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April 2021

Editors' Introduction

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Article 1

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We first put out this special issue's call for papers in June of 2019, excitedly anticipating a summer 2020 release for this issue of the *RDYL* journal. We could not have anticipated what would happen between then and now: the spreading of COVID-19 as a global pandemic, wreaking havoc not only around the world but having particularly devastating effects on minority and more vulnerable populations; the death of George Floyd after a Minneapolis police officer knelt on Floyd's neck for eight minutes and forty-six seconds; or that Floyd's death would be a call to action that led to more visible and prolonged periods of protests against police brutality across the United States and around the world.

We could not have anticipated the clashes between protestors and increasingly violent federal agents across the United States in cities like Portland and Minneapolis, or that the protests would have global implications and spark solidarity marches and protests around the world. We could not have anticipated the international toppling of statues and monuments, from watching a statue of Edward Colston sink into the River Avon in Bristol, England, to the reimagining of Richmond's Robert E. Lee statue as a canvas for images, holograms, and painted protest statements. We could not have anticipated that Native activists and organizers would bring down a statue of Christopher Columbus in St. Paul, Minnesota, in the same year that the Washington football team would finally retire the R*dskins logo and image and the Cleveland baseball team would retire their own racist name and mascot.

The year 2020 alone has laid bare the fact that racism continues to color historic and contemporary conversations in politics, sports, education, and nearly every facet of our lives. The 45th US president's repeated referral to "the China virus" in his remarks on

COVID-19 paralleled a rise in racist attacks on Asian and Asian American people, which included a white man's mass murder of eight people (mostly Asian American women) in Atlanta Asian American owned businesses in March 2021. That president's dogged attempts to build a wall along the border between the United States and Mexico continue to cause uproars among those who are concerned about the sovereignty of Native nations whose lands straddle the border, those who support asylum seekers fleeing violence in their home countries, and those who denounce the irreparable damage the construction causes to the environment that lays in its path. Police brutality has not abated in the wake of George Floyd's death: two of the three police officers involved in the death of Breonna Taylor have not had charges brought against them, and the third was simply charged with wanton endangerment—after shooting into an adjoining apartment—and in late August of 2020 police officers in Kenosha, Wisconsin (against whom prosecutors later declined to press charges) shot Jacob Blake in the back seven times while three of his children sat in his car. In late October, police in West Philadelphia shot and killed Walter Wallace, Jr. Unfortunately, this list continues to grow alongside a popular culture that regularly marks nonwhite people as dangerous thugs or expendable casualties and white perpetrators of violence as innocent victims.

While none of these issues originated or ended this year or even with this particular presidential administration, attention to racial depictions in popular culture illustrates how popular, racialized representations of people have exacerbated and facilitated racist structures and individual acts, in a variety of arenas. We present this special issue on minstrelsy and appropriation in a context in which we must acknowledge the dire consequences of racism and the intertwining of racist violence and these kinds of harmful

misrepresentations. These consequences also make clear the importance of accurate racial representations, particularly those created by the people from those groups who are being represented.

Recent instances of racial masquerading in academia have brought matters of race, performance, and appropriation to bear upon ongoing conversations about diversity, inclusion, and equity in US colleges and universities. Three scholars of history and journalism/communication, respectively, appropriated performances of various Chicana, Black, North African, and Afro-Latinx identity, pretending these identities and legacies were their own as they situated themselves in still predominantly white fields of study. As critics have traced these scholars' varied and sometimes ambiguous performances of nonwhite identity back to their white childhoods, actual Black, Indigenous, and people of color scholars have rightly noted not only the misrepresentation but the theft involved in this dishonesty. Considering the circuitous trajectories of these racial appropriations, one might find the clearest explanation of them as a grounding in white childhood. Even as childhood is a fundamental site for racial formation and the grounding of racialized experiences, white children are still not presented with enough clear and responsible models for understanding race and racism, while models of racist performance present poor but prominent models in their stead. The continued reduction of nonwhite people to caricatures or costumes that can be claimed by whiteness—taken up, put on, and laid aside at will—is the clearest explanation for how these scholars' racial appropriation became possible.

These white scholars have appropriated nonwhite identities while nonwhite scholars working overwhelmingly in disproportionately white fields and institutions

continue to have our legitimacy and value questioned by gatekeepers who (intentionally or otherwise) work to uphold the dominance of whiteness and white supremacy. Meanwhile, we are continually faced with the notion that our identities (individual, intersectional, shared, collective, and complex) can be simply “put on,” negating our inherited and experiential knowledge of the long histories of oppression that have and continue to affect us and our people. Moreover, such appropriations implicitly deny the privilege of whiteness, perpetuating the notion that our presence in these institutions is undeserved, contingent upon fulfilling quotas of racial “representation.” Our presence in such institutions is seldom met with equity, as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) scholars continue to shoulder the emotional and intellectual burden of supporting and educating our students—and often our colleagues—about issues of race and racism. The importance of childhood for altering this cycle of disproportionate race-work becomes clear. This shift must be generational. And as the population of US school children shifts to a nonwhite majority, deprioritizing the default position of whiteness and tackling race’s complexities early on will be essential for recognizing and grappling with the full depth and complexity of racialized experiences, rather than just scratching the surface.

The domino effects and seismic shifts of 2020 might lead some readers to question the purpose of this *RDYL* issue. Why, one might ask, is *this* the moment for a conversation around minstrelsy and racist appropriation in literature aimed at children and young adults? However, we could also argue that these scholarly interventions and interpretations are *exactly* what we need in this moment. As we wrote in our call for papers, “Children’s literature and popular culture are key to the production of racism. Young people encounter depictions and performances of race in a myriad of forms, often in ways that appropriate

and misrepresent non-white people. Given the overwhelming whiteness of children's literary and popular culture in the US, it is clear how such misrepresentations risk overshadowing non-white people's presence, resistance to racial oppression, and self-representation. Children's literature and popular culture contributes to minstrelsy, blackface, redface, yellowface, and other forms of racist caricature and performance." And while promoting better racial representations in children's literature and popular culture remains necessary for intervening in racist forms, we must also take the time to understand and intervene in the already-existing historical and present state of racist appropriation, lest we allow it to be perpetuated, in either familiar or new forms, thus interfering with even the best of our better representations.

As co-editors of this special issue, we come to this topic from different academic backgrounds. Fielder's work explores race via nexuses of relation via gender, childhood, and human-animal relations, and her book, *Relative Races: Genealogies of Interracial Kinship in Nineteenth-Century America* (Duke University Press), shows how race is constructed not simply in bodies but in the kinship relations between them. Phillips' teaching and scholarship focuses on American Indian history and the history of the American West. Her forthcoming book, *Staging Indigeneity: Salvage Tourism and the Performance of Native American History* (The University of North Carolina Press), examines how ideas of Native peoples, places, and histories have been and continue to be co-opted for regional tourism endeavors. Both of us approach the study of race and racism with attention to specific historical contexts and their continued resonances in the present. As we approach childhood as a clear site for racialization and a foundational period of learning about the workings of race and racism, we understand children's literature and

culture as a key vehicle for transporting (often harmful) ideas about race from the past into the present in which they are often not simply preserved but reinforced, often with dire consequences.

Children's and youth literature are rife with both implicit and explicit depictions of racism and cultural appropriation. Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie* series—books that have permeated the American imagination since the first book was published in 1935—has come under fire in recent years, particularly for Wilder's depictions of Native peoples. The books are “brimming with casual racism,” writes Laura June Topolsky, and the Osage Indians the family encounters are shown not as human, but as “a brooding pack of inconvenience” (Topolsky). Wilder's father, Charles Ingalls, moved his family from Wisconsin to Kansas in 1869, choosing to build a cabin within the borders of the Osage Diminished Reserve—land that was not open to white settlement. But Ingalls, author Caroline Fraser contends, was among a wave of settler farmers who felt “emboldened by the Civil War to call on federal troops to enforce what they saw as their rights” (Fraser, *Prairie Fires* 52). Topolsky ties Wilder's openly racist writings on Native peoples to a ditty Pa Ingalls sings about a Black man called Uncle Ned—a minstrel song written by Stephen Foster and dating to 1848—underscoring deeply-ingrained notions of anti-Indigeneity and anti-Blackness. Topolsky's essay is a rumination and a reflection, shifting from her childhood love of the series to a struggle to answer whether or not she would let her daughter read any of Wilder's books.

The collective reckoning surrounding books like *Little House on the Prairie*, which culminated in the 2018 removal of her name from an award granted by the Association for Library Service to Children, offers the chance to not only engage with these books in a new

way but to encourage the diversification of the field writ large (Fraser, “Yes, ‘Little House on the Prairie’”). The announcement to remove Wilder’s name from the award, however, was not exactly met with unanimous support. Fraser, for instance, argued that “the answer to racism is not to impose purity retroactively or to disappear titles from shelves.” Native and Indigenous children and young adults should not have to be exposed to an uncritical reading of *Little House*, she noted, but “no white American should be able to avoid the history it has to tell” (Fraser, “Yes, ‘Little House on the Prairie’”).

Native-authored children’s literature, of course, presents a much wider array of representations. The quality and diversity of characters created by Native writers extend beyond the stereotypical and thereby push against works like Wilder’s. At times, this literature directly addresses caricatured representations, challenging them and replacing them with other possibilities. For example, *Indian No More*, a 2019 middle-grade novel by Charlene Willing McManis with Traci Sorell, presents readers with what it calls “a Different Style of Cowboys and Indians.” The story’s protagonist, Regina Petit, is initially confused by the differences between her friend’s impressions of “TV Indians” and her family’s reality as Umpqua people living on the Grand Ronde Tribe’s reservation. An important difference, she notes, is that “When we played Cowboys and Indians on the rez, we made sure the Indians had guns and that they could win” (McManis and Sorell, *Indian No More* 68). This child’s play representation refuses racist stereotypes, imagining other possibilities for Native representation.

Regina’s description of the popular game, most often associated with the perpetuation of racist stereotypes and power relations not unlike those promoted by the *Little House* series, instead upsets settler-colonialist power. This book presents readers with

Native children who are able to imagine this game in another way, one not divorced from histories of white US expansion and anti-Native violence, but which centers itself on Native perspectives and what Anishinaabe writer Gerald Vizenor calls “survivance,” meaning the “active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name” (Vizenor, *Manifest Manners*). Even children participate in acts of defiance to white stereotypes and white authority. The children play this game right at the boundary of land owned by a white racist man who calls them a slur and does not want Native people on “his” property. Even when not directly responding to racist representations, Native children’s literature must contend not only with the preponderance of racism in white-authored children’s literature, but the perpetuation of that literature, in the continued circulation and preservation of “classic” texts and the persistence of popular images like those similar to the Washington NFL team’s former mascot.

Scholars continue to call attention to the ways in which these problematic constructions of racism permeate our collective consciousness. Like images and written representations of nonwhite people, literature itself has also been subject to white appropriation. In *The Tar Baby: A Global History*, English professor Bryan Wagner deconstructs the pervasive story of how Brer Rabbit outwits Brer Fox—or what Nina Martyris called “a classic trickster folk tale” (Martyris ““Tar Baby””). While the story has global variations, Wagner turns to Joel Chandler Harris’ *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings* as the American impetus for the story. Mark Twain and Rudyard Kipling (whose own writings were filled with racist stereotypes, imagery, and characters) praised Harris, and President Theodore Roosevelt invited the author to the White House. For Wagner, though, the fact that tar was used “as a police technology under slavery undoubtedly has

some relevance to the story,” he said. “The fox uses the tar baby to trap the rabbit, and this sticky, black material would have held special meaning for slaves who had experienced tar as a police technology. But, of course, there are many, many other ways in which tar takes on a special symbolic resonance in the story” (Martyris ““Tar Baby”).

While Harris claimed that the 185 Uncle Remus stories he wrote were adapted from folk tales he heard told by formerly-enslaved people, his reliance upon stereotypical depictions of African Americans and his prioritization of a white audience marks his work as questionably appropriative. Disney’s 1946 animated musical *Song of the South* would perpetuate the resonance of Harris’ stories throughout US popular culture. Key to the film’s popularity and its problems was its depiction of the Uncle Remus character played by James Franklin Baskett, who received an Academy Honorary Award for the role in 1948. Baskett was the first African American man to win an Oscar, a fact that is complicated by his character’s reliance upon stereotypes about Black people who were enslaved by or in service to white people. It is, perhaps, unsurprising that such recognition would be relegated to a white-created character steeped so much in the plantation nostalgia and minstrel genres that it would obscure distinctions between Black people’s roles and relations to white people during the antebellum slavery and Reconstruction periods. The first African American to win an Oscar was, of course, Hattie McDaniel, for playing the character Mammy in the 1939 film *Gone with the Wind*, a role that similarly perpetuated the pretense of Black people’s contentment with servility. It is not a coincidence that both of these films depict Black people specifically in roles of caretakers to white children. In the figure of Uncle Remus, we see how Black care—and Black storytelling—are framed for the sole benefit of white children, while Black and other nonwhite children are absent

from this scene. Only white children are the intended beneficiaries of this intergenerational literary inheritance.

Black authors of African American children's literature have since sought to reclaim some of the folk stories for which Harris is best known, importantly framing them for a Black child audience, rather than a white one. Such reappropriations take on various forms, from Julia Price Burrell's "Br'er Rabbit" stories published in the *Brownie's Book* in 1920, to Julius Lester's 1987 picture book *The Tales of Uncle Remus: The Adventures of Brer Rabbit*, to the appearance of folk characters such as Gum Baby and Brer Rabbit in Kwame Mbalia's Tristan Strong fantasy novels, the first of which debuted in 2019. These authors' adaptations respond to appropriative uses of Black folklore and caricatured depictions of the Black people who conveyed these stories while also attending to their erasure of Black children from this history. Characters like Harris' storyteller were given familial appellations. Harris' use of "Uncle" repeated a trope most popularly visible in Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 character Uncle Tom and which appeared similarly in the "Mammy" trope that would be repeated well into twentieth and twenty-first century representations of "maternal" Black women. Under the pretense of enslaved people's kinship with their enslavers under plantation slavery's paternalism or with the assumption that the white children who Black people were later paid to care for were more valuable than their own, these depictions of Black elders in supposed kinship with white children deliberately displace and erase Black children. African American children's author's reappropriations of these trickster tales reminds us that Black parents and caregivers have always passed on their own stories, literatures, histories, and cultures to their children, even

when mainstream media representations have left those children out of popular representations.

The parallels between life and literature in the history of America—a country founded on stolen land and built with stolen labor—might not be what some people would consider the best fodder for children’s books. The reliance on romanticized narratives, historical erasure, or the desire to avoid uncomfortable conversations has led to a body of scholarship that does not reflect the readership of American children’s literature. Non-white children and young adults have long been and often continue to be confronted by books filled with characters who don’t look like them. In a 1922 essay, author, editor, activist, and educator Alice Dunbar-Nelson critiqued the predominant whiteness of literature, noting that “for two generations we have given brown and black children a blonde ideal of beauty to worship, a milk-white literature to assimilate, and a pearly Paradise to anticipate, in which their dark faces would be hopelessly out of place” (Dunbar-Nelson, “Negro Literature for Negro Pupils” 59). This out-of-placeness would, of course, be exacerbated by the prominence of racist depictions of nonwhite people in children’s literature and other popular culture. Dr. Debbie Reese (Nambé Pueblo) is among those who have more recently led the push for a more accurate representation of non-white characters and storylines in children’s literature. Reese created *American Indians in Children’s Literature* in 2006 (co-authored by Dr. Jean Mendoza since 2016) in order to offer critical analyses of Native American and Indigenous peoples in books aimed at children and young adults.

We begin with these examples of racist appropriation in academia and in the children’s literature of our respective fields of expertise in order to tie together the

relevance and resonance of this particular form of racism within our current moment of continuing racist violence and increased popular attention to it. Phenomena such as blackface and playing Indian contribute to the preponderance of racist depictions of nonwhite people, the perpetuation of stereotypes, and the erasure of accurate representations of nonwhite people past and present. They push aside the broad array of full and accurate representations that could be highlighted in their stead. They make possible racial masquerading and misrepresentation, pretending that race is something merely to be performed, rather than lived. They contribute to the naturalization of whiteness, the denial of white privilege, and the pretense that surface-level attention to diversity is sufficient rather than addressing issues of equity and inclusion. These appropriations make it harder for Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color to do the work of addressing other forms of racist violence and structures of racial oppression.

We asked contributors to examine various forms of minstrelsy and racist appropriations in popular culture, performance, and youth literature. We asked them to consider the most prominent genres of these depictions, how forms of racism translate across genres, and how performance plays into adaptations of minstrel themes. We asked them to consider both historic and contemporary iterations of minstrelsy and racist appropriation as well as the work that counters these histories. Lastly, we asked for contributions that push against these constructions and stereotypes, and we asked how we can better navigate these productive works as researchers, scholars, librarians, educators, parents, and others who seek to prioritize the interests of the children (and adults) who are adversely affected by racist appropriation in this body of work.

The six essays in this issue, arranged chronologically, draw on historical and contemporary literature, film, and activist movements. The first four of these essays present case studies for examining histories of racist appropriation in children's literature and culture, and the variety of its forms. Together, these illustrate the persistence of familiar forms of racist representation and the attendant prioritization of white child readers. With the inclusion of the latter two essays in this special issue we want to register both the importance of recognizing Black, Indigenous, and People of Color's explicit resistance to the racist forms that would dominate representations of nonwhite people in children's literature, as well as the potential limitations faced by some such forms of intervention.

Jewon Woo's essay, "Between Laughter and Tear: Topsy's Performance in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*" begins with what was arguably the most popular children's text of the nineteenth century. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was read widely, by adults and children alike, and was spun into a plethora of adaptations, both for children and for the minstrel stage. Stowe's Topsy is an iconic and notorious representation of caricatured Black girlhood; its influence upon later degradations of Black children is difficult to gauge exactly, but it is a clear and clearly negative contributor. Woo's essay offers a rereading of Topsy's performative potential, particularly by considering her in light of child readers who may not yet have solidified their own relationship to the text's nexus of abolitionism and racism or who may have identified more easily with the text's children than with its white adults. In this provocative approach to Topsy's performance, Woo considers this character beyond the perspective of Stowe's white characters, the author herself, or the novel's predominantly white (racist) readership. Approaching this Black girl character from the assumption of her worth and sense of self, Woo reads Topsy's melodramatic

responses to the violence enacted upon her. Rather than the entirety of the child's self and actualization, Topsy's performance might therefore be understood as a minstrel mask, indicative of her awareness of the white gaze and an interiority that is, perhaps, available only to readers who might be able to identify with her—to not only “*feel for*” but to “*feel like*” Topsy.

In “Scenes of Slavery and the ‘Chinee’ in *Uncle Remus* and a Minstrel Picture Book” Caroline H. Yang traces the origins of this prominent anti-Asian caricature. Reading the resonances of minstrelsy in Harris’ plantation nostalgia fiction, Yang illustrates how this form of racist depiction extended itself beyond images of antebellum slavery. Exploring how both anti-Blackness and ideas about enslaved labor informed anti-Asian racism, Yang reads the merging of Black and Asian depictions in Harris’ folk stories and in an 1883 picture-book *Pantomime and Minstrel Scenes*. Here we see how the figure of the “Chinee” in Harris’ text is not entirely independent from, but built upon anti-Black racism, and rooted in related white racist ideas about Black and Chinese religion and labor, including the characterization of Chinese labor as “slavery.” Yang also reads similarities of sinophobia and anti-Black caricature through Bret Harte’s version of this racist trope, arguing that this character is indebted to the minstrel figure of Topsy, from Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Like Harris’ plantation nostalgia, *Pantomime and Minstrel Scenes* extends minstrel tropes beyond blackface performance as well as depicts a common form of anti-Chinese dehumanization. Yang describes this dehumanizing image as characterized by wickedness or deception as well as childishness via both these earlier resemblances to Topsy and the text’s juxtaposition of the “young Chinee” and Black child “pickaninny” characters. In the complex web of racism in this children’s story, Yang understands a

certain fungibility of the minstrel form, as these texts create a series of slippages between adult and child, human and nonhuman, and Black and Chinese figures as they are presented for white children's consumption.

Dawn Sardella-Ayres' "'What's goin' on around here?': Dancing Past Binaries and Boundaries in *The Little Colonel*" examines the 1935 film version of Annie Fellows Johnston's book series. Sardella-Ayres centers this analysis on the now-infamous staircase dance with Shirley Temple and Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, which was the first interracial dance scene featured in a Hollywood film. While Johnston's books leaned heavily on minstrel stereotypes in her depictions of Black characters, many of which were reproduced in the film, Sardella-Ayres argues that the staircase dance "confronts, questions, subverts, repositions and re-presents, all with a sense of agency. Although relying on minstrel codes, the staircase dance...also reveals a markedly different dynamic." Her intertextual analysis draws on the film as well as the books that inspired the adaptation, arguing that it offers the possibility of active engagement with Black history and Blackness in America. Few critics of the film turn to *The Little Colonel's* literary predecessors, Sardella-Ayres contends, much less the adaptation's changes "as related to race, gender, agency, and minstrelsy." The forty years between the book's publication and the film's release offer a rich space for analysis as Sardella-Ayres moves beyond the predominant notion of stock minstrel characters, demonstrating that minstrelsy "is not a straightforward black-and-white-binary, nor even a black-and-nonblack binary."

Danielle Haque's analysis turns to Orientalism, assimilation, and cultural pluralism. In "From the Beqaa Valley to Deep Valley: Arab American Childhood & US Orientalism in Children's Literature," Haque uses Edward Said's definition of Orientalism—in short,

“a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient”—to analyze how Minnesota-born author Lovelace both encouraged empathy for Arab American characters while simultaneously misrepresenting and appropriating them. Haque draws on several books from two of Lovelace’s children’s book series, *Betsy-Tacy* and *Deep Valley*, to contextualize both “the historical milieu they describe, and the period in which they were published.” Haque connects the Orientalism and exoticization of Arab Americans in twentieth-century children’s literature to contemporary representations of Arab Americans in the wake of 9/11, arguing that “Popular rhetoric about diversity and inclusion, such as stories about welcoming refugees or helping immigrants assimilate, too often endorses a simple moral economy in which we do not need to make structural changes in terms of curricula... let alone changes to domestic and foreign policies that create the conditions for displacement.” Her call to decolonize the curriculum encourages educators and publishers to move beyond simply “widening the representative scope” and to embrace own voice texts that move beyond notions of tolerance and coexistence.

Karen Sands-O’Connor’s essay, “Power Primers: Black Community, Self-Narration, and Black Power for Children in the US and UK,” is a clear departure from these first four essays’ examination of racist appropriation. Sands-O’Connor illustrates how the Black Power Movement educators prioritized Black children both through the critique of mainstream educational materials and by creating educational materials of their own in the face of public schools that misrepresented and neglected the histories and cultures of nonwhite people. Even while encumbered by white mischaracterizations of Blackness, both adults and children worked to forge and articulate their own Black identities. Reading similarities in the US and UK, Sands-O’Connor recounts how pro-Black activists in both

countries viewed education as a key mode for countering prominent white racist constructions of Black identity. O'Connor describes a variety of educational materials that were created specifically with Black children in mind, discussing texts from predominantly Black Caribbean and African contexts. Some of these not only centered Black children but considered them outside the context of predominantly white, racist environments. Many of these texts thereby connected Black children to a larger African diaspora outside the US or UK and in the case of the latter, to the broader array of non-African people of color who have also been categorized under the umbrella "Black."

In "Tethered to Whiteness: The School-to-Prison Pipeline and Uneven Emancipation in Jason Reynolds' *Miles Morales: Spider-Man*," Bevin Roue delves into the issues and interactions of structural racism, whiteness, and the school-to-prison pipeline in Reynolds' superhero prose novel. Roue uses Ebony Elizabeth Thomas' dark fantastic cycle as an introduction to *Miles Morales* and Miles Morales. Roue traces the history of the character and his initial placement in the Marvel Ultimate Universe, a now-discontinued component of the Marvel media empire: in the Ultimate Universe, Miles replaces Peter Parker after Parker dies fighting the Green Goblin. While the diversification of the Marvel universe is laudable, Roue highlights how Miles "can always be Miles, but he can never just be Spider-Man. He is always the *Black* Spider-Man." Roue's nuanced examination of the historical frameworks of Reynolds' novel underscores its relevance to contemporary conversations about how race and racism are represented.

As we present this special issue, we want to acknowledge the fact that in order to responsibly address racism in our own twenty-first century moment we must each address it from our own specifically racialized positions, whatever these may be. We must do this

with an eye to the long histories of racial construction that inform our experiences of the world and our relationships to one another. We write this introduction from our own specific and intersectional racialized positions and are also mindful of the positions occupied by the contributors to this special issue, which includes no other Native or Black contributors, even while it does include other nonwhite scholars. As we approach the topic of minstrelsy and racist appropriation from the predominantly white fields of history or literary studies or youth literature, we must each consider how and from what positions of privilege we take up the work of writing about race and racism. This consideration is not tangential to but an absolute prerequisite for responsible scholarship in any of these fields.

The topic of minstrelsy and appropriation allows us to think not only about whose racialization is being represented or discussed, but also how, who is responsible for these representations and discussions, to whom are they directed, and what effects might they have on unintended audiences who do or do not see themselves represented and discussed therein. The considerations that many of us ask when evaluating children's literature are therefore necessary to ask ourselves as scholars whose approach to the scholarly engagement with that literature may risk similarly minstrelizing or appropriative forms. As we consider the work in this special issue, we might also consider also how we can better navigate the minstrelizing and appropriative forms we encounter as researchers, scholars, librarians, educators, parents and caregivers, and others who seek to prioritize the interests of the children and adults who are adversely affected by this particular form of racism. This is both intellectual and emotional work and we bear differently racialized burdens when approaching these scholarly endeavors.

We would like to offer special thanks to *RDYL*'s editors, Sarah Park Dahlen and Gabrielle Halko, for the expertise, care, and patience they offered in order to shepherd this special issue to publication amid the unprecedented work and life conditions of the pandemic. We also thank the anonymous peer-review readers who offered their insights to make this entire issue better. Your labor is greatly valued.

*Content Warning: Essays included in this special issue directly quote and describe material that is overtly racist, including derogatory language and written and visual depictions of Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color.

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