

Philip Nel

## A Manifesto for Radical Children's Literature (and an Argument Against Radical Aesthetics)

*Abstract: In The Avant-Garde and American Postmodernity: Small Incisive Shocks (2002), I took for granted that an avant-garde for children was both possible and critically viable. More recently (in "Surrealism for Children: Paradoxes and Possibilities," 2015), I questioned what I had taken for granted. In this manifesto, I veer further away from the notion that there is a usefully definable radical aesthetic for children's literature – and yet also argue for that very thing whose formal features resist codifying.*

*This is both a manifesto for radical children's literature and a record of my failure to locate a politically radical aesthetic. Taking (mostly contemporary) picture books as its primary focus, this paper considers the wide range of aesthetic choices that can be directed toward radical ends. Arguing for radical children's literature but refusing to codify its aesthetics may seem paradoxical. But I encourage us to embrace this very paradox, to resist enshrining radicalness within a set of aesthetic principles, so that we may instead be agile improvisers, unleashing the power of our fugitive imaginations, as we advocate for books that inspire the next generation to build a more just world.*

Keywords: radical, avant-garde, aesthetics, picture books, picture-books

In *The Avant-Garde and American Postmodernity: Small Incisive Shocks* (2002), I took for granted that an avant-garde for children was both possible and critically viable. In one chapter of *Children's Literature and the Avant-Garde* (edited by Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer and Elina Druker, 2015), I began to question what I had taken for granted. In this manifesto, I veer further away from the notion that there is a usefully definable radical aesthetic for children's literature – and yet also argue for that very thing whose formal features resist codifying. There is no necessary connection between the aesthetically radical and the politically radical, but we need the latter to help inspire, imagine, and build a future committed to human flourishing.

My evolution towards a more capacious sense of radicality developed over the past decade or so, via co-editing a collection of radical children's literature (*Tales for Little Rebels: A Collection of Radical Children's Literature*, with Julia L. Mickenberg, 2008), co-writing an article on contemporary radical children's literature ("Radical Children's Literature Now!", also with Mickenberg, 2011), teaching a class on the subject (in 2004, 2008, and 2018), and reading new scholarship on various kinds of politically engaged children's literature – most recently, Kimberley Reynolds' *Left Out: The Forgotten Tradition of Radical Publishing for Children in Britain 1910–1949* (2016) and Ebony Elizabeth Thomas' *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games* (2019). There is no unitary aesthetic shared by the works in *Tales for Little Rebels* nor in Reynolds, Jane Rosen and Michael Rosen's *Reading and Rebellion: An Anthology of Radical Writing for Children 1900–1960* (2018); nor the works discussed in "Radical Children's Literature Now!"; in *Left Out*; in Mickenberg's *Learning from the Left: Children's Literature, the Cold War, and Radical Politics in the United States* (2006); or in Rudine Sims Bishop's *Free Within Ourselves: The Development of African American Children's Literature* (2004). There is radical children's literature, but a wide range of aesthetic choices can convey radical ideas.

In its literary and critical texts, my graduate course in Radical Children's Literature reflects that more aesthetically inclusive sense of the radical. For its Spring 2018 iteration, the final paper was a manifesto. This essay originates in that class: I did the assignment as well, and we all shared our manifestos in the last two class sessions. I invited the students' manifestos to address these questions:

- What should radical children's literature do? Do radical ideas require a radical form? In radical children's literature, what is the relationship between form and content?

- How should contemporary writers build upon the history of radical children's literature? What are the radical books that we need (or need more of) today? What should these books address?
- What must radical teachers do? Is knowledge always liberatory?  
Or: How can we present knowledge to children in a way that is more liberatory than oppressive? Related question: How should we distinguish between indoctrination and liberation?

But I also left them the option of choosing other questions related to our class. To help them structure it, I wrote "A strong manifesto should have coherence to it. It should not merely be a list. By 'not merely a list,' I mean that, if you choose the series-of-claims format, there needs to be a discernable logic to the sequence of those claims – an argument that builds." To generate such a document, I assigned them this ongoing project: "throughout the semester, take notes of questions you have, deficits you perceive (in the syllabus, the literature, the criticism, my teaching, the assignments, etc.), and think about how said deficits might be addressed. Use these notes as the basis of your draft for the manifesto."

I chose the manifesto as a form for their assignment for four reasons. First, it compels the writer to distill a semester's worth of reading (and, in my case, a career's worth of reading) into a series of "truths." Second, there is a visionary element to the manifesto: it describes a future not yet realized, but yearned for. It's a hopeful, aspirational, utopian document. As Nathalie Loveless writes, "A manifesto is a call to action. It mobilizes declarative and persuasive language and works to manifest a different world, performatively" (2).

Third, we live in an urgent time – an age of manifestos. As I revise this one in November and December 2019, a casual survey reveals at least ten book-length scholarly/political manifestos published since 2017: Nathalie Loveless' *How to Make Art at the End of the World: A Manifesto for Research-Creation* (2019), Suketu Mehta's *This Land Is Our Land: An Immigrant's Manifesto* (2019), David Buckingham's *The Media Education Manifesto* (2019), L.H. Stallings' *A Dirty South Manifesto: Sexual Resistance and Imagination in the New South* (2019), Bhaskar Sunkara's *The Socialist Manifesto: The Case for Radical Politics in an Era of Extreme Inequality* (2019), Chelsea Kwakye and Ore Ogunbiyi's *Taking Up Space: The Black Girl's Manifesto for Change* (2019), Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya and Nancy Fraser's *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto* (2019), Steffen Lehmann's *Urban Regeneration: A Manifesto for Transforming UK Cities in the Age of Climate Change*

(2019), Ronald Rael's *Borderwall as Architecture: A Manifesto for the U.S.-Mexico Boundary* (2017), Lidia Yuknavitch's *The Misfit's Manifesto* (2017), and Kevin Gannon's forthcoming *Radical Hope: A Teaching Manifesto* (April 2020). And those are just the books with "manifesto" in their titles. There are many more books with comparably transformative aims – Jenny Odell's *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy* and Ibram X. Kendi's *How to Be an Antiracist*, to name just two from 2019.

Fourth, avant-garde manifestos are often playful, juxtaposing bold statements that both build upon and seem to contradict one another. But such apparent paradoxes are also a semi-humorous way of acknowledging complexity, difficulty, even impossibility. (We know our utopia may not be realized, but we work towards it nonetheless.) Tristan Tzara's "Dada Manifesto on Feeble Love and Bitter Love" (1920) juxtaposes apparently unrelated and contrary ideas within individual sentences: "A manifesto is a communication made to the whole world, whose only pretension is to the discovery of an instant cure for political, astronomical, artistic, parliamentary, agronomical and literary syphilis. It may be pleasant, and good-natured, it's always right, it's strong, vigorous and logical" (33). The notion of an "instant cure" for such a range of ills, and the tension between "pleasant" and the totalitarian insistence of "always right" register some of the gaps between theory and practice, building a rhetorical structure upon dialectical ironies.

The tensions and associations between statements can be a key structural element of the manifesto. Via proximity, the statements suggest their connections to one another. In "PROCLAMATION!" (2011), a bullet-pointed picture book manifesto by 22 picture book creators (including Mac Barnett, Sophie Blackall, Laurie Keller, Jon Klassen, Isol, Christian Robinson, Jon Scieszka, and Dan Santat), the bullet-pointed sentence "[c]hildren's books merit grown-up conversation" is followed by "[g]rown-up conversation doesn't mean asking kids to leave the room" (Barnett et al.). And the sentence "[t]he line between author and illustrator is irrelevant" directly precedes "[t]he line between moral and meaning is paramount." Through such juxtapositions, a manifesto can offer poetic provocations that – because they lack full elaboration – invite the reader to respond.

In this sense, the manifesto might be seen as the activist cousin of the keywords essay. Both may map tensions (in this case, the tensions that swirl around the word "radical"), but the manifesto hopes readers will use its map to change the world. The keywords essay's thesis is implicit, revealed in the contours of the contradictions it

charts; the manifesto's argument is more explicit, emerging both in bold claims *and* in the friction between those claims.

My manifesto began as an argument unfolding via 42 numbered points of a sentence or two each. Developing it for publication, I condensed the number to 40 (combining related points, excising a redundant one) and expanded upon some though not all of these points, creating a hybrid manifesto-essay. I did not elaborate upon all points *both* to retain some of the original's poetic logic *and* to prevent this document from expanding into a book.

I wrote the manifesto because I know what I want radical children's literature to do, but the many ways in which it might achieve these goals frustrates any attempts to place parameters around a "radical aesthetic." In that sense, this manifesto for radical children's literature is also a record of my failure to locate a politically radical aesthetic. I say "failure" because, first, once institutionalized, a radical aesthetic ceases to be radical. Second, a radical aesthetic depends upon standards of taste, which are highly individual and ever-changing – historically, regionally, nationally, and institutionally. Third, the cultural aesthetic experiences against which radicalness must be judged makes a radical aesthetic *for children* especially difficult to gauge. As I observe in "Surrealism for Children," "When everything is new, there can be no shock of the new. When everything is new, everything can be – on some level – shocking" (272). Fourth, the *concept* makes the work radical; as points number 29 and 36 explore in greater detail, many aesthetics can express radical content.

That said, this radical content does arrive via particular aesthetic choices, and meaning manifests at least partly via medium, mode, style, genre. So, this manifesto for radical children's literature both articulates activist aims and – taking picture books as its primary focus – considers how particular aesthetic choices assist or inhibit the radical.

## The Manifesto: 40 Paths to Radical Transformation

1. Radical children's literature nourishes curiosity.
2. Radical children's literature – following Paulo Freire's advice – presents the world as a problem to be solved rather than as a given to be accepted.

Bernardo Carvalho's *Trocoscópio* (2010) – a wordless picture book from Portugal – begins by moving pieces of the picture on the left-

hand page into the (initially) blank space on the right-hand page. As it continues but withholds any explanation of why it is moving and rearranging shapes, the book prompts the question of *why*. As the factory on the left-hand pages gradually becomes a tropical forest on the right-hand pages, *Trocoscópio* invites readers to imagine how else these shapes could be rearranged – and consequently how else we could transform our world. (The endpapers reinforce this idea by creating two *different* pictures built from the same shapes.)

In presenting the artistic transformation as a problem to be solved, the book also suggests that the *built world* is a problem to be solved. Neither explicitly didactic nor prescriptive, *Trocoscópio* instead offers many options for creative, analogical thinking.

3. Radical children's literature goes to the roots of the problem. As Raymond Williams reminds us, the root of the word "radical" is *radix*, the Latin word for "root" (251).

Inviting us to examine the roots of language itself, the bug protagonists of Carson Ellis' *Du Iz Tak?* (2016) speak in an invented language, which reminds us that languages are inventions (and not natural), and positions *all* readers as potential solvers of the puzzles of the characters' speech. It does not go as far as the unpronounceable language of Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* (2006) – speakers of languages that use descendants of the Latin alphabet will find deciphering *Du Iz Tak?* easier than speakers of languages that use a logographic system or syllabaries. But, in denaturalizing the written word, the book reminds us that *how* and *what* we speak is learned. In this way, it puts adult readers in the position of children learning to read. It also offers an implicit challenge to those who allege that one language is better, more civilized, or should be required for citizenship.

4. Radical children's literature is hopeful.

5. Radical children's literature recognizes that hope is not wishful thinking. Hope requires action. As Howard Zinn put it,

To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness. [...] If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places – and there are so many – where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction. (Zinn)

The first children's book to address the consequences of the compromised election of Donald Trump, Maya Gonzalez' *When a Bully Is President: Truth and Creativity for Oppressive Times* (published February 2017), embodies this hope by locating it in relation to the historical and contemporary cruelty it must oppose. Speaking plainly in both English and Spanish, Gonzalez uses the concept of bullying to historicize America's current President and the social structures that support him, a particularly apt approach because, as the Southern Poverty Law Center documents in its report *The Trump Effect*, Mr. Trump's campaign and presidency has inspired a sharp rise in bullying at school – harassment of children of color as well as “immigrants, Muslims, girls, LGBT students, kids with disabilities and anyone who was on the ‘wrong’ side of the election” (Costello). In the book, the metaphor of the bully explains America's history of crimes against humanity – murdering Native Americans, enslaving and murdering people of African descent, exploiting Mexican Americans. It also allows the book to address the “echo” of that bullying in the present: discrimination against “Muslim and Sikh Americans, Asian Americans, and many immigrants, as well as “LGBTQ Americans, disabled Americans and Americans who identify as women or girls.”

Gonzalez' book locates hope in various manifestations of community: “Together we look and see WHAT A BULLY IS. Seeing keeps us strong” (7). As the book later explains, this broader historical context helps us “see that bullying is not based in truth. Everyone deserves to be themselves, equally and freely. That is the truth. When we look closer and see through bullying, we see YOU. You are the truth. Knowing that you are the truth keeps you strong” (17). One way to oppose the bullies is to know that “[s]tanding in your truth keeps you strong” (30). Children can also join others who protest. They can speak out against bullies or stand with those who are being bullied. But they don't have to: “Even if you don't do anything about a bully being president, you're still doing something. You are being you. You are being your truth. We need the truth of you. Always remember that you are important” (21). Children can use creativity. They can draw the stories of their ancestors, they can draw themselves as powerful animals, they can use art to bear witness.

This book is one reason why I push back against the idea that a radical project requires a particular radical aesthetic. Gonzalez' aesthetic works for this particular book because it addresses the needs of those currently under threat from a government headed by a man who “joins Andrew Johnson as the most racist president in American



history,” as Pulitzer Prize-winning Presidential historian Jon Meacham has said of Trump (Wise).<sup>1</sup> The aesthetic also works because its magic-marker-drawn people affirm children’s own artistic inclinations. When the book first invites children to draw, it says, “Play with drawing yourself in the same way the people in this book are drawn” (Gonzalez 32), and offers a how-to. *When a Bully Is President* is a self-published advice book, with art rendered in marker on pages that can be too crowded. But its woolly line and packed pages convey the book’s urgency (Gonzalez created it in 4 months) and invite children to participate.

6. Radical children’s literature understands that longing can be a mode of critical engagement, if its nostalgia inspires reflection instead of reverence.
7. Radical children’s literature rejects what Svetlana Boym calls restorative nostalgia. It resists attempts to make memory whole, conquer time, or mythologize history.
8. Radical children’s literature builds on the possibilities afforded by reflective nostalgia. It embraces (to quote Boym) the “imperfect process of remembrance,” ruminates on brokenness, and dwells in history’s gaps (41).

Antonia Herrera and Gabriel Osorio’s *Historia de un Oso* – an Oscar-winning animated short film (2014) and picture book (2016) from Chile – dwells in those very gaps. Rooted in a complex nostalgia, *Historia de un Oso* (or *Bear Story*, to use its official English title) narrates the trauma wrought by the 1973 CIA-backed Chilean coup d’etat. A bear tells the story of his life via miniature mechanically animated versions of himself, his wife, and their son. The bear-storyteller exists in the present, and in the mechanical diorama. His wife and son appear only in the diorama. The bear bicycles to a square, sets up his miniature theatre, a young bear arrives to see it, the old bear turns the crank, and a history of personal and national pain unfolds via intricate mechanical figurines that evoke wind-up toys of childhood. With halting, deliberate movements that evoke his emotional brokenness, his bear avatar recalls being captured by the thuggish, uniformed, nightstick-wielding “domadores” – a Spanish word for *trainers, tamers, or horse-breakers*. The domadores enter apartments, where they beat and kidnap a lion, an elephant, four monkeys, a seal, a giraffe, and the bear – separating him from his wife and child. The



domadores force the bruised and imprisoned animals to perform. In quiet moments, the bear looks at the photo of his family in his pocket watch. He escapes, returns to his apartment, finds it ransacked and apparently empty. As his head drops in mourning, his wife and child appear, they embrace, and the mechanical curtain closes.

Outside of the diorama, the audience of boy bear is happy. The storyteller bear then looks at *his* pocket watch, where he sees that same photo of papa bear, mama bear, and their son – reminding us that the happy ending within the mechanical diorama was a nostalgic fiction. His wife and child are really gone. At story's end, the bear stands alone on the street, ready to retell the story, via this act of reflective nostalgia that – in Boym's words – is “a form of deep mourning that performs a labor of grief both through pondering pain and through play that points to the future” (Boym 55).

9. Radical children's literature is suspicious of happily-ever-after.

10. Radical children's literature asks, “happily-ever-after for *whom*?”

*Michael Rosen's Sad Book* (illustrated by Quentin Blake, 2004) exemplifies reflective nostalgia. It dwells in algia, in longing, in the permanent unresolvable ache of loss. It refuses restorative nostalgia. Acknowledging that he is sad for other reasons than the loss of his son Eddie, Rosen writes, “Maybe it's because things now aren't like they were a few years ago. Like my family. It's not the same as it was a few years ago. So what happens is that there's a sad place inside me because things aren't the same.”<sup>2</sup>

It explicitly rejects the expectation of a happy ending by, first, turning to happier memories, and then concluding on a sharp pang of longing. After naming a pain so acute that “I just want to disappear,” the next page signals a turn towards light. “But” – the next page begins – “sometimes I find myself looking at things: faces at a window... a crane and a train full of people moving past.” He remembers his “mum in the rain,” and his son “Eddie walking along the street laughing and laughing and laughing.” Blake's warm illustrations offer memories of people smiling, celebrating birthdays with candles on their cakes – “candles. There must be candles.” Moving from a panorama of people and lit birthday cakes, the final two-page spread presents a solitary candle, a photograph, and Rosen seated before them. Alone.

In her “The Open Ending Manifesto,” Catherine Williams – one of the students in my spring 2018 class – wrote of the need for endings

that do not resolve neatly. Challenging Bruno Bettelheim's assertion that stories for children require happy endings because those fulfill their need for security, she wrote, "Instead of providing security, 'happily ever after' may actually produce doubt and feelings of exclusion amongst some children, especially those experiencing adversity." She then took an autobiographical turn:

as a child, I read many books about children experiencing hardship because I was searching for a mirror. However, instead of finding representation, the emphasis on closure and happy resolutions often made me feel isolated because I knew that "happily ever after" was not a possibility within the foster care system. As a young reader, I felt like stories like mine were too scary for children's literature, and [that absence] made me feel invisible within the genre I was desperately seeking comfort from. (C. Williams 3)

This is not to say that all radical children's books should avoid joy or humor. Not at all. It is, however, making a case for the power of sadness.

11. Radical children's literature does not reject all rules as suspect. It helps children distinguish between which rules might liberate, and which might harm.
12. Radical children's literature respects children. It knows that though children may have fewer years or less vocabulary than adults, they are not lesser people.
13. Radical children's literature does not construct children to serve adults' fantasies.

Rowboat Watkins' *Pete with No Pants* (2017) is happy to let Pete be his imaginative, pantsless self. It begins: "Shortly after breakfast, Pete decided he was a boulder." He thinks: "Let's see... I'm BIG. Check. I'm GRAY. Check. And I'm NOT wearing pants. Yup. I'm a boulder." He spends the book seeking a friend to tell his knock-knock joke to, and trying on different identities. He next decides he is a squirrel. And then a cloud. And then a pigeon. (Boulders, squirrels, clouds, and pigeons all do not wear pants.) On the book's final pages, his mother observes her naked son's frustration, as he cries out "KNOCK! KNOCK!" to yet another indifferent audience. She asks, "Who's there?" On the triumphant, final two-page spread, he replies "It's me!" His mother - who previously had been encouraging him to

wear his pants – happily carries her naked son aloft, as she runs across a meadow. His mom accepts him for who he is.

As Watkins has said of his character,

Pete’s pantslessness [...] is not an act of sartorial sedition so much as an act of self-liberation. Pete’s pants are (for whatever reason) an impediment to his being able to imagine whatever else he might be – other than an elephant in pants. They are a metaphor for the way his mom wants to see him. And by extension, the way society wants to see him. Which becomes the way Pete feels he is supposed to see himself. (qtd. in Danielson)

The mother in the book was originally more dominant, and Watkins realized that he needed to make her less so when he was

thinking about my niece, who was, not so long ago in her still young life, formerly my very withdrawn nephew. And how her incredible journey toward becoming the bouncy girl she now is was so dependent on her having parents who were willing to put down the literal pants they were putting her in – and theirs somehow having the parental where-withal to allow their child to dress herself. Literally and figuratively. My niece’s transformation was and is so contingent on her knowing her parents love(d) and see her for whoever she is. (qtd. in Danielson)

So, while *Pete With No Pants* is not about transgender kids as such, it is about parents accepting and loving their children for who they are. That is what Pete’s mom does at the end. As Watkins says, “Pete’s mom is the only character in the book to answer Pete’s knock-knock joke and ask, ‘Who’s there?’ But in doing so, she isn’t simply obliging Pete as the initiator of a joke, or setting up his punchline. She is also earnestly asking her son: ‘Who are you? Please tell me, because I am listening’” (qtd. in Danielson).

14. Radical children’s literature listens to children. As Elisabeth

Young-Bruehl advises, “By consulting children and considering their viewpoints, we can help them understand their experiences and prepare them to participate in the struggle against childism and other prejudices” (12).

Mocking the tendency to idealize children with Down syndrome, Gusti’s *No Somos Angelitos* (2017; *We Are Not Angels*) offers a contrary perspective from the perspective of a child with Down syndrome. This pointed, funny refutation from the Argentine-born/

Barcelona-based artist Gusti insists that readers see Down-syndrome children *as children*. The words “Soy el orgullo de papá y mamá” (“I am the pride of my mother and father”) accompany an illustration of the Down-syndrome child letting rip a massive fart. The announcement “Doy amor cada hora del día” (“I give love every hour of the day”) contradicts an illustration of the same child, playing a trumpet while marching on the twin bed of two adults (presumably his parents) who are both trying to sleep. While the protagonist is of course Gusti’s *imagined* version of a child with an extra chromosome, the child is based on his own son, Mallko – a relationship explored with more nuance and complexity in his earlier book, *Mallko y Papá* (2014, published in English as *Mallko and Dad*, 2018).

15. Radical children’s literature realizes that, as Marah Gubar says, “children and adults are separated by differences of degree, not of kind” (454).
16. Radical children’s literature understands that identity is intersectional.
17. Radical children’s literature knows that oppression is intersectional, and that locating people within overlapping structures of power and privilege is both challenging and necessary.<sup>3</sup>
18. No single work of radical children’s literature can address all forms of structural oppression.
19. No single work of radical children’s literature should uphold any form of structural oppression.
20. Each work of radical children’s literature does what it does well, and knows that it cannot do everything.
21. Radical children’s literature seeks to foster conditions for human flourishing.

There are many ways to foster such conditions, both aesthetically and ideologically. In addition to the works discussed so far, we also need books that encourage *collective* responsibility and – with a nod to Fred Moten – remind readers that oppressive structures hurt everyone, including those who benefit from them.<sup>4</sup> Armin Greder’s *Die Insel* (2002) – published as *The Island* (2007) in English – dramatizes

a failure to take responsibility for our fellow humans, and shows how that damages all involved. The people of the island reluctantly take in a refugee, and then gradually turn on him. Greder's stark, expressionist art conveys their cruelty via exaggerated facial features that display the monsters they have become. As the islanders claim, "He's not one of us. He isn't our problem" in an attempt to convince themselves that he is less human, Greder's portrait of them recalls James Baldwin's observation that "[p]eople who shut their eyes to reality simply invite their own destruction, and anyone who insists on remaining in a state of innocence long after that innocence is dead turns himself into a monster" (178).

Via a very different artistic style, the wordless *I Walk with Vanessa: A Story About a Simple Act of Kindness* (2018) – by Kerascoët (the husband-and-wife team of Sébastien Cosset and Marie Pomme-puy) – also advances an ethic of collective responsibility. In warm watercolor-and-ink cartoons, shy Vanessa – a brown-skinned child – arrives at a new school featuring children in a range of hues. As they depart school, a blonde White boy bullies her. A beige-complexioned girl witnesses the bullying and Vanessa crying afterwards. Beige child is sad, and tells her friends, each of whom walks home feeling sad. Sadness lingers until the next morning, when beige girl has an idea: she will walk with Vanessa to school. As others gradually join her, an ethic of care ripples through the community. The smiling kids *all* walk together, except for the blonde bully, now red-faced and thwarted. The book deals less with how oppression robs oppressors of their humanity, but does model allyhood for young readers.

22. Radical children's literature recognizes that modes of domination cannot be modes of liberation. As human rights activist İyad el-Baghdadi observes, "activism should be driven by love and not revenge." He acknowledges "how difficult it is, after paying a heavily personal price, to insist on being fueled by love and not revenge." But, since "revenge is toxic" he advises that activists "be pulled to the future by a beautiful vision, rather than pushed forth by your pain and your demons."
23. Radical children's literature recognizes Freire's distinction between the radical and the sectarian, striving to embrace the critical, creative spirit of the former and oppose the mythologizing, fanatical impulse of the latter.<sup>5</sup>

And here I would disqualify a few of the works that Julia L. Mickenberg and I included in our *Tales for Little Rebels* as too sectarian. We acknowledge their fanaticism in our apparatus and deliberately included tales that present a suitably complex portrait of the left. As we write of M. Boland's "ABC for Martin" (a 1935 Communist ABC that includes the line "K is for Kremlin, where our Stalin lives"), "the intent may have been liberatory, but the message winds up mixing violent sentiments with praise for a dictator – not lessons progressives want to teach their children" (Mickenberg and Nel 9).

24. Radical children's literature is guided by love.

In Jessica Love's picture-book debut *Julián Is a Mermaid* (2018), after seeing women in mermaid dresses on the train, Julián tells his grandmother, "Abuela, I am also a mermaid." While she takes a bath, he "has a good idea." He decides to dress as a mermaid. When Abuela sees him, we at first think he is in trouble. Instead, she gives him a necklace to wear, and accompanies him to the mermaid parade – presumably, the annual Mermaid Parade in Coney Island, Brooklyn. In watercolor, gouache, and ink, *Julián Is a Mermaid* offers a message of love for children who are transgender or who just enjoy cross-dressing. (The book never indicates why Julián dresses as a mermaid. It just affirms that it is OK for a child born as a boy to do so.)

25. Radical children's literature's love is (to paraphrase Freire) fueled by its commitment to others, faith in dialogue, and yearning to increase freedom.

26. Radical children's literature respects differences in opinion, but also insists that all opinions are not equally valuable.

27. Radical children's literature encourages careful, empirical analysis.

28. Radical children's literature teaches young people how to recognize propaganda.

In George Saunders and Lane Smith's *The Very Persistent Gappers of Frip* (2000), when the daily infestation of gappers ceases to afflict all three neighbors' goats, the two neighbors whose goats are now gapper-free assume that the afflicted neighbor – Capable and her widowed father – *deserve* their misfortune. Parodying conservative

*pull-yourself-up-by-your-own-bootstraps* propaganda, one neighbor explains his decision to withhold help via this ludicrous “advice”: “Work harder. Actually, no, don’t work harder, work smarter. Be more efficient than you’ve ever been before. In fact, be more efficient than is humanly possible. I know that’s what I’d do” (Saunders and Smith 45). Beyond the advice’s sheer absurdity, its context shows it to be a lie: Capable *has* been working both harder and smarter, but is no match for the gappers. The tale reminds children to trust and learn from their experience, rather than the propagandistic homilies of free-marketeers. Capable does and she proves herself... capable. She sells the goats, and teaches herself to fish. Though her neighbors didn’t help her, she also teaches them to fish because, as the narrator reports, “she soon found that it was not all that fun being the sort of person who eats a big dinner in a warm house while others shiver on their roofs in the dark” (70).

## 29. Radical children’s literature vows that facts matter.

The most powerful refutation of the racist lie that slavery somehow benefitted the enslaved is the fact that many enslaved Africans preferred suicide over slavery. Lucille Clifton and Don Miller’s *The Black BC’s* (an Afrocentric ABC book from 1970), Tom Feelings’ *Middle Passage* (wordless picture book from 1995), and Irene Smalls and Jon Onye Lockard’s *Ebony Sea* (narrative picture book from 1995) all – and via different genres – tell of Africans killing themselves to escape slavery. *The Black BC’s* identifies “slavery” or “slave” by name in ten of its letters (B, D, F, M, Q, S, T, U, V, W), and places suicide at the center of its “Middle Passage” pages. Close to the center of the two-page spread, Miller depicts a young African man hurling himself off the ship’s deck. His chained hands (which weigh him down and will prevent him from swimming) indicate that he will drown. Clifton’s verse – in a slightly larger font, at the top left of the first page – calls our attention to his choice. Of “the slave,” she writes: “what peace they knew / the waters gave” (24).

In *Middle Passage*, Tom Feelings’ haunting images – rendered in pen and ink and tempera – show men and women, in chains, launching themselves overboard, into the ocean deep, where sharks await. Using the language of comics, the two-page spread’s panels spatialize time, showing their journey from boat to sharks to skeletal remains. In *Ebony Sea*, Jon Onye Lockard’s bright pastels and watercolors dramatizes the 1803 arrival of a slave ship, in which its “cargo ... a large group of Ebos from the African coast” march silently and



with dignity from the ship, and follow their queen into the water. As Irene Smalls' narration explains, "In her Ebo believes an African who dies goes back home to Africa. She wanted to go home." So, the narrative explains, "They walked into that river and drowned themselves, every man, woman, and child. ... They walked into the water and stayed down. That day the sea turned ebony. They wanted to go home." All three books, in three different genres, tell the truth. Because...

30. Radical children's literature believes in and seeks the truth.

31. Radical children's literature admits what it does not know. Doubt invites reflection, complicating and deepening our understanding. Uncertainty reminds us that we always have more to learn. Ambiguity acknowledges that truths are not always clear.

Wolf Erlbruch's *Ente, Tod und Tulpe* (2007) – *Duck, Death and the Tulip* in English – has Ente (Duck) ask whether there is a Heaven and a Hell. "Some ducks say you become an angel and sit on a cloud," says Duck, and "[s]ome ducks say that deep in the earth there is a place where you'll be roasted if you haven't been good." Tod (Death) replies, "You ducks come up with amazing stories, but who knows?" Duck responds, "So you don't know either." Death "just looked at her," but does not respond.

A profound, philosophical, and vaguely unsettling book, *Ente, Tod und Tulpe* makes aesthetic choices that deepen the mystery and our sense of unease. Erlbruch dresses Death in a housecoat, and gives him the elongated skull of a fetus. In other words, the skull's shape is still fetal or infantile rather than fully formed. Also, Death's skull-to-body size ratio is that of an infant, even though he has an adult's posture and facility with language. Conjuring domesticity (via the housecoat), infant mortality or abortion (via the fetal skull), the formation of human life (also via the fetal skull), and children's books (via the talking duck), Erlbruch's imagery haunts and provokes. Indeed, it maps the various senses of the sublime – horror, greatness, beauty, irrationality, awe. It makes us wonder.

32. Radical children's literature knows that doubt, uncertainty, and ambiguity are not radical in and of themselves. If they evade problems or abet propagandists, they are not radical; if they address problems and hold the powerful accountable, they can be radical.

33. Radical children's literature is only temporarily radical because radicalness is itself temporal, shifting as systems of power collapse or regenerate, as institutions decay or – through persistent activism and hard-won reforms – maybe even improve.

The normalized interracial friendships of Lorraine and Jerrold Beim's *Two Is a Team* (1945) and Inez Hogan's *Nappy Has a New Friend* (1947) were radical for children's books published by mainstream American presses – Harcourt Brace and E.P. Dutton, respectively – in the 1940s. Although books featuring characters who are (to borrow Michelle Martin's term) "unextraordinarily black" could be more plentiful, it is no longer radical for children's books to feature characters of color and yet not make race a central theme. Similarly, while Maya Gonzalez' *When a Bully Is President* is radical now for readers based in the United States, we can only guess at its status in the future. Perhaps the successful anti-racist education programs instituted by President Elizabeth Warren or Vice President Kamala Harris will make the book's message seem almost quaint. Or perhaps *When a Bully Is President* will inspire nostalgia for that more hopeful time when we still thought we could still restore United States democracy. And so...

34. Radical children's literature does not pretend that art can divest itself of politics.

35. Radical children's literature insists that ideas are inextricable from their mode of expression: liberating content requires a liberating form.

As I have been suggesting throughout this manifesto, nearly *any* form can be liberating. But that fact does not prevent us from pointing to books that make especially *effective* use of their form. Kate Samworth's *Aviary Wonders Inc.* (2014) – subtitled both *Spring Catalog and Instruction Manual* and *Renewing the World's Bird Supply Since 2031* – presents itself as a capitalist artefact from the dystopian future towards which humankind is headed. The tension between the peppy catalogue copy and the realistic illustrations of extinct birds (seven of which are already extinct in the present day) creates a lingering unease. Selling artisanal parts for do-it-yourself bird assemblage, the catalogue presents the red-and-white striped beak of the Laughing Owl, accompanied by this copy: "Curtains for the

Laughing Owl came around 1914, a few decades after settlers arrived in New Zealand with their cats" (Samworth). And: "TEACH YOUR BIRD TO CACKLE AND WHOOP IN THIS COLORFUL BEAK." Amplifying the discomfiting feeling, illustrated step-by-step instructions for bird assembly show images of living but partially dismembered birds. In the process of being put together, they look very much alive and in pain. (In this sense, the book gestures back to John James Audubon, who created vivid portraits of birds... by killing birds and then painting them.)

Samworth activates a sense of the uncanny (*unheimlich*) in vividly realistic birds that are both living and not living, animate and inanimate – haunting doppelgangers of extinguished species. As extinction rates rise, I hope that the uneasy experience of reading *Aviary Wonders Inc.* inspires readers to save the dwindling variety of life on planet earth.

36. Radical children's literature recognizes that, as Eve Ewing says, "you can't really be obsessed with the form or the function; there has to be a concept beneath something. And when you have a concept, it just goes" (qtd. in Hopper). Or, as Sol LeWitt wrote in his "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" (1967), "The idea becomes a machine that makes the art" (79). As the range of works discussed in this manifesto indicates, many media, genres, modes, and styles can convey radical ideas.

37. Radical children's literature encourages children's play. As Robin Bernstein suggests, play affords children a chance to develop that complex, contingent agency that may help them navigate the real world: as she says, "simultaneously compliant and unruly," play "is not simplistically resistant; rather, it is creative, symptomatic, anarchic, ritualistic, reiterative, and most of all, culturally productive" (460).

*Shadow* (2010) – a near-wordless picture book from Singapore-based artist Suzy Lee – opens with the spine at the top, the gutter dividing the upper half (a basement) from the lower half (a shadow that will be transformed by imagination). This creative challenge to conventional book design – in the tradition of Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963) and Ruth Krauss and Sendak's *A Very Special House* (1953) – suggests that a child's imagination has the power to *literally* transform reality. Though the shadows initially seem shaped by the little girl's play, they also have their own agency – first, taking

an oppositional role in the creative endeavor, and second, cavorting in the basement after the little girl has left. The book puts me in mind of Kimberley Reynolds' analysis of Enid Bagnold's *Alice and Thomas and Jane* (1930): "For children, everything they do is real at the time they do it, and in the stories extended collective fantasies and everyday reality are often fused" (110). Exploring the thin-boundaried world of children's imagination, *Shadow* conveys that strong childhood feeling that powerful dreams can become real – that play is, as Bernstein says, "culturally productive."

38. Radical children's literature affirms the urgency of liberation, and demands its immediate realization.

39. Radical children's literature knows that liberation is a struggle, and may not be achieved in the lifetimes of its creators or its readers.

40. Radical children's literature is committed to the struggle.

As I have suggested here, a wide range of genres and modes and media can express that commitment to the struggle. Wordless picture books, nonsense, activist non-fiction, talking-animal stories, reflective nostalgia, melancholy, humor, expressionism, didactic cartoons, realism rendered in watercolor and gauche, absurdist parables, ABC books, philosophical unheimlich, dystopian consumerism – and many others not discussed here – can all be directed towards radical ends.

This is not to suggest that a radical aesthetic can be reduced to authorial intent, but rather that – to quote the late Peter Bürger's description of the historical avant-garde – working to "reintegrate art into the life process" in order to engender in the audience a "critical cognition of reality" is deeply entwined with morals and values (50). And, more importantly, the radicalness – the *radicality* – occurs in the interaction between the work and the reader, a reader whose experiences and aptitude and aesthetic preferences *can* be imagined, but never fully nor completely apprehended.

Arguing for radical children's literature but refusing to codify its aesthetics may seem paradoxical – to say nothing of contrarian. But I would encourage us to embrace this very paradox, to resist enshrining radicalness within a set of aesthetic principles, so that we may instead be agile improvisers, unleashing the power of our fugitive imaginations, as we advocate for books that help the next generation build a more just world.

*Biographical information: Philip Nel, University Distinguished Professor of English at Kansas State University, is the author or co-editor of 11 books, the most recent of which is Was the Cat in the Hat Black? The Hidden Racism of Children's Literature, and the Need for Diverse Books (2017). Forthcoming in 2020: second edition of Keywords for Children's Literature, co-edited with Lissa Paul and Nina Christensen (NYU Press), and Crockett Johnson's Barnaby volume 4: 1948-1949, co-edited with Eric Reynolds (Fantagraphics).*

## Works Cited: Children's Books

- Beim, Lorraine, Jerrold Beim, and Ernest Chrichlow. *Two Is a Team*. New York, Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1945.
- Boland, M. "ABC for Martin." *Martin's Annual*, edited by Joan Beauchamp, New York, International, 1935.
- Carvalho, Bernardo. *Trocoscópio*. Carcavelos, Planeta Tangerina, 2010.
- Clifton, Lucille, and Don Miller. *The Black BC's*. New York, E. P. Dutton & Co., 1970.
- Ellis, Carson. *Du Iz Tak?* Somerville, Candlewick Press, 2016.
- Erlbruch, Wolf. *Duck, Death and the Tulip*. Translated by Catherine Chidgey, Minneapolis, Gecko Press USA, 2011.
- Feelings, Tom. *Middle Passage*. New York, Dial Press, 1995.
- Gonzalez, Maya. *When a Bully Is President: Truth and Creativity for Oppressive Times*. San Francisco, Reflection Press, 2017.
- Greder, Armin. *The Island*. Translated by Armin Greder, Crows Nest, Allen & Unwin, 2007.
- Gusti. *No Somos Angelitos*. Mexico City, Océano Travesía, 2017.
- Herrera, Antonia, and Gabriel Osorio. *Historia de un Oso*. 2016. 5<sup>th</sup> ed., Santiago, Zig-Zag, 2017.
- Hogan, Inez. *Nappy Has a New Friend*. New York, E. P. Dutton & Company, Inc., 1947.
- Kerascoët. *I Walk With Vanessa: A Story About a Simple Act of Kindness*. New York, Schwartz & Wade Books, 2018.
- Krauss, Ruth, and Maurice Sendak. *A Very Special House*. New York, Harper & Brothers, 1953.

- Lee, Suzy. *Shadow*. San Francisco, Chronicle Books, 2010.
- Love, Jessica. *Julián Is a Mermaid*. Somerville, Candlewick Press, 2018.
- Rosen, Michael, and Quentin Blake. *Michael Rosen's Sad Book*. 2004. Somerville, Candlewick Books, 2005.
- Samworth, Kate. *Aviary Wonders Inc.: Spring Catalog and Instruction Manual: Renewing the World's Bird Supply Since 2031*. Boston/New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014.
- Saunders, George, and Lane Smith. *The Very Persistent Gappers of Frip*. New York, Villard Books, 2000.
- Sendak, Maurice. *Where the Wild Things Are*. New York, Harper & Row, 1963.
- Smalls, Irene, and Jon Onye Lockard. *Ebony Sea*. Ann Arbor, Borders Press, 1995.
- Tan, Shaun. *The Arrival*. 2006. New York, Scholastic, 2007.
- Watkins, Rowboat. *Pete With No Pants*. San Francisco, Chronicle Books, 2017.

## Works Cited: Criticism & Other Context

This manifesto represents a synthesis of many sources, some of which I explicitly cite and others of which lack the citation – because it is an allusion, has been woven into my own argument, or I am not fully conscious of the influence. A result of pondering these questions off-and-on for a couple of decades is that I cannot remember all influences, but prominent ones include Robin Bernstein, Svetlana Boym, Paulo Freire, Marah Gubar, Julia L. Mickenberg, Fred Moten, Kimberley Reynolds, Raymond Williams, Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, Howard Zinn, Jack Zipes, and the recent “Children’s ‘68” issue of *Strenae: Recherches sur les livres et objets culturels de l’enfance* (volume 13, 2018), edited by Sophie Heywood and Cécile Boulaire. I was also influenced by the discussions with the students in my Spring 2018 graduate class, “Radical Children’s Literature”: Miriam Barton, Christina Chappell, Alyssa Cook, Jaime DeTour, Latrice Ferguson, Jenette Follmer, Kat Goetting, Katie Hall, Dan Haws, Rey Irwin, Brittani Ivan, Emily Littlejohn, Mandy Moore, Leif Nelson, Chelsea Osademe, Brittany Roberts, Cailin Roles, Jamie Teixeira, Kathleen Wallace, Cat Williams, and Hannah Wright.

Along with a few others, below are works I cite explicitly and works that have deeply influenced my thinking, whether or not they are explicitly cited in the essay. Critique of the above and suggestions for other resources are welcome.

Baldwin, James. *Notes of a Native Son*. 1955. With a new introduction by Edward P. Jones. Boston, Beacon Press, 2012.

Barnett, Mac, Brian Biggs, Sophie Blackall, Lisa Brown, Kevin Cornell, Carson Ellis, Isol, Laurie Keller, Jon Klassen, Matthew Myers, Tao Nyeu, Sean Qualls, Aaron Renier, Adam Rex, Christian Robinson, Jon Scieszka, Dan Santat, Lemony Snicket, Erin E. Stead, Philip C. Stead, Scott Teplin, Maria von Lieshout. "PROCLAMATION!" *The Picturebook*, 2011, [www.thepicturebook.co](http://www.thepicturebook.co). Accessed 4 December 2019.

Bernstein, Robin. "Toys Are Good For Us: Why We Should Embrace the Historical Integration of Children's Culture, Material Culture, and Play." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, vol. 38, no. 4, 2013, pp. 458-63.

Bishop, Rudine Sims. *Free Within Ourselves: The Development of African American Children's Literature*. Westport/London, Greenwood Press, 2007.

Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York, Basic Books, 2001.

Bürger, Peter. *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Translated by Michael Shaw, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

Costello, Maureen B. "The Trump Effect: The Impact of the 2016 Election on Our Nation's Schools." *Southern Poverty Law Center*, 28 November 2016, [www.splcenter.org/20161128/trump-effect-impact-2016-presidential-election-our-nations-schools](http://www.splcenter.org/20161128/trump-effect-impact-2016-presidential-election-our-nations-schools). Accessed 25 January 2017.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, no. 1, 1989, pp. 139-167.

Danielson, Julie. "Pantslessness (Metaphorical and Otherwise) with Pete." *Seven Impossible Things Before Breakfast*, 24 May 2017, [blaine.org/sevenimpossiblethings/?p=4353](http://blaine.org/sevenimpossiblethings/?p=4353). Accessed 26 June 2018.

el-Baghdadi, İyad. "I speak a lot on my timeline about how your activism should be driven by love and not revenge. I speak about



how revenge is toxic, and is a terrible long-term motivator." Twitter, 7 June 2019, 6:24 p.m., [twitter.com/iyad\\_elbaghdadi/status/1137138195093708800](https://twitter.com/iyad_elbaghdadi/status/1137138195093708800).

---. "Not many people appreciate just how difficult it is, after paying a heavily personal price, to insist on being fueled by love and not revenge. To be pulled to the future by a beautiful vision, rather than pushed forth by your pain and your demons." Twitter, 7 June 2019, 6:25 p.m., [twitter.com/iyad\\_elbaghdadi/status/1137138420889919490](https://twitter.com/iyad_elbaghdadi/status/1137138420889919490).

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 1970. Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos, New York, Bloomsbury, 2016.

Gubar, Marah. "Risky Business: Talking About Children in Children's Literature Criticism." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, vol. 38, no. 4, 2013, pp. 450–457, [doi.org/10.1353/chq.2013.0048](https://doi.org/10.1353/chq.2013.0048).

Hopper, Jessica. "Eve Ewing on Challenging Your Own Ideas of Failure." *The Creative Independent*, 7 February 2018, [thecreativeindependent.com/people/eve-ewing-on-challenging-your-own-ideas-of-failure](https://thecreativeindependent.com/people/eve-ewing-on-challenging-your-own-ideas-of-failure). Accessed 10 July 2018.

LeWitt, Sol. "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art." 1967. *Sol LeWitt: The Museum of Modern Art*, edited by Alicia Legg, New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 1978, pp. 166–167.

Loveless, Nathalie. *How to Make Art at the End of the World: A Manifesto for Research-Creation*. Durham/ London, Duke University Press, 2019.

Martin, Michelle. *Brown Gold: Milestones of African American Children's Picture Books, 1845–2002*. New York, Routledge, 2004.

Mickenberg, Julia L. *Learning from the Left: Children's Literature, the Cold War, and Radical Politics in the United States*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2006.

Mickenberg, Julia L., and Philip Nel. "Radical Children's Literature Now!" *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, vol. 36, no. 4, 2011, pp. 445–473, [doi.org/10.1353/chq.2011.0040](https://doi.org/10.1353/chq.2011.0040).

---, editors. *Tales for Little Rebels: A Collection of Radical Children's Literature*. New York, New York University Press, 2008.

Moten, Fred, and Stefano Harney. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*. New York, Minor Compositions, 2013.

Nel, Philip. *The Avant-Garde and American Postmodernity: Small Incisive Shocks*. Jackson/London, University Press of Mississippi, 2002.

---. "Surrealism for Children: Paradoxes and Possibilities." *Children's Literature and the European Avant-Garde*, edited by Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer and Elina Druker, Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2015, pp. 267–283.

Reynolds, Kimberley. *Left Out: The Forgotten Tradition of Radical Publishing for Children in Britain 1910–1949*. London, Oxford University Press, 2016.

Reynolds, Kimberley, Jane Rosen and Michael Rosen. *Reading and Rebellion: An Anthology of Radical Writing for Children 1900–1960*. London, Oxford University Press, 2018.

Thomas, Ebony Elizabeth. *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games*. New York, New York University Press, 2019.

Tzara, Tristan. "Dada Manifesto on Feeble Love and Bitter Love." *Seven Dada Manifestos and Lampisteries*. 1977. Translated by Barbara Wright, London/Paris/New York, Calder Publications/Riverrun Press, 1992, pp. 31–48.

Williams, Catherine. "The Open Ending Manifesto." Unpublished, written for Philip Nel's English 725: Radical Children's Literature. 2 May 2018.

Williams, Raymond. *Keywords*. 1983. Rev. ed., New York, Oxford University Press, 1985.

Wise, Justin. "Presidential Historian: Trump now with Andrew Johnson as 'Most Racist President in American History'." *The Hill*, 16 July 2019, [thehill.com/homenews/administration/453240-presidential-historian-trump-now-with-andrew-johnson-as-most-racist](https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/453240-presidential-historian-trump-now-with-andrew-johnson-as-most-racist). Accessed 7 December 2019.

Young-Bruehl, Elisabeth. *Childism: Confronting Prejudice Against Children*. New Haven/London, Yale University Press, 2012.

Zinn, Howard. "The Optimism of Uncertainty." *The Nation*, 20 September 2004, [www.thenation.com/article/optimism-uncertainty](http://www.thenation.com/article/optimism-uncertainty). Accessed 17 July 2018.

## Notes

1 For a more extensive history of Trump's racism, see David A. Graham, Adrienne Green, Cullen Murphy, and Parker Richards' "An Oral History of Trump's Bigotry" (*The Atlantic*, June 2019, [www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/06/trump-racism-comments/588067](http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/06/trump-racism-comments/588067)).

2 Like most picture books, this one is unpaginated. When a work is paginated, I have included page numbers. When not, then not.

3 Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term to address the "interaction between race and gender": "Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated" (140). Though developed as a critique of Black liberationist politics' and feminist theory's failure to address the specific experiences of Black women, I here invoke the term in a broader sense, encompassing other axes of identity, including (but not limited to) race, gender, sexuality, gender identity, ability/disability, class, religion, ethnicity, and nationality.

4 Speaking of the need for the privileged to understand how structures of power and oppression damage them, too, Moten says: "I would love it if they got to the point where they had the capacity to worry about themselves. Because then maybe we could talk. That's like that Fred Hampton shit: he'd be like, 'white power to white people. Black power to black people.' What I think he meant is, 'look: the problematic of coalition is that coalition isn't something that emerges so that you can come help me, a maneuver that always gets traced back to your own interests. The coalition emerges out of your recognition that it's fucked up for you, in the same way that we've already recognized that it's fucked up for us. I don't need your help. I just need you to recognize that this shit is killing you, too, however much more softly, you stupid motherfucker, you know?'" (140-141).

5 As Freire writes, "Sectarianism, fed by fanaticism, is always castrating. Radicalization, nourished by a critical spirit, is always creative. Sectarianism mythicizes and thereby alienates; radicalization criticizes and thereby liberates. Radicalization involves increased commitment to the position one has chosen, and thus ever greater engagement in the effort to transform concrete, objective reality. Conversely, sectarianism, because it is mythicizing and irrational, turns reality into a false (and therefore unchangeable) 'reality'" (37).