

#### NOTE TO GRANT COMMITTEE:

This proposal has been revised to address the concerns stated in the memo rejecting our application in the Fall. Specifically, we have (1) provided an explanation and evidence supporting the claim that our work should be considered scholarship/research and *not* service, (2) included expanded biographies to demonstrate our ability to complete this project, (3) added a section that indicates what may follow from this project (after publication), and (4) clarified the funding received from the Virginia Peck Trust Fund. We have highlighted (in bold) all four of these changes for your convenience.

The original proposal included an Abstract, Introduction, Specific Aims, Design and Methodology, Milestones and Timeline, Dissemination and Significance, Other Available Funding, and Biographical Sketches. The revised proposal contains one addition—a References section—and thus conforms to the application guidelines.

#### ABSTRACT

The abstract below describes the work that will be accomplished under the auspices of the FRCAC grant. It does not include references to the essays contributed to the special issue.

The Introduction, tentatively titled “Children, too, Sing America: An Introductory Essay,” begins with an examination of the career and legacy of Langston Hughes, one of the most prolific black writers for both children and adults. Though Hughes’s *Collected Works* (16 volumes) includes two entire volumes of work published for children, many scholars of African American literature dismiss that work. Arnold Rampersad’s *The Life of Langston Hughes* (1986), the standard academic biography, dismisses his early (and initial) publication in *The Brownies’ Book* (the children’s magazine published in 1920-21 by the NAACP), includes brief mentions of one collection of poetry for children, *The Dream Keeper*, and very short accounts of Hughes’s collaborations with Arna Bontemps; Rampersad does not mention the non-fiction writing or other fictional writing Hughes produced for children. The lack of scholarly attention devoted to Hughes’s writing for children exemplifies the ways in which scholars have ignored the role of child readers in the career of a black author. Indeed, in our surveys of scholarship in academic journals focused on black literature, only a handful of articles about texts for child readers have appeared in the last five decades (approximately 30 articles out of a total of over 3,800).

What explains the persistent adult/child dichotomy in black literary studies? The dominance of whiteness in both children’s literature and in the larger field of American literary studies further complicates scholarship on the work of black authors. Scholars of black children’s literature such as Rudine Sims Bishop, Katherine Capshaw, Karen Chandler, Paula Connelly, Anna Mae Duane, Violet J. Harris, and Michelle Martin have worked mightily, with only modest success, to draw attention to the work by black authors within the study of children’s literature. In our survey of the four most significant journals on US children’s literature, we found only 96 articles on black children’s literature or culture out of the roughly 1,930 published. African American literary studies confronts a similar dominance of whiteness in American literary studies.

These academically-based issues are complicated by market forces. In a landmark 1965 article in *The Saturday Review*, Nancy Larrick revealed the “All White World of Children’s Books,” a world in which only 6.5% of the books published over the years of her study had even a mention or illustration of a black child. Even more damning, she found that only .45 of one percent of the books told the story of a contemporary black child. These statistics don’t address the fact that many of the depictions of black life were racist stereotypes. The trends Larrick analyzed in 1965 have only slowly and incompletely remedied, according to the continued findings of the Cooperative Children’s Book Center (CCBC). The 2019 findings show that of the over 4,000 books published in the US that year that were submitted to the CCBC, only a little over 442 were about the Black or African experience and of those 442, only 212 were written by a black or African author. Market forces circumscribe the amount of black literature available to any reader.

Other social forces also affect the access of black children to that literature. Our special issue answers calls for a richer understanding of the role of children in the black literary tradition. By encouraging critical inquiry at the intersection of two literary fields, we will expand awareness of the canon of black literature by examining how both children and adults are envisioned as readers of this literature.

## I. INTRODUCTION

**This project began during the Fall 2019 semester and has proceeded with support from the English department in the form of release time for research. The editing of a Special Issue journal involves similar, if not identical, work as editing a book. Both scholarly activities are considered major contributions to the field of literary studies, requiring substantial research, writing, and editing. In the College of Liberal Arts, a candidate for tenure and/or promotion would list such work on their OFD as scholarship. The reputation of the publisher, together with the amount of original work (an introduction, backmatter, e.g.) contributed by the editor(s), would determine the weight given to such scholarly activity.**

**Our co-editing project has progressed through several stages, beginning with the writing of a proposal peer reviewed by the editorial board of *College Literature* (Johns Hopkins Press). In the English department, a faculty member writing such a proposal is granted three hours of release time for research. In subsequent semesters, we established our Table of Contents, began compiling a bibliography for the introduction, responded to first drafts, and planned a writing workshop for second drafts. This work is different from the tasks performed by a managing editor of a journal, tasks that may be rightfully considered service to the profession.**

**We seek funding for the next stage: researching and writing (1) an introduction for the Special Issue that develops an argument within the context of the most current thinking on our topic, and (2) profiles of approximately 20 hitherto overlooked texts which reside at the convergence of African American literature and children’s literature. To meet *College Literature’s* deadline, we need to complete this research and writing during summer 2021 term.**

*Children, Too, Sing America*, the title for our Special Issue, seeks to bridge a gap between two fields too often considered separate and not equal.

In 2018 Duke University Press reissued James Baldwin's *Little Man, Little Man: A Record of Childhood*. In "A James Baldwin Book, Forgotten and Overlooked for Four Decades, Gets Another Life," *NYT* writer Alexandra Alter notes that in 1976 *Little Man* received lukewarm reviews: "critics didn't know what to make of an experimental, enigmatic picture book that straddled the line between children's and adult literature." Alter posits that because of a changed social and political climate, Baldwin's book will now have an easier time finding an audience. Alter quotes the 2018 winner of the Children's Literature Legacy Award and the Library of Congress' 2018-19 national ambassador for young people's literature, Jacqueline Woodson, who defines that audience broadly: "It's a book that young people can read or have read to them, but it's also a new Baldwin for adults."

For the last twenty years, scholars of African American children's and young adult literature have been calling for the type of "critical crossover" Woodson describes. In her introduction to a 1998 special issue of *African American Review*, Dianne Johnson-Feelings declares "a moment of dynamism" for black children's and YA literature while making an explicit call to *AAR* readers to participate in this moment by recognizing gaps in their own knowledge, gaps that limit their critical perspectives. As the editor of Volume 11 of the *Collected Works of Langston Hughes: Works for Children and Young Adults* (2003), Johnson-Feelings has drawn attention to Hughes as arguably the most recognized major black writer who created texts with cross-generational appeal, those texts inspiring a bookshelf of children's and YA texts, many of them winning prestigious literary awards.

The following year, Katharine Capshaw's *Children's Literature of the Harlem Renaissance* (2004) reconceptualized a standard period of literary study by examining the efforts writers of this era made to engage child readers. She and Anna Mae Duane extend that examination into the nineteenth century in *Who Writes for Black Children?* (2018). In her 2002 introduction to a special issue of *MELUS*, Capshaw also made the case for recognizing a much wider scholarly audience for children's literature: "Reconsidering our major writers as children's authors changes our sense of the breadth of their readership and enhances our understanding of writers' complicated aesthetic and political purposes" (5).

Whatever terms scholars use to challenge traditional ways of categorizing and considering individual *black* writers—cross-writing, cross-reading, dual audience, critical crossover—the consensus is clear: without such a challenge, our understanding of the African American literary tradition, its readers, writers, and texts, will always be partial and incomplete.

## II. SPECIFIC AIMS

**This project consists of six phases as outlined in Milestones and Timeline:**

- 1. Development of proposal to *College Literature* and subsequent Call for Papers (Sept 2019)**

2. Review of submissions and decisions regarding acceptance of essays (March 2020)
3. Review of first drafts by contributors and feedback (Sept/Oct 2020)
4. Workshop with contributors (Jan 29/Feb 1 2021)
5. Composition of Introductory Essay and back matter of the issue (Summer 2021)
6. Review of journal peer reviews and feedback to contributors as well as editorial revision to our own material. (Fall 2021)

Phases 1-3 and 6 are funded through the English Department's granting of release time for research and scholarly activity. Phase 4 is funded by the Virginia Peck Trust Fund. We are requesting funding specifically for phase 5, the composition of the Introductory Essay and the back matter. This phase must occur in the Summer of 2021 to meet the publication deadline of *College Literature*.

We propose this Special Issue, in a venue not associated with either African American literature or Children's and YA literature, in order to generate more boundary-crossing among scholars in both fields without privileging one or the other. Specific aims include (1) expanding and revising the canon, (2) challenging the adult/child dichotomy that has disguised the intersections between these two fields, (3) investigating historically situated reading practices that draw together children and adults, and (4) examining the role of literacy in African American culture.

### III. DESIGN and METHODOLOGY (our Call-For-Papers)

Unlike many journals wherein the editor's introduction simply previews the individual essays included, *College Literature* offers editors of Special Issues the opportunity to write a full-fledged essay that not only establishes the context for the Special Issue and provides an overview of the contents but also empowers the editors to develop their own arguments about the state and direction of their field/topic. The best introductions thus stand on their own as both critical assessments and calls for new and different ways of thinking. The essay for which we are requesting support is this kind of scholarly contribution. In addition, we are providing back matter in the form of a series of short entries on a list of approximately 20 titles that we think merit attention given the context and focus of the issue. These titles are additions to the primary works that are analyzed in the individual contributor's essays. Each entry will provide a brief (1000 words) rationale for why the primary text merits attention. These entries are a significant contribution to the issue because this intersection of African American and children's literature is a sparsely populated (rather than contested) arena and such a list would draw attention to works not readily visible to scholars in their respective fields. These two contributions—the introductory critical essay and the 20 profiles—exist separate from the editorial work involved in shepherding this Special Issue to publication.

In the May/June 2019 issue of *The Horn Book Magazine* commemorating 50 years of the Coretta Scott King Book Awards, Dianne Johnson-Feelings notes that the "history of African American children's literature has still to be written in its fullness." Her call for more work in this field echoes an earlier call, made in her introduction to a 1998 special issue of *African American Review* on children's and young-adult literature, a call "for the continued study of a long neglected but rich and emerging part of African American literary history."

In the last 20 years, scholars in several fields have produced bibliographies, anthologies, monographs, and articles exploring African American children's literature from various disciplinary perspectives. The introduction to Katharine Capshaw and Anna Mae Duane's *Who Writes for Black Children?* (2017) identifies three primary and overlapping concerns for critics in literary studies: canon revision and expansion; social and literary constructions of childhood; and the relationship between reader, writer, and text. Their anthology of writing for and by African American children during slavery and Reconstruction challenges various boundaries having to do with literary history, genre, authorship and audience.

This Special Issue responds to both Johnson-Feelings and Capshaw and Duane by exploring African American writers and texts in the twentieth and twenty-first century that address both child and adult readers—authors producing work for *people*, and texts, however marketed, with cross-generational appeal.

Our title takes inspiration from Langston Hughes, the most widely recognized black writer who produced work marketed to and read by people of all ages. In response to the idea that black writers should produce work that reflected a certain type of “new Negro,” Hughes declared his and his peers’ artistic freedom in his 1926 manifesto, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain.” Often read within the context of a generational divide—W. E. B. Du Bois vs. the young writers of the Harlem Renaissance—Hughes’ essay dismantled various dichotomies, insisting on the black artist’s freedom to create without consideration of an overtly political agenda determined by racism and valuing didacticism over aesthetics in art.

To problematize the developmental model that makes distinctions between a child and an adult reader, to “queer,” as Capshaw and Duane put it, “the narrative of age as a straight path on which childhood is a stop along the line to an empowered adulthood,” is to occupy the intersection of two fields too often thought of as separate—African American literature and Children’s/Young Adult literature. While both fields claim Hughes, many other writers whose work participates in what we can call the tradition of Hughes’ writing for “my people,” are claimed by either one field or the other. This lack of cross-over, noted by both Johnson-Feelings in 1998 and Capshaw and Duane in 2017, exacerbates a persistent problem—too few books about black experiences circulating as well as the continued marginalization of children’s and YA literature within African American literature, itself a marginalized field within American literary studies.

We seek essays that challenge the child/adult reader dichotomy in black literature via

- Analysis of reading and/or reception practices that bridge generational divides (e.g., the collaborative reading between child and adult that takes place with alphabet books, primers, and picture books, the communal experience of theater, or other social practices that circulate texts across generations)
- a focus on specific work(s) of a particular genre of African American writing, including but not limited to Picture Books, Comics, Life Writing, Poetry, Novels, Film/TV/Digital Media, Folklore, Biographies and Cultural Histories
- genre-bending or adaptations of texts for different audiences

- intertextual analyses of texts within a single author's *oeuvre* or of texts by authors currently claimed by different fields
- considerations of the relationship between the didactic impulse, a tradition of uplift, and aesthetics
- investigations of the paratextual historical circumstances (e.g., access to publication) that contributed to such dichotomies, particularly as they relate to African American writing and reading
- analyses of social and literary constructions of black childhood and/or adulthood as depicted in specific texts
- analyses of the ways in which a text reveals the relationship between the author and the cross-generational readers

#### IV. DISSEMINATION and SIGNIFICANCE

*Children, Too, Sing America*, a Special Issue of *College Literature* (Johns Hopkins University Press) is scheduled for publication in Spring 2022. The significance of our special issue is its location at the (currently unoccupied) intersection of our two fields.

Since the special issues of *AAR* (1998) and *MELUS* (2002), only one special issue challenging the child/adult dichotomy has been published. In her 2012 introduction to "Critical Cross-overs" in *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, Katherine Capshaw foregrounds "the variety of adult engagements with children's books" (such as the *Harry Potter* series) and a "contemporary reading practice that eschews borders between constituencies." The border-crossing thus continues but primarily within the field of Children's and YA literature and culture and not necessarily with regard to race.

#### V. MILESTONE and TIMELINE (activity during grant period is underlined)

Acceptance of Special Issue Proposal	October 2019
TOC established	March 2020
Written Reviews of Draft 1	September 2020
Zoom Workshop for Draft 2 (funded Peck Trust)	January/February 2021
<u>Introductory Essay and Text Profiles (Back Matter)</u>	<u>Summer 2021</u>
Editing	Fall 2021
Publication	Spring 2022

#### VI. OTHER AVAILABLE FUNDING

**We received funding in the amount of \$750 from the Virginia Peck Trust Fund (VPTF) to award honorariums to external reviewers for two Zoom writers' workshops in January and February 2021. The VPTF supports scholarly activity that serves both faculty and students. Both workshops will include the participation of graduate students. All participants, including the two of us, will report this activity as service and/or mentorship on our end-of-year faculty activity report. Although this event is an integral part of our two-year project, and listed above as a "milestone," we are not requesting FRCAC funds to support it.**

## VII. BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

As representatives of Children's and YA Literature (Ellen) and African American Literature (Laura), we are uniquely positioned to explore the intersection between these two fields. We both have publication records and active research agendas in our respective fields. **Note that each of our "current projects" is evidence of productivity that follows from the project for which we are seeking funding and thus should be considered part of its "significance."**

**Ellen Donovan** teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in children's and young adult literature in the English Department. She has served the institution and the profession in the following roles: Director of Lower Division English; Director of the Middle TN Writing Project; organizer with MTSU colleagues of Modern Critical Approaches to Children's Literature, a conference which was held biennially from 1995 to 2009, and book review editor of *Children's Literature*, an annual. Her research typically focuses on late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century American children's literature. The list below documents her scholarly activity since 2010.

### Current Projects

Truth and Reconciliation in Carolyn Comans' *Many Stones*  
Toy Books as Souvenirs: Celebrating the Circus with Children  
Langston Hughes's Biographical Writing

### Publications

"A Boy Like You: Varieties of Boyhood in Late Nineteenth-Century American Children's Literature." Forthcoming *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, vol. 46, no. 1.  
"Annie Does Not Love the Monkeys': Hawthorne, Irony, and Childhood Innocence." *Nathaniel Hawthorne Review*, vol. 40, no. 1, Spring 2014, pp. 41-60.  
"The Circus in Nineteenth-Century Children's Literature." *The American Circus*. Ed. by Weber, Ames, and Wittmann. Bard Graduate Center: Decorative Arts, Design History and Material Culture and Yale U P, 2012, pp. 330-57.

### Conference Presentations

"Empathy and Sentiment in Postbellum American Boys' Fiction." Children's Literature Association, Indianapolis, Indiana, 2019  
"The Civics of the Circus." Children's Literature Association. Tampa, Florida, 2017  
"Annie does not love the monkeys: Hawthorne, Irony, and Childhood Innocence." Children's Literature Association. Ann Arbor, Michigan, 2010.

**Laura Dubek** teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in African American literature in the English Department. She has served the institution and the profession in the following roles: Director of Lower Division English; Faculty Senator; Committee member, Popular Culture Association African American Book Award; peer reviewer for *MELUS*. Her research typically focuses on 20<sup>th</sup> century African American fiction and popular culture. The list below documents her scholarly activity since 2010.

## Current Projects

Revisionist History and Harriet Tubman in Children's Picture Books

Walter's Blues: Finding Lorraine Hansberry in Anthony Grooms' *Bombingham*

Rewriting Richard Wright: James Baldwin's *Little Man, Little Man*

## Publications

"'Restorying' the Past: Morrison's *Remember*, a Black-and-White Primer for American Children." *College Literature*. Special Issue: Toni Morrison and Adaptation. 47.4 (Fall 2020): 840-867.

"Black Writers Matter: Frederick Douglass in the Literary Present." *Critical Insights: Frederick Douglass*. Ed. Jericho Williams. Salem Press, 2020. 219-234.

*Living Legacies: Literary Responses to the Civil Rights Movement*. New York: Routledge, 2018.

"[D]e understandin' to go 'long wid it': Storytelling and (the) Civil Rights Movement." Introduction. *Living Legacies: Literary Responses to the Civil Rights Movement*. Ed. Dubek. New York: Routledge, 2018. 1-16.

"Back to Birmingham: Three Poets Remember the Sixteenth Street Church Bombing." With StarShield Lortie. In *Living Legacies: Literary Responses to the Civil Rights Movement*. Ed. Dubek. New York: Routledge, 2018. 69-79.

"'Fight for It!': The Twenty-First-Century Underground Railroad." *The Journal of American Culture*. 41.1 (March 2018): 68-80.

"Deeds Not Words: The Battle Cry of Spike Lee's *Miracle at St. Anna*." With Jesse Williams, Jr. *The Journal of Popular Film and Television* 43.2 (2015): 83-91.

"'Pass it On!': Legacy and the Freedom Struggle in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*." *Southern Quarterly* 52.2 (Winter 2015): 90-109.

"*The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and the African American Quest for Freedom and Literacy." In *Prison Narratives from Boethius to Zana*. Ed. Philip Edward Phillips. Palgrave-Macmillan, 2014. 195-214.

## Conference Presentations

"*Hamilton: An American Musical* and the Douglass, King, Miranda Mix-Tape" With Micah Hallman, PhD candidate. PCAS. October 4-6, 2018.

"White History Week: James Baldwin's Modest Proposal and the Liberation of Atticus Finch." PCA/ACA. Seattle. March 23-26, 2016.

"The Scandal of American Democracy: Zora Neale Hurston's Call and TV Writer Shonda Rhimes's Response." Faulkner & Hurston. Southeast Missouri State. Oct. 23-25, 2014.

## VIII. REFERENCES

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- Turner, Patricia A. *Crafted Lives: Stories and Studies of African American Quilters*. U of Mississippi P, 2009.
- Wong, Hertha D. Sweet. *Picturing Identity: Contemporary American Autobiography in Image and Text*. U of North Carolina P, 2018. Ebook edition: *Project Muse*. [Muse.jhu.edu/book/58891](https://www.muse.jhu.edu/book/58891) See, particularly pp. 196-218.