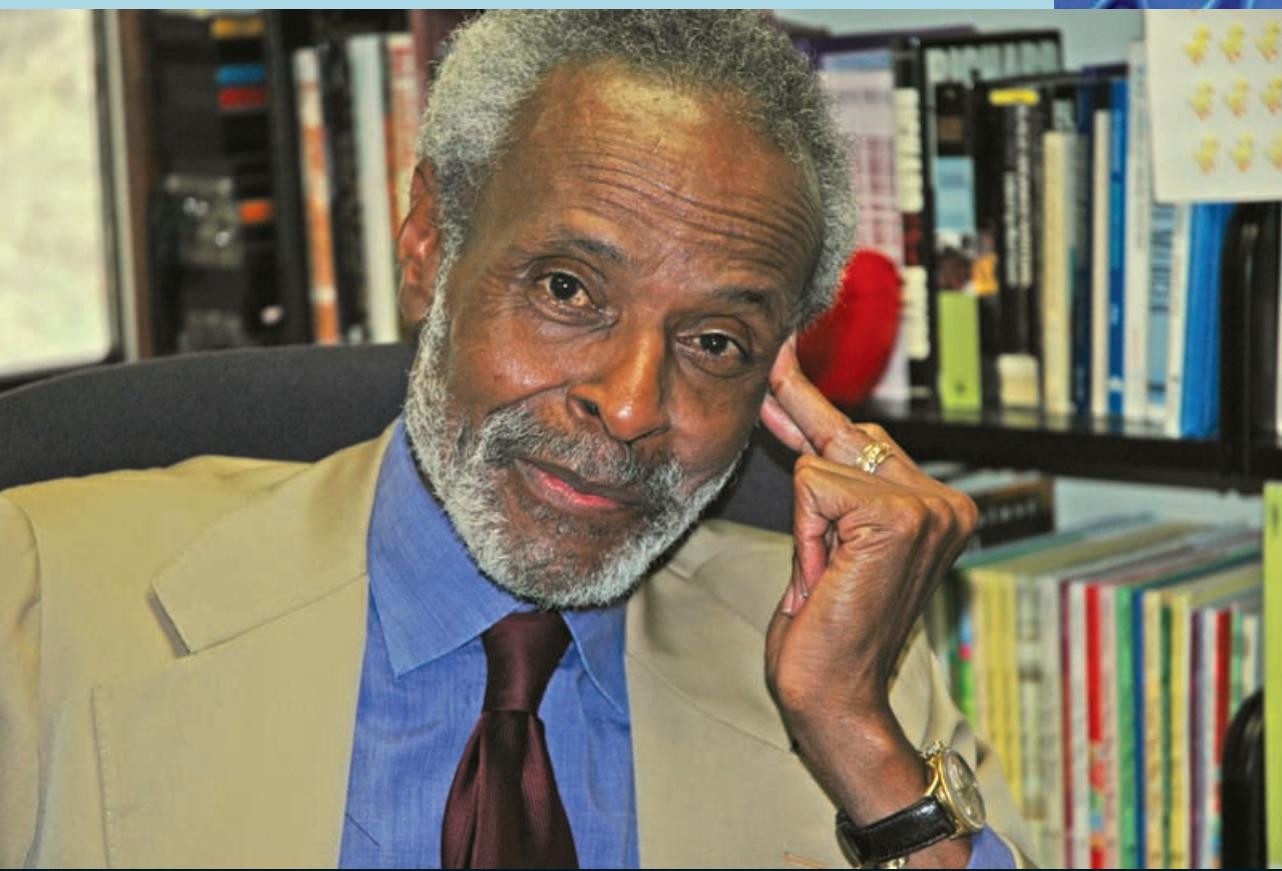


Diaries of a Prolific Professor

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH FROM THE
James Haskins Manuscript Collection

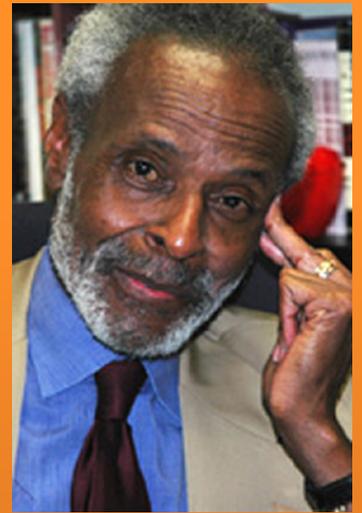
Edited by Stephanie Y. Evans
and Sharon D. Wright Austin



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December 2011

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Research Team: Yoldine Valery, Teshara Burton, Angela Thorpe, Ashley Clemons, Jeanette Pepin, Flo Turcotte, Carl Van Ness, Jana Ronan and Professor Stephanie Evans.

Student Paper Abstracts

James Haskins and the Challenges of Preserving Black Culture

Angela Thorpe

As the author of almost two hundred books, Dr. James Haskins used literature as a tool to preserve African-American culture. This attempt at preservation is especially visible in three of Haskins' writings: *The Cotton Club* (1977); *Queen of the Blues: A Biography of Dinah Washington* (1987); and *Voodoo and Hoodoo: The Craft as Revealed by Traditional Practitioners* (1990). These works stand in contrast to the *Cotton Club* screenplay, whose producers failed to accurately and adequately portray the rich culture of the Cotton Club as Haskins expressed it in his book of the same name. The work of these producers resulted in a skewed interpretation of the historical and cultural value of Haskins' book, as well as the failed potential historical and cultural value of their film. Similarly, in an attempt to determine cultural value, publisher's critique of the relevancy and "appropriateness" of famed blues singer Dinah Washington prevented Haskins from publishing her biography, *Queen of the Blues*, for an entire decade. In yet another misinterpretation of culture, the St. Tammany Parish School Board's forced removal of Haskins' *Voodoo and Hoodoo* and thus limited Black youth's access to a cultural point of reference. This paper explores Professor Haskins' attempts to preserve culture through his publications, and the manner in which these attempts were challenged by several institutions.

This paper finds that materials which successfully preserve Black culture, like the writings of James Haskins, provide a point of commonality with which Blacks can identify. If these materials remain difficult to attain as a result of institutions' challenges to authors or their cultures as a whole, African Americans will face greater challenges to adequately identifying with their culture. Thus, it is the joint responsibility of professionals at local libraries and universities to ensure that literature which preserves Black culture is supported in production, distributed, circulated, and made accessible on a greater scale.

Keywords: *Preservation, Culture, Identity, Black Experience, Interpretation of Literature*

Tracing Trends in Mid-Twentieth Century African-American Children's Literature:

The Literary Legacy of James Haskins, 1969-2009

Jeannette Pepin

In this paper, I examine the trends in publishers and topics of James Haskins against the background of historical events, other children's books featuring Black subjects, and the publishers of Black children's literature in the years 1969-2009. Also examined are the routine historical exclusion, marginalization and stereotyping of African Americans in children's literature and the growth of varied and racially sensitive portrayals in this genre following the Civil Rights Movement. The manuscripts and personal papers of James Haskins are researched as the primary example of this growth in this post-1960s awareness.

Research methods include: quantitative analysis of children's books dealing with Black subjects and publishers of these books; qualitative analysis of the treatment of Black subjects in children's literature; and analysis of the trends in Haskins' publications. Data has been collected from archives, publishing statistics manuals, scholarly articles, databases, newspapers, publication records and the papers of James Haskins at the University of Florida. In this research, I argue that the success of Professor Haskins' books reflects a growing demand by the consumer of the time period, but does not necessarily imply more equitable racial relations in the publishing world. Despite Haskins' vast contribution to African American literature, my research shows that it is not enough to merely have authors interested in writing books featuring Black persons; it is crucial to have editors and publishers committed to presenting a Black perspective, as well as having a consumer base willing to demand high-quality and multi-racial themes in books. Only with these foundations can Black children's literature continue to flourish, inspiring new generations to further break down racial barriers.

Keywords: *Identity, Children's Literature, Role Models, Black Authors and Readers, Representation, Censorship*

Dancing the Grit and Glitter, through the Humanizing Lens of James Haskins: An Analysis of Black Body Image and Implications for Black Youth

Yoldine Valery

James Haskins was explicit in addressing what he felt Black youth needed to succeed: Black role models who: 1) challenged society's stereotypical images of "blackness"; 2) offered humanizing qualities often disassociated from Black individuals; and 3) were successful by means of projecting a strong racial identity. His solution for writing about successful individuals was never to present a stainless depiction of positive representations of blackness. Instead, his work highlighted the humanity of individuals who represented a population of people who have been systematically dehumanized. By showcasing the lives of successful media icons, Haskins made it apparent to those suffering from deteriorated self-esteem that Black racial identity--blackness--was not antithetical to success.

Today, there is a constant battle between Black individuals and various media outlets (the largest distributor of racial stereotypes) over who will be the narrator of what "blackness" is and what it represents. Black youth are at the forefront of this battle because they are often bombarded with negative images in the popular media. Blackness is too often depicted in a demeaning and offensive manner, especially in music videos and television programs. As a result, many Black youths perceive themselves in a negative way because of these derogatory images. By writing the autobiographies of Katherine Dunham, Bill Robinson, Ada B. Smith, Lena Horne, and Michael Jackson, James Haskins provided Black youth with the ability to solidify their racial identity using a positive visual portrayal of the Black body: dance. Haskins wrote and assisted with the biographies and autobiographies of successful Black dancers who used dance to readjust societal perception of the Black body. As avant-garde performers, these individuals used dance (once a tool of racist White society to depict Blacks as "backwards" or to further imply inferiority) to illuminate their humanity via their autobiographical narratives. By James Haskins' interpretation of the legendary and hallmark genius of five performers, we can examine the interconnectedness of racial identity, the Black body and the implications image portrayal has for the self-esteem of African American youth.

Keywords: *Physical Identity, Dehumanization, Cultural Narrative, Visual Autobiography, Youth Success*

"I am Black, I am a Woman, and Yes I am a Politician": Double Consciousness in Two of Haskins' Political Biographies

Teshara Burton

In 1903, W.E.B Du Bois coined the term "double consciousness" to describe the pressures of attempting to be both a "Negro" and an American. Using Du Bois' terminology to express those same pressures of being a woman and Black in America, I explore the stories of Shirley Chisholm and Barbara Jordan as politicians with African American and female identities. Both Shirley Chisholm and Barbara Jordan served as Black female politicians during a time in America when being Black and being a woman were not credentials that would lead down the path of success--especially political success. By exploring the only two political biographies of Black women in Haskins' vast collection of narratives, the content in this paper offers historical context of how minorities--particularly Blacks and women--were deprived of an equal education, social justice, and civil liberties. Being a Black woman with political ambitions, I have been inspired by the struggles, the successes, and the ambition of Jordan and Chisholm. Using race and gender-based theories, dissertations, articles and journals, relevant to the documents of James Haskins, this paper examines the struggles and triumphs of Shirley Chisholm and Barbara Jordan as they faced their double consciousness while battling both sexism and racism as citizens determined to be politically active in the United States.

Keywords: *Double Consciousness, Feminist Political Philosophy, Critical Race Theory, Civil Rights Movement*

Preface

Kathy Benson

When Jim Haskins decided to make a gift of his archives and personal libraries to the George A. Smathers Libraries at the University of Florida, he did so in both appreciation and hope. He welcomed the attention paid to him by library staff—in particular John Ingram, then head of Special Collections, and Bruce Chappell in the Department of Special Collections—and by Joel Buchanan, who would soon join the Libraries' staff as liaison to the African American community. All three were instrumental in the planning and implementation of a special "Tribute to James Haskins, Author" in 1998, a belated but much appreciated acknowledgment of Jim's contributions to American literature.

Jim hoped that by consigning his personal archives and book collections to the care of the UF Libraries, he would influence future generations of scholars to build on his life's work. He made his wishes clear as he negotiated the gift. He wanted the James Haskins Collection to be available to the university community, the Gainesville community, and beyond. *And*, he envisioned the African American Studies Program, in the creation of which he had been instrumental, would use the James Haskins Collection to encourage new scholarship.

The collaboration between the George A. Smathers Libraries and the African American Studies Program that made this volume possible is exactly what Jim had in mind. Great credit is due to both Judith Russell, Dean of the Libraries, and Stephanie Y. Evans and her successor as head of the African American Studies Program, Sharon D. Wright Austin, for understanding Jim's vision and making it a reality.

In February 2011, I was honored to be invited to the Smathers Libraries to see the evidence of this collaboration at first hand. The occasion was a tribute exhibition of Jim's books, scrapbooks, and memorabilia, accompanied by a program that celebrated Jim's life and work. In attendance at the program were the students whose work is contained in this volume. Prior to the program, I had the opportunity to visit the work-in-progress that is the arrangement and description of the James Haskins Collection—the boxes and boxes of books, manuscripts, correspondence, and ephemera that were consigned to the Libraries during Jim's lifetime and after his passing and that the students had the unique opportunity to access and help to catalogue.

It pleases me, as it would have pleased Jim, that the students were given the opportunity to handle the original materials in the archive—especially the correspondence, which tells so much about the real life of a published author. Angela Thorpe and Jeannette Pepin found letters between Jim and a legion of editors, and gained a sense of how difficult it was for him—a Black man writing about Black personalities—to find publishers for some of his books. Pepin further discovered how Jim's correspondence with one of the rare Black editors at that time—Toni Morrison, then at Random House—helped him improve his work. Without access to the James Haskins Collection at the Smathers Libraries, these students would have been clueless about the back story.

It would also have pleased Jim to know that mining his archive took Yoldine Valery to places she might not otherwise have gone—into an investigation of literature for Black children—and Teshara Burton into a quest, through the lives of Shirley Chisholm and Barbara Jordan, of her goal to become a civil rights attorney.

The students' papers also demonstrate a keen awareness that James Haskins was a man of his upbringing—formed as a human being by his experiences growing up in segregated Demopolis, Alabama, the son of parents who encouraged him to read both books and newspapers and the student of teachers who impressed upon him the importance of emulating successful Black role models. The papers herein also attest to an understanding of Jim's options as a writer—the changing trends in children's literature and the vagaries of funding for the genre. That is what Jim hoped for. That is what this volume of essays delivers.

Faculty Foreword
**Mapping the Haskins Legacy and an Imperative to Train Young Scholars:
Race, Region, and Undergraduate Research**
Stephanie Y. Evans

The Invisible Giant

It seems unfathomable that someone who has written two hundred books could somehow remain relatively unknown...unless, of course, the author were Black and from the American South. Further, it is beyond belief that a university campus where such a prolific author dedicated three decades of teaching would be void of physical tribute. But such is the case with the legacy of Dr. James Haskins who taught at the University of Florida between 1977 and his passing in 2005. This collection of undergraduate student research papers is one small step in reversing this current state of affairs.

Though much progress has been made since the widespread integration of higher education in the 1970s and 1980s, we still exist within a national setting that in many ways struggles to adequately (i.e. systematically) recognize the contributions of Black writers such as James Baldwin, Zora Neale Hurston and Richard Wright. Thus, it is an even greater struggle to unearth lesser-known authors who have provided significant insight into central issues in African American history. Institutions and emerging scholars have much work to do in excavating archival material by those who have actively contributed to the humanizing project of re-imagining Africans in America. The following papers represent a hopeful and tangible gesture towards creating a significant body of scholarship that takes seriously the work of Dr. Haskins, an unparalleled chronicler of Black culture and heritage.

Dr. James Haskins was a critically-thinking, sharp speaking, serious-minded man who was generous of spirit and gifted in intellect. While Haskins wrote approximately 200 books, very little has been written about this prolific author or his work. To date, only one dissertation has been written that explicitly mentions James Haskins (Soalt, 2010). In this present collection, four University of Florida undergraduate students from a spring 2011 Senior Seminar class in African American Studies present papers that are the culminating effort of a semester interning in the James Haskins Special Collections at the University of Florida Libraries.¹ The themes of these undergraduate papers derive from the research interests of these young scholars: literary trends, body image and Black youth, Black women's politics, and challenges of Black cultural preservation. *Diaries of a Prolific Professor: Undergraduate Research from the James Haskins Manuscript Collection* strengthens an ongoing effort to garner due scholarly recognition of Haskins' work and offers hints of the intriguing contents of his collected papers to encourage future research.²

Building a Senior Seminar Excavation Team: The Thrill of Digging for Diaries

The spring Senior Seminar course consisted of two parts: in the classroom and in the archives. In the classroom, we read work by Black Studies scholars including Perry Hall (thematic and systematic principles of African American Studies) and Mary Cassata (*Profiles of the Users and Usages of Afro-American Literature: A Unification of Communications and Library Research Strategies*).

¹ Authors retain all rights to papers.

² See Endnote for recognition of Ashley Clemons, a graduate student participant.

The syllabus outlined that students will:

1. analyze discipline-based and interdisciplinary scholarship.
2. develop and strengthen research, writing, and presentation skills.
3. reflect on prior coursework and incorporate it into a seminar project.
4. conceptualize, plan, and complete an original research paper or project on a topic relevant to their desired professional and academic goals.
5. investigate and assist with the organization, interpretation, preservation, and presentation of the James Haskins Collection in the University of Florida Library.
6. work in teams to brainstorm, constructively criticize, and edit one another's work.
7. demonstrate academic competency/adaptive learning skills (Self, Communication, Tasks, Innovation).

The course objectives focused on critical thinking, oral and written communication, and student development of independent research agendas, which can easily be seen here in the final drafts.

I met Professor Haskins only once, shortly after I arrived in the 2003-04 academic year. We met at one of his favorite Gainesville haunts: a restaurant called Harry's. A mutual student, Stephanie J. Evans, arranged the meeting to ensure I could enjoy his company and during that short meeting, we spoke about his passion for writing and teaching and the important lessons I learned from colleagues of his at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, where I attended graduate school. Professor Haskins struck me as an engaging but no-nonsense person and I feel honored to have had the pleasure of his company, no matter how brief. It was my intention to teach the course in a way that would get to the heart of his life-long commitment to producing Black cultural history for a critical and purposeful education.

In *Diary of a Harlem Schoolteacher* (1969), he wrote that public education, "is supposed to be the doorway to active and wholesome participation in American society." Towards that end, the students' engagement in broadening their understanding of Haskins' intellectual corpus by viewing that body of work through their own academic interests was an *active and holistic* approach to scholarship. Thus, his manuscripts (the professional and intellectual "*diaries*" alluded to in the title of this collection) became a cornerstone in creating their own academic diaries. It is my hope that this experience has launched them into a clearer understanding of the significance of writing and the infinite possibilities to impact the world around them through their own intellectual and professional passions.

In addition to the student essays, three Special Collection administrators (Jana Ronan, Florence Turcotte and Carl Van Ness) offer reflections and contextual history of the meaning of Haskins' work for the University of Florida libraries. They made this class possible and have been diligent in attempting to create awareness of the Haskins Collection. The committed work that resulted in the 2005 Special Collections display commemorating Professor Haskins' passing was revisited in February 2011 during Black History Month for a second look at the treasures that are in the UF holdings. Equally as important, Dean Judy Russell's enthusiastic support of this idea from its inception has definitely made this publication possible and her closing comments underscore the significance of the project to the university and a much-needed commitment to continued partnership.

Kathy Benson, Jim Haskins' wife and long-time publishing partner, graciously agreed to contribute a Preface. Her words present a unique perspective of this outstanding teacher, researcher, writer, traveler and activist in the Civil Rights Movement. I made a commitment to her when we met on campus in February 2011 that I would continue to work toward raising awareness of this work, especially by encouraging use of Special Collections to demonstrate a need for increased university and national scholarly commitment. We met again in

April 2011 while I was presenting at a conference in New York and I enjoyed a personal tour of Harlem, complete with stories of Jim Haskins' time in New York and a visit to Sylvia's restaurant. Though the process has been unexpectedly delayed (the original goal was to publish the work by Haskins' birthday: September 19), it is a pleasure to fulfill that promise with the production of these student papers.

As this project neared completion, I moved from UF Director of African American Studies to Chair of the Department of History and joint Associate Professor of History and African American & Africana Women's Studies at Clark Atlanta University. I am grateful to Dr. Sharon Wright Austin as incoming Interim Director of UF African American Studies for her willingness to see the project through its final stages. This collection will serve as an outstanding roadmap for both UF and CAU students: it unequivocally demonstrates the capacity of undergraduate scholars to produce quality research using untapped primary sources and reveals the excitement in such an undertaking. The Woodruff Library Collections of the Atlanta University Center now houses the Tupac Shakur and Dr. Asa Hilliard papers; there are surely endless possible projects for Clark Atlanta Students undergraduates and graduate students alike. As I have argued elsewhere, the future of African American doctoral training should take place in the South, where a wealth of manuscripts, material culture, and oral histories await a new generation of academics. As physical integration lagged in the South, so has intellectual integration...so these innovative UF students have demonstrated they are ahead of the professional trend.

Strengthening the Haskins Legacy through Academic Mentoring

As an extension of the Senior Seminar class, two students, Angela Thorpe and Yoldine Valery also traveled to Richmond, Virginia to present their research at the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH) in October 2011. As chair of the panel, I was certainly pleased with the audience turnout, (14 attendees) and absolutely impressed with Thorpe and Valery's ability to present—as undergraduates—in a full conference presentation. Questions audience members asked about Haskins included inquiries from the structural and logistical (how the papers were being processed and what means of promotion the university has undertaken) to more substantive questions (how researchers should interpret Haskins as a scholar, teacher and unsurpassed literary innovator). These two students dedicated their academic energy as well as their own resources to ensure that scholarship on the Haskins collection takes at least one significant leap forward. At the conference, these two students were joined by Ayana Flewellen, an undergraduate student aid in African American Studies who presented her research on Black feminist archeology (based on field work in Tanzania and Jacksonville, Florida). And she held her own on a panel with senior faculty from other national institutions!

While at ASALH, the current UF students also met Vanessa Fabien, a graduate of the UF African American Studies Program who is now finishing her doctoral studies in the Afro-American Studies PhD program at University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Ms. Fabien was enrolled in a research methods course in my first year as a faculty member in 2003, and in summer 2011 returned to her alma mater UF to teach a summer course. In addition to these demonstrations of undergraduate success, Jeanette Pepin, who graduated in June 2011, assisted with the editing process of these student papers, demonstrating a sustained interest in both professional development and professional service. These examples, alongside several other students who have attended conferences (National Black Graduate Student Association, National Council of Black Studies, and American Anthropological Association) with various African American Studies faculty, demonstrate that—given the chance—undergraduate student research can produce outstanding results. These investments in professional development benefits students, faculty, and institutions in ways that will advance scholarship and

enjoyment of the research process for everyone. Moving from conference presentations toward mentoring for academic publishing is yet one additional important step in this investment.³

Building the Biography: Increasing the Visibility of a Giant

Two areas of research interest are African American autobiography and Jazz Age history, so it was significant for me that one of the many texts James Haskins assisted in producing was the autobiography of Ada Beatrice Queen Victoria Louise Virginia Smith--aka Bricktop. As I understand them, Bricktop and James Haskins were both free spirits and world travelers who cared *about* people, even if they did not necessarily care *for* people all of the time. My current book project *Black Passports* investigates how international memoirs can open worlds for youth with few tangible options. It is a curriculum for youth and, by all measure, Haskins' had massive "swag" and his catalog provides pathways to empowerment. Haskins and Bricktop both created worlds of swinging culture, lasting images, and vibrant life, yet neither has been adequately recognized for the weight of their contribution to their local, national and international communities.⁴ In his "About the Author" autobiographical sketch, Professor Haskins admitted, "I have always liked true stories better than made-up ones." Surely these papers are just the beginning of the multitude of true stories that lie within his manuscripts and many others who created 20th century Black culture.

The development of the Haskins Collection was made possible with essential contributions of time and energy of many UF faculty including Drs. Irma McClaurin, Marilyn Thomas-Houston, and Faye Harrison. This collection of papers recognizes those efforts along with those of committed colleagues, family members and admirers of James Haskins who sincerely respect Professor Haskins' epic task of dedicating his life to writing the lives of others. One unsung advocate of Professor Haskins legacy is Ms. Sharon Burney, the AASP Office Manager who has committed over a decade to the University of Florida. She was a student of Dr. Haskins and her unique insight also played a central role in this project in particular and the growth of the African American Studies Program in general. What is most needed now is a growing voice from national and international scholars demonstrating interest in researching this manuscript collection and additional demand for funds to ensure its timely processing in order to make visiting scholar research possible and productive.

In the final analysis, this edited volume of essays by undergraduate scholars is especially important for one simple reason: Haskins' intended primary audience was Black youth. With respect to his activist legacy through intellectual mentorship, I salute these four students in their willingness to give due academic attention to an area where little has been paid because of the lack of prestige young audiences garner in academic circles. May these excellent papers encourage (even challenge) scholars world-wide to mine the wealth of knowledge yet to be discovered for the explicit benefit of future generations of marginalized kids who, like Haskins as a young man and like me as a young woman, just want to see our positive Black reflections in a book.

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³ See also, Stephanie Evans, Ed. *Discussions in Jazz Historiography*.

⁴ Ada Bricktop Smith's papers are housed at Emory University.

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Endnote: Ashley Clemons, a graduate student, also participated in the class for research experience. Paper title: "Motown According to James Haskins: Biographical Works of Motown Records' Artists and the Cultural Politics of Detroit." *Abstract:* Professor Haskins examines the culture, music, history, and politics of Detroit, Michigan, in several biographies of the musicians and singers of Motown Records: *About Michael Jackson; Diana Ross: Star Supreme; The Story of Stevie Wonder; and Black Music in America: A History Through its People*. Interestingly, Professor Haskins describes the fact that the "Motown sound" lacked a social and political consciousness during the height of the modern civil rights movement. He acknowledges the significance of the Motown legacy, discusses the complex relationships between its artists and founder Berry Gordy, and details the company's attempt to create music that appealed to diverse groups while operating in the racially charged city of Detroit. He also reveals a politically selective company within a socially distressed local and national African American community. Professor Haskins' research points out the dilemmas Gordy faced when attempting to run a politically nonthreatening company within a socially and economically distressed, predominantly Black city. Essentially, Haskins depicts the lives of these Motown artists in an effort to capture the culture of a city that has made a significant contribution to African American culture and national history.

Archivist Notes

James S. Haskins and the Special Collections at the University of Florida

Jana Ronan, Flo Turcotte, Carl Van Ness

James Haskins Papers: A Life of Activism, Education and Writing

What do Martin Luther King, Jr., Bricktop, and Toni Morrison have in common? They are three of the hundreds of significant African Americans whose lives and accomplishments were documented by the award-winning author and University of Florida professor James S. Haskins.

On this fiftieth anniversary of the Freedom Rides that jolted our nation into the struggle for civil rights, it is easy to forget what life must have been like for a Black child in the 1940s, in the small Alabama town of Demopolis. James Haskins-- who also wrote under the nickname "Jim"--grew up there in a compound of eight houses among a loving family of parents, uncles, aunts and cousins. His father Henry was a working man who built concrete vaults for a local funeral home; his mother Julia worked as a laundress. Though Haskins asserts that he was raised in "the heart of a particular area that did not subjugate Blacks as much as the people of other counties" (Haskins 84-90), Haskins attended a segregated school and could not even enter the Demopolis Public Library to read a book. He was a curious child who looked for hues in the colored water fountains, and a voracious reader who read every article in the encyclopedias purchased at the Piggly Wiggly grocery by his mother. Haskins later joked about this saying, "Kids used to ask me which volume I was reading, and I would say, 'D' or 'E'" (Haskins 84-90). A bright young boy, he absorbed all that his teachers taught him about African American culture and history, and circumvented the restrictions for access to literature through a partnership with his mother's White employer, who used her library card to keep Jim steeped in good books.

When his parents separated in 1952, Haskins moved to the African American neighborhood of Roxbury, Massachusetts, with his mother. After testing his academic skills, he gained attendance to the prestigious (and integrated) Boston Latin School, a rarefied atmosphere where Harvard professors often moonlighted as his teachers. Haskins thrived there and was offered a scholarship to attend Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts. Instead, he elected to return to the South, and enrolled in Alabama State College (now Alabama State University) in Montgomery, Alabama. Montgomery was a hotbed of civil rights activism in 1960, and Haskins soon became involved with well-known figures such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Marzette Watts, and Bernard Lee. His activism ultimately led to his expulsion from college. The Freedom Riders passed through Montgomery in March 1960 and Haskins joined them, along with other Alabama State students, for a meal at a local Black café. When the four White riders were arrested for violating segregation laws, Haskins joined the hundreds of indignant Alabama State students who marched downtown in protest. He was arrested along with thirty-four others, fined \$200.00 and was later expelled ("Birmingham Post-Herald" 1). The Montgomery Improvement Association stepped in and lent support so that Haskins could continue his education. Financed by a scholarship to Georgetown University, he majored in psychology. By the time Haskins returned to his "unfinished business in Montgomery" in 1962, he had ceased to be considered an outside agitator and was welcomed back to Alabama State (Haskins 84-90). There he earned a second bachelor's degree in history. Uncertain about employment, Haskins then pursued graduate studies in social psychology at the University of New Mexico.

Fresh out of university with a master's degree, Haskins moved to New York City in 1963 where he spent several years exploring various careers. He worked as a journalist for the *New York Recorder* and the *New York*

Daily News, as a caseworker for the city welfare department, and as a stockbroker for Smith Barney. In 1966, following an unsatisfied desire to teach, Haskins became the teacher for a Special Education class at Public School 92 in Harlem. Haskins' work and experiences with these disadvantaged youth led to his first award-winning publication, *Diary of a Harlem Schoolteacher* (1969). Fortified by the success of *Diary*, Haskins gained new confidence in his writing abilities and voice, beginning a lifelong campaign to change the face of children's literature by writing books about the African American experience. Many of his children's books centered on the events and characters of the Civil Rights Movement, such as: *Resistance: Profiles in Nonviolence*; *Ralph Bunche: A Most Reluctant Hero*; *The Life and Death of Martin Luther King, Jr.*; and *The March on Washington*.

Haskins enjoyed teaching, and taught courses devoted to children's literature and writing at local colleges and in Indiana in the 1970s. He briefly operated a talent agency in New York, where he helped budding writers and musicians find their audiences. Haskins also worked on his best-known book, *The Cotton Club*, under the editorial guidance of Toni Morrison, then an editor at Random House. In 1977, the same year *The Cotton Club* hit the bookstores, Haskins joined the faculty of the Department of English at the University of Florida (UF). Haskins remained at UF for the rest of his life, lending his rich experience and keen intellect to the courses he taught on writing and children's literature. He maintained residences both in Manhattan and Gainesville, commuting between the two weekly, and was deeply involved in activism and cultural enrichment ventures in both locales. Haskins was also instrumental in the development of the UF African American Studies Program.

Haskins was an extremely prolific writer, and in his later years kept three books in progress at all times--one in New York, one in Gainesville, and one that he worked on during flights between the two. He researched and wrote biographies of both well-known and obscure but important Black figures. He also partnered with some, such as Ada "Bricktop" DuConge and Lionel Hampton, assisting them with their autobiographies. Haskins introduced important cultural figures to children in books such as *I Am Rosa Parks* and *James Van Der Zee: The Picture Takin' Man*. Many of his works were for adult audiences as well, ranging from biographies such as *Mabel Mercer* and *Pinckney Benton Stewart Pinchback*, to explorations of culture such as *Black Dance in America*. Haskins wrote and edited a total of nearly 200 works, including award winners such as *Black Music in America* (The Carter G. Woodson Award) and *The Story of Stevie Wonder* (The Coretta Scott King Award). He also received the Alabama Author Award from the Alabama Library Association for his *Count Your Way* book series.

James S. Haskins passed away in July 2005, at the age of sixty-three. His widow (and frequent writing collaborator) Kathleen Benson Haskins and daughter Margaret continue to reside in New York. His son, Michael, lives in Washington, D.C., and his elder daughter, Elisa Beth, in Denver, CO.

About the James Haskins Collection at the University of Florida

The James Haskins Collection was donated by Haskins and his widow Kathleen Benson Haskins after his death in 2005. The nucleus was donated by Haskins during his lifetime, along with some of his principal manuscripts, to the Manuscripts Unit of the Libraries's Special Collections Department. The remainder was sent to the University of Florida after he passed in 2005. Nearly 250 boxes of materials in total were transmitted to the library. Most of these (approximately 180 boxes) were filled with books either written by Haskins or in his personal collection. The rest of the boxes contain manuscripts, research files and notes, photographic material and video, correspondence, personal papers, and records from his employment at the University of Florida. The manuscript material arrived at UF without an inventory and with little organization.

Collections of this size require months of processing before they can be effectively used by researchers. Most likely the fully processed collection will be divided and described in the following four series:

Series I –General Correspondence

Most of the correspondence is hand-written or typed originals. There are some photocopies and printed emails.

Series II –Literary Files

This series includes a large number of research files related to individual book titles as well as book drafts and galleys and correspondence with publishers.

Series III – Academic Career

Materials relating to Haskins' career as a professor at the University of Florida including lecture materials, administrative correspondence, and other faculty papers.

Series IV – Miscellaneous Materials

Materials relating to Haskins written by others or papers held by Haskins related to other figures.

- a. Miscellaneous Papers - For example, the collection contains a small archive of photographs and memorabilia related to jazz legend Lionel Hampton.
- b. Scrapbooks and Clippings. Scrapbooks compiled for him by Kathy Benson, clippings of book reviews, etc.
- c. Regalia - Awards, certificates, and personal effects.
- d. Photographs and other AV materials

Using the Haskins Collection to Illustrate a Life and a Profession

In the spring 2011 semester, five students (four undergraduates and one graduate) had an opportunity to work with the Haskins Collection in its original state. Archival collections are seldom employed in undergraduate instruction, which makes the decision to use an uncataloged and unprocessed collection extraordinary, if not unique. The students chose specific class assignments related to Haskins' research and were also given the more generic task of helping the Libraries organize the collection. The students did a rough sort of the manuscript boxes in order to divide the materials into their respective records series.

The library team met with the class early in the semester to outline course objectives and once again mid-semester to evaluate group progress and discuss issues and problems encountered in the process of working with the collection. The two archivists on the team worked with the students throughout the semester to help them understand the nature of the materials and to guide archival processing. The hands-on experience of working with the collection provided the students with content they needed to determine essay topics and complete their assignments. Haskins' research archive became the students' own archive, and the class assignments and the archival work meshed closely.

As the collection was acquired without an inventory, the students were tasked with helping to create one. In so doing, they gained an understanding of how a writer approaches the craft of writing. Because Haskins was an author of non-fiction, research files take up a significant portion of the archive. And because Haskins wrote for a wide audience spanning all age groups, the class also developed an appreciation of the importance of proper preparation before beginning a writing project. Regardless of whether the target audience was grades 3-6 or adult readers, Haskins accumulated a mass of material before sitting down to write.

The collection also illustrates the important roles selectors, marketers and editors play in the publications industry. Any illusions about the solitary nature of writing are quickly dissolved when a researcher examines the close relationship between Haskins and his publishers. Haskins himself had no illusions and sought out the advice and help of successful editors--some, such as Toni Morrison, were accomplished writers

themselves. One of the students noted that Haskins' work was a response to a growing market in the African-American community for historical literature. Haskins wrote in a historical context that shaped not only the content and subject matter of his work but also the character and style of his work. He was acutely aware of the role he played in building a sense of cultural consciousness in the African-American community, particularly among Black youth. This is evident in all of the students' papers.

Given the complexity of the collection and the lack of inventory, the students were only able to explore and utilize a small portion of the materials. The archivists themselves had little knowledge of what was in the collection before the class began and still had only a basic understanding of the collection's depth and organization at the end. During the course of the semester, both students and archivists embraced the serendipitous nature of the discovery process. Students quickly learned that archival research involves a high degree of uncertainty. The size of the collection, far larger than what we normally expect for the personal archive of a writer, will provide future students ample opportunity to build on the work of the initial class. It is our hope that the Haskins Collection will become a resource for African-American Studies at UF and nation wide for many years to come.

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Resources

- 2005 CLAS Memorial Program:
http://clasnews.clas.ufl.edu/_styles/images/portfolio/newsletters/2005haskinsmemorial.pdf
- University of Florida Library James Haskins Collection Guide:
<http://guides.uflib.ufl.edu/content.php?pid=133150&sid=1143308>
- UF African American Studies Program:
<http://www.clas.ufl.edu/afam/>
- To support the University of Florida James Haskins Collection:
<http://www.uff.ufl.edu/EndowedFunds/EndowedFundInfo.asp?eFund=013757>
- To support the UF African American Studies Program James Haskins Visiting Scholars Fund:
<http://www.uff.ufl.edu/scholarships/ScholarshipInfo.asp?ScholarshipFund=013759>

Director's Introduction
Continuing a Legacy and Growing a Partnership
Sharon D. Wright Austin

The late Dr. James S. Haskins was a father, friend, husband, mentor, and scholar to all who either knew him or were influenced by his wealth of scholarship. As an educator, his brilliant scholarship lives on through the many books and articles he wrote in order to educate others about various aspects of African American life and culture. His diverse body of work examined the fields of dance, education, history, literature, music, and politics, among others.

Because of a generous donation from Dr. Haskins and his family, the James S. Haskins papers are available for review at the University of Florida libraries. These papers include his scholarly writings as well as personal correspondences. As the interim director of the African American Studies program, it gives me great pleasure to co-edit the outstanding essays written by four UF students that analyze some of his writings.

This project began in one of Professor Stephanie Evans's courses at our university. The student participants learned about Professor Haskins' work and his life. They also gained information about the resources offered at University of Florida libraries generally and the services provided by African American Studies librarian Jana Ronan. Because several professors and librarians edited the essays that were written by Teshara Burton, Yoldine Valery, Jeannette Pepin, and Angela Thorpe, they were able to improve their writing skills and also work closely with university professors and librarians. Some of them also discussed their work at the Annual Meeting of the Association of African American Life and History during the fall 2011 semester. All of these things provided them with information about the work that professors do outside of the classroom.

In addition, these students learned about the challenges Professor Haskins faced when attempting to publish his work. For example, Angela Thorpe discusses his inability to publish *Queen of the Blues: A Biography of Dinah Washington* for a decade because some publishers failed to appreciate the importance of her biography and her contribution to the music industry. Another of his books, *Voodoo and Hoodoo* was banned from many New Orleans' school libraries because the St. Tammany Parish school board misinterpreted its interpretation of the role of voodoo (a unique form of religion that emanates from the African Diaspora) and hoodoo (a form of African American "folk magic") in African American culture.

Professor Haskins' publications also examine the impact that African American musical artists and dancers have on the self-esteem of Black youth. In her essay, Ashley Clemons pointed out that the music of Motown lacked a social consciousness during the turbulent 1960s, but provided young people of all races with music about love, happiness, and loss. More importantly, Ashley's essay, as well as that of Yoldine Valery, reveals that many White and Black Americans, for the first time, saw positive images of young African American performers on television frequently. Haskins' work discusses the contributions of these entertainers and of African American dancers to the self-esteem and self-images of African American youth in vivid detail.

Jeannette Pepin's essay discusses the children's books that Professor Haskins published, and the impact of racial and fiscal politics on the censorship of books featuring African American stories and culture. These books not only presented a contrast to the formerly mostly racist depictions of African Americans in children's books, but also documented different aspects of the history of African Americans that had been unavailable before writers like Professor Haskins began to tell their stories. His books examined themes that all children could relate to, but featured the beautiful faces of African American children--a luxury he was denied as a child.

As a mother of two young children, who is working on publishing a children's book about autistic African American children, I particularly have a great appreciation for this literature.

Finally, Teshara Burton's essay alludes to the fact that Professor Haskins wrote about the political experience of Black men and women. Twenty of his books discuss the lives of African American women, and two discuss women who accomplished major feats in the field of politics, such as the late Shirley Chisholm (the first African American woman to seek a major party nomination for the presidency and a former U.S. representative from New York) and the late Barbara Jordan (a former U.S. representative from Texas and a champion of civil rights and women's rights). The essay uses these two women to discuss a nuanced phenomenon of “double consciousness” in the lives of African American women, and how it affects their political ambitions. Therefore, all of the essays in the collection provide insight about the challenges and triumphs the late Professor James Haskins experienced as both a scholar and a human being.

Student Papers

Jim Haskins and the Challenges of Preserving Black Culture

Angela Thorpe

Introduction

African Americans play an essential role in the creation and development of their culture. According to Richard Peterson and N. Anand, specific “elements of culture are shaped by the systems within which they are created, distributed, evaluated, taught, and preserved” (311). Because these systems are part of an “ever-changing patchwork”, African-American culture has evolved over time (312). Yet the development and evolution of African-American culture would not be possible without attempts to consistently preserve the culture.

As a result of devoting his career to “setting the historical record straight about the achievements of African Americans,” author Jim Haskins was successful in spreading cultural knowledge relevant to Blacks (“Something about the Author” 89). Whether expressed through food, music, or literature, African-American culture is ultimately the result of the piecing together of values, practices, and representations Blacks deem relevant. Haskins’ literature not only adequately expressed various facets of African-American culture, but provided documentation of African-American history. As the author of hundreds of books, Jim Haskins used literature, characterized by cold and blunt writing, as a tool to preserve African-American culture (“Twelve Books of 1970” 379). This attempt at preservation is visible in three of Haskins’ writings: *The Cotton Club* (1977); *Queen of the Blues: A Biography of Dinah Washington* (1987); *Voodoo and Hoodoo: The Craft as Revealed by Traditional Practitioners* (1990). In an attempt to suppress the culture displayed within these writings, each of these works was directly challenged by institutions including publishing companies, “Hollywood,” and the St. Tammany Parish School Board of New Orleans, Louisiana.

The Cotton Club

Jim Haskins’ book, *The Cotton Club*, chronicles the rise and eventual decline of the “peculiar institution”—a night club—that was twentieth century Harlem’s jewel, so influential it transformed the “morals” of individuals across the globe (*New York Times*, “Negro Culture” 3). This picturesque work invites its readers to immerse themselves in the exotic and luxurious grandeur the Cotton Club offered, a result of its entertainment, atmosphere, and patrons (*Cotton Club* 33, 39). Stocked with a montage of photos, and characterized by provocative, animated language, the culture and atmosphere of the club is successfully conveyed. Thus, the reader is offered a “sense of discovering the ‘inside’ of an era” (Morrison, 1).

Professor Haskins’ book inspired Robert Evans and Mario Puzo to create a movie based on “Harlem’s Cotton Club” (Harmetz 27). In March of 1980, he signed an agreement with Charles Childs, James Hinton, and Edward Padula, which gave them all of the rights to *The Cotton Club*, exclusive of publishing rights. In August of 1980, the group secured Robert Evans to produce a motion picture inspired by Haskins’ book (Branton 1).

It was clear early in the film’s production that it would distort history (Johnson 1). The movie would ultimately center on White (or rather Italian-esque) gangsters and their conflicts, supplemented here and there with Black entertainment. The Cotton Club simply served as a venue, or backdrop. Howard Johnson, sociology professor at the State University College at New Paltz, played a major role in providing historical research and film analysis to positively supplement and ensure historical accuracy of the film. Johnson advised that more emphasis be placed on the culture of the Cotton Club (particularly in reference to Blacks), as “...an emphasis on

the great Black entertainment that made the Cotton Club and made money for the gangsters would [not] lessen box office success of the film” (2). Further, Johnson provided producers and writers of *The Cotton Club* with *specific* solutions to ensure enhancement of the film, including editing the story line so that the theme of the Black entertainers and gangsters was co-plotted and placing African-American writers on the project (3). It was simply, and understandably, expected that the film do justice to its namesake.

Ultimately, neither the producers nor the writers took heed of the multitude of suggestions offered to them. The story-line remained the same, and the rich culture of the true Cotton Club was not accurately or adequately portrayed in the film, specifically in regards to Black cultural contributions to the club. The film was released in December of 1985, debuting at #5; in twelve days, it slipped to #9, grossing a mere \$16,654 (“The Week at the Box Office” 1).

According to Jerome H. Schiele, *The Cotton Club* film serves as an acute example of cultural oppression, especially due to the fact that it was the result of a culture-rich book. Schiele defines oppression as the “...regulation of cultural values and interpretation”; otherwise, using a dominant group’s experience to define and/or determine the norm (803). As portrayed through the film and film development process, the experiences of the White producers resulted in a skewed interpretation of the historical and cultural value of not only Jim Haskins’ book, but the potential historical and cultural value of their own film. Its producers blatantly chose to disregard historical value, accuracy, and cultural portrayal/representation within the film for financial gain. Furthermore, they flatly ignored the input of African Americans in the production process, disregarding the cultural enhancements that could have been made. Thus, African Americans, through every stage of the film’s process, were not as culturally relative or relevant as they could or should have been (807).

Queen of the Blues: A Biography of Dinah Washington

In his biography of famed blues singer Dinah Washington, Professor Haskins chronicled her unstable and insecure life from childhood to her untimely death. According to Haskins, Dinah Washington “...had a volatile personality. She was rarely calm, and lived her life on the edge of one extreme emotion or another” (60). Washington was also notorious for her boozing, pill-popping, and violent ways. Nevertheless, Dinah Washington had a voice—and a gift—like no other: “...there was nothing like it to touch the heart of even the most hardened individual” (127). It is noted that Haskins strived “to give a balanced and fair picture of the lives he [chronicled]” (“Something about the Author” 89). Therefore, despite Washington’s evident flaws, it was important to note that it was her singing that touched lives, propelled her to fame, and enabled her to become a career woman (although her eccentricity and instability negatively affected her level of popularity).

Queen of the Blues was published in 1987; yet the first proposal for the autobiography was submitted in 1973, over a decade before the date of publication. According to primary sources in the Haskins papers, the proposal was sent to at least thirteen publishing companies between 1973 and 1983 (when it was contracted). In analyzing correspondence between Haskins and publishing companies, one common theme arises: Dinah Washington was not considered a relevant or exciting figurehead in Black history, or on the jazz circuit. Mr. Evan Thomas—Vice President and Editor for W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. Publishers—went so far as to state the following regarding Haskins’ proposal:

“I am sorry to say that the trouble for us here is a lack of giving a damn about the woman who has such vast self-indulgence, that it not only includes drugs and several many husbands, but a bad habit of throwing whiskey glasses at people, etc.” (Thomas, 1)

As Haskins' proposal was analyzed further, the responses of publishing companies became even more puzzling and ironic. Although the companies continuously cited Washington's lack of relevance and importance, Haskins clearly states, as duplicated below, her impact on her audience (a predominantly Black one):

"[Dinah Washington] was a superstar, and uncomfortable about it; she was a millionairess who felt more at home in the streets; she was a woman whose music could inspire and sustain everyone, it seemed, but herself. When she died, America lost not just its Queen of the Blues, but...its last exponent of this distinctly American musical form." (Haskins, 4-5)

Washington's appeal is clear: she dealt with real-world and *relatable* issues, she felt a strong connection to her community as well as her roots, her singing was inspiring and she represented the end of a significant musical era in Black creative history.

According to Delores Minor in her journal article "Public Schools and Black Materials," Black writers charge themselves with the responsibility of providing literature that "...presents problems and struggles common to the Black community, touching the life styles of that community and their needs..." because people desire to understand and connect with the Black experience through literature (86). This notion of common connection permeates Professor Haskins' proposal for the Dinah Washington biography.

It is also important to note *who* is reading, critiquing, and responding to his proposal. According to his papers, individuals named Kisner, Thomas, Sachs, and Arnovitz, a few charged with evaluating his work. Professor Haskins' proposals reached predominantly Caucasian-run publishing companies - many of which, according to Stephanie N. Brown, questioned the "authenticity" of Black literature (Brown i). Joseph Keller warns that it is "risky [for Whites] to hypothesize the structure of a work the language which one cannot fully understand" (103). Although White publishers may sympathize with African Americans and their culture, they can never fully understand the manner in which African Americans think, as they "...have never faced the critical need to understand [Black] attitudes" (103). With this in mind, we can assume that the publishers who reviewed Haskins' proposal were not only unqualified in determining who was important to Black culture and history, but were also not prepared to "...translate [factors relevant to] the Black experience for a White readership" (Brown 1). Keller further argues that an "ethnic consciousness" will always exist amongst Black writers. As a result, those publishers who fail to understand this consciousness or the Black experience in general should not make such critical judgments about the writing styles of African American authors (104). Such writings provide insightful depictions of Black people and their culture. *Queen of the Blues* was an attempt to educate others about the Black musical culture of the time. Thus, the ability to personally shape and define one's culture should not be inhibited simply by those who do not understand the culture. This was unfortunately the case with Haskins' attempts to publish Washington's story.

Voodoo and Hoodoo

In the fall of 1992, the St. Tammany Parish School Board of New Orleans, Louisiana, banned *Voodoo and Hoodoo* from their school libraries. According to Dr. Haskins, *Voodoo and Hoodoo* simply served as a "...book of sociology and folklore" related to the origin, development, and practice of voodoo and hoodoo, from Africa to (then) present-day America (Associated Reporters, Inc. 13). Within *Voodoo*, Haskins explains that "...there is a certain universality about these beliefs and superstitions among American [Blacks]" (Haskins, 16). As a result, the practice of voodoo and hoodoo may easily be considered a recognized part of African-American cultural

development. According to school board member Robert Womack, however, Haskins' book was a "'how-to manual for sexual perversion and killing'" which violated the Christian values of the schools within the school system (Associated Press 1). On October 15, 1992, the American Civil Liberties Union filed suit against the St. Tammany Parish School Board, citing that censorship of Haskins' book "...violated the First Amendment rights of students to freedom of speech and freedom from imposition of religious orthodoxy by state" (Pedler 1). This suit served to inhibit the distribution of a work whose sole purpose was to discuss the relevance of voodoo for African-American culture.

In addition to being considered a "perverse how-to-manual," it was also argued that *Voodoo and Hoodoo* "[affected the] mental development of adolescents... (by encouraging them) to read inappropriate, dangerous material" (Associated Reporters 28, 31). Haskins' documentation of these practices did not have ill intentions; it simply served to educate and inform its audience, particularly middle school to high school aged children. In an era where little literature representing Black youth or Black culture existed, *Voodoo and Hoodoo* served as a cultural, historical and geographic point of reference for Black youth. During this era there was an increased "demand for Black literature that expressed Black experience" by Black youth (Minor 86). Writers like Jim Haskins had the responsibility of responding to and meeting this demand. Representation of African American culture—whether through music, media, or literature—helped Black youth to form their own sense of identity. In a trend followed by writers as early as Zora Neale Hurston and Richard Wright, Black authors drew from experiences and observations to create works which helped to express a Black identity (Abston 20). According to conclusions drawn from a survey performed by William L. Jones "...the average Black teenager is genuinely proud of being who he is [because he doesn't have to] seek [his] identity of blackness...he now has a heritage and culture with which to identify" (Jones 88,89). Thus representation, symbols, and examples of Black culture have proven crucial for identity development of Black youth. If representations of African American culture were not accessible, because of their forced removal from foundational public institutions (schools, media outlets, churches, and libraries for example), these Black youth would have little left to base their social identity on.

St. Tammany Parish School Board's forced removal of Haskins' book succeeded in limiting Black youth's access to a cultural point of reference. It is clear that the claims the school board presented do not align with Haskins' mission in writing *Voodoo and Hoodoo*. In addition, the school board's claims had little validity. Various sources shared the general consensus that "...reading the book... [did] not, on the whole, present such a danger that removal from the public junior high school libraries [was] warranted" (Donnerstein and Linz 1). In addition, it was assumed that young students had the ability to discern that Haskins' text was purely historical and informational. Thus, these students were subjected to harm by a lack of cultural representation and a limitation of access to historically relevant information.

Implications

It is imperative that African Americans have access to literary resources about their culture. Without access to these resources, they lose a point of commonality, or a common theme with which to identify. Materials like the books penned by Jim Haskins successfully preserve Black culture. Yet when these materials are not distributed, or are made difficult to access, African Americans face a dilemma in adequately identifying with their culture and understanding their culture in broader social contexts.

In order to ensure successful and increased dissemination of culturally rich materials such as Black

literature, the frequency at which gatekeeping occurs must be monitored. Gatekeeping refers to: "...promoting the status quo and establishing the agenda for those issues that are set (and in the case of Afro American literature not set) before the public" (Cassata 45). In essence, those responsible for regulating what is "appropriate" for the Black public must be held accountable. If Black literature and cultural knowledge is continuously challenged, as was the case in several of Haskins' works, and a blind eye is turned to these challenges, the trends of blocking distribution of materials that aim to preserve Black culture will only continue.

Essentially, we must consider whether we have access to literature and materials that celebrate African American culture. According to Mary B. Cassata, there is a historic lack of resources expressing the Black experience at the "local community level" (45-46). Several factors contribute to this lack of resources. As addressed previously, much literature relevant to Black culture is not successfully or adequately circulated due to barriers faced from institutions like publishing companies. Nevertheless, professionals, like librarians, must be held responsible for this lack of resources as well. Librarians must work "...more closely with (Black) publishers in selecting books relevant and true to the Black experience" and also demand that these publishers evaluate African American cultural materials fairly (46). In addition, librarians must keep controversial "Black materials" like *Voodoo and Hoodoo*, on their shelves. These professionals must ensure that materials which preserve Black culture and identity are available, not just the "Black materials" that are strictly entertaining. Further, professionals among various institutions, including local libraries, schools, universities, and centers of research, have an obligation to publicize literature, such as that written by Professor Haskins that deliberately preserves Black culture, by showcasing these materials and generally informing others about their importance (64).

Responsibility of Black Studies Programs for the Promotion of African American Culture through Literature

Black Studies programs can and must serve an important role in educating others about literature which "... [strives] to instill in Black people a sense of identity, unity, and group dignity [in the context of the Black cultural experience], and boldly [rejects] the host of standards traditionally dictated by White Americans" (Gilroy 48). By reading relevant literature about Black culture, African Americans can increase their sense of identity, unity, and dignity. In addition, Black literature has been characterized as a "unique body of literature" that cannot accurately and adequately be dictated or judged by White American standards (Gilroy 47). Because many White Americans fail to understand the role of Black literature in preserving black culture, Black Studies programs must promote the study and dissemination of black literary materials (Gilroy 47). Simply put, the study of Black literature should be a crucial goal of Black Studies programs (Gilroy, 48). According to J.C. Smith, as mentioned by Mary B. Cassata, there are several benefits to studying literature in Black Studies programs, including:

"(1) The dissolution of some commonly held myths as... Black literature is political propaganda ... full of raving ... not universal in its meaning or applicability... recent and new. (2) The emphasis on complete freedom of subject matter. . . Afro-American writers have been effectively "transmuting the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everlasting life." (3) The extensive and intensive presentation of what it means to be Black in America ... Black literature also helps us to correct and supplement erroneous and inadequate views of historical events that have largely been presented from the singular angle of the White perspective. (4) The development of an awareness of the great variety of activities and endeavors in the arts and literature that have been an organic portion of American culture. (5)

Finally, the inescapable conclusion that this literature is indeed universal art and not merely . . . a parochial expression of the limited experiences of an ethnic minority.” (64)

Materials that successfully preserve Black culture must not only continue to be studied, but must be created for popular consumption as well. Professionals must work in close proximity with various institutions to ensure that materials such as Black literature are not being overlooked, misrepresented, distorted or suppressed. Professionals must also work with these institutions like movie production companies, book publishers and libraries to ensure that Black literature is being thoughtfully selected, and strategically, yet *freely* circulated. African Americans need culturally relevant literature to help create and base their identities upon. This literature presents positive and more accurate images of African Americans and their culture that inspires youth and unifies them as a people through validating their humanity.

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**Tracing Trends in Mid-Twentieth Century African-American Children's Literature:
The Literary Legacy of James Haskins, 1969-2009**
Jeannette Pepin

Young, Black, and Bright in Pre-Civil Rights Alabama

James Haskins was born in Demopolis, Alabama, in 1941, and grew up amid the tumultuous civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s. The segregated school he attended as a young man “provided outdated, cast-off textbooks that mentioned African Americans only as slaves” (89). He recalls an early knowledge of the fact that he was born “in the South at a time when southern Black people did not have many rights.” This meant that “you had to pay very careful attention...Blacks were in deep trouble if they forgot about the real world...we had to lower our eyes or cross over to the other side of the street if we encountered a White person.” He speculated that it may be because of this hyper-sensitive awareness of everyday life that he “always liked true stories better than made-up ones,” and had “no desire whatsoever to write fiction.” (Haskins 2002, 91).

In school, his teachers “did independent research on subjects they believed were important to us,” and as a consequence the students learned about “the lives of famous Blacks like Booker T. Washington and W.E.B Du Bois, Duke Ellington and Marian Anderson.” Portraits of these Black heroes lined the classroom walls, but were “removed on the occasions when the White superintendent of schools came to visit” (Haskins 2002, 93). Many of the books Haskins wrote as an adult would follow this tradition, incorporating the struggles and successes of African Americans from slavery through the Civil Rights movement and beyond.

After graduating with two degrees from two different universities (Alabama State and Georgetown), Haskins gained a lucrative job on Wall Street--“one of those opportunities that had been opened up for Blacks as a result of “all the marching and beatings and arrests”--but found himself still unsatisfied. After a few years of various vocations and studies, he decided to follow the path of those “who had made the strongest impression” on him, and began teaching a Special Education class in Harlem in 1966 (95). The triumphs and frustrations he experienced there would provide the material for his first book, *Diary of a Harlem Schoolteacher*, beginning a career that would span decades, and bear witness to dramatic shifts in the status and political power of Black Americans. Despite, or perhaps because of, the difficulty and racism Haskins witnessed as a child, he was committed to the idea of portraying an “ecology of human excellence”—emphasis on “human”, because “for the major part of our history here in America, we Black people have not been accorded by our fellow inhabitants of this continent full membership in the human race” (Haskins 54).

Black Faces in Children's Literature

The world was fortunate that the history and accomplishments of African Americans interested authors like James Haskins. Before his generation used the power of the pen to highlight the history and accomplishments of African Americans, adequate and truthful profiles of African Americans in mainstream American literature was minimal. If they were mentioned at all, it was generally in the form of broad stereotypes or outright viciousness (Harris 541). In 1922, *The Voyages of Dr. Doolittle* featured a single African character, Bumpo, who had left Oxford University because “he must wear shoes.” Bumpo was shown as “ridiculous because of his inappropriate use of big words and his naïve behavior.” Another character in *Frawg* (1930) was drawn with “large lips, bug eyes, bare-footed,” and was mainly interested in “the eating of watermelons and in conversing with his dog, who is far superior in intelligence” (Williams 16). It was the

continued publication of books like these that forced young James' teachers in Demopolis to do their own research into Black history (Haskins 2002, 93).

In her landmark 1965 essay "The All-White World of Children's Books," Nancy Larrick echoes the question of a young Black girl who asked, "Why are they always White children?" Larrick calls this "one of the most critical issues in American education today: the almost complete omission of Negroes from books for children." She cites this as a problem--not just because of the irreparable damage to the self-esteem of the young Black child, but because "the White child learns from his books that he is the kingfish," when in fact "his light skin makes him one of the world's minorities" (Larrick 1).

In a survey nearly ten years after the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Larrick examined "more than 5,000 trade books published for children in 1962, 1963, and 1964." She found that only 6.7% featured Black people in any way, and of those, many were merely "one or two dark faces in a crowd" (2). In the 1946 Caldecott Medal Award winner *The Rooster Crows*, the illustrations of White children are "nothing less than cherubic, with dainty little bare feet or well-made shoes". In contrast, there are four pages that show Black children, all with "great bunions feet, coal Black skin, and bulging eyes", with "in the distance, a dilapidated cabin with a Black, gun-toting, barefoot adult" (4). Apparently, "after eighteen years enough complaints had been received" that "in the new edition of *The Rooster Crows* (1964), only White children appear" (Larrick 7).

Black Literature in the 1960s and 1970s

Partly because of the increase in African American literary publications during the late 1960s, more children's books featured realistic Black characters (380). There were a number of possible reasons for this. One was the passage of The Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965 which "included provisions for 'financial assistance...to local educational agencies serving areas with concentrations of children from low-income families'" (Richardson 389-90). This monetary inducement likely encouraged a sudden interest in diverse literature on the part of publishers. However, it is difficult to determine whether this law resulted in the growth in the number of African American literary books.

To gain an understanding of the literature available for children in the decades surrounding James Haskins' career, I studied 632 children's and young adult books published between 1906 and 1990 that featured a clear focus on Black characters.⁵ I divided these titles into three categories based on my categorization of Haskins' work: 1) biographies of famous or influential Black people; 2) books dealing primarily with some aspect of the African American experience, including issues of race, African folklore, discussions of slavery, Civil Rights movements, or Black pride; and 3) books that featured Black main characters, but did not have an emphasis on Civil Rights or racial struggle as the primary focus.

An examination of these books organized by the year they were published shows that the yearly total has gradually increased since the late 1940s. A decisive bump upwards occurred in 1958, three years after the arrest of Rosa Parks sparked the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and one year after the Little Rock Nine desegregated Central High School (Harley 270-74). In 1963, President Kennedy's urgings for an end to discrimination went unheeded as Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Birmingham demonstration was beset by policemen wielding fire hoses

5 Titles and publication dates drawn from Williams, Helen E. *Books by African-American Authors and Illustrators for Children and Young Adults*. Chicago: American Library Association, 1991, with all titles by Haskins omitted.

and attack dogs; later that year, King's landmark "I Have a Dream" speech preceded by a few weeks a Ku Klux Klan bombing of an Alabama church that killed four young Black girls (Fletcher). In 1964 the number of titles almost doubled and this year also saw the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Dr. King in Oslo, Norway (Harley 292). In 1964 and '65 readers saw a rise in biographies, but the other categories remained steady through the passage of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the years immediately following it.

In 1967 America witnessed "the worst summer of racial disturbances in U.S. history" (Harley 300); in 1968 the number of published titles increased by fifty percent again, a high that coincided with the assassination of Dr. King, rejection of non-violence by those including members of the Black Panther party, and student protests across the nation (Harley 306, Wright 160). These years also saw the publication of groundbreaking novels such as Alice Walker's *One* (1968), Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* (1968), and Lucille Clifton's *Good Times* (1969), which *The New York Times* later listed in the top ten books of the year (Harley 305, 309). Also in 1969 was the founding of the *Journal of Black Studies* and Gwendolyn Brookes' recognition as Poet Laureate of Illinois, as well as Harlem Hospital being re-named Wright Hospital in honor of its first Black physician. It was in this year that Haskins' life as a published author began.

Haskins' Contributions to Literature

James Haskins' first book, *Diary of a Harlem Schoolteacher* was, like several other books of that year, an examination of an aspect of blackness in America. In this case, it was the inequalities and insufficiencies of educational opportunities available to urban Blacks, many of whom existed far below the federal income poverty level. The school he taught at, P.S. 92, was located in a neighborhood "infested with drug addicts—many still in their teens, and many who were familiar to older teachers as a result of having been in their classes," where "fathers sat on the stoops and stared at the broken classroom windows, behind which sat their children" (26-27). Though the book was published in 1969, a new foreword for the 2008 reprinting stated that "it could equally have been written now, in 2008, almost forty years later" (19).

Diary, which started out as just that, was published at the urgings of a friend, the appearance of which coincided with a long-overdue shift in children's books that began around 1968. Books such as *Striped Ice Cream* (Lippincott, 1968) and *Lillie of Watts* (Ward Ritchie, 1969) began portraying "Blacks in relation to each other rather than constantly reacting to and confronting the White world" (Richardson 392-3). The overall rise in children's literature brought a corresponding rise in biographies of famous or influential Blacks, which had formerly been the main topic for Black children's books (384). As Richardson noted in her 1974 essay "*Black Children's Books: An Overview*", this rise in nonfiction would have been profitable for children's publishers, for whom one of the largest markets was institutional sales (390). Schools in poverty-ridden Black neighborhoods suddenly had the funds and the freedom to purchase books that reflected the cultural legacy of the majority of their students, and publishers suddenly had a vast incentive to produce for these markets. In this climate, it is not surprising that after the success of his first book, when Haskins mentioned to an editor at Doubleday that "students should have an opportunity to read books on their level about the Civil Rights movement, the Black Power Movement, and the anti-war movement," that company approached Haskins about writing books for children (Haskins 2002, 89). It is mildly strange that they would focus on a man whose first book was described on its back cover by *The New York Times* as "a weapon—cold, blunt, painful," but whatever their motivations, Haskins turned out to be the perfect man for the job (Haskins 1969).

Because of his frustration with the lack of available books about African Americans that he could use in his classroom, Haskins "knew exactly the kinds of books I wanted to do—books about current events and books

about important Black people so that students could understand the world around them” (Haskins 2002, 96). This was a sentiment that was being repeated across America by educators and students alike—“the need for culturally relevant curricula” (Wright 160). The rise of Black writers was significant, providing the kind of “internally generated” force that can “enable individuals and communities to push limits and overcome barriers” (Hall 717). For much of the 35 years of his career, this was what Haskins aimed to achieve with his books. His next title after the success of *Diary was Resistance: Profiles in Nonviolence*, published by Doubleday in 1970, where he “tried to put into perspective the nonviolent Civil Rights Movement of the time by showing that throughout history there have been nonviolent warriors for change, among them Patrick Henry and Henry David Thoreau...not just Martin Luther King, Jr.” (Haskins 2002, 96). In 1971, Doubleday published his *The War and the Protest: Vietnam*, a book to introduce young adults to the controversial conflicts surrounding that war (Williams xi). Together with *Profiles in Black Power* (Doubleday, 1972), his first four books had covered current and historical events, as well as Black issues and a broader view of history.

The 1974-75 recession resulted in a substantial decrease in the publication of books with African American themes across the country (Brossard 283). Whether it was due to financial constraints or some other historical factor, the late 1970s and early 1980s witnessed only a modest resurgence in Black publications, before another slump into the nineties. Foster’s essay *Since the Sixties* corroborates this fact, noting that “since the eighties, the stream of books for children has slowed to a mere trickle” (42). Like many other essayists on the topic, Foster recognizes Haskins as “the most prolific African American writer of non-fiction for youth” (40).

Trends in Haskins’ Writings

Haskins’ personal trajectory turned out to be somewhat more stable than the surrounding market, though his number of new books per year did fall from six or more per year in 1973-1975, to about four per year from 1976-1986. With the exception of 1981 (which saw only *Werewolves*, and, incongruously, *The Child Abuse Help Book*) from 1972-2002, he never produced less than three new works a year, and for fifteen of those years produced five or more yearly. His most productive year was 1992, in which he wrote or collaborated on no fewer than ten titles: *Against All Opposition: Black Explorers in America* (Walker); *Amazing Grace: The Story Behind the Song* (Millbrook Press); *Colin Powell: A Biography* (Scholastic); *The Day Martin Luther King, Jr., Was Shot: A Photo History of the Civil Rights Movement* (Scholastic); *I Am Somebody!: A Biography of Jesse Jackson* (Enslow); *I Have a Dream: The Life and Words of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Millbrook Press); *The Methodists* (Hippocrene); *One More River to Cross: The Stories of Twelve Black Americans* (Scholastic); *Rosa Parks: My Story* (Dial); and *Thurgood Marshall: A Life for Justice* (Holt). He wrote fewer books on famous Black athletes after 1992, perhaps because he wished to focus the attention of young Black children onto other routes for success, in light of the trend for Black youth to seek success through sports or entertaining (*Bring Your A Game*). He once stated that “young Blacks should have other role models besides successful athletes” (Haskins 2002, 96). Around this time he also began to write more books that discuss the history of Africa, such as *Bound for America* and *African Beginnings*.

Throughout his career, he would author, coauthor, or edit over 170 books, with sole authorship of 105 books. He won many awards, including: the Carter G. Woodson Award for young adult non-fiction in 1989, 1994, and 2001; the Alabama Library Association Award for best work for children in 1988; and the Coretta Scott King Award in 1976 (James Haskins, “Professor Emeritus”). All of his books were nonfiction, and the bulk of his works were biographical, covering musical sensations such as Bricktop and Stevie Wonder, Civil Rights heroes like Rosa Parks and Malcolm X, and political groundbreakers like Thurgood Marshall and Shirley Chisholm. His books that

dealt particularly with Black issues peaked in 1973 and '74, rose again briefly in the mid-eighties, and then rose again from 1992-2002, the time period for which he was the editor of the *Black Stars* series for Wiley. Following the trend of other African American authors in my survey, it was not until 1971 that he produced a book that did not focus on Black American issues. This kind of title made up much of his works in 1976, where he produced *Pelé: A Biography* (Doubleday), *Teen-age Alcoholism* (Hawthorn), *A New Kind of Joy: The Story of the Special Olympics* (Doubleday), and *The Long Struggle: The Story of American Labor* (Westminster Press), but rose and fell throughout the eighties, and mostly dropped off in the nineties.

His books about contemporary Black people and events helped fill in modern Black accomplishments, an important fact, since Nancy Larrick's survey found that, of the 6.7 percent of all children's books that portrayed Black people, almost 60 percent were "placed outside of the continental United States or before World War II" (3). Some of his books were written for adults, but he preferred writing for children, since "'adults either read or do not read, depending on how they felt about books when they were young'" (qutd. in Foster 40).

The Critical Reception of Haskins' Books

Merely to have authored such a staggering number of books is impressive, but the quality of James Haskins' books was also recognized by critics. In the biting 1972 *New York Times* article titled "A Little Bit About a Lot of Black Folks," the authors criticized the "dull, unreal and patronizing" writing of several contemporary books on African Americans, but called Haskins' *A Piece of the Power* "valuable as a reference" and "great reading." They remarked that they "liked the book and the men very much" and "suspected that James Haskins does too" (Clifton). This speaks to the truth of Haskins' statement that "I write books about people and subjects that intrigue me, and hope to inspire similar interest in my readers" (89). This might explain some of the more quirky books in his vita, such as *Snow Sculpture and Ice Carving* (Macmillan, 1974). According to Haskins, "I was interested in the beautiful sculptures that people make out of snow and ice, and so I wrote a book about them" (Haskins 2002, 96).

A newspaper clipping in one of the UF Special Collection files shows a review of a book someone else had written about the Harlem Renaissance. The reviewer cites the book as "in places...unpolished," and lacking "immediacy". The review ends with the statement that "Jim Haskins' *The Harlem Renaissance*...does a much better job" (Makowski). Further proof of critical acceptance came in the form of another clipping, an interview from early in his career, when he had only (only!) published thirty-five books (thirty-three of which were still in print at the time of the writing). "I don't teach or write for money," Haskins told the newspaper, "one tends to write because one has to...but one sees how much he is being read by the royalty check. And I've been read" ("Interview").

Life as a Writer

The incredible number of works Haskins produced did not always translate into personal gain. Haskins once noted, in response to an encyclopedia article that erroneously cited him as being a full-time author that "it would be very nice to do that, but it is very hard to make a living writing the kinds of books I write" (Haskins 2002, 97). Indeed, many of his correspondences with editors and executives feature inquiries about royalties and advances still owed: in April of 1986, he wrote to an editor at New American Library that he was "pleased to see that there is money due at last," but that "only \$1500 of the \$4000 stipulated in the contract has been paid" (Haskins, "Letter to Carole Hall, Editor"). Another from a year before expresses his frustration with a long delay of expected editions with "Enough already! Where are the copies of the foreign editions?" (Haskins)

The editors he dealt with could sometimes be difficult. A letter from one Hillel Black at William Morrow & Company expresses “with regret” that a manuscript for a biography of Dinah Washington “just did not generate enough enthusiasm here” (Black). Another letter from an editor at Scribner indicated that he’d requested some sample chapters from the proposed book. When Haskins responded with an indignant statement that he’d never been asked for sample chapters before, the editor replied: “My apologies if my letter...offended you...It occurs to me, however, that your past success in securing contracts ensures that you will have no trouble placing this one, and therefore do not require my services” (Dehais). The most colorful of the rejections of this manuscript came from W.W. Norton & Company, in which the editor remarked:

I am sorry to say that the trouble for us here is a lack of giving a damn about a woman who has such a vast self-indulgence that it not only includes drugs and several many husbands, but a habit of throwing whiskey glasses at people, etc.

Well, we’ve been wrong before, and thanks again. (Thomas)

Perhaps it was some solace that, eight years later, *Queen of the Blues: A Biography of Dinah Washington* was actually published—by William Morrow, whose editor wrote the first rejection letter.

Spreading the Word about African American Successes

As it turned out, Professor Haskins’ choice to focus on current events and important Black people for his books would be more possible than ever before in the 1970s and after. Around the time of his birth, some of the African American greats he would later write about were making themselves known: Lena Horne debuted in *Panama Hattie* in 1942 (251), and in 1946 Congressman Adam Clayton Powell became the first African American to successfully sponsor a major civil rights law—the “Powell Amendment,” which denied “federal funds to any project where racial discrimination exists” (256). Aretha Franklin and Diana Ross, two more of his biographical subjects, were born within a few years of Haskins (Harley 251, 255).

Just as Professor Haskins’ career as a writer was beginning, the seventies brought another rising tide of African American accomplishments: in 1971, Maya Angelou’s Pulitzer Prize-nominated book of poems “*Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water ‘fore I Diiie*” was published (315); in 1974, Muhammad Ali regained “the heavyweight crown” in the first heavyweight bout held in Africa (323); in 1978 Guion S. Bluford, Jr., Frederick D. Gregory, and Ronald E. McNair became the first African Americans to be admitted to NASA; and also in 1978, Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon* won the National Book Critics Circle award (331). Haskins would cover many of these people and more in his prolific writing career.

Many of Dr. Haskins’ books sought to put world events in a “historical perspective,” but equally important to Haskins was the here-and-now. His biographies of important Black people included “living people, not just dead ones,” partly because he wanted young people to have “living Black heroes to read about,” and partly because, with “the gains made by Black people, there were more living Black heroes to write about” (Haskins 2002, 96). His books would cover nearly every area of life that might interest or affect young people, with titles such as: *Jokes from Black Folks* (Doubleday, 1973), *Street Gangs: Yesterday and Today* (Hastings, 1974), *Witchcraft, Mysticism and Magic in the Black World* (Doubleday, 1974), *Gambling—Who Really Wins?* (Watts, 1978), *The Child Abuse Help Book* (Addison-Wesley, 1981), *Black Theater in America* (Crowell, 1982), *Bricktop* (Atheneum, 1983), *Break Dancing* (Lerner, 1985), *The Autobiography of Rosa Parks* (Dial, 1990), *Outward Dreams: Black Inventors and their Inventions* (Walker, 1991), *Spike Lee: By Any Means Necessary* (Walker, 1997), *Black Eagles: African American in Aviation* (Bt. Bound, 1999), *Jesse Jackson: Civil Rights Activist*

(Enslow, 2000), *Toni Morrison: The Magic of Words* (Millbrook, 2001), *African Heroes* (Wiley, 2005), and many more besides.

War of the Words: Books as Battlegrounds for Cultural Identity

When considering his motivation for becoming an author of children's literature, Dr. Haskins remembered the "outdated, cast-off textbooks" that his segregated school provided, and the independent research of his teachers into Black history. He also recalled his mother's acquisition of an entire set of the *World Book Encyclopedia* for his reading, and his parents "insisting that I listen to the news on the radio and read the daily newspapers as soon as I was able" (Haskins 2002, 93). Haskins was made aware from an early age of the role that books can play, both as weapons of oppression and tools of rebellion and independent thought.

Books are objects of power in the right circumstances, and the effect they can have, especially on the minds of children, has been discussed for centuries. In an 1853 address to the National Association for the Advancement of Education, Bishop Potter exclaimed that "morals may be drawn from books...Away with literature that would make a paragon of excellence out of a monster!" ("Education Convention"). But while the power of books to instill cultural values has been consistently recognized, the values in question have varied dramatically across cultures and time periods. In 1974, angry parents and church leaders in Charleston, West Virginia, violently protested the use of new textbooks in some schools, citing content such as a Ginsberg poem that featured sexual words, and "works by militant Blacks" that were "critical of the police and Whites" ("Department of Book-Banning").

Today's parents face similar dilemmas about when to expose their children to issues such as sexuality and race, though now parents "often hesitate to speak to children about racism for fear they will create problems where perhaps none exist, afraid that they will make 'colorblind' children unnecessarily color-conscious" (xvi). The risk of this approach can be equally harmful, because "when the dominant identity of Whiteness goes unexamined, racial privilege also goes unacknowledged," leading a young person to take for granted "the achievements that unearned privilege make more attainable" (126). Many children grow up in homogenous communities of the same racial background, and their knowledge about other cultures can come as "secondhand information... [which has] often been distorted, shaped by cultural stereotypes, and left incomplete" (Tatum 4). As Tatum suggests, diverse literature is essential for a broad range of young audiences.

Many researchers and scholars have noted "that all students benefit when they and their peers are recognized and valued as participants in the learning process." Because "books are used in formal education and as a socializing agent for children, it is imperative that youth are exposed to literature that not only stimulates their imaginations but also offers realistic depictions of their cultural, social, and linguistic realities" (Davis 25).

Despite the urgent need for cross-cultural experience and knowledge, books featuring Black culture and Black people have often been perceived as a product solely for Black readers. Author and Professor Candy Dawson Boyd expressed exasperation with "going to conventions and having White [librarians, teachers, and principals] look at my books and say 'Oh, I know a little Black girl who would like this.'" The availability of such books is also an issue. In 1982 (during the aforementioned slump in new titles in the 1980s), when Massachusetts mother Gail Willet went looking for ethnically diverse books for her children, she "came home with nothing." Believing that "there were others who felt the same way," she started a mail-order book business that "specializes in books about children of color," and by 1990, Savannah Books occupied "a cozy storefront in Cambridge's busy central square" (Frederick).

Publishers and Black Books

Historically, publishers have had difficulties with books that featured Black characters. In her 1965 essay “The All White World of Children’s Books,” Nancy Larrick discusses the dilemmas that faced publishers of children’s books, stating that “it is not unusual for critics to disagree as to the effectiveness of the picture of the Negro in a book for children.” *Whispering Willows* by Elizabeth Hamilton Friendmood (Doubleday) “brought mixed response” (5). The book features a friendship in 1911 between a White high school girl and a Black girl “who works as a domestic in a White home.” One reviewer “gave the book a top rating” while the other “objected to the stereotype of the gentle Negro serving-girl who ‘knows her place.’” To explain his own company’s difficulties, the president of Golden Press recounted how “almost every time we reissue *Little Black Sambo* we receive mail deploring it. When it is not available in our Little Golden Book series, we have had letters asking why we do not keep this classic in print!” (Lerner 6). Publishers have also encountered resistance from people like “one irate Mississippi (White) mother” who “denounced a Little Golden Book” because “‘on page 15 there was actually the picture of three small children in a basket together...and one was a little Negro!’” Larrick quotes one sales manager as saying “Why jeopardize sales by putting one or two Negro faces in an illustration?” (Larrick 6).

Even publishers like Doubleday, who published many of Haskins’ books and “had already decided to do a Black heritage series” before the ESEA of 1965 passed, had some reservations (390). When Dorothy Sterling discussed her proposal for the book that would become *Mary Jane* (1959), a story about a Black girl’s first year in an integrated school, her “editor at Doubleday winced,” and said “Couldn’t you set it in the North?” Hastings House, another publisher whom Haskins later published with, had forced an author “to change the children in her story from one White and one Black to two White children.” As an editor at Albert Whitman explained, when Blacks appeared in three books from his company, “customers returned not only these titles but all stock from our company. This meant an appreciable loss and tempered attitudes toward further use of Negro children in illustrations and text” (Richardson 388).

Significantly, and sadly, it may have been Haskins’ preference for “real stories” (Haskins 2002, 92) that ensured his success as a writer. During the “restrictive atmosphere” of the 1954 Supreme Court ruling on school desegregation, “some books...made it through.” But these books were what Richardson calls “comparatively safe titles—*biographies of famous men, descriptions of slavery as it had been one hundred years before, and sports stories in a volume too large to even begin to deal with*” [emphasis mine] (388). While Haskins’ topics were not restricted to these categories, they did make up a large part of what he produced; apparently, editors were more comfortable with these kinds of works.

Disagreements in Black Literature

In her essay “Thirty Years of Black American Literature,” Farah Griffin cites a move away from “the politically oriented paradigms of thinkers of the Black arts movement” as a positive one (167), and notes with approval the development of “complicated, nonlinear narratives, [and] beautiful, rich, sensuous language” of emerging female writers in the 1970s. She attributes an “astonishing trend of the last 30 years” to the critical success of these kinds of books: “the rise in Black commercial fiction” (169). Impatience with books that seem to chronicle past achievements, or react mainly to White actions, is not an uncommon feeling among writers who discuss this subject.

Gerald Early, Merle Kling Professor of Modern Letters at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, regards books like those of Dr. Haskins as being characterized by the “expectation of political protest or special

pleading for the humanity of the [African American] race or the worth of its history and culture.” He notes that the tradition of these books continues mostly “in African-American children’s and adolescent literature, which is frequently, as one might expect, highly didactic” (Early). While not hostile towards books that focus on political and racial issues, Early clearly believes that African American literature can and should branch out from these themes. Critical discussions about politics and race in Black literature can sometimes miss the point, though. If children’s literature has a function in “the construction of Black subjectivity by insisting upon a process of individual and collective history making,” then political and reactive literature is just as necessary as other kinds, because it “does not evade the wounds of the body but by recognizing them as central to the function of language on the Black subject, might transcend them” (Priest 1).

The state of the field is a complicated one. Black literature is finally getting more attention from publishers, many of whom have formed imprints specifically for Black books, such as One World (Random House), Amistad (HarperCollins), Dafina (Kensington), Harlem Moon (Doubleday), and Strivers Row (Villard). Despite this, “according to the Association of American Publishers, in 1999 only 2.4% of editorial employees were Black” (Griffin 170). There are also concerns about the effect of wider readership on mass marketing. Richardson was skeptical in 1974 about the “recent trend of conglomerates, whose prime concern is profit rather than literary quality” buying up publishers such as Holt and Random House (382).

Some critics might argue that Richardson’s fears have indeed come to pass. According to Nick Chiles, “on Essence magazine’s list of best sellers at Black bookstores... authors of street lit now dominate, driving out serious writers.” As a Black author himself, he feels “ashamed and mortified to see my books sitting on the same shelves as these titles,” many of which display “all forms of brown flesh, usually half-naked and in some erotic pose, often accompanied by guns and other symbols of criminal life.” He sees this trend towards “street lit” as a sign of “the sexualization and degradation of Black fiction” (Chiles). Editor and publisher of *Mosaic Literary Magazine*, Ron Kavanagh, worried in 2003 that though “some of the larger publishers have spurred the growth of African American writing...I don’t think most of what they are publishing will last long” (Arnold).

These are valid fears. James Haskins worked for a time with Toni Morrison on his manuscript for *The Cotton Club*, in which she indicated a need for further revision because “it is a flat read. And sounds like every other book on the subject.” Further, she pointed out that:

Its focus is White. It has no flavor of intimacy or gossip that only Blacks might be privy to. What will make it a sensational book is not “the history as everyone knows it” but the gossip...the scenes of the hoi polloi—drunk, carousing, the fights there (remember Dorothy Parker, Oscar Hammerstein, et al)...Talk to Victoria Spivvy, she lives in Brooklyn. (Morrison)

Without Black editors like Morrison, with extensive experience in Black literature, Black culture, and a commitment to a Black perspective, books such as Haskins’ successful *Cotton Club* would not have been possible.

Large companies have different concerns. “This is a business opportunity,” said chief executive of AOL Time Warner Books Laurence J. Kirshbaum. “It’s the right thing to do, but we are publishing them in a cold, calculating way, which means we have to build a Black audience and also publish crossover books” (Arnold). Publishers who see Black children as a business opportunity may still produce rich, racially sensitive books, but the history of the bottom line has trended towards the palatable, where “conformity has replaced consciousness,” (57) and the general public can be distracted away from the “continuing problems of inequality and racism” (52) by the “false satisfaction of false needs as a substitute for the real solutions of real problems” (Strinati, 57).

Another obstacle that literature for African American children experiences is use in the classroom. This is not due to a lack of suitability—indeed, “the literary quality of the work equals, and in many cases surpasses, the quality of general children’s literature” (550). However, “some teachers are hesitant to use them because they believe that the books depict only bleak ghetto situations, that they might embarrass African American children, or that White children are not interested or may be ill at ease with the books.” This issue is added to the fact that for much of the time since the 70s, African American books have only been published at a rate of “around 200 books per year” (Harris 552).

The issues of class and race are still clearly problematic in today’s educational climate, up to the present date. In 2005, a newspaper affiliated with the University of Florida published a series of cartoons featuring racially offensive implications and the “N” word. It was only after a concerted effort by student and faculty protesters that the cartoon was retracted and apologized for (Nixon). Unrelated, but also at UF, a book in the Education Library—*Curriculum: Foundations, Principles, and Issues* (Allyn and Bacon, 2003)—states that “educators put themselves in peril if they ignore the social dynamics of the society in which they are living” (140), and goes on to (somewhat defensively) assert that:

Certainly, we have poor children. And we must have a curriculum that gives them the tools and attitudes to succeed and escape the cycle of poverty and the often accompanying violence. But despite all the talk about the haves and the have nots...the majority of African Americans are in the middle class...Even critics of our social and educational system must admit that there are far too many examples of successful people to give credence to the belief that schools consciously or unconsciously plan via their curriculum to keep students down, to marginalize them, or to assure that they are deprived of their rights as citizens. (146)

The fact that a statement such as this appears in a modern textbook speaks for itself, and raises too many implications to address here, but it is clearly a continuation of the type of problems grounded in the history of race politics surrounding education and publishing.

Conclusion: The Legacy of Dr. James Haskins and the Future of Black literature

Historically, one of the difficulties that African American authors faced was lack of mainstream recognition and dissemination for their books, so the publication of many of Dr. Haskins’ works by well-known publishers was significant (Harris 549). Haskins was signed by publishers such as Scholastic, Harper Collins, Simon & Schuster, Macmillan, Doubleday, and Random House. Many of his books have seen more than one print run, including *Diary of a Harlem Schoolteacher*, *Rosa Parks: My Story*, and *A Piece of the Power: Four Black Mayors*.

Professor Haskins’ contribution was not merely a quantity of books about famous Black people, but a definitive statement about the importance of the lives he recorded, and the attainability of success for people struggling under oppression. His long career, and his publication by numerous major companies, suggests that there has been a continuous demand for knowledge about and content produced by African Americans, even outside the sphere of African American readers. By populating the world of children’s literature with a wider variety of people and subjects, he enabled African American and White children to envision a bigger and more varied world. His books on African culture and history have also enabled children of all cultures to learn more about an often little-understood part of the world. In concert with other writers who explored and challenged

the established territory--and despite many challenges--he helped to add African Americans to the ranks of the successful and influential in the American cultural consciousness.

Today, prominent and award-winning children's books are still being published by many of the same imprints who produced Black books in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, such as Henry Holt (*Keeping the Night Watch*, Hope Anita Smith), Dial (*The Moon Over Star*, illus. Jerry Pinkney), Amistad (*God Bless the Child*, illus. Jerry Pinkney), Atheneum (*The Battle of Jericho*, Sharon Draper), and Lerner (*Bad News for Outlaws*, Vaunda Micheaux Nelson) ("The Coretta Scott King Book Award"). If "all the Toni Morrisons to come will be an outgrowth of the bottom line," as some concerned reviewers have remarked (Arnold), then Black consumers will need to take an active interest in seeking out and rewarding the publication of diverse children's literature with their business.

This has been emphasized by many of the authors cited in this paper: "If we read, buy, and demand quality literature by African-Americans for our children, it will be made available" (Foster). He argues, "we must continually teach our children and ourselves, not only our own history and literature, but that history and literature as presented by our own authors" (43). Richardson emphasizes that "the only factors that might help," if publishers begin to treat Black fiction as inconsequential, "is the watchfulness of parents who could demand that stores carry the kinds of books they want for their children" (400). Willis lays the power in the hands of teachers, who "must acknowledge and incorporate [Black culture] into their instructional methods and curriculum" (70).

Griffin places her emphasis on a childhood of "reading books by Black authors, not in school, but after school, during the summer...and most importantly, in the street...We did not only read these books; we spent summer afternoons on the steps discussing them...We practiced our own Black girl brand of literary criticism." It is with this last note that I think Haskins would have agreed most: whether true stories or richly woven fiction, "it doesn't matter so much what kids read as it does that they read" (Haskins 2002, 96). If the role of Black writing is to allow us "to imagine a past unrecorded in the history books...and a future...worth struggling for or against" (Griffin 172), then Haskins' vast contribution to the historical imaginary for children of all nations and backgrounds alike is a valuable one, and may help further the virtuous cycle of young Black readers becoming young Black authors and editors.

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**Dancing the Grit and Glitter, through the Humanizing Lens of James Haskins:
An Analysis of Black Body Image and Implications for Black Youth**
Yoldine Valery

Introduction

Symbols, signs, and images are all reinforcing factors of social conditioning. When we see a red light, we stop. When we see a cross, we think Christianity. When we see a reindeer, we think of things associated with Santa Clause or Christmas. Unfortunately, in the case of the Black body some of the associations offered are depictions opposite to a mythical Whiteness: inferiority, low economic status, ghetto, and lack of competence (Winston 3). What is worse is that Black youth may internalize these associations with their racial and physical identity. The internalization of these stigmas may have an effect on Black youth and how they perform. The way in which the Black body is portrayed can either intensify or dilute stigmas associated with its identity. The question then becomes, how does one attach positive connotations to Black identity? James Haskins provides an answer: to make visible successful Black individuals who challenged society's perceptions of "blackness" and who have made progressive social difference. By exploring the manner in which Dr. James Haskins has written about five particular people, we are offered a glimpse at his interpretation of identity and how performing arts can be used to inspire confidence in the racial identity development of children who are members of a marginalized group in society.

Professor Haskins, in efforts to counterbalance the most negative and pervasive tactics of the media, wrote biographies and helped write the autobiographies of prominent Black media icons who could positively influence Black youth. In this study, I will explore the manner in which Dr. Haskins discusses the lives of five Black dancers--Katherine Dunham, Bill Robinson, Ada B. Smith, Lena Horne, and Michael Jackson--and the impact they have had on the racial identity of Black youth.

The Agenda of Dr. James Haskins: Stereotypes, the Black Body, and the Source

Noted in his autobiographical summary, James Haskins clearly states his mission in writing his books is to write about important Black people on a level that young people could relate (Haskins 2002, 96). Young readers relate to his work because he infuses his works with elements of the Black experience. To summarize, the Black experience is:

Incidents, altercations, and interactions that Blacks in America undergo due to their race, which affects their existence in society. For example, the external macro-level forces such as socioeconomic hardship, inequality, and oppression. And the internal forces such as physical, emotional, and psychological adaptation against the struggles, which influence the complete essence of the experience. (Evans 30)

Because many of his writings are non-fiction, defining the Black experience becomes important because by validating Black experiences, Black youth are able to become inspired by others in similar circumstances, which is his overall goal (Haskins 96). Professor Haskins inspires youth with hardships overcome (grit) and celebrates victories won (glitter).

The success of Black youth depends upon whether or not they have a strong sense of identity. "Racial/ethnic identity is the perceptions of one's group within the larger societal context and such perceptions may be fundamentally influenced by local experiences with race and ethnicity" (Nasir, McLaughlin, and Jones 75). The way in which blackness is projected becomes an issue if it is

continuously projected in a negative manner. A semiotic conception of oneself is consistent with how one views himself or herself within a social/cultural context, so the depictions of blackness translates into how one defines himself or herself (Singer 486). Racial identity and the connotations associated with blackness thus become important when Black youth have a negative view about their racial identity.

Because of his upbringing in the “Jim Crow South,” Professor Haskins experienced overt interpersonal and institutional racism. Therefore, he was particularly aware of a society that marginalized African Americans. He explicitly credits his strong academic background to his teachers who took it as their personal responsibility to educate him about the accomplishments of African Americans (93). It is because of their lasting impressions that Dr. Haskins later pursued a career in teaching and dedicated his life to writing biographies and autobiographies (mostly for African American young people) that detailed the positive contributions African Americans have made to American history. During his life and career, Professor Haskins attempted to provide honest and positive portrayals about the African American experience.

Recognition of humanity is something that people of African descent have long been denied (Cassata 50). During the institution of slavery, dehumanizing stereotypes about African Americans developed and were justified by inaccurate, “scientific” evidence (Drake 17). Today, the media is the main vehicle that reinforces negative stereotypes. Cassata explains, “media portrayals are unfair...since it forms a close-minded function that teaches us [Blacks and Whites] that Black is bad and White is good in a way we don’t even question” (51). Professor Haskins knew that such portrayals would ultimately lead to one result for African Americans: failure. Thus, after looking at his collection of books, it becomes obvious that Black identity mattered tremendously to him. As a result of having teachers who taught him about the lives of famous African Americans such as Booker T. Washington, W.E. B Du Bois, Duke Ellington, and Marian Anderson and their ways of overcoming racial struggles, Haskins wrote that he did not suffer from a notion that young African Americans still struggle with today thinking “Blacks never done anything in history of the world *except* be slaves” (Haskins 93). For this reason, Dr. Haskins wrote non-fiction books and biographies about successful African Americans as a method for educating people about *the real* world and Black people’s place in it.

By writing these biographies, Professor Haskins provided an alternative to the slave narratives that failed to depict the humanity of Black people. He never intended to write about African Americans in a glorified and unrealistic fashion, but to offer realistic depictions of them. His biographical writings depict people who suffer and struggle, but who never allow their struggles to defeat them; those who have a positive sense of identity, have the drive to execute their dreams, and as a result of their struggles are successful. With his pen as his weapon, Professor Haskins made it his priority to educate Black youth about the wide variety of components in the African American experience beyond slavery.

Because there is a shortage of African American role models in school textbooks, African American youth have been educated about the Black experience by the media. Media outlets (i.e. television, Internet, radio, movies and magazines) promote the same type of negative stereotypes about African American that Professor Haskins spent his career trying to dispel. Thus, one way his work is important is his focus on icons of popular culture and dancers in particular. Because dance forms are important in the African American community, James Haskins wrote about five specific individuals who have made significant contributions to this art form: Katherine Dunham, Bill “Mr. Bojangles” Robinson, Ada “Bricktop” Smith, Michael Jackson, and Lena Horne. In addition, he published a book entitled *Black Dance in America: A History through Its People*. By analyzing the ways that Professor Haskins interprets the body and image of Dunham, Horne, Bricktop, Bojangles, and Jackson, we can

better understand how to positively view the Black body rather than accept the demonizing images offered by our contemporary culture.

Professor Haskins' approach to counterattacking negative racial/ethnic images was writing the biographies of many successful Black people engaged in art. Each of the five dance phenomena he wrote about served a purpose in addressing a particular issue involving racial identity and in spite of the obstacles these individuals had to overcome, each of their lives were portrayed as successful. Thus, he simultaneously encouraged reading and reinforced positive racial/ethnic identity by writing about these individuals.

In order to guarantee the full submission of African enslaved persons, the image of blackness had to be devalued. Colonizers needed to convince the Western World that everything associated with "blackness" was backward, primitive, savage, and needed saving. The way colonizers achieved this task was by associating all cultural practices and beliefs of Africans to these negative connotations (Castaldi 2). On the other hand, in this scheme, Whites represented pureness, modernity, success, wealth, and superiority (Eichstedt 447). African dancing became a target of White supremacists because those enslaved use the art form of dance as a way to express their emotions. The African body was portrayed with "heavy tones of racist discourse" because caricatures made Black bodies look unattractive and vulgar. Although many Whites believed that enslaved Africans danced because they were happy, in reality they danced because they were searching for ways to cope with tremendously hateful and oppressive environments and still maintain and express their spiritual strength.

Dance: The Survival Mechanism

Enslaved Africans on slave ships had to reverse what dance had traditionally been. In Africa, it was an integral part of life. In all of life ceremonies, dance was there serving as a form of expression. Now bound for the Americas, dance took an immediate turn in its association to the African way of life. It had once been a medium for uninhibited personal expression, and during enslavement, dance became a survival mechanism. For the sake of bringing in a "healthy breed" for auction at the slave markets, enslaved African persons would have to participate in what was called "dancing the slaves" as a means of exercise (Haskins 4). Here, dance once a joyous, free expression took on new significance.

Now, they were being forced to dance to survive, and to make the slave traders rich.

But dance would not only help the slaves to survive in a physical sense in The New World. It would also help them to stay alive in spirit, and that was something the slave masters could not take away from them. And because enslaved Africans brought their dances to the New World, over time their dances, like their music, would have a profound effect on the cultures there. (Haskins 5)

It is through this sense of the complexity of dance in the Black experience that James Haskins provided a useful lens relatable to Black youth's lives. He presented a history of a people who were deprived of everything and portrayed to be inferior, but nevertheless reclaimed the essence of what has been robbed from them and re-invented it to fit their new settings. That same fervor of using dance as a survival mechanism and adaptive skill would continue for several decades to come. Similarly, Dunham, Robinson, Smith, Jackson, and Horne used dance as a survival mechanism and a tool of expression to overcome obstacles decades after Emancipation.

Ada "Bricktop" Smith: An Imperfect Success

The art of dance had a major influence in Bricktop's early life. Born Ada Beatrice Queen Victoria Louise Virginia Smith, she dropped out of school at the age of 16 to pursue a career as an entertainer (Haskins 23). In

later years, Bricktop admitted that she should have adhered to her mother's advice to finish her education. Through this realization, Black youth might understand that they should always make their education their top priority. In her biography, Bricktop acknowledges her regrets about quitting school, but believed it was the best decision at the time. Because of her features (red hair, freckles, and a slender boyish figure), Ada Smith stood out in a crowd, but her confidence also distinguished her from others. Where did her confidence stem from? Bricktop described her figure as a "handicap" in comparison to her peers, but regarded her freckles, willowy figure, and youth as "assets." However, she undeniably established confidence through her dance. As Bricktop once said when she was 16, "there weren't many people who didn't agree that Ada Smith was a terrific natural dancer" (Haskins 26).

Bricktop's life was not picture perfect by any measure and she did not intend to depict it as such. In her autobiography, she admitted that the first man she ever loved was a pimp; her sister was murdered; and she grew up during the Prohibition period surrounded by drug dealers and thugs. In the midst of all that she flourished in her dance and made a successful living. Her dancing was her connection to those in her community and, although she grew up in an environment which was considered to be "bad," she did not judge the "bad" people in her community. Through her dancing, she met many people and formed networks which would later be useful in her life and career. For example, one day she met Bill Robinson who told her to always be a professional and perform with the same level of intensity during every show (55). In retrospect, Bricktop described learning to do the "Charleston" as one of her best decisions in life. It brought her fame in Paris: "I have to give the Charleston the credit it deserves for launching me on my career as a saloonkeeper" (102). James Haskins wrote that she "became a celebrated Paris night club operator because she taught the British Duke of Windsor to do 'The Charleston'" (Haskins 45). Simply put, Haskins conveyed the fact that despite the hardships and obstacles Bricktop experienced throughout her life, she made it a priority to triumph over each one.

Bill Robinson: Dancing Past "Copacetic" Appearances

During Bill Robinson's lifetime, Black dancers were exploited and deprived of opportunities for advancement and recognition. Many White performers watched them and imitated their performances before segregated audiences (32). The very first portrayals of African Americans on screen portrayed them as dancers, but no one on stage was Black. Instead, Whites performed in Blackface.⁶ Only a few African Americans had the opportunity to appear in films. During the few times that Black performers were shown on screen, Whites enacted a "two-colored rule" which demanded that they perform in pairs (*Black Dance in America* 54). Bill Robinson was one of the pioneers of Black dance and usually portrayed himself on screen, but he was one of few Black dancers who had this opportunity.

Later known for his flawless tap dancing, Robinson at first did not believe he could make a decent living by dancing, but believed that "dance was just one of many ways to get pennies" (Haskins 35). In other words, he did what he needed to do to survive, but in the end was such a talented performer that he opened doors for African Americans which had previously been closed. On several occasions, Robinson used his talent as a way to show White audiences that he and other African American dancers were talented figures. By dancing, Robinson was able to show the humanity of Black people. Each time he accepted an award, he acknowledged others of his

⁶ Black face is the darkening of the face using burnt cork to portray Black individuals as "darkies"--a common stereotype in the Vaudeville era (31).

race as a way to help them "get their foot in the door" (Haskins 19). Sadly though, Robinson was not always seen as a vanguard.

Behind closed doors, Bill Robinson had numerous problems. These included a gambling problem, the possibility of imprisonment for a crime he did not commit, a belief by many in his community that he was an "Uncle Tom," and a state of poverty at the time of his death.⁷ Professor Haskins pointed out that Robinson had an optimistic "copacetic" attitude.⁸ Bill Robinson passed away long before the Haskins biography was published and Professor Haskins could have only discussed the positive qualities Robinson had, but he wanted to provide a rounded and more account to African American youth. As a result, Professor Haskins wrote about both the positive and negative aspects of Robinson's life...that which was copacetic and that which was far from it.

Katherine Dunham the Activist: No Dancing Around the Issues

The name Katherine Dunham is synonymous with dance. Although a vanguard of dance, she also studied anthropology, but was best known for the international fame she gained from choreographing and dancing in outstanding performances all over the world. Dunham not only shared her knowledge and understanding of dance with people worldwide, but also made it a point to learn dance interpretations from others (72). When asked about the depictions Hollywood made of people of color, Dunham once commented, "All they wanted was something colorful and exciting. They weren't concerned if it was real or not" (72). She, on the other hand, was precise about the aesthetic expressions of blackness. Dunham rejected the extreme color-consciousness of Hollywood, and explicitly refused to comply with its demand for lighter dancers, and she believes this attitude cost her a longer and more successful career in Hollywood (73).

Katherine Dunham's firm stance against representing phony depictions of Black dance gained her much respect. She not only challenged the ways that African Americans were portrayed, but also protested the fact that she and others had to perform before segregated audiences. In addition, Dunham filed and won discrimination lawsuits. As a result of one of her lawsuits, the American Theatre in Louisville Kentucky desegregated its facility (75). At the age of 58, Katherine Dunham was arrested when trying to help homeless youths. Her goal was to take them away from environments plagued by crime and destructiveness and instead provide them with a sense of discipline and self-pride (Haskins 10). At her studio, she once told her dancers that "dance isn't just ballet but the expression in movement of the traditions and cultures of people" (Haskins 10).

In his biography of Katherine Dunham, Professor Haskins discussed her remarkable accomplishments, the obstacles she overcame during her life, and the role that dancing played in helping her achieve her goals. Katherine Dunham performed on Broadway, appeared in film, and traveled to several countries, but she also grew up poor, lost her mother at the age of three, lived in several different households, and had a "color-conscious" family (some of her siblings were half White and could "pass" for White in public). Despite all of this, she was proud of her racial identity and made significant marks in history. She is often remembered solely for her achievement in dance, but James Haskins informs his readers of her success in fighting discrimination and activism for Black rights.

7 A term used to describe Black people who are humiliatingly subservient to White people (Zygmonski 2010).

8 A term he coined for meaning that everything was better than fine; dandy (*Black Dance in America* 54).

Lena Horne: The Beauty of Blackness

Because of her beauty, Lena Horne was booked for several shows before anyone knew she had talent. As a result, she gained more attention for her looks than for her singing and dancing...at first. Even when writers praised her performances in newspaper articles, they made a point to mention her “light-brown skin” (Berchhollywood 1). Lena Horne was made aware of her physical features from a very young age. The issues of colorism⁹ within the Black community is something that Professor Haskins discusses throughout his biography of her in an attempt to demonstrate the impact that color prejudice has on Black identity within the Black community. In African American communities, skin tone often led to various intra-racial prejudices. Lighter-skinned individuals have been placed on pedestals because of beliefs that they are more “beautiful” and sometimes more intelligent than darker-skinned individuals. During interviews, Lena Horne talked about her family's “prized Caucasian-like features” and how she many times received favoritism because of her light-skin and features (12). However despite her physical beauty, she had to work very hard to become a successful dancer and singer. Her looks may have helped her gain a place on stage, but her talent gained her notoriety.

Lena Horne could have passed for White, but she refused to. Instead she used her body and her racial identity to awaken the world to the beauty of blackness. James Haskins deals with the racism within the Black community and provides context to why ideas of blackness being associated with ugliness may be prevalent today. When discussing colorism, Professor Haskins straightforwardly discussed the negative images African Americans have of dark-skin and African features as a way to educate Black youth about the ignorance associated with this way of thinking.

Michael Jackson: It Doesn't Matter if He's Black or White

Michael Jackson was internationally known for his expertise in dance. Jackson was introduced to dance at an early age because his father wanted to develop a sense of cohesiveness in his family (11). In Jackson's large family, dancing and singing were the primary forms of entertainment because the children had few friends. Jackson's talent even among a large family of outstanding talent was no doubt in a class of its own. At a young age, he displayed an element of uniqueness that would set him apart from others for the rest of his life.

Professor Haskins highlighted the unique qualities that made Michael Jackson different from his peers. He discussed his fame and changing appearance over the years in order to help young people understand that Jackson was a remarkable, unique individual. Professor Haskins opens his biography of Michael Jackson with a quote from Steven Spielberg about him, “If E.T. hadn't come to Elliot, he would have come to Michael's house” (5). Haskins describes Michael Jackson's abnormal behaviors and actions in a positive light by explaining the fact that Jackson was an individual. This is interesting to note because Michael Jackson was portrayed as being “weird” and was later dubbed “Wacko Jacko” before his death. It is commonly known that Jackson had an obsession with his physical appearance which in turn caused him to alter it drastically and he engaged in childlike behaviors that even his staunchest fans could not understand (59). Although these things were evident about Michael Jackson, Professor Haskins pointed out that Jackson was a perfectionist in other ways as well, especially when it came to his dancing, singing, and wardrobe. Haskins argued that it was precisely Jackson's “weirdness” and his talent that made him a musical icon who was revered internationally. In short, his weaknesses were his strengths and vice versa. In Professor Haskins' portrayal, we find that although Michael

9 Colorism: assuming the importance of skin color--the lighter the better and more favoritism one would receive in society (12).

Jackson struggled with his own image, he helped lift the self-esteem of others by being a prominent figure in the Black community.

Conclusion: Dance and the Autobiographical Narrative--The Art of Professor Haskins' "Vocal Dance"

Art is visual. Dance, a form of art, is uniquely engaging. Dancing is one of the earliest forms of art many people are exposed to (Castaldi 2). In African American and other communities, dancing is engaged in beginning in infancy and is a central part of all stages of life. When describing the early use of dance by African Americans, James Haskins highlights its traditional and current role in religion, farming, births, deaths, weddings, and other ceremonies (Haskins 5). Moreover, the art of dance has a role in social identity: "Although it is of the body, dance is not just about the body, it is also about subjectivity-about how that body is positioned in the world as well as the ways in which that particular body responds to the world" (Albright 4). Therefore, dance is one of the best avenues for positively molding and shaping racial identity in youth.

According to Professor Haskins in his biographies of Ada B. Smith, Katherine Dunham, Bill Robinson, Lena Horne, and Michael Jackson, the art form of dance had a major role in their lives because it helped them gain fame and wealth, but it also was their survival mechanism. As importantly, Haskins wrote in ways that not only portrayed art, but that demonstrated his own commitment to the art of writing. James Haskins recognized the importance of role models for the success of Black youth. By writing about prominent individuals, he wrote about their successes and accomplishments, but also about the obstacles each of them faced. He felt that the best way to use their experiences to motivate Black youth was to reveal both the "grit" and the "glitter" of their lives. Professor Haskins' writing revealed holistic, and therefore realistic, portrayals of the lives of these individuals when he discussed their accomplishments, as well as their shortcomings. Young people can gain a sense of motivation when reading his writings because they can understand that individuals are not perfect. They can understand that everyone is imperfect in some way, but that all individuals can overcome any obstacles they encounter in life. Young people can also learn accurate, detailed and unbiased information about these individuals which is superior to the depth of information they would learn from the popular media.

Today's media continues to portray African Americans in a negative light. This can result in a diminished sense of racial identity in Black youth if they believe the negative images they are bombarded with. Throughout his writings, James Haskins provided counter images to the media's pessimistic illustration of blackness. Haskins once wrote, "Whoever I write about, I try very hard to make that person seem like a real person, with troubles as well as triumphs" (96).

Within the works of James Haskins, we are offered a glimpse of the way in which dance can bridge the gap in racial solidarity in ways that can positively impact inside and beyond Black communities. Writing about Katherine Dunham, Bill Robinson, Ada B. Smith, Lena Horne, and Michael Jackson, he gives us a blueprint of how to further reconstruct the image of the Black body. Professor Haskins used the art form of dance to portray icons in a humanistic light. Now, in the legacy of Professor Haskins, it is the responsibility of scholars to continue to publish research that can uplift the racial identity of Black children as they grow into adulthood.

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**“I am Black, I am a Woman, and Yes I am a Politician”:
Double Consciousness in Two of Haskins’ Political Biographies
Teshara Burton**

Of the hundreds of books James Haskins authored, twenty texts focused on African American women in careers ranging from actresses to writers and only two of these books are dedicated to Black women who became elected politicians. Those two women are Barbara Jordan and Shirley Chisholm. Barbara Jordan was the first Black woman to serve in the Texas state legislature, and the first Black Texan to serve in the United States Congress in the House of Representatives. Shirley Chisholm was the first Black woman elected into congress and the first Black woman to run for U.S. President within the Democratic party. Being an African American woman in America during the 20th century brought much scrutiny from American society. James Haskins made an effort through his writing to exhibit the lives of Black women in America who lived with a double consciousness in a positive and uplifting way. Although these two women were very different people, being Black women came with experiences of sexism and racism.

Citizenship and Black American Women’s Double Consciousness

The term double consciousness was introduced by W.E.B Du Bois in 1903. Du Bois believed that because Black Americans are caught between being Black and being American, Blacks have a disadvantage (Mhorter). Dr. Haskins further emphasized this point through his many writings. In his autobiographical sketch, he wrote:

“I was born in a society where Blacks were in big trouble if they forgot about the real world...we knew we had to lower our eyes, or walk across the street if we encountered a White person. We knew we couldn’t drink from the nearest fountain if we were thirsty, we knew we had to find a fountain that read “colored.” (91)

Though there are many limitations that Blacks have in life, higher education and politics were ways to rise above oppression--especially the oppression Black women faced. The double consciousness of being Black and a woman has been made a public issue for over a century, as evidenced by Maria Stewart in the 1830s. Maria Stewart is commonly recognized as the first Black woman to openly speak about balancing the struggles of sexism and racism at the same time. Though Du Bois coined this term to describe the condition of being Black in America, in this paper I am applying it to African American women, using his concept to address how both Shirley Chisholm and Barbara Jordan defined their similar experiences.

Barbara Jordan was aware of her double consciousness at a very early age. According Haskins’ book on *Barbara Jordan*, she knew that being Black meant she was going to be underestimated and that she had to work extra hard to prove herself. Further, she knew she was a woman and was therefore also considered secondary to men in private and in public life (13). Jordan recalled being told that she was “too big, too Black and too ugly” to ever accomplish her goals in life (8). She did not possess the stereotypically slim body of a White woman, her skin was not the color of “purity,” and her African nose and facial structure were not good enough to be considered beautiful. The person who said this to Barbara was implying that she would never have a man love her (which, in his eyes, all women needed) and that her race automatically counted her out of any possibility of success. This form of racism and sexism could have shattered Jordan and she could have believed it and given up, but she didn’t.

Shirley Chisholm had similar experiences. In school Chisholm remembers students being grouped by race and fighting each other. She understood early on that she was Black and a second-class citizen in America. Many experiences as a youth made Shirley develop an awareness of her oppression: thus, she developed a double consciousness. When asked by a White male professor if she would begin a career in politics, she replied, "Proffy, you forgot two things. I am Black and I am a woman" (*Shirley Chisholm* 61). The sad part about this double consciousness is that not only has it been instilled in the minds of Black women for centuries but, because of continuing sexist and racist challenges, it is being passed down.

According to an article published by *Louisiana Weekly*, major law firms tend to hire fewer women and minorities as attorneys. My career aspiration is to become a civil rights attorney. Fighting for justice for all people under the constitutional laws of the United States is a passion that I hold dear. Knowing the imbalance in the hiring rates for Blacks and lawyers has shown that there is still both racial and gender bias in the political arena. It is clear to me that the Black woman's double consciousness is real and exists to this day and investigating the lives of Jordan and Chisholm hold keys to unlocking secrets to overcome the challenges that lie ahead for me and others of my generation.

Conscious of Sexism

Patricia Hill Collins discusses Black women's double consciousness. In her book, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, she writes:

Placing African-American women and other excluded groups in the center of analysis opens up possibilities for a both/and conceptual stance, one in which all groups possess varying amounts of penalty and privilege in one historically created system. In this system, for example, White women are penalized by their gender but privileged by their race. Depending on the context, an individual may be an oppressor, a member of an oppressed group, or simultaneously oppressor and oppressed. (222)

Collins does not call her theory double consciousness as I have used it; she calls her theory "Black Feminist Thought." This theory is very similar except she speaks to the oppression of all minorities--not just Blacks. Collins writes about ways that White women are oppressed by their gender, as are gays and lesbians by heterosexism.

Growing up in America during the early 20th century, it was not uncommon for a mother to tell her daughter to stay in a "woman's place." For example, the *New York Times* published an article in 1933 about a woman who was advised by her parents to choose her husband over her college acceptance (Barnard). Though this may not seem like a huge deal to some people, for women of all racial backgrounds it has been a traditional handicap of sexism that has been handed down for generations.

Chisholm remembered her mother telling her a woman is supposed to do the housework and the man is supposed to do the outside labor (78). Barbara Jordan's mother felt the same way. In Haskins' biography of Jordan, he writes:

When Barbara confided her ambition to be a lawyer to her parents, she met mixed reactions. Arlyne Jordan was against the idea, for she did not think it was the right thing for a girl to do. Her other two daughters had pursued careers proper for women. They would marry and lead a secure, Black middle-class existence. Law was a profession for men: she was not sure her youngest daughter could make it as a lawyer. (17)

Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander was the first African American woman to be accepted by the Pennsylvania Bar Association (Epperson 2). Not only did she live with being Black in predominately White institutions, but she was

mistreated more because she was a woman: her colleagues felt that she should be in the field of nursing or in the home. Alexander was certainly a trailblazer for her race, and her gender as well.

Feminist political philosophy grew significantly between the 1840s and 1920s. The first wave of feminism gave this philosophy wider recognition. By the time second wave of feminism came around, this philosophy of women's public power gained strength. During the first wave of feminism, this term was coined to get political attention on feminist needs (McAfee). Women were being denied legal rights and were not being seen as equals in the eyes of the law. Thanks to the feminist movement and other factors, women were granted the right to vote through the U.S. Constitution's 19th Amendment. The second wave of feminism during the 1960s gave women a greater voice in politics. The purpose of the second movement was to elect female officials and grant women more rights as equal citizens: the rights of representation. This philosophy along with many other factors helped both Barbara Jordan and Shirley Chisholm be seen as human beings rather than as gendered second-class citizens who were disenfranchised in the political world.

James Haskins wrote about the second wave of feminism in Shirley Chisholm's biography, saying she won her election by the votes of women, "some poor and some even middle class" (121). Chisholm explained that her community service for women in domestic jobs and child care expressed her true character more than being a politician did. Women greatly respected Chisholm (73). Once, a woman came to Chisholm's door with a handful of coins and bills as an offering of support. Chisholm knew right away that the women in the community supported her and felt they needed a voice. So in her campaign, she pulled the "gender card," as Haskins points out. Chisholm began to make her campaign all about the rights of women and poor Blacks. She knew the poor Blacks would vote for her, but she also played up the importance of her gender. Haskins cites Chisholm saying, "Not only am I the best candidate, but according to Farmer I am a woman, but you are a woman also, let's show Farmer that woman power can beat him" (126). By using gender as a strength, she won over 75 percent of female votes, Black votes, but also Hispanic votes: she spoke Spanish and appealed to the Hispanic population on the basis that she was a minority like they were and used language as a way to connect.

During her election for Congress she expressed how James Farmer, the founder of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), moved up north just so he could run for the open U.S Congress seat (120). Chisholm admitted that she was intimidated because he was a Black man and was supported by many organizations because of his gender. Thus, Chisholm was not always as confident as Haskins portrayed her throughout his book. Despite her strengths, she constantly had to fight sexism. A book titled *Legislative Women: Getting Elected, Getting Ahead* discusses the positioning of women from campaigning to fundraising, up until they are seated in office, and examines exactly how gender matters, why it is a major factor and state, "this book brings a new depth to the study of women in politics" (Reingold 131).

Some may argue that sexism no longer exists, but according to 21st century sex discrimination statues, it does. For example, Wal-Mart, a major retailer has been accused of discriminating against women in pay and promotions. This was the largest sex-discrimination case in the Supreme Court's history and it happened in this decade (Lapidus). Because this is recent, this adds credibility to the argument that sexism is a major problem still in America: Jordan's and Chisholm's fights are still ongoing.

Consciousness of Racism and the Struggles of the Civil Rights Movement

According to the *Harvard Black Letter Law Journal*, Critical Race Theory came about as "the United States began limiting and eviscerating precedents that once promised African Americans equal opportunity under the law" (Jones). This theory was being used by African Americans who felt the Civil Rights Movement was

not complete because though the rights had been promised, during the 1970s and 1980s there was still only slow progression for African American communities. "From the Front Lines of the Movement for Environmental Justice," is a recent article relevant to the current discussion of critical race theory and demonstrates broad-based relevance. Going back to the days of the race riots and Civil Rights Movement in the United States, this article explores the progress made by African American attorneys (22). This article shows that though the numbers of Black lawyers and lawyers against racist laws are not as large as we would like them to be, they have come a very long way and are branching out to fight against racism in many areas.

In Barbara Jordan's biography, Haskins reveals a pioneer in Black legal struggles. He explores some instances of the oppression African Americans have suffered as citizens in the "land of the free." One of Jordan's most famously repeated quotes in the book was "We the people." She said this when she wanted to make a point that African Americans were not being considered in the WE portion. She wrote:

We the people--it is a very eloquent beginning. But when the constitution of the United States was written on the 17th day of September 1787, I was not included in that "We, the people". I felt for many years of my life that maybe Alexander Hamilton and George Washington just left me out by mistake.... (Barbara Jordan)

Unlike Shirley Chisholm, Barbara Jordan grew up in the southern region of the United States, so she would have experienced much more overt racial prejudices than an African American from the north. This is why many Blacks migrated north for more rights and freedoms. James Haskins writes about his own experiences growing up in the South. He wrote: "southern Blacks didn't have many rights...there were no Black hospitals and White hospitals had inadequate areas for Blacks" (Haskins "Something about the Author"). Having these experiences, he made sure to highlight the place of regional racism in the story of her fight for political justice.

According to James Haskins' autobiography, the Civil Rights Movement was supposed to change the way minorities were treated in America (92). Haskins believed that though everything did not change swiftly, the United States took a giant step towards equality for all. In Shirley Chisholm's Biography, Haskins wrote:

The Civil Rights Movement quietly began in 1954 when the U.S Supreme Court outlawed desegregated schools. It gained momentum when MLK led a successful Black boycott that desegregated buses in Montgomery, Alabama, and his founding of (SCLC) the southern Christian leadership conference to stop discrimination across all the cities in the south...the freedom rides, and Black college students who were starting counter sit-ins to desegregate restaurants...violent coordinating committee all played a major role in the Civil Rights Movement. (86)

At Alabama State College, Haskins reflected on his experiences as a student activist during the Civil Rights Movement. He explains how because the college was very conservative he was arrested for participating in lunch counter sit-ins to integrate all White restaurants close to the campus ("Something about the Author" 95).

Many scholars like James Haskins believe that the Civil Rights movement helped college campuses flourish around America and that Black college students helped Blacks as well as women be seen as equals. Political activism in the 20th century played a major role in the way women and Blacks would be treated on college campuses. Student activism was not important for some aspects of culture, but it was important for the lives of students in general (105). Recent books document how the Civil Rights Movement was partially fueled by Black students in high school and college (Franklin 106).

In Shirley Chisholm's' biography, Haskins wrote that he believed the Civil Rights movement and the race riots were successful in grabbing the attention of the White Supremacy called "America"; this article titled

"Paying for the past? The movement for reparations for African-Americans explores the then and now effect of African Americans in the political arena. Exploring how African Americans came a long way but still have far to go. The writer has predicted that African Americans are going to go even further in next decade or so (Torpe 171-187).

Growing up, Barbara Jordan did not believe in the slogan "We the people," because she felt she and her race had been left out. Jordan recalls gaining her faith back a little when in the *Brown v. Board* case, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Brown. After this ruling she thought she could conquer the world because it was now her constitutional right to go to one of the best integrated law schools and be seen as an equal pupil. Jordan was in for a rude awakening. She dreamed of attending Harvard because it was said to be the best law school. She applied, and she was denied. Jordan wrote: "It wasn't because I was a woman, they had already graduated their first woman, it wasn't because I was Black, it was because I was both and because of the fact that I had attended a segregated school and an all-Black southern college" (*Barbara Jordan* 26). Her credentials were not seen as good enough. However, in her famous Constitution Speech of 1974, she wrote: "through the process of amendment, interpretation, and court decisions, I have finally been included in "We, the people." For Barbara Jordan was now a member of the United States Congress.

James Haskins reflected on the Jim Crow laws that were still intense in the South even after there were supposed to be laws in place to ensure safety and equality for all citizens. Lawyers later in life sometimes become politicians to change the laws which they do not agree with; Barbara Jordan became a politician because of these same ideas. In Shirley Chisholm's biography, Haskins writes about how upset she became when she learned about "re-districting." The term refers to use of census figures on ethnicity and gender to determine how to reshape the district lines so they could have a better chance at winning elections (105). The few sources I found featuring the stories of Black female lawyers record the many obstacles they faced (McDaniel 3). This gave me a sense of how hard it was to be a Black woman trying to be an attorney. It is discouraging to note that both gender and race have hindered someone who otherwise has the intelligence to succeed, but today as much as ever, both education and political participation are the way out.

Conclusion: Education, Citizenship and Double Consciousness in the James Haskins Tradition

Black women seeking to hold political office or positions of legal power have been routinely blocked and discriminated against, beginning with the first attempts in 1872 of Black women who wished to become lawyers and continued through the 1950s. Experiencing double discrimination that resulted in a double consciousness of being Black and a woman forced them to fight even harder, and consequently made them stronger and better attorneys overall, resulting in lawyers like Constance Baker Motley (McDaniel 4). Researchers speak about the fight Black female lawyers had to face during a time in America where law was not a field Blacks should enter. For example, Hines writes, "Baker attended integrated schools and experienced episodic racism, including being refused admission to a local beach and roller skating rink. During her high school years Baker developed a strong racial consciousness" (549).

In the 1900s, Black children were not entitled to a proper education. A proper education would mean new school books, working science labs, gym equipment for physical education classes, and an equal opportunity to go to college. During the 1950s, there were many riots and struggles that prevented Black and White schools from integrating. These events were vividly described in a book titled *Brown v. Board of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone and Its Troubled Legacy*. This book discussed the mistreatment of African American students striving for an education, highlighting the African American politicians who fought for their

equal liberties. The author described the integration of Central High school: Taunts of the word “Nigger” and chants like, “two, four, six, eight, we don’t want to integrate” were used as tactics to scare and dismay parents and Black students from integrating (Patterson 225).

A *New York Times* article written in 1957 discusses the tension between the protesters at Central High school in Little Rock during the first few days of integration. The reporter says there were hundreds of people sweating and lined up in the sun-- supporters and protesters. He also reports that both sides were mixed in race (Fowle). Due to integration, there were many mob activities and much confusion. Haskins also wrote about these days as a student at Alabama State (“Something about the Author”).

According to a survey taken in 2005 by the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, “Black student graduation rates remain low, but are moderately slow.” The statistics also show how the differences in school ranking play a major role on the graduation rates. James Haskins mentions his struggles to gain access to books from the public library in his home town Demopolis. Haskins explains that it was against the law for Blacks to enter a public library (“Something about the Author”). Blacks were limited to the amount of education they could obtain, especially the education of Black history. During an interview, Haskins said “In school you are not supposed to teach Black history” (Haskins, *Interview*). Haskins’ inspiration for writing the biographies of successful African Americans is the simple fact that as a child he could not access books that showed the success stories of Blacks. Haskins went as far to write “the only thing they taught us was Blacks were slaves.” He also says he became a teacher and a writer because he knew that Blacks couldn’t always access the books because of the segregation within the publishing companies (“Something about the Author” 93).

In 1978, Mary Cassata wrote an article in the *Journal for Black Studies* about the same sort of publishing segregation in college libraries. Featured in the article, Ann Allen Shockley called the method of keeping Black books off the shelves in 1974 “gate keeping.” Shockley argued this is a central problem for African Americans. As Cassata expressed, it is important for Blacks to be able to study research on their own history so they will be able to see their situation more clearly. According to the managing editor Herb Boyd, from the *Black World Today* magazine, “Young Black readers have not had a more trusted guide to their culture and history than James Haskins.” Though Haskins wrote his first books about Black history in the 1970s, the first attempt to write about Black history was in 1836 (Palmer 4). Haskins wrote over one hundred of books on African American history, and part of his focus was on how Black studies could change the lives of aspiring African American students.

Between the years of 1968-1971, African American studies programs flourished rapidly throughout the nation (Brossard). The first Black studies program started at San Francisco State College in 1968 (Palmer 7). The University of Florida started its Black studies program in 1969, which was interesting because their first African American to graduate from the University’s law school was George Allen in 1962 (University of Florida’s Program History). The University of Florida’s African American Studies Program has indeed come a long way, but has a long way to go to keep educating the campus and community about ongoing racism and sexism.

African American studies is a fight for justice in higher education in the same way that political and social justice fights have been taken on by activists like Jordan and Chisholm. Both Barbara Jordan and Shirley Chisholm played a major role in reforming race and gender limitations in the political arena. Haskins illustrates how both of these women added their own unique ingredient to the House of Representatives, and African American history as a whole. Beyond demonstrating the injustice of racism and sexism Chisholm and Jordan experienced, James Haskins showed how both women navigated their experience of double consciousness in American politics. According to reviews, Haskins has contributed a unique way to educate the youth of America

about the history of successful African Americans. According to Leona Mattison from Children's Media, Puget Sound Council in Seattle, "Barbara Jordan is honestly portrayed. Her success story is an excellent addition to the achievements of both women and Blacks. She is industrious, intelligent and should serve as an inspiration to any young person interested in politics." In addition, *Publishers Weekly* called *Fighting Shirley Chisholm*, "a well-researched biography of a brave woman...the woman who became the first Black Congresswoman and the first Black woman to run for the [U.S] Presidency."

Through his publications, Haskins shed light on some of the lesser-known success stories of Black Americans. Haskins detailed the struggles and high points of Chisholm's and Jordan's lives, which serve as an inspiration to the next generation of young Black politicians and lawyers-to-be. The book about Shirley Chisholm received an award for best children's book. Eddie Five Gates wrote, "[James Haskins] who wrote on Shirley Chisholm's rise from house wife to first Black Congresswoman in the House of Representatives, gives an absorbing story of transformation of [Barbara Jordan] the young "ugly duckling" into one of the foremost women in the 1970s." Through the works of James Haskins, the lives of these women have been revived as role models, educators, politicians, and legends. While addressing the issues of sexism and racism that these women have experienced throughout their lives, Haskins himself has made a noteworthy contribution to both women's history and African American history.

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