis Pinkney (2008), “That was day three-eighty-two, when Jim Crow flew away. He had no more power in Montgomery,” exemplifies how half of these books ignore the historical record. The struggle to integrate public facilities including libraries, parks, and schools in Montgomery continued over a decade after the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision. Similarly, geographical references to the South were not present in almost half of the books. Although it is “an embarrassment to many school people and difficult to explain to children without accounting for the moral corruption of the majority of the European American community” a thorough account “of legalized segregation in the South during the 1950s is integral to the story of the Montgomery Bus Boycott” (Kohl 1991, 40). Omission of place makes the historical context invisible, creating a sense of cognitive dissonance and avoidance. The final two elements of the cluster, inclusion and/or description of the term “Jim Crow” and a portrayal or explanation of the inequity inherent within the misnomer “separate but equal,” were each represented in only one-third of the books. Examples of Jim Crow practices were common within the stories, but without the integration of the concept and the term, authors missed an opportunity to introduce key vocabulary and build depth of understanding. Similarly, an explicit explanation, example, or illustration of the injustice behind “separate but equal” as in Nikki Giovanni (2005)—“She was tired of getting somewhere first and being waited on last. Tired of ‘separate,’ and definitely tired of ‘not equal’”—could illuminate for the reader that the chasm between the races was often manifested in the disparate facilities, thereby making visible the presence of “second class citizens” within the community.

The final cluster of variables, *Community Involvement,* includes issues regarding engagement of other community members in planning, leading, or participating in activities connected to the bus boycott. Kohl (1991) notes, “The connection between Rosa Parks’ arrest is a mystery in most accounts of what happened in Montgomery. Community support for the boycott is portrayed as being instantaneous and miraculously effective the day after Mrs. Parks was arrested.” He continues by adding that this widespread viewpoint is “an insult to the intelligence and courage” (44) of the black community and is the “most important point left out in popularized accounts” of the boycott. The results for this cluster revealed that beyond recognizing the length of the boycott, authors failed to provide readers with any account of prior bus arrests and disputes, long-term planning of the boycott, or representation of boycott leaders (besides the customary iconic figures of Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr.). These omissions minimize the power of collective action and portray his-
tory as an event rather than a movement. No wonder children fail to connect with history; the missed opportunity to protect the value of human agency is replaced with a vision that only heroes impact change. The integral place of the church within the boycott is mostly silenced. Failure to mention affiliated groups working on the boycott minimized the role of the broader African-American community to mobilize for change. Finally, specific mention of the court case Brown v. Board was absent from the entire sample, silencing the voices of the brave plaintiffs who took their fight for equality to the nation’s highest court.

LIMITATIONS

In selecting texts for this study, we purposefully chose books that were easily available from libraries and publishers so that readers may access these texts for further review. We also chose texts that were published in the last ten years to allow writers sufficient time to address Kohl’s concerns. We acknowledge that this selection of texts is limited and that other texts may more fully address the issues Kohl identified in his critique. One limitation may be the years of publication selected for the sample. We did not compare books that Kohl might have examined before crafting his critique in order to make broad statements about how children’s books have changed. Additionally, due to the subjective nature of the variables, interpretation may vary due to the perspective or lens of the reviewer.

IMPLICATIONS

In this study, we used Kohl’s (1991) work as a heuristic to examine how picture books published since 2002 present the topic of Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott. From our analysis, we conclude that many of Kohl’s concerns are relevant today and have implications for teachers, teacher educators, and students.

In an era when teaching is restricted by mandated time allotments and accountability measures, teachers often find refuge in children’s literature as a way to extend and supplement their integrated, ELA/social studies curricula. First, it is critical that these resources provide a complete and accurate portrayal of historical events. When the narrative presented in these texts is incomplete, inaccurate, or both, children get only a limited scope of important historical events. For example, presenting the Montgomery Bus Boycott as a largely unplanned and spontaneous uprising in response to “Rosa’s bravery” marginalizes many community voices in lieu of iconic figures and succinct sanitized narratives. This not only misrepren-
sents history; it perpetuates dominant narratives of the black community during the Civil Rights Movement as being largely uneducated and disorganized as opposed to engaged in sustained activism characterized by thoughtful planning and broad community participation. Children view African Americans as victims of an oppressive and racist social structure, rather than a community of people with power, conviction, and strong moral character.

Second, it is critical to remember here that Kohl's (1991) original article was motivated not only by the inaccurate presentation of Rosa Parks and the boycott narrative, but also by his observation and concern that teachers were unwilling and/or unprepared to discuss issues of racial justice and inequity in society (37). This remains a critical concern as classrooms today are increasingly diverse and a majority of teachers believe that students in the elementary grades are too young for frank and honest discussions of race (Howard 2010). Children's literature that accurately present the American Civil Rights Movement and other social justice topics as complex social realities can provide teachers with a strong foundation for initiating such discussions and give students authentic opportunities to grapple with prevailing social issues. However, sanitizing narratives regarding race relations and segregation not only misrepresent the reality of modern society in the U.S., they also negate the daily lived experiences of people of color. U.S. schools are intensely segregated; schools primarily attended by students of color are significantly under-resourced compared to those of predominantly white students; and race continues to be a significant indicator of "achievement" on national exams (Kozol 2005; Orfield, Kusserow, and Siegel-Hawley 2012). Rather than engendering a dialogue on racial equality, agency, and collective action, these stories of Rosa replicate the myths and misperceptions of history that Kohl sought to change. Curriculum can empower or disenfranchise. According to Kohl, we contend that Rosa is still tired.

When will students have the opportunity to uncover the complex story behind the Montgomery Bus Boycott? Rather than reading the story for literal interpretations, teaching students to exercise historical inquiry, such as sourcing and contextualizing, in search of the inaccuracies and missing voices in Rosa's story would reveal much of what we learned in our own inquiry. This investigative approach to trade books aligns with current curricular initiatives in the ELA Common Core and has the potential to achieve more of what Kohl recommends. In closing, we contend that it is crucial for teachers to engage in critical analysis of children's literature.
REFERENCES


