Decoding Anti-Blackness in Children's Literature: A Century-Long Content Analysis of John Newbery Award Books, the Underrepresentation of Black Authors, and its Implications for Critical Librarianship

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation critically examines the representation of Black authors and themes within the John Newbery Medal canon from its inception in 1922 to 2023. It explores how this literary award has mirrored or challenged societal perceptions of race, particularly in children's literature. Utilizing a thematic content analysis methodology, the study investigates the works of the six Black authors who have won the Newbery Medal, using a priori coding to critically examine the racial narratives, themes, and authorial diversity presented in these titles. Despite the noted increase in diversity within children's literature, this research identifies a persistent underrepresentation of Black authors and Black cultural themes in Newbery Medal recipients. The study highlights a significant gap in racial inclusivity, with a mere six Black authors receiving the Newbery Medal in over a century. This underrepresentation is not only a marker of racial disparity but also reflects broader systemic biases within the literary and publishing industries. This dissertation engages with theories from critical race theory and critical librarianship to interrogate the structural barriers that sustain this racial homogeneity. In examining the implications of these findings, the research advocates for a more equitable literary landscape, emphasizing the need for librarians, educators, and publishers to foster inclusivity in children's literature. The ultimate aim is to ensure that young readers encounter a more representative spectrum of narratives that celebrate racial diversity and promote inclusiveness.

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

Children's services; Critical librarianship; Young adult services; Publishing.

AUTHOR KEYWORDS
Children's literature; John Newbery Award; Critical race theory.