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REVIEWED ARTICLE



## Can Children of Different Races “See” Themselves in Audiobooks? A Comparison of U.S. Library Systems’ Offerings

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### ABSTRACT

Culturally responsive librarians must provide high-quality children’s literature featuring characters of color via multiple formats, including audiobooks. This study examined the accessibility of audio versions of award-winning children’s novels in U.S. public libraries. Chi-Square analyses were used to determine whether offerings in six locales were distributed proportionally using a significance level of  $p < .05$ . Findings revealed an availability deficit in audio versions of novels primarily featuring characters of color. Therefore, book publishers and librarians must strengthen efforts to provide audio versions of high-quality novels written for youth audiences. Particularly needed are books reflecting Latino/a, Asian/Pacific, and American Indian populations.

### KEYWORDS

audiobooks; multicultural children’s literature; critical race theory; equity; public library systems

### Introduction

Librarians, teachers, students, parents, and school administrators discover high-quality children’s literature by consulting the lists of annual prizes for excellence in children’s literature. Since 1922, the Association for Library Service to Children, a division of the American Library Association, has awarded the John Newbery Medal to the author of the “most distinguished contribution to American children’s literature” each year (American Library Association 2018). More recently, organizations have come together to honor children’s literature written by and about people of color. These awards, such as the Coretta Scott King Book Award (CSK), the Pura Belpré Award (PB), the Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature (A/P), and the American Indian Library Association’s Youth Literature Award (AILA), help bring stories about people of color to the forefront. As Bishop (1990) and Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) noted, it is important for all children to see themselves in literature, and literature is an essential tool to help children learn about people with traditions, cultures, challenges, and strengths that are different from those they experience in their own lives

(Mar and Oatley 2008). According to Lowery and Sabis-Burns (2007, 53), “Multicultural literature brings about a multitude of opportunities to conduct personal reflection, examine other cultures, and consider sensitive issues of race, prejudice, discrimination, and the ability to challenge stereotypes within the context of various subject areas.” Novels, in particular, allow readers to delve deeply into the thoughts and feelings of characters and to understand their experiences in ways not available through shorter texts (Kidd and Castano 2013).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged in the early 1980s as a way for scholars to examine and bring awareness to the persistent racism and resulting inequities present in society (Taylor 2009). Among the key principles of CRT is the notion of Whiteness as Property (Harris 2000). Whiteness, Harris explained, “is an aspect of racial identity surely, but it is much more; it remains a concept based on relations of power, a social construct predicated on White dominance and Black subordination” (2000, 287). People who are White have certain unearned advantages that are often unrecognized by those who benefit from them. One such advantage could be the ability to enter a public library and be able to access limitless books in multiple formats that reflect the experiences of White people. In line with CRT, then, the purpose of this study was to examine whether children of different races have equitable access to audiobooks featuring characters that reflect their race and/or ethnicity.

## Literature review

Many educators recognize the need to diversify the types of reading material to which students are exposed. Building on theories of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings 1994) and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (Gay 2000), Hollie (2018) proposed a concept of Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching and Learning which seeks to validate and affirm the experiences of people of color. He suggested educators make every effort to choose literature that represents the “authentic cultural experiences” of people of color in meaningful ways (Hollie 2018, 141). In this way, Hollie highlights the importance of counter-storytelling, which is the CRT-embedded notion that people of color must be empowered to tell their stories in ways suited to their cultural values and practices (Taylor 2009). When people of color share their stories through literature, bridges to understanding across cultures are built (Hollie 2018). This notion aligns with the standards of the International Literacy Association, which require elementary classroom teacher candidates to “provide differentiation and instructional materials including print, digital, and online resources that capitalize on diversity” and “facilitate a learning environment in which

differences and commonalities are valued (e.g., use literature that reflects the experiences of marginalized groups)” (ILA 2010, parentheses in original). Similarly, the Association for Library Service to Children lists among its competencies for librarians the need to maintain “a diverse collection that is inclusive of the needs of all children ... and recognizes children’s need to see and learn about people like and unlike themselves in the materials they access,” which include “children’s literature, multimodal materials, digital media, and other materials that contribute to a diverse, current, and relevant children’s collection” (American Library Association (ALA) 2015).

In the past few decades, audiobooks have become an important point of access to children’s literature (Lamb 2017; Larson 2015; Moyer 2011). In many classrooms, especially those serving ESL students or other struggling readers, audiobooks are an essential teaching tool (Milani, Lorusso, and Molteni 2010). Children with impaired sight or difficulty reading may benefit from listening to audiobooks in place of reading words on the page (Clark 2007; Fues 2009; Gander 2013; Grover and Hannegan 2008; Moore and Cahill 2016), in part because it allows them to access literature that is too difficult for them to read independently (Esteves and Whitten 2011; Larson 2015). Studies have shown that *assisted reading*, or listening to audiobooks while following along visually with the text, can improve reading fluency and motivation (Esteves and Whitten 2011; Gander 2013), and school librarians using audiobooks with struggling middle-grade readers noted improvement in reading skills and attitudes toward reading as well (Whittingham et al. 2013). Outside of school, busy students and teachers listen to audiobooks while commuting, exercising, or taking care of household chores (Fues 2009; Gander 2013; Lamb 2018), and families listen to audiobooks on long car trips (Clark 2007). For all these reasons, it is important that members of the community have access to a broad range of children’s literature via audiobooks. In particular, it is important to have equitable access to high-quality diverse children’s literature such as those works honored with distinguished awards.

The institution of the public library in the United States exists to provide free access to information. Library patrons across the country can view and borrow books, movies, music, magazines, and all forms of electronic media. In recent years, U.S. library systems have created online catalogs and inter-library loan systems where patrons can request library materials from a network of local libraries and pick them up at their local branches or, in the case of digital files, simply download them onto their computers.

Librarians must choose among all the different works published in a given year when deciding which books—and how many copies of each—to

circulate from their shelves and online (Lamb 2017). In this sense, librarians wield a great deal of power over public discourse and a great deal of responsibility for providing an equitable selection of library materials to their patrons. If a library does not obtain certain books, the public's access to them is limited. It is crucial, then, for research to illuminate any discrepancies between the public's access to stories about people of color and its access to stories about White people. A few studies (e.g., Subramaniam et al. 2018) have described libraries' attempts to engage urban youth, yet a search of several key education databases (e.g., Education Research Complete, ERIC) did not indicate the existence of any studies investigating the equitable availability of audiobooks in public library systems.

The aim of this study was to examine the existence of audio versions of award-winning children's novels in the public marketplace and their availability via the public library systems in different areas of the United States. The guiding questions for this study were:

- Are audio versions of award-winning novels, primarily featuring characters of color, available via the public marketplace (amazon.com) at rates consistent with those primarily featuring White characters?
- In U.S. public libraries, is the availability of award-winning children's audiobooks primarily featuring White, Black, Latino/a, Asian, and American Indian characters proportional to the number of audiobooks representing each group in existence?
- When taken together, are audio versions of award-winning children's audiobooks primarily featuring White characters available at rates consistent with those primarily featuring characters of color?

## Method

In this section, I will explain the selection of novels for the data set ( $n=181$ ), the selection of library systems to compare ( $n=6$ ), the search procedures, and the data analysis procedures.

### Data source

To begin the investigation, I created a list of all the winners and honorees of each of the five awards to be studied ( $n=709$ ). Then, because the Newbery Medal (first awarded in 1922) and Coretta Scott King Book Award (first awarded in 1970) have been given for many more years than the other awards, and because audio recordings of books have only been available for the past several decades, I decided to look only at award recipients dating back to 1996, the first year the Pura Belpré award was given

( $n = 299$ ). While audio versions of classic children's books have certainly been recorded, I felt it would be a more meaningful comparison to look at more recently published works.

Because books from genres such as nonfiction and picture books might be less likely to have had audio versions recorded (Grover and Hannegan 2008) and because novels offer readers extended experiences with characters, this investigation focused specifically on children's novels. Since each of the children's literature prizes reported on in this article (Newbery, CSK, PB, A/P, and AILA) is given to literature in multiple genres, I first needed to eliminate from the list all books that were not fictional novels written for child or youth audiences, such as picture books, graphic novels, biographies, other types of nonfiction, short-story collections, and poetry. I did not eliminate novels written in verse form. Since 1996, seven novels earned two of the prizes, so I did not double count them. After deducting the repeated novels and books that were not novels, the total number of titles came to 188.<sup>1</sup> Table 1 shows the number of prizes awarded to novels since 1996 for each of the children's literature awards. See Appendix A for the full list of novels included in the initial data set.

### ***Determining race and/or ethnicity of primary characters***

I searched the amazon.com website for publishers' descriptions of each of the 188 novels in the data set and recorded the race or ethnicity of the primary characters. When the race or ethnicity was not discernible from the summary description, I opened the preview versions of each of these books provided by amazon.com and read until I found an indication of the primary character's race, ethnicity, or nationality. For books featuring American Indian characters, I recorded their particular community group (Navajo, Choctaw, etc.) when it was mentioned. I recorded the nationality of Latino/a characters (Cuban, Mexican, etc.) and Asian characters (Vietnamese, Indian, etc.), both of which I found consistently mentioned in the first few pages of each of the previews. All of the CSK winners featured Black characters in primary roles, but I recorded instances where the characters were of mixed race (e.g., in *Full Cicada Moon* by Marilyn Hilton, the protagonist is of both Japanese and African descent) or where two characters of different races were equally prominent (e.g., in *All American Boys* by Jason Reynolds and Brendon Kiely, the story is told alternately from the perspective of a Black teen and a White teen).

For several Newbery winners, I was unable to determine the race or ethnicity of the primary characters by reading the pages provided in the preview on amazon.com, so I requested these books from my local library, then read them until I could determine the race of the primary characters. Interestingly, there were some books (e.g., *The Wanderer* by Sharon

**Table 1.** Children's literature prizes.

Award	Number of Prizes Awarded for Novels Since 1996
John Newbery Medal	76
Coretta Scott King Award	43
Pura Belpré Award	23
Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature	40
American Indian Library Association (AILA) Youth Literature Award	13*

*Note:* The 2008 award for *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* was given to Sherman Alexie, but it was rescinded in 2018 due to allegations of misconduct by the author. Because the novel is still in circulation and is one of the most widely-read novels portraying the life of an American Indian teen, I decided not to remove it from my totals, but I do so with all due respect for the AILA's decision to rescind the award.

Creech) where a thorough physical description (skin color, hair color, or eye color) was not given. In those cases, I made the assumption that the characters were White based on time period and location and the absence of a description of them as being of another race or ethnicity. For example, in *One Came Home* by Amy Timberlake, the character lives in rural Wisconsin in 1871, where people of color were unlikely to have lived, and if they *had* lived in a primarily White community, their distinction as a person of color would certainly have been mentioned as a factor influencing the story.

There were four Newbery novels (*The One and Only Ivan* by Katherine Applegate, *The Underneath* by Kathi Appelt, *Whittington* by Alan Armstrong, and *The Tale of Despereaux* by Kate DiCamillo) that featured animals as main characters. There were three Newbery novels (*The Inquisitor's Tale* by Adam Gidwitz, *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* by Gary Schmidt, and *The View from Saturday* by E. L. Konigsburg) that featured multiple characters in primary roles. Because I could not categorize these novels according to the race and/or ethnicity of the primary characters, I eliminated them from the data set ( $n = 181$ ).

### **Selecting comparison cities and library systems**

For this investigation, I chose U.S. cities that were geographically widespread and which represented high population concentrations of the different cultural groups celebrated by the children's literature awards. I consulted Index Mundi ([indexmundi.com](http://indexmundi.com)), a website which ranks the largest 100 U.S. cities by different measures, to find cities with high concentrations of Black Americans (to correlate with the CSK Award), Latino/a Americans (to correlate with the PB Award), Asian Americans (to correlate with the A/P Award), and Native Americans (to correlate with the AILA Award). For comparison, I also looked for a city with a high concentration of White Americans, and I chose to include one additional city with a more diverse population distribution (World Population Review 2018). I

**Table 2.** Comparison of selected cities.

	U.S. Census Region and Division	Demographic Concentration	Population
City A	South (South Atlantic)	Population not concentrated by race/ethnicity	97,032
City B	West (Mountain)	85.2% White (non-Hispanic)	205,671
City C	South (East South Central)	63.3% Black	646,889
City D	West (Pacific)	45.5% Latino/a	347,483
City E	Midwest (West North Central)	15% Asian	285,068
City F	South (West South Central)	5.3% American Indian	391,906

sought cities with total populations ranging from approximately 100,000 to 650,000, and after choosing six cities meeting this criteria, I researched their local library systems to ensure they had online catalogs where I could look up the availability of books in different formats. I also compared the number of library branches within each system as a means of ensuring the library systems were of relatively similar size, selecting systems that included between 13 and 24 branches.

Table 2 lists each city's U.S. Census region (U.S. Census Bureau 2019), demographic concentration, and population. Note that Cities B-F are each ranked among the most highly-concentrated cities in the nation for the particular race or ethnicity being considered (Index Mundi 2018), though in some cases (e. g., City F), there is still a relatively low number of people of that race/ethnicity compared with the overall population.

### **Search procedure**

Using the library website for City A, I looked up each of the titles in the data set ( $n = 181$ ) and recorded whether an audio version in the form of a CD, preloaded device such as Playaway, digital download, or, in a few cases, audio cassette, was available for patrons to borrow. I did not include "Book Club Kits," which were available for a few of the novels and may or may not have included audio recordings. I then repeated the search with each of the other five library systems.<sup>2</sup>

Because audio versions of some novels were not available at any of the libraries, it seemed likely that an audio version was either never recorded for these titles or that any such recording was not distributed widely enough to be accessible to most readers. Because it has such a vast collection of books, I consulted amazon.com to see if audio versions of these books were available there. If evidence of an audio version was not found on amazon.com nor on any of the six library websites, I deemed, for the purposes of this paper, that either no audio version had been recorded or that any existing audio version had been distributed too narrowly to be considered among the total number of available audiobooks.



## **Data analysis**

First, I calculated the percentage of audiobooks primarily featuring characters of each racial/ethnic group (White, Black, Latino/a, or Asian)<sup>3</sup> available within each library system. Then, I used SPSS to run a Chi-Square analysis for each city to determine whether the availability was distributed proportionally to the number of audiobooks in existence. I determined whether the results were significant using the common statistical level of significance,  $p < .05$ . Next, I ran the analyses again (one per city) collapsing all the books featuring Black, Latino/a, and Asian characters into one category (labelled “of color”) and comparing it with those primarily featuring White characters.

## **Results**

### ***Market availability of audiobooks***

My first research question asked whether children’s book publishers produced audio versions of award-winning novels at consistent rates for books primarily featuring characters of color and White characters. Among the 181 novels in the data set, 137 were deemed to have had audio versions produced and were commercially available. All of the 52 novels (100%) featuring White characters in primary roles were found to have had audio versions recorded and were readily available on the public marketplace (amazon.com). In contrast, only 85 of the 129 novels (65.9%) featuring people of color in primary roles were deemed to have had audio versions recorded and were readily available commercially. A Chi-Square Analysis revealed this to be a significant difference ( $\chi^2(1, N=181) = 24.433, p < .001$ ). Broken down by race/ethnicity, 91.7% of novels primarily featuring Black characters, 64.0% of novels primarily featuring Latino/a characters, 48.8% of novels primarily featuring Asian characters, and 30.8% of novels primarily featuring American Indian characters had been recorded as audiobooks and were commercially available on the public marketplace. For the remaining analyses, I reduced the data set to reflect only those novels which had audio versions available on the public marketplace ( $n = 137$ ).

However, at the time of data collection, versions of only four of the 13 novels that won the AILA award were available commercially, and four books were not enough to achieve statistical significance in a Chi-Square analysis. As a result, these four books could not be included in the data set and were excluded prior to analysis ( $n = 133$ ). Correspondingly, I excluded City F, which had a highly-concentrated American Indian population, from the list of library systems ( $n = 5$ ).

### ***Library availability of audiobooks featuring white, Black, Latino/a, and Asian/Pacific characters***

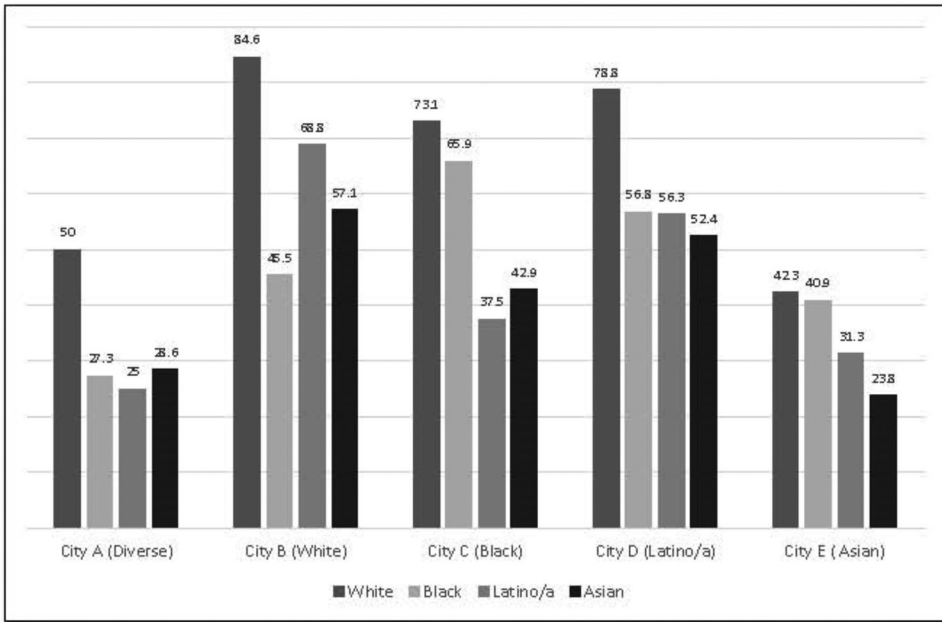
My second research question asked whether the library availability of award-winning children's audiobooks primarily featuring White, Black, Latino/a, Asian, and American Indian characters was proportional to the number of audiobooks representing each group in existence. After excluding the novels featuring American Indian characters and City F, a Pearson Chi-Square analysis was constructed in SPSS for each remaining city and results were reported using Fisher's exact test. There were statistically significant differences in the availability of audiobooks featuring characters from each racial/ethnic group for each city (see [Figure 1](#)). The results indicated that audiobooks were disproportionately available in Cities B ( $\chi^2 (3, N=133) = 16.936, p = .001$ ), C ( $\chi^2 (3, N=133) = 10.294, p < .02$ ), and D ( $\chi^2 (3, N=133) = 7.645, p < .05$ ), which have high concentrations of Whites, Blacks, and Latinos, respectively. The results for City A, whose population is not concentrated by race/ethnicity, were not statistically significant ( $\chi^2 (3, N=133) = 7.213, p = .074$ ), nor were the results for City E, which has a highly-concentrated Asian population ( $\chi^2 (3, N=133) = 2.674, p = .474$ ).

### ***Library availability of audiobooks featuring white characters versus characters of color***

My third research question asked whether audio versions of award-winning children's audiobooks primarily featuring characters of color were available at rates consistent with those primarily featuring White characters in U.S. public libraries. In this set of analyses, I compared the availability of audiobooks primarily featuring White characters with those primarily featuring characters of color (collapsed into one category) in each library system. In each city, there was a higher percentage of audio versions of novels featuring White characters than characters of color (See [Figure 2](#)). The results for City E ( $\chi^2 (1, N=133) = .809, p = .237$ ) were not statistically significant. The results for each of the other cities were significant (City A:  $\chi^2 (1, N=133) = 7.162, p < .01$ ; City B:  $\chi^2 (1, N=133) = 13.915, p < .001$ ; City C:  $\chi^2 (1, N=133) = 4.712, p < .05$ ; City D:  $\chi^2 (1, N=133) = 7.518, p < .01$ ).

## **Discussion**

When looking at different library systems across the United States, the expectation was that cities with high concentrations of a certain racial/ethnic group would have a correspondingly high percentage of books featuring

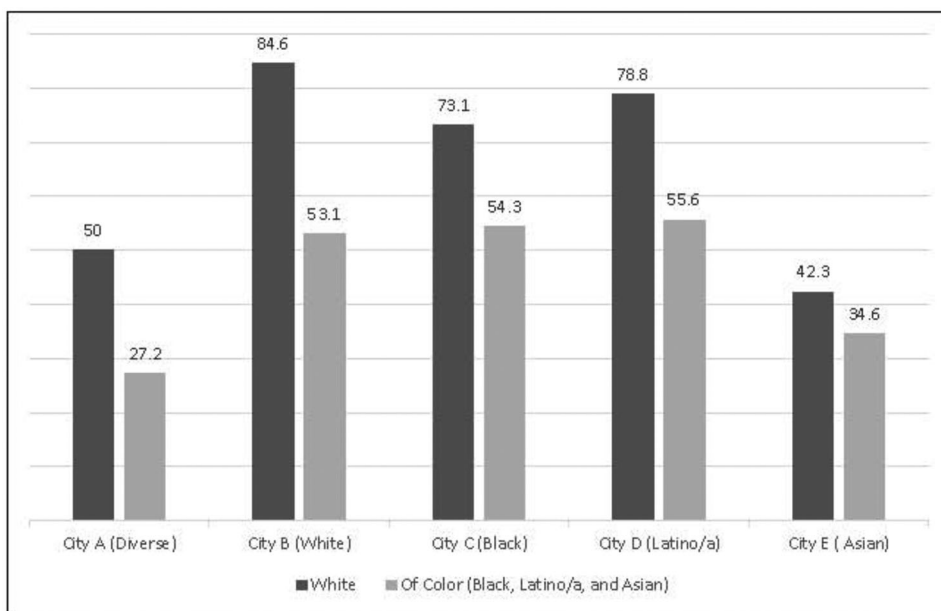


**Figure 1.** Percent of commercially available audiobooks found in library catalogs, by race (White vs. Black vs. Latino/a vs. Asian).

characters of that race/ethnicity in prominent roles. For example, City C has a high concentration of Black residents, so we would expect its library system to have a correspondingly high percentage of books featuring Black characters. The findings of this study show that is not generally the case.

### **Market availability of audiobooks**

The first research question addressed the market availability of audiobooks. Findings revealed that 100% of the novels in this data set featuring White characters in primary roles were produced as audiobooks and were readily available on the public marketplace (amazon.com), while only 65.9% of those featuring characters of color in primary roles were shown to have had audio versions readily available commercially. This 100% production and commercial distribution rate is likely due to the fact that all of the books primarily featuring White characters were Newbery winners or honorees. Because the Newbery Medal is such a distinguished honor with a long history, it is likely that publishers automatically produce and distribute audio versions of books having earned this distinction. This disparity, then, could be partly explained by the fact that the Newbery Medal is so prestigious, but it could also point to an inequity that negatively affects populations who are not equally represented in children's audiobooks.



**Figure 2.** Percent of commercially available audiobooks in library catalogs, White characters vs. characters of color.

### ***Library availability of audiobooks***

#### ***Comparing across race/ethnicity***

Looking specifically at the highly-concentrated populations in the different areas, City C did have audio versions of a relatively high percentage of books featuring Black characters (65.9%) to correlate with its high Black population (63.3% Black), as compared with the other cities, which only carried between 27.3% (City A) and 56.8% (City D) of titles featuring Black characters (see [Figure 1](#)). This shows that librarians in City C may be attempting to purchase a higher number of high-quality audiobooks featuring Black characters to appeal to its highly-concentrated Black population. This would be a positive sign, as young Black patrons should be able to enter their public libraries and find many audiobooks featuring characters who look like them. Still, City C had an even higher percentage of the award-winning audiobooks featuring White characters (73.1%), which shows City C's librarians still need to add more audiobooks featuring characters of color to ensure their collection of audiobooks more accurately reflects their city's population distribution.

Interestingly, City E had the lowest percentage of audio versions of Asian/Pacific novels (23.8%) as compared with the other cities, despite its high Asian population concentration. This could reflect the differences among Asian populations in different areas of the United States. The U.S. Census designates people from many different parts of the world as

Asian—they could be from Middle-Eastern countries like Iran and Syria, far-Eastern countries like Japan and China, south-eastern countries like Laos and Thailand; even people of Indian descent are considered Asian (U.S. Census Bureau 2012). City E's large Asian population is due in large part to an effort to resettle Hmong refugees after the Vietnam War (McNall, Dunnigan, and Mortimer 1994), but none of the books on the Asian/Pacific Awards list featured Hmong characters. So, it might not be reasonable to expect City E's librarians to seek out high-quality audiobooks featuring Asian characters in general when its own specific Asian population consists mostly of people who are not reflected in any of the award-winning books.

Similarly, City D has a large Latino/a population, but due to its western geographic location, a breakdown of the population by country of origin would likely reveal more of a concentration of Mexican Americans as opposed to, for example, Cuban Americans. Therefore, a closer examination of the availability of books featuring characters from specific Latino/a subgroups might reveal more of a trend in librarians' choices regarding the purchase of audiobooks. In general, though, as compared with the other cities, City D did have a fairly high percentage of the books featuring Latino/a characters at 56.3%; only City B had a higher percentage at 68.8%.

City B, the city with the highest percentage of White people among the 100 most populated U.S. cities (Index Mundi 2018), had the highest percentage of audiobooks in three of the four race/ethnicity categories (White, Latino/a, and Asian), but it had only the third-highest percentage of audiobooks featuring Black characters (45.5%). This statistic is troubling because it shows that children in City B, who are mostly White, have relatively little opportunity to learn about life through the perspective of Black characters via audiobooks, an experience that might be especially important since the opportunity to interact with people of different races in their community might be more limited. Moreover, City B had the most award-winning audiobooks in its library system overall. Though the focus of this article is not on availability of high-quality audiobooks in general, the data indicate that the community with the highest concentration of White people has access to the largest overall number of audiobooks—even though its total population is the second-smallest among the six cities (see Table 2). In line with Critical Race Theory, greater access to high-quality literature via multiple formats (print, audio, and digital) in public libraries could be a manifestation of White privilege. I did not investigate the socioeconomic differences among the six cities, but one could hypothesize—due to historic inequities and systematic oppression—that mid-size cities with high percentages of Whites may have populations that are more financially well-off than cities with greater concentrations of people with color. That economic

advantage, then, could translate into better-funded library systems with a greater ability to provide listening materials to its patrons.

Because a very low number of audio versions of award-winning novels representing American Indians were available on the public marketplace, I did not report the statistical information for City F, which had a highly-concentrated American Indian population. With only four of the 13 novels on the AILA awards list available in audio versions commercially, though, one can speculate that American Indian children are the least likely to enter a public library and be able to find recorded versions of high-quality novels featuring characters of similar ethnicity to themselves.

### ***Comparing books featuring white characters/characters of color***

The third research question addressed whether the availability of audio versions of award-winning children's novels across the United States is consistent among books featuring White characters in primary roles and books primarily featuring people of color. In every locale, there was a higher percentage of audio recordings of novels featuring White characters available, even when accounting for the fact that a higher percentage of those novels is produced in the first place. In other words, even when just looking at the novels for which we know audio versions exist, there are still substantially higher percentages available of those featuring White characters in each of the six library systems. City B—the city chosen because of its highly-concentrated White population—had the largest gap between the percent availability of novels featuring characters of color in primary roles (53.1%) and novels featuring White characters (84.6%). City E, the city with a highly-concentrated Asian population, had the smallest gap with 34.6% availability of audiobooks featuring characters of color compared with 42.3% availability of audiobooks featuring White characters.

The across-the-board discrepancy points to an inequity that needs to be corrected in order to provide equal access to high-quality children's books that illuminate the experiences of people of color. Without equal access in public libraries, we deprive children of all races and ethnicities of opportunities to experience stories about people of color, and we lose the chance to promote greater understanding among people from different cultures.

### **Limitations and recommendations for future research**

This project was limited by the choice of literature, which could have been more comprehensive. Data from more cities could have been incorporated. Also, I could have looked more closely at the number of copies of each audiobook available to patrons, rather than simply noting whether any copy was available at all.

Future research could include interviews with publishers and librarians to better understand their decisions about whether to make or obtain audio versions of children's novels. Also, researchers could consider novels recorded in languages other than English, as all children would benefit from having access to audiobooks in their home language. And, in addition to looking at the number of audiobooks available in public libraries, researchers could consider the availability of electronic versions of books accessible via devices like Kindle. More generally, researchers could seek information about the use of high-quality, diverse children's literature in any format and language in classrooms and school libraries across the United States.

## Conclusion

The data from this project show a deficit in high-quality audiobooks featuring characters of color across the United States. Therefore, publishers need to make more of an effort to record audio versions of high-quality, culturally diverse children's novels. Specifically, they would do well to consider automatically producing audio versions of novels that win prestigious awards celebrating books written by and about people of color such as the Coretta Scott King Book Award, the Pura Belpré Award, the Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature, and the American Indian Library Association's Youth Literature Award. Public libraries, too, should make every effort to obtain copies of such recordings and distribute them widely among library branches and online. Recently, websites such as [diversebookfinder.org](http://diversebookfinder.org) have helped librarians and teachers assess the diversity of their picture book collections, and perhaps a similar effort could be launched regarding books for more advanced readers.

The focus of this article has been primarily about providing access to stories that act as "mirrors" into children's lives (Bishop 1990), allowing them a chance to experience the fictional worlds of characters who look like them or are similar in other ways. However, we must also remember the flip side of Bishop's famous metaphor, which is that books should also serve as "windows" children can look through to learn about people who are different from themselves. For that reason, we cannot simply urge librarians to stock books that reflect the race/ethnicity of their particular patrons. Instead, we must aim to diversify the selection of high-quality children's literature to include as many voices and faces as possible.

## Notes

1. *Free Throw* and *Triple Threat* by Jacqueline Guest are novels in a series that, together, earned the 2012 AILA prize. Accordingly, I counted them as one book in my calculations.



2. The data is available at <https://doi.org/10.7294/Y376-Z243>.
3. An explanation for why I did not include novels primarily featuring American Indian characters in this group is in the following section.

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**Appendix.** Award-Winning Children's Novels (1996-2018).

John Newbery Medal

<b>2017</b>	<b><i>The Girl Who Drank the Moon</i></b>	<b>Barnhill, Kelly</b>
2017	<i>The Inquisitor's Tale: Or, the Three Magical Children and Their Holy Dog</i>	Gidwitz, Adam
2017	<i>Wolf Hollow</i>	Wolk, Lauren
2016	<i>The War that Saved My Life</i>	Bradley, Kimberly Brubaker
2016	<i>Echo</i>	Ryan, Pam Munoz
2015	<i>The Crossover*</i>	Alexander, Kwame
<b>2014</b>	<b><i>Flora &amp; Ulysses: The Illuminated Adventures</i></b>	<b>DiCamillo, Kate</b>
2014	<i>Doll Bones</i>	Black, Holly
2014	<i>The Year of Billy Miller</i>	Henkes, Kevin
2014	<i>One Came Home</i>	Timberlake, Amy
2014	<i>Paperboy</i>	Vawter, Vince
<b>2013</b>	<b><i>The One and Only Ivan</i></b>	<b>Applegate, Katherine</b>
2013	<i>Splendors and Glooms</i>	Schlitz, Laura Amy
2013	<i>Three Times Lucky</i>	Turnage, Sheila
<b>2012</b>	<b><i>Dead End in Norvelt</i></b>	<b>Gantos, Jack</b>
2012	<i>Inside Out &amp; Back Again</i>	Lai, Thanhha
2012	<i>Breaking Stalin's Nose</i>	Yelchin, Eugene
<b>2011</b>	<b><i>Moon Over Manifest</i></b>	<b>Vanderpool, Claire</b>
2011	<i>Turtle in Paradise</i>	Holm, Jennifer L.
2011	<i>Heart of a Samurai*</i>	Preus, Margi
2011	<i>One Crazy Summer*</i>	Williams-Garcia, Rita
<b>2010</b>	<b><i>When You Reach Me</i></b>	<b>Stead, Rebecca</b>
2010	<i>The Evolution of Calpurnia Tate</i>	Kelly, Jacqueline
2010	<i>Where the Mountain Meets the Moon</i>	Lin, Grace
2010	<i>The Mostly True Adventures of Homer P. Figg</i>	Philbrick, Rodman
<b>2009</b>	<b><i>The Graveyard Book</i></b>	<b>Gaiman, Neil</b>
2009	<i>The Underneath</i>	Appelt, Kathi
2009	<i>Savvy</i>	Law, Ingrid
2009	<i>After Tupac &amp; D Foster</i>	Woodson, Jacqueline
2008	<i>Elijah of Buxton*</i>	Curtis, Christopher Paul
2008	<i>The Wednesday Wars</i>	Schmidt, Gary D.
2008	<i>Feathers</i>	Woodson, Jacqueline
<b>2007</b>	<b><i>The Higher Power of Lucky</i></b>	<b>Patron, Susan</b>
2007	<i>Penny from Heaven</i>	Holm, Jennifer L.
2007	<i>Hattie Big Sky</i>	Larson, Kirby
2007	<i>Rules</i>	Lord, Cynthia
<b>2006</b>	<b><i>Criss Cross</i></b>	<b>Perkins, Lynne Rae</b>
2006	<i>Whittington</i>	Armstrong, Alan
2006	<i>Princess Academy</i>	Hale, Shannon
<b>2005</b>	<b><i>Kira-Kira*</i></b>	<b>Kadohata, Cynthia</b>
2005	<i>Al Capone Does My Shirts</i>	Choldenko, Gennifer
2005	<i>Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy</i>	Schmidt, Gary D.
<b>2004</b>	<b><i>The Tale of Despereaux: Being the Story of a Mouse, a Princess, Some Soup, and a Spool of Thread</i></b>	<b>DiCamillo, Kate</b>
2004	<i>Olive's Ocean</i>	Henkes, Kevin
<b>2003</b>	<b><i>Crispin: The Cross of Lead</i></b>	<b>Avi</b>
2003	<i>The House of Scorpion</i>	Farmer, Nancy
2003	<i>Pictures of Hollis Woods</i>	Giff, Patricia Reilly
2003	<i>Hoot</i>	Hiaasen, Carl
2003	<i>A Corner of the Universe</i>	Martin, Ann M.
2003	<i>Surviving the Applewhites</i>	Tolan, Stephanie S.
<b>2002</b>	<b><i>A Single Shard</i></b>	<b>Park, Linda Sue</b>
2002	<i>Everything on a Waffle</i>	Horvath, Polly
<b>2001</b>	<b><i>A Year Down Yonder</i></b>	<b>Peck, Richard</b>
2001	<i>Hope Was Here</i>	Bauer, Joan
2001	<i>Because of Winn-Dixie</i>	DiCamillo, Kate
2001	<i>Joey Pigza Loses Control</i>	Gantos, Jack
2001	<i>The Wanderer</i>	Creech, Sharon
<b>2000</b>	<b><i>Bud, Not Buddy*</i></b>	<b>Curtis, Christopher Paul</b>
2000	<i>Getting Near to Baby</i>	Couloumbis, Audery

(continued)

**Appendix. Continued.****John Newbery Medal**

2000	<i>Our Only May Amelia</i>	Holm, Jennifer L.
2000	<i>26 Fairmount Avenue</i>	dePaola, Tomie
<b>1999</b>	<b><i>Holes</i></b>	<b>Sachar, Louis</b>
1999	<i>A Long Way from Chicago</i>	Peck, Richard
<b>1998</b>	<b><i>Out of the Dust</i></b>	<b>Hesse, Karen</b>
1998	<i>Ella Enchanted</i>	Levine, Gail Carson
1998	<i>Lily's Crossing</i>	Giff, Patricia Reilly
1998	<i>Wringer</i>	Spinelli, Jerry
<b>1997</b>	<b><i>The View from Saturday</i></b>	<b>Konigsburg, E. L.</b>
1997	<i>A Girl Named Disaster</i>	Farmer, Nancy
1997	<i>Moorchild</i>	McGraw, Eloise
1997	<i>The Thief</i>	Turner, Megan Whalen
1997	<i>Belle Prater's Boy</i>	White, Ruth
<b>1996</b>	<b><i>The Midwife's Apprentice</i></b>	<b>Cushman, Karen</b>
1996	<i>What Jamie Saw</i>	Coman, Carolyn
1996	<i>The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963*</i>	Curtis, Christopher Paul
1996	<i>Yolanda's Genius</i>	Fenner, Carol

**Coretta Scott King Book Award**

<b>2018</b>	<b><i>Piecing Me Together</i></b>	<b>Watson, Renee</b>
2018	<i>Long Way Down</i>	Reynolds, Jason
2018	<i>The Hate U Give</i>	Thomas, Angie
2017	<i>As Brave as You</i>	Reynolds, Jason
<b>2016</b>	<b><i>Gone Crazy in Alabama</i></b>	<b>Williams-Garcia, Rita</b>
2016	<i>All American Boys</i>	Reynolds, Jason & Kiely, Brendan
2016	<i>The Boy in the Black Suit</i>	Reynolds, Jason
2016	<i>X: A Novel</i>	Shabazz, Ilyasah with Magoon, Kekla
2015	<i>The Crossover*</i>	Alexander, Kwame
2015	<i>How it Went Down</i>	Magoon, Kekla
<b>2014</b>	<b><i>P.S., Be Eleven</i></b>	<b>Williams-Garcia, Rita</b>
2014	<i>Darius &amp; Twig</i>	Myers, Walter Dean
2014	<i>Words with Wings</i>	Grimes, Nikki
<b>2011</b>	<b><i>One Crazy Summer*</i></b>	<b>Williams-Garcia, Rita</b>
2011	<i>Lockdown</i>	Meyers, Walter Dean
2011	<i>Ninth Ward</i>	Rhodes, Jewell Parker
2010	<i>Mare's War</i>	Davis, Tanita S.
<b>2008</b>	<b><i>Elijah of Buxton*</i></b>	<b>Curtis, Christopher Paul</b>
2008	<i>November Blues</i>	Draper, Sharon M.
<b>2007</b>	<b><i>Copper Sun</i></b>	<b>Draper, Sharon M.</b>
2007	<i>The Road to Paris</i>	Grimes, Nikki
<b>2006</b>	<b><i>Day of Tears: A Novel in Dialogue</i></b>	<b>Lester, Julius</b>
2006	<i>Dark Sons</i>	Grimes, Nikki
2005	<i>The Legend of Buddy Bush</i>	Moses, Sheila P.
<b>2004</b>	<b><i>The First Part Last</i></b>	<b>Johnson, Angela</b>
2004	<i>Locomotion</i>	Woodson, Jacqueline
2004	<i>The Battle of Jericho</i>	Draper, Sharon M.
<b>2003</b>	<b><i>Bronx Masquerade</i></b>	<b>Grimes, Nikki</b>
2003	<i>The Red Rose Box</i>	Woods, Brenda
<b>2002</b>	<b><i>The Land</i></b>	<b>Taylor, Mildred D.</b>
2002	<i>Money Hungry</i>	Flake, Sharon G.
<b>2001</b>	<b><i>Miracle's Boys</i></b>	<b>Woodson, Jacqueline</b>
<b>2000</b>	<b><i>Bud, Not Buddy*</i></b>	<b>Curtis, Christopher Paul</b>
2000	<i>Francie</i>	English, Karen
2000	<i>Monster</i>	Myers, Walter Dean
<b>1999</b>	<b><i>Heaven</i></b>	<b>Johnson, Angela</b>
1999	<i>Jazmin's Notebook</i>	Grimes, Nikki
<b>1998</b>	<b><i>Forged by Fire</i></b>	<b>Draper, Sharon M.</b>
1998	<i>I Thought My Soul Would Rise and Fly: The Diary of Patsy, a Freed Girl</i>	Hansen, Joyce
<b>1997</b>	<b><i>Slam</i></b>	<b>Myers, Walter Dean</b>
1996	<i>The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963*</i>	Curtis, Christopher Paul

(continued)

**Appendix. Continued.****Coretta Scott King Book Award**

1996	<i>Like Sisters on the Homefront</i>	Williams-Garcia, Rita
1996	<i>From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun</i>	Woodson, Jacqueline

**Pura Belpré Award**

2018	<i>Lucky Broken Girl</i>	Behar, Ruth
2018	<i>The Epic Fail of Arturo Zamora</i>	Cartaya, Pablo
2018	<i>The First Rule of Punk</i>	Pérez, Celia C.
2017	<i>Juana &amp; Lucas</i>	Medina, Juana
2017	<i>The Only Road</i>	Diaz, Alexandra
2016	<i>The Smoking Mirror</i>	Bowles, David
2015	<i>I Lived on Butterfly Hill</i>	Agosin, Marjorie
2014	<i>Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass</i>	Medina, Meg
2014	<i>The Living</i>	de la Peña, Matt
2013	<i>Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe</i>	Sáenz, Benjamin Alire
2013	<i>The Revolution of Evelyn Serrano</i>	Manzano, Sonia
2012	<i>Under the Mesquite</i>	McCall, Guadalupe García
2012	<i>Hurricane Dancers: The First Caribbean Pirate Shipwreck</i>	Engle, Margarita
2011	<i>The Dreamer</i>	Ryan, Pam Muñoz
2011	<i>90 Miles to Havana</i>	Flores-Galbis, Enrique
2010	<i>Return to Sender</i>	Alvarez, Julia
2006	<i>The Tequila Worm</i>	Canales, Viola
2006	<i>Becoming Naomi León</i>	Ryan, Pam Muñoz
2004	<i>Before We Were Free</i>	Alvarez, Julia
2004	<i>Cuba 15</i>	Osa, Nancy
2002	<i>Esperanza Rising</i>	Ryan, Pam Muñoz
1998	<i>Parrot in the Oven: mi vida</i>	Martínez, Víctor
1998	<i>Spirits of the High Mesa</i>	Martínez, Floyd

**Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature**

2017-2018	<i>It's Not Like It's a Secret</i>	Suigara, Misa
2017-2018	<i>Saints &amp; Misfits</i>	Ali, S. K.
2017-2018	<i>Step Up to the Plate, Maria Singh</i>	Krishnaswami, Uma
2017-2018	<i>Cilla Lee-Jenkins: Future Author Extraordinaire</i>	Tan, Susan
2016-2017	<i>Outrun the Moon</i>	Lee, Stacey
2016-2017	<i>Watched</i>	Budhos, Marina
2016-2017	<i>The Land of the Forgotten Girls</i>	Kelly, Erin Entrada
2016-2017	<i>Momotaro Xander and the Lost Island of Monsters</i>	Dilloway, Margaret
2015-2016	<i>P.S. I Still Love You</i>	Han, Jenny
2015-2016	<i>Ink and Ashes</i>	Maetani, Valynne E.
2015-2016	<i>Full Cicada Moon</i>	Hilton, Marilyn
2015-2016	<i>Blackbird Fly</i>	Kelly, Erin Entrada
2014-2015	<i>Tiger Girl</i>	Chai, May-Lee
2014-2015	<i>Ting Ting</i>	Hammond, Kristie
2013-2014	<i>Jet Black and the Ninja Wind</i>	Lowitz, Leza and Oketani, Shogo
2013-2014	<i>Gadget Girl: The Art of Being Invisible</i>	Kamata, Susan
2013-2014	<i>The Thing About Luck</i>	Kadohata, Cynthia
2013-2014	<i>The Vine Basket</i>	La Valley, Josanne
2012-2013	<i>Chengli and the Silk Road Caravan</i>	Kang, Hildi
2011-2012	<i>Orchards</i>	Thompson, Holly
2011-2012	<i>The Great Wall of Lucy Wu</i>	Shang, Wendy Wan-Long
2011-2012	<i>Vanished</i>	Sheela, Chari
2010-2011	<i>Shooting Kabul</i>	Senzai, N. H.
2010-2011	<i>A Boy of Heart Mountain</i>	Bazaldua, Barbara
2010-2011	<i>Heart of a Samurai*</i>	Preus, Margi
2010-2011	<i>Bamboo People</i>	Perkins, Mitali
2009-2010	<i>Everything Asian</i>	Woo, Sung
2008-2009	<i>Roots and Wings</i>	Ly, Many
2008-2009	<i>1001 Cranes</i>	Hirahara, Naomi
2008-2009	<i>Good Enough</i>	Yoo, Paula
2007-2008	<i>Hiroshima Dreams</i>	Easton, Kelly
2007-2008	<i>Keeping Corner</i>	Sheth, Kashmira

(continued)

**Appendix.** Continued.

## Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature

<b>2006-2007</b>	<b><i>Nothing But the Truth (and a Few White Lies)</i></b>	<b>Headley, Justina Chen</b>
2006-2007	<i>Year of the Dog</i>	Lin, Grace
<b>2005-2006</b>	<b><i>Kira-Kira*</i></b>	<b>Kadohata, Cynthia</b>
2005-2006	<i>Project Mulberry</i>	Park, Linda Sue
<b>2001-2003</b>	<b><i>A Step from Heaven</i></b>	<b>Na, An</b>
2001-2003	<i>Born Confused</i>	Hidier, Tanuja Desai
2001-2003	<i>Beacon Hill Boys</i>	Mochizuki, Ken
2001-2003	<i>A Single Shard</i>	Park, Linda Sue

## American Indian Library Association's Youth Literature Award

2018	<i>Marrow Thieves</i>	Dimaline, Cherie
<b>2016</b>	<b><i>In the Footsteps of Crazy Horse</i></b>	<b>Marshall, Joseph III</b>
<b>2016</b>	<b><i>House of Purple Cedar</i></b>	<b>Tingle, Tim</b>
2016	<i>Her Land, Her Love</i>	Yazzie, Evangeline Parsons
<b>2014</b>	<b><i>How I Became a Ghost: A Choctaw Trail of Tears Story</i></b>	<b>Tingle, Tim</b>
<b>2014</b>	<b><i>Killer of Enemies</i></b>	<b>Bruchac, Joseph</b>
2014	<i>Danny Blackgoat, Navajo Prisoner</i>	Tingle, Tim
2014	<i>If I Ever Get Out of Here</i>	Gansworth, Eric
<b>2012</b>	<b><i>Free Throw and Triple Threat</i></b>	<b>Guest, Jacqueline</b>
<b>2010</b>	<b><i>Between the Deep Blue Sea and Me: A Novel</i></b>	<b>McGregor, Lurline Wailana</b>
<b>2008</b>	<b><i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian (Rescinded 2018)</i></b>	<b>Alexie, Sherman</b>
2006	<i>The Birchbark House</i>	Erdrich, Louise
2006	<i>Hidden Roots</i>	Bruchac, Joseph

\* Novels Appearing on Multiple Awards Lists. Boldface denotes winners.

Sources: AILA (2018), ALA (2018a), ALA (2018b), ALA (2018c) and Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association (2018). 2018 Newbery titles unavailable at time of analysis.