



Reading Is  
Fundamental

**Reading Is Fundamental  
Multicultural Literature Celebration and Panel Discussion**

**February 8, 2012  
Library of Congress Young Readers Center  
Thomas Jefferson Building, Room LJ G29**

**EVENT TRANSCRIPT**

**Part 1 of 5**

**Watch the video at <http://youtu.be/M-jFHiJeHJA>**

[MUSIC]

John Cole: Well, welcome to the Library of Congress. I'm John Cole. I'm the director of The Center for the Book in the Library of Congress, and I'm also a historian of the Library of Congress. So I am going to say a word about the historic significance of the place in which we sit, and are having this wonderful program today.

The Library of Congress itself is an appropriate place for a presentation of multicultural book and talking in multicultural ways. This is the largest library in the world, and we're fortunate enough to have some congressional support to make us into a world library. And we're one of the few libraries that collect in all languages, in all formats, and are very pleased to be able to have multiformat materials. As a matter of fact, Daniel Boorstein who was the librarian of congress a number of years ago, who actually created The Center for the Book, called this place a multimedia encyclopedia. And today we can add multicultural, multimedia encyclopedia to the description.

I hope if you've never been here before that when the program is over, you will take a look upstairs at the Great Hall and get to know this wonderful structure. This building was opened in 1897. We now have two other large buildings on this campus, on Capital Hill, plus annexes in other places. Above all, we are a collection of educational materials. There are about a hundred and sixty million items in our collections of which around thirty million are books. And of the thirty million, of course, there are many specialized collections.

There are also about twenty reading rooms in the Library of Congress. This is a special place for young readers. It's not an official reading room; it's better than an official reading room. It's a program space for people or kids sixteen and under as long as they are accompanied by an adult or have an escort. This is revolutionary for the Library of Congress. We have only been open for two years. The decision was made by my boss, Dr. James Billington, the librarian of Congress that the Library of Congress needed to open itself up in ways we had never done so. In our other twenty reading rooms, you need to be sixteen or older to get a readers card. In this day and age, everyone felt that it was ridiculous for the Library of Congress *not* to pay attention to young readers, and it was Dr. Billington's initiative that brought us here today.

I hope you had a chance to look at all three of these rooms. I think we will by the time we have finished the program. The Young Reader's Center is administered by The Center for the Book, and Jane Gilchrist [PH] who is the head of The Young Reader's Center is over here. Jane is our welcoming presence and we're very pleased that she is able to help us with The Young Reader's

Center. We also have a variety of volunteers, interns, and students, and we have reading promotion partners, such as Reading is Fundamental that are part of this network. The final word about our networks, and then I will be quite, and start the program. We really exist through two national networks. There are state centers for The Book in all the states, plus DC, and the Virgin Islands. And guess who had to go to the Virgin Islands to open it up?

Unidentified Male: Ah! [LAUGH] poor man. We pay him.

All: [LAUGH]

John Cole: They all work at the local levels to promote writers, and writing, and books, and literacy, and reading. We have eighty organizations, nonprofit or government organizations including Reading is Fundamental that we work with in both programming and partnership ways to try to do what we can together to stimulate reading and literacy for people of all ages. So, it's – RIF has been a partner since the very beginning of The Center for the Book in 1977. I may say a word about that later, but now to move into our program and I want to make certain it \_\_\_\_\_ [00:04:38] Judy Cheatham who is the vice president of Literacy Services in RIF who is going to introduce the program and get us started in what is a unique program that is going to substantially contribute to the mission of both the Center of the Book, The Young Reader's Center, and the Library of Congress. We love books. We love RIF. Judy, it's yours. Thank you.

All: [APPLAUSE]

Judy Cheatham: Thank you John. We are delighted to be here at Reading is Fundamental with our old friends and our new friends, and this amazing panel. We found out we had this opportunity about three weeks ago, and we've got the best in the fields all across the board, and everybody did this just for us. Dr. Brushak [PH] said he had two days between now and the end of the year, and he loved RIF so much that he would come and see us. So, I want to introduce you to Dr. Harris, Dr. Brushak, Liz Lopez, and Mr. Meyers [PH]. If you want to read about them, unless you're hiding under a rock, you already know about them, but here is a brief introduction and you'll have the opportunity after we finish our discussion to have them sign your books. We have a copy of each of their books for you, and they have graciously agreed during our reception to have a book signing for us. So that will be wonderful.

Now let's get to the program, and what a timely program it is. We are going to start – we've asked Dr. Harris, Violet if she would come set the stage for us. Anything that happens culturally or educationally, or socially, always has a philosophical base, a social/emotional affective base, and for those of us who teach then pedagogical implications. So we've asked Dr. Harris if she would kind of give us a little framework.

Dr. Harris: Okay that's a big chore, especially for me because I tend to go off on tangents and will remember books and people and times associated with those books. But we're at a point in our lives in this society when it is quite important for us to treasure and value the book, whether that book is in digital format or print format, it is vitally important that we make that literature available for children. I'm of the belief, and I'm sure many of us here are of the belief that having that literature is as vital to us as breathing, or eating, or drinking water.

And that something in our lives is lacking if we don't have literature in our lives, or art, and music, and many other disciplines as well. But we're especially lacking in that literature that we label multicultural, and we have to thank, the late, Dr. Nancy Larik [PH] who nearly sixty seven years ago published an article, and she wasn't the first to push for this literature by any means. There were people who came prior to her. In Washington DC, you had Dr. Carter G Woodson [PH] who

had the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, who published books in the 1920s. You had Dr. W.E.B Du Bois [PH] publishing books in the 1920s, and you had Wigwam [PH] Journal in the 1800's with Native Americans, and \_\_\_\_\_ [00:08:17] New York City pushing for the literature.

So lots of people were engaged in this work, but she captured the imagination of the American public at a critical time in 1965, in the Saturday [PH] Post when she published the "All White World of Children's Books." Think about that, in 1965 how critical was that time period, and for that article to appear in the Saturday Post. And it had a tremendous effect in that there was a great deal of soul searching going on. How can we say to the rest of the world that you need to model yourselves after us, in our educational systems, our political systems, our economic systems and so forth, when you disenfranchise a significant portion of your citizenry? So, that article sparked a lot of self reflection among teachers, librarians, writers, illustrators, publishers. You had groups that were formed, and you also had some significant changes occurring. More authors were being published. *Christopher's Father* won one of the contests sponsored by one of the organizations that was created in the 1960s by The Council of Interracial Books for Youth, and that's an important element to know.

There has always been individuals of varying cultures, languages, ethnicity, races, etcetera, coming together to ensure the children have access to the literature. And it has been that important, but I want to emphasize to us, it is a fight that goes constantly on. Each generation or even every couple of years or so, your father wrote an article, two steps forward, one step back to indicate what was occurring at the publishing. Joseph was sharing that his books are going out of print with one of the publishing companies. Bilingual books are under fire across the country. So, we need to have these books available for children. Not just the children who are \_\_\_\_\_ [00:10:25], and whose stories are told in those books, but for every child.

How can you have The American Literature with significant portions of people who contribute to that literature not included, and that everyone else does not read it? I could no more not read Cinderella that I could not read Ya Chen, which is like our oldest variance of Cinderella that we have, and knowing that that is a universal fairy tale, that will sometimes have males. That will not always have a glass slipper, but fruit [PH] and occasionally some other elements attached to it. It is very important for children to know. The literature should be used as we use any literature, primarily because it entertains; it engages the reader intellectually, emotionally, esthetically.

Think about the language that you find in books. Think about the art that you find in books. Think about the phrase that you find in a text that stays with you forever and ever. Imagine children not having that, because the author is African-American or Latina, or the author is \_\_\_\_\_ [00:11:36], and so on. So, you can not exclude the literature from them, because any literature has the possibility of affecting a child in a myriad of ways. I'm being very pragmatic, because we also have to show to demonstrate the value of literature. It's not enough to say that literature is great for children anymore. That argument doesn't hold water in an era of palatability and testing. So we have to point out these quiet pragmatic aspects of it, and one of those pragmatic aspects that I'd like to point out is that exposing children to a variety of written and artistic modes increases their vocabulary, increases and improves their reading comprehension skills, provides them with models of oral and written language.

I, for example learned the use of semicolons, not from a teacher drilling me on it, but looking at how they were used in language. And what I'll leave you with, because she's giving me the sign. \_\_\_\_\_ [00:12:40]

All: [LAUGH]

Dr. Harris: I mean, I could go on, is that I have seen this literature, year-after-year, week-after-week transform readers. That's what we want literature to do is to transform readers, and it does transform them. Can you imagine – at one point a couple of months I had young men come into my office during office hours to talk about their programs and things of that sort, and these were young African-American males who are in our Bachelorette Programs. And they would leave out of my office sometimes crying. So I finally had to go out to the people in the outer room saying, I'm not doing anything to make these guys cry. I'm just simply showing them books, and when you have people who can look at a work of literature, and cry, because they can – never seen anything so beautiful before, or because they'd never seen a book like this before in their entire experience growing up, that's transformative, but shows how much we have yet to do in terms of making this literature available to all children.

In case you were wondering what book was that they had to read, people read in my office, crying, but also being proud, and wanting to go out, and purchase it, it was Kadir Nelson's *We are the Ship*, and they were just mesmerized by that particular book. One young man, he literally would pick it up, and hold it like this, and was talking about his program then he would start looking inside, and just let him go on, and do that, and he'd just pick write back up about our discussion about his program. And I finally had to say, you know, you really have to leave my book, because I'm going to be using it in class this week. So you can't take it with you, but he ordered it, and each of those young men in my – in that classroom, ordered those books.

But also I can give you other examples of the ways in which not having this literature is affecting so many of our students. We use two books with my undergraduate students, and many of these young women are from middle to upper middle class families, from the suburbs of Chicago primarily, and they're in training to become teachers. And they're going to work with a student population that in about ten years will be majority Latino and African-American, but the teaching population will still be majority of young white women. And we had \_\_\_\_\_ [00:15:03], because I wanted to give them an understanding of literature in its broadest sense. So, we read *Day of Tears*, by Julius Lester which was about the largest slave auction in The U.S., and also *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet*, and of those sixty plus young men and women in that classroom, I would say only about fifteen percent knew about the events depicted in those two books.

In their American History courses throughout their schooling, they were not told about those events. The two iconic events that they're often told about slavery's glossed over, completely. The two iconic events that they're often told about are Rosa Parks, and Martin Luther King. They don't have other historical events. They don't see history as an ongoing process in which they two are engaged, and which multiple people have participated. And to me, that signals that in the Twenty-first Century we still have a lot of work to do to ensure that our children know the history of this country. Not a selective history, but history of everyone who's contributed to the making of this country, so that we don't have mistakes [PH] with the state of Virginia publishing a textbook which states that a significant number of slaves walked with the confederacy; so that we don't have the textbooks not mentioning Angle Island, so that we don't have textbooks mentioning *Day of Tears*. So that we don't have textbooks not mentioning *The Trail of Tears*, so that we don't have textbooks from which Law versus Little is not mentioned. So that people do not only associate immigration issues with Latinos, that they know it started by a Chinese family who could either be classified as Spanish or White or Black.

We need to know that if we're going to know who we are as a people, and where we're going to go as a people. And by the way, the woman who wrote that history textbook for Virginia, she got her information off the internet. [LAUGH] And just as we now have a serious issue of Arizona in which the books were taken off the shelves in classrooms recently, because Arizona has decreed that

they no longer want mixed studies [PH], but they didn't say all of mixed studies. They singled out particular groups. So, what is it about these books that some people find so transformative, and other people find flawed [PH]. And we need to allow children an opportunity to engage with these texts, so that they can develop the critical thinking skills that are needed in order to make judgements on their own, without resorting to dogma of any kind. Even in my home, I'm tempted to bring to my classroom soap box, so they'll say, I'm on my soapbox now. So, you can take it for what it is.

But one soap box that I will always be on is the idea that literature is vital to children, and that they need to have exposure to all kinds of literature. And I've even gone so far in my own teaching and my own classroom is to say, they need, and I need to have exposure to literature \_\_\_\_\_ [00:18:44] languages. So we're fortunate now, that I can now get – in middle school, and that's sold in picture books that are bilingual about the libre, the fighters, and wrestling. So, that's one \_\_\_\_\_ [00:19:00] important this year, and you know it right? That's going to be quite an important book to share in the community with kids who are interested in that form of entertainment. And it's bilingual, and its middle school and it's a broadly distributed book available by a major publisher.

So, even pushing myself to make that stance that there's a need for me too to acquire a syllabi in other languages, and to read that literature as well, that's the next frontier, and so, this is a fight, and it is a fight, because Walter wrote several decades ago two steps forward, one step back. And so, we need to continue to make this literature available to all children.

[End of Audio]

## Part 2 of 5

Watch the video at <http://youtu.be/fpXGF0tYHDl>

Moderator: . . . well and really so pleased through the film of Macy's actually. We are so pleased that this year we have 45 books in the multi-cultural collection. And we have been putting together a multi-cultural collection since 2007. Macy's has helped us with that. These are actually books as you see them. And one of them, the *I Love Saturdays y domingos*, my own students who are teaching have told me in their \_\_\_\_\_ [00:00:35] classes that when they use the books and they start with *I Love Saturdays y domingos*, their own children perk up because they recognize Sunday. This year, in addition to the 45 books, we have teaching materials for parents, for community based organizations, and for educators. And so if you are any of those three, those will be added to the website and they are totally free. They are all in PDF files, so you can download them. They are beautiful. They have been designed, and they actually followed the common four standards. If you are a teacher, you need that.

Well, Joe, speaking of censorship, so you, your book is one of those that has been taken off the shelves in the Arizona schools; multi-cultural, the whole topic is a very hot one right this minute. How do we answer people who say that multi-cultural literature is inferior, that it takes the place of the western cannon of the literature from Greece, and from Rome, and from England? What do we say to critics like that?

Dr. Joseph Bruchac: Keetah [ph], keetah means listen in the Abenaki language. The Creator gave us, every one of us two ears and only one mouth. We are supposed to listen twice as much as we talk. And we are supposed to remember because those ears are on either side of our head; we can always hear at least two sides of every story. If you hear only one side, you are half-deaf. And it is also true that in literature, just as in music, in storytelling, we and our children look to see ourselves, but also to see others, to experience other lives and experience our own. If the child cannot find herself or himself in a picture book, what image does that child have of herself or himself? When I grew up, there were no really good books that dealt with native people that dealt with American Indians, just as there were also no really good books that dealt with African Americans or Asian Americans. Oh yeah, we had *Little Black Sambo*. We had the five, or six or seven Chinese brothers, who knows how many there were. We had caricatures. We had pictures which were not realistic. And it is only when people begin to write about their own communities from their own experience that we begin to have the children's literature that truly reflects those realities.

That is not to say that you have to be from one of those communities to write well about that community. If you are willing to really listen and really look, and learn over a long period of time you may be able to do that. But to have a literature that is dominated by people who come from one perspective means that you are always going to see a narrow, tunnel vision of life itself.

Our children do not live in the classroom, they live in the world. And this world we live in is a great circle. Like the breath that went through this flute and came out as song, it is shared by all of us. It is heard by all of us. Each of us in that circle has a perspective that is different from everyone else's. But we can all see the center. And if we look forward, we also can all see each other's faces in that circle. That is what literature does for us. It helps us see each other. It helps us hear each other's words, recognize each other's faces. See ourselves in others, but also see that everyone is not us. Which is one of the dangers of limiting literature, of limiting life.

You know, kids learn by hearing. They learn by reading. If you want a young man, it is almost always a young man, who does not read well to become a better reader, all you have to do is read

to him from books regularly. That is all you have to do. Every level of reading increases it. Every ability increases, except for spelling. That is how it works.

A good friend of mine is John Cheska [sp], and John and I talk a lot about the whole questions of guys who read and finding literature and finding material that will encourage people to become better readers. All of the things we are trying to improve in our schools by testing can better be done in other ways. Everyone who knows anything about brain development, for example, knows that if you have ability in music and you increase your musical ability, your mathematical skills increase. It is directly related. Everyone who knows anything about history realizes that we learn history better when it is told in a story, rather than in numbers and names that are memorized out of context.

What better stories do we have than a story that brings to life a time, a place and a people in a memorable children's book. I became a write for my own children. I told stories first to my kids and then began to write them down. And so my children turned me into a children's writer. And when I write, I always keep in mind that kid I was who never saw himself, poor, mixed blood, in a book. I never saw myself in a book, although I saw lots of other people and learned from them, and also still loved them. I mean, I read every now, every three or four years I re-read *The Jungle Book*, which is a very interesting cross-cultural story, I might add. Kipling had something there about being raised by wolves and being a poor Indian child who has been deserted by his own culture.

We as human beings need each other, we need each other. There is a tradition within the Abenaki culture, and by the way, I think that bilingualism, trilingualism, multilingualism is deeply important. Whenever I write a book about any other cultural group, I spend a long time learning everything I can about that language and about those cultures, and from the people themselves, not just from the internet. The internet is, I think Dickens would say, is an idiot. It has no mind. It's true, it doesn't have a mind. It only has the input of people who don't know often what they are talking about.

And so when you hear other people, when you hear other languages, you hear the world and see the world in a different way. I know just today, we were riding over with the guy who drove us over, the van was from Togo. I lived in West Africa for a few years, and so we were talking back and forth in Ewé. I sang him a song I learned in Ghana many years ago. You know, when you hear someone else's music, you also hear who they are.

And you know, American music is more complicated than we, than a lot of people think it is. I just want to mention one ethnic writer, who is a very good friend of mine, Frank Chin, an incredible playwright. Frank also does country/western music. And we were sitting around playing music together. And he said, "You know, people have said I sound like Charlie Pride. And Charlie Pride is the black Hank Williams. And so I guess that makes me the yellow, black Hank Williams." That is Frank Chin for you.

And so I wanted to share with you very briefly, to have you hear another language. This is a book of poetry by myself and my son, Jessie, called *Two Rivers* (speaks in Abenak language). Abenak is one of the Algonquian languages of the northeast, very similar to the Powhatan language of our region here. A lot of their words are very much alike and Jessie has been teaching the Abenaki language for over 15 years. And we have been writing things in the language together for a few years and doing a few small publications. This is called *The Wind Eagle*. I will do it for you first in the Abenaki language. The wind eagle gives breath to the earth, that breath which we all share, that breath which we all share.

Moderator: Well, it is too bad we are so afraid of languages. You know, the great news writer, at the beginning of the 1900s said that if English were good enough for Jesus Christ, it was good

enough for us. That was \_\_\_\_\_ [00:10:59]. He was, had come back from a world tour, said he could not – and remember now, I tell this now, it is nothing if you don't get that satire, but he said if English was good enough Jesus Christ, it was good enough for us.

[End of audio]

### Part 3 of 5

Watch the video at [http://youtu.be/a8tf\\_oEr3jQ](http://youtu.be/a8tf_oEr3jQ)

Moderator: So Christopher, would you like to expand upon the whole issue of the Western Canon?

Christopher Myers: I did not bring a flute. [Laughter]

Joseph: You have done other things in the past, Chris.

Christopher Myers: Recently, my pop, they named him the Ambassador of, Tutor of like Literature, Youth. We were taking it very seriously. So he calls me up and he says alright, so what do we need to do to fix literacy in America? That is a problem. And then he left me a message one time and then called me back in about three hours and was like have you done it yet? And I am like I am working on it, I am working on it.

Strangely – and I think that this is one of the keys to this conversation – since he has been doing this, he has been doing a lot of interviews, he has also gotten a lot of pushback. A lot of pushback. And I think that part of what we are thinking about here, what we are discussing, is the idea of pushback. Because when we discuss the idea of multicultural literature, who here... I mean, we are probably fairly in a room of like-minded individuals and everyone nods and everyone, we all self congratulate. It is like we are very multicultural, we do love literature, don't we? [Laughter] And we do that. And it is good to be in a room of like-minded individuals.

But I think that we need to start to really address the fact that there is pushback. We need to address the fact that there is this undercurrent. And we need to understand what this undercurrent is from their point of view. Joseph talked about the idea of listening to both sides of the story. We need to ask what is this pushback.

So we have reached this new age of euphemism and this age of speaking, we speak underneath our speech, right? So we hear phrases like the welfare president. And when you hear women being described, you hear them being described by this outfit or that outfit and you realize there is a euphemism here. There is an understanding that what we are doing is – in the example of speaking of women, especially women politicians – we are putting these women politicians in their place with that sort of language. And you see this so often and it is quite disturbing.

As authors, we all have opportunity as educators and people who care about reading and literature to change this national conversation. To say I really do care about America, for example. This is why I want to understand our literary history, why I want to understand us as a literary people. We are one of the only countries in the world that is founded in declaration. We are founded on words – those words part of who were borrowed from the Iroquois confederacy. But that is important to understand, that our words do not come from nowhere. We share as a heritage both John Locke and the Iroquois confederacy. We share as a heritage the philosophers of Europe, the philosophers that came afterward, philosophers who were steeped in the Arab world. When we look at, for example, the libraries of a lot of our founding fathers, they had work in Arabic because that was a classical language. We understand that a lot of our Greek philosophers are folks that had other names but then become Latinized – [indiscernible] for example, these sorts of folks.

So that is the first thing – this idea of understanding ourselves as a literary people and as literary people then, the other part of the pushback is people say oftentimes that we should be reading classics. I am a huge fan of classics. I feel like so often, we are put on this dichotomy, this

[indiscernible] dualism, right? Where it is classics on one side and I do not know what they imagine is on the other side. Probably several songs by Lil Wayne [Laughter]... That is what was on the other side of the classics. As if it was a choice between Ovid and [indiscernible].

But as somebody who studied the classics, spent three years studying Latin, several other years studying other things, I am fascinated with the idea of the classics themselves of multicultural literature. To understand that Aeneas and Dido got together and Dido was from Carthage, and Carthage was in North Africa. And to understand ourselves in this sort of... Like we can take in this argument, this euphemistic argument, this double speak argument about classics and American-ness. And because we are armed with the tools of literacy, because we are readers, because we really do know our stuff, we can say I very much believe in classics. I very much believe in Ovid. I very much believe in understanding these things. And I also believe in telling stories. I understand that Ovid, for example, is the center of so much of our storytelling tradition in the world. You know, you read Metamorphosis, that is pretty much every story you have ever heard ever. I love Metamorphosis. It is like the biggest sci-fi epic ever. People turned it into Birds, etc., etc.

And at the same time, you can see the threads of those stories in earlier stories and in our later stories. We understand that Romeo and Juliet comes from Ovid, but we also understand that the problems of those stories are universal. The problems of those stories are echoed in other stories that we have as our job as literary people to bring out. So I think that this idea of, this dichotomy between classics and [indiscernible] and Lil Wayne, I think that we need to fight against that and we need to fight against that as artists and as educators to say okay, let's look at our new classics. Let us look at them in relationship to the old classics. Let us see ourselves on a continuum of literary production. And let us not give up on our legacies, our multiple legacies of literature in this country. That is the gift we have. We have tradition upon tradition that we build upon. It is like our culture, our music. We borrow from everywhere and we make new things. Now it is up to us whether or not we choose to give that up, that essential American-ness. If we do, then we lose. And we find ourselves in the strange position of being a country founded on literacy, founded on borrowing, founded on radical collage in many ways, and denying that same history. That is a very, very, very awkward place for us to be.

And I think that in summation of this idea of where our radical collage has left us, I think that it is time to take this conversation to another level, which... Because as Violet mentioned, this is a conversation that has been happening since well before I was born. My dad is old now. He is not here, so I can say that. And we were talking and 1969, he published his first book for children. And we are still talking the same terms about inclusivity, about changing our curriculums to have special units and chapters. And what I am suggesting that we need to change our conversation from this inclusivity model, which is about taking a drop and putting it in, to a newer model of understanding that our roots are multicultural and the fruit of our tree is necessarily multicultural. And I think that is an important kind of thing to notice is that it is not about inclusivity anymore; it is just about being honest, about telling good stories, telling open stories. If we can get to that, we can get rid of all of this – hopefully – get rid of some of this pushback. Or at least take the pushback that is done in euphemistic terms and let people show their face in whatever way they choose to. If we can get rid of this...

To understand that we come from, the roots of the tree are as multicultural as the fruit. And I think that is really what the goal is, is to change this conversation, the conversations about what is our national character. And I think that it also has repercussions for every other section of literature.

I am also equally disturbed recently by the depiction of young women in our literature, and that is a problem. Every book about a young woman is about a love triangle, right?

Joseph: Usually, the vampire. [Laughter]

Christopher Myers: Yes, right. But this thing is, there are the popular ones and it is always about... As if that is what we care about our young women thinking about themselves. All they care about but now some boy likes them? But this is the problem with this model of inclusivity that says we will put a woman in here, we will put a Chinese person in there. This is a problem. We do not tell the rich, intertwining story that we need to be working on to understand that all it is is multicultural as Pop's latest book, Larry Epps' latest book, whoever, Ian Mosley, whoever you want to talk about, and to understand that that is the standard that we hold ourselves to.

[Applause]

Moderator: So the finished press, I think was established in 1970 and women's studies, I think the first women's studies department was established in 1973. So I was in college in the 1970s. And I remember hearing discussions about how stupid it was to have women's studies and that why would anybody want to read about the struggles of females? And I am sitting there thinking so you want to read about a grown man chasing a whale, which as any idiot can tell you, is not going to end well, and that is more important. Most of us have not chased whales – maybe metaphorically – but literally chasing a whole? It is dumb. And everybody has got a situation of being in a family. Whether you like them or not, you have got one. And you know, it is kind of pigeonholing, well, you are not picking up the important things, that is really dumb.

So what we are going to do, we have another question for Loretta and then I want to ask the panel to come in on each other's discussion. Loretta, over the last thirty years, so many changes have taken place in the world of publishing. And we have some of our publishing friends here with us today. And also, the experience of childhood has changed so much in the last thirty years. Would you talk about that a little bit?

Loretta Lopez: Yes, I will talk about that a little bit. It is interesting. It is interesting to me to hear the other two speakers speak and the questions that they brought up I want to touch on lightly. I was born and raised on the border of the United States of Mexico, but my ancestry goes back in New Mexico for three or four hundred years. I mean, we can look back at the Spanish and the Native American people who were there before it was even the United States. You know, I can trace my family back.

But what is really interesting to me is when I was growing up, my mother was educated. She was born in Arizona, but educated in Mexico, and my father was educated in California. But neither one of them got past the sixth grade. And so when I was growing up, literature was not something that was held up very high for my family. They were kind of just trying to make ends meet. And so for me, it was kind of interesting because the classics were multicultural literature to me. They were a window into a completely different world and they were something that expanded my mind and the way I perceived the world. It was something that I was able to bring back to my family.

But what is also interesting is that recently, I remembered talking to a publisher about a book I had written that I was sort of pitching to them. And it was just about how boring some of us, about how one summer when I was a kid growing up in the sixties, it just seemed to last endlessly. It was hot, there was nothing to do, there was no TV to watch, and it was all soap operas. And so I had to find things to do myself, and I turned to books. And what is interesting to me today is because of technology, the way technology has changed, I see my nephews, my sister's grandkids, my nephew's kids and my family's kids and my friends' kids and I see that they have such a different experience of childhood. They are not bored all day. Their days are scheduled. From school, they go home, they do this. They seem to have everything allotted. They do not have endless amounts

of time in which to discover books. And also, social media, the fact that given the opportunity, they are not bored. They have got TV, there is always something to watch on cable and there are computer games that they can play with all day.

You know, I think childhood has changed a lot. But I also think that, I guess as educators and just parents and as storytellers, it is important to focus on the fact that we are still human beings. We are going to experience stuff. And getting back to the classics and having seen them as a window into another world and the fact that my parents did not value literature at all, the pivotal moment for me as a very small child was that my mother buying groceries. I must have been in first or second grade. And there was a Golden Book. And that was something that she would like oh, okay, well, it costs a few cents in the grocery store. Yes, you can pick that up. And when I was growing up, even though she had been born in Arizona, she did not know how to speak English very well and so reading was challenging for her. And we looked at this Golden Book. It was a story about how to bake an apple in the fireplace. And this little boy and his grandfather baked this apple in the fireplace. And my mother said oh, I used to do that when I was kid. And so she said we can do that together. You know, looking at this book together, somehow I was able to bring literature to my mother who for her, literature and books were very alien.

So I think that all these questions tie together. The fact is that multicultural literature is not a distraction. And even if people say it is, even if they have banned the books and take them out of the classrooms, the world is so big. Technology has made this whole planet such a small world. And you can say that it is a distraction but the fact of the matter is we all come from different places. We all come from Latin America or from Asia or from African ancestry. And the human spirit is so resilient that we are all going to end up telling our stories.

**Part 4 of 5**

Watch the video at <http://youtu.be/hjupGDNirQg>

Moderator: I think the beauty of this selection is we also try to expand just a little tiny bit and if you have an opportunity I hope you will look at Anna and Natalie which is actually about children with disabilities and limitations. It is told in such a wonderful way that you do not even know it and in the pirate.

Unidentified Male: Yeah.

Interviewer: In the kindergarten about a child who actually has double vision and that is autobiographical. Then some of our books like the *National Geographic One World One Day* that takes us through the life of children across the world. Then what Visfer did in Wayne's is he takes the story of Icarus who tries to fly too close to the sun. Remember it has the \_\_\_\_\_ [00:00:51] and gets kind of shot down and he gives it a different twist. Then the um *Boy Called Slow* what an irony that is actually the story of Sitting Bull. I am very pleased with our, I am proud of it. Now what would you all like to say to each other about what you been talking about?

[Laughter].

Unidentified Male: Actually, I had one quick comment I wanted to make and in line with what Christopher is saying, the fact that we recognize that there are roots and branches and they are all connected together. I think one of the big problems we have in American culture is we think we can deal with the problem by focusing on it briefly. We can have Black History Month and just forget about it for the rest of the time. We can think about Indians around Thanksgiving, thank you for the turkey [laughter] and then whoop, forget about them. The thing is there are good events, but they should not be the be all and the end all. They should be let us call attention so we will remember through the rest of the year what we are talking about because we are not going to look at literature in isolation. One of the things I learned in college and even in high school is that when you dissect a frog you got a dead frog. You got all those parts the frogs dead you know. [Laughter]. So when you start cutting it up too much you kill it. It has to be seen as a living breathing entity. Our culture you know multiculturalism is different for each of us. That point is so great. For you multiculturalism was western literature. That was multicultural and multiculturalism is everything. It is all-inclusive, it is not just these little pigeonholes that have been created to name a group of people and basically to name them out of relevance to make the irrelevant by classifying them.

Unidentified Female: And technology I mean that is the thing. It is like well you can ban a book but people can find it on the web. when I was growing up, there there were also I mean I was born in 1963 so you know in 1970 I was seven, and I came across a book called *And Now and Again* it was the first time I had ever read a book that talked about Hispanic culture. I remember thinking that like oh I am special, look they are eating beans and tortillas [laughter] and its cool. You know somehow finding yourself in a book helps you to realize how wonderful your culture is. And I think that.

Unidentified Male: Affirmation.

Unidentified Female: Uh-huh, it is affirmation.

Unidentified Female: I did have a little boy who read *On the Road*, you know the Jack Kerouac sophomore lit, and guess what he went on the road and his mom called me and said where do you go [laughter].

Moderator: Okay so let us take about five minutes.

Unidentified Male: I would like to...

Moderator: Oh, I am sorry.

Unidentified Male: I mean I like to just make one comment or three basically. The first one is about our construction of the child. I think that another kind of thread that is going through all of the pushback that we hear is the idea of what is a child. We talk about well has childhood changed and clearly there is all kinds of access to technology and this sort of thing. However, I think that more just as much as much as childhood has changed and developed our idea of what a child is seems to be getting more and more stultified. Seems to be getting more and more I am getting all kinds of pushback from my editors and from librarians about what a child is in their mind. What a child should be open to. I mean as a kid I was surrounded by books, I was lucky enough to be surrounded by books and picked up everything I possibly could. I loved Greek and Roman myths, probably because of the death and the lurid. There is a lot of transformation and a lot of dead people, people die in crazy ways. Turn in to a bird and then the blood hit the ground and became the hyacinth and then you look at the hyacinth and you are like wow. I did not know what a hyacinth was as a flower, but I did know that was Apollo's friend at the funeral. Therefore, this idea of this understanding what a child is and we do not want to close the doors or that definition. We do not want to children are made of possibilities. We want to leave those possibilities open. In addition, more and more and more especially from certain quarters, I am hearing well children do not need this; they should not have this kind of discussion. The scary part of this of course is they are exposed to infinitely more nowadays.

Unidentified Male: Yes they are.

Unidentified Male: And they do not have the framework with which to understand that exposure. Therefore, if you say I am going to do a book that includes death, you know and people will say children should not be exposed to death. They are exposed to death. Earlier we had discussions with them about what death looked like; how do you deal with death. Now we are going to shield them from that in the literature. That is we refuse them the frameworks with which to understand these things. I think that definition of the child is one thing I was thinking about.

The other thing we talked about censorship and that is another thing that is underlying our discussion. I spend a lot of time running around the world because you can and that is nice. [Laughter]. I have dealt with the censors in the last three years in China, in Vietnam, in Sudan and I have dealt with this issue of censorship in a very direct way. If you mount a show an art show in Vietnam, you first write a letter to the Cultural Police to tell them what you are trying to do. I think that our understanding of what censorship is here just because we do need to eat still, at least I do [laughter] and that is something to understand is that your support is so key to being able to do what we do.

Lastly, I wanted to talk about *Moby Dick* because you mentioned it. [Laughter]. I will tell you I do not like that book, it has way too much whaling terminology [laughter]. I do not know anything about whaling similar to the way I do not know what hyacinth looks like and if someone shows me, I would appreciate that. One of the things again you talk about these classics and you talk about a figure like Quequay and this again this multicultural thread it lives in our literature. It is already been there. You have Quequay; you have all these folks that Tony Morrison talks in her lecture *Playing in the Dark*.

Unidentified Male: Yep.

Unidentified Male: That this is our shadow history. It is our job to take that history out from the shadows to tell the story of young women in the triangle shirt factory or all the factory-working women in the world. Or to tell the story of little boys I know from Brooklyn who happens to have wings. I do not actually [laughter].

Unidentified Female: I was going to address something with the classics. What I really just like about \_\_\_\_\_ [00:09:01] it was always either or.

Unidentified Female: Yeah.

Unidentified Male: Yeah.

Unidentified Female: And we never, another pet peeve of mine is that people are in storybooks. They do not know that what we consider to be American classics are not considered to be American classics prior to World War II. That if you were to be an educated person in this country first of all you had to read Latin and Greek.

Unidentified Male: That is right.

Unidentified Female: And French because that is what the literatures were written, that is what your academic training would have been and it was only a very small percentage of people who would have been able to do that. There was democratizing of American literature occurring after the world wars when we began to look inward to say we have a voice. There are writers within our midsts and I am not talking about African American writers or Latino writers, I am talking about people who are for the most part writers who were not a part of the classic cannon then. But now they are because of that inward turn that rejection of Europe as the sole model for what we should know. Each year I start all of my undergraduate classes with reading the classics. I give them a survey and it is based upon one of our former education secretary's William Bennett. Now I like William Bennett for a variety of reasons because he was very smart. He took materials that were in the public domain and wrote those books.

Unidentified Male: That is right.

Unidentified Female: It reflects the kind of literature to which kids were exposed. He also created a list in response to what E.B. Hershey did in terms of cultural literacy.

Unidentified Male: Right.

Unidentified Female: He could not have created that list by himself; he had to have some help of some librarians because it was multicultural.

Unidentified Male: Yeah.

Unidentified Female: I always do the traditional classics as you say because cannon are not dead they are living and there are going to be new works that challenge, new works brought in to the cannon, it is an organic process. With these students initially when I started this about 20, 25 years ago, I would list about 50 children's classics in the cannon – *Treasure Island*, *Swiss Family Robinson*, things of that sort. I would say which have you read, which have you not. typically the only people who read more than one or two books and the most I ever had anyone read was about 25. She was the daughter of professors and she had librarian classics; English majors and people

who had families that had a collection of the classics were the most. But over the years, those columns have expanded, I have seen the film, I have seen a condensed comic book of this version or another or I have seen some kind of dramatic reading or I heard of it but I have not read it. This year we did, I was sixty plus undergraduates that I had the average number of books on that about 50 list were about three that they had read. So it is not as if multiculturalism plays a heavy place.

Unidentified Male: It is as if literature is replaced.

Unidentified Female: This has been replaced and they are not reading that either. I make that point to argue is that the cannons have always been the province of an elite portion of a population. The majority of populous, we were serving you what you are reading now. How many of you are reading John Grisham or whatever is on top of the best *New York Times* bestseller list. Probably eight out of 10 of the top books of the *New York Times* bestseller list are considered pulp fiction or popular fiction. Pop literature with a capital L has certainly not the classics. When we place the classics on this pedestal, we need to understand why they are placed on that, it is not usually a democratizing act it is usually an act to limit access when we say that \_\_\_\_\_ [00:13:06] the article appeared in the *New York Times*. My classes wrote papers on that. Why are they reading Walter B. Myers and Socrates?

Unidentified Male: Right.

Unidentified Female: These kids read Harlan and not Socrates. Well that is debatable. To always, make that argument that if we give kids multicultural literature and they will never pick up these courses. You cannot understand Tony Morrison unless you know classic literature.

Um That is right.

Unidentified Female: If you want to know, why you are struggling with *Song of Solomon* is because of all the references that she makes in *Song of Solomon* that are related to classic literature. And also her style of writing draws from some related to the cannon later I was going to say Steinbeck but it is not Steinbeck, \_\_\_\_\_ [00:14:04].

Unidentified Male: Wayne Faulkner.

Unidentified Female: Thank you, it would come to my head. That her thesis if I recall correctly was on \_\_\_\_\_ [00:14:14], was very strongly influenced by his writing style, the stream of consciousness in those books. In order to understand her at multiple levels, you need to have that background. It is the same thing with Miles Davis says – if you are going to empathize you need to know.

Unidentified Male: What your provising against.

Unidentified Female: You need to know how great those traditions so you need to know those traditions and the same thing with literature. Most of the writers that we place on this list are those who have steeped themselves in other literature, in the literature that we label \_\_\_\_\_ [00:14:52] literature. They have chosen to break those rules and break those traditions in different ways.

**Part 5 of 5**

Watch the video at <http://youtu.be/4HI4t9qaykI>

Moderator: Thank you panel. For our \_\_\_\_\_ [00:00:02] died nobody thought he was still alive. Let us clap for our panel [applause]. Everybody can visit they are going to sign their books in the very back room. You can visit also with the authors after that.

Unidentified Male: Yeah two things I wanted to point out. One is I have a list of websites if anybody wants this. In terms of websites, I think we need to think about access because access has changed to literature drastically in the last few years. This is a book of mine called *Hidden Roots*. By the way, Scholastic Press has been very good to me and I love the Press. This book was taken out of print by Scholastic even though it is being in American Indian schools all around the country. Montana has it in their curriculum for Indian education for all because it deals with a very big problem, which was that of the Eugenics project that existed around the country-sterilizing people. This is a very important story for our Abenaki people because there was Vermont Eugenics Project that led to the sterilization of many American Indians and people going underground. It is about a boy who discovers he has Indian ancestry and did not know it because his family has hidden it from him. This book, Scholastic was kind enough to revert the rights to me and I republished it myself using Print on Demand technology. Through Print on Demand, you can publish one copy or a hundred copies or five hundred copies and only pay per copy per book. Because of the new Print on Demand technology like lulu.com writers who are getting a first book in print or writers who are, writing a very specific limited audience book or writing in another language can have access to getting their work out. Plus this book is listed on Amazon.com and is available as a digital download. I think that there is no reason if someone cares enough for any book to go out of print with the new technology that we have available. I think that is a very hopeful thing for children's literature.

Unidentified Female: This book has generated so much conversation; I assign it to my undergraduate classes when it first came out. They were stunned that these acts could happen in the U.S. they again did not have it in their history textbooks.

Unidentified Male: It was not just American Indians, it was African Americans, it was poor people and this is a book for kids. We cannot limit what children read.

Unidentified Male: Hold the tape.

Unidentified Female: I want to introduce our President and CEO Carol H. Rasco [applause].

Carol H. Rasco: I am an obnoxious fairly new \_\_\_\_\_ [00:03:00]. I have peter out this morning through one of our guests whom I had never met. What in the world my grandson was referring to. He loves to go to the zoo in Little Rock, Arkansas. He was telling me about the poems at the zoo. I was crediting a very creative imagination. Guess what I learned this morning. That Doctor Bruchac has just finished three years at the poet in residence at the Little Rock, Arkansas Zoo.

Unidentified Male: Pretty poems everywhere.

Carol H. Rasco: Thank you so much I am going to give William a whole different credit now. I thought he was creating and coming up with poems at the zoo. His mother has read them and I am sorry I did not know you were there.

Unidentified Male: I was the third cage from the left [laughter].

Carol H. Rasco: I do want to thank the panel. I always learn so much at this type of event. I wish we could do much more of this. We would all be the better for those children that we often put in pigeonholes and thank you for this contribution this morning. I am very proud to present to you this morning first and we have a presentation to make, Margaret McNamara, pastor, who is, I always say this, we say it with pride and I know it is a point of pride to her, she is the daughter of our founder and as we celebrate this our Forty-fifth year I would like to present her for a few moments and then we have a presentation.

Margaret McNamara: I learned so much this morning. What you guys do for me is I studied \_\_\_\_\_ [00:05:09] and I am a good way in to it. What you help me understand is why I think as an adult, it was exciting and so much fun. When I was growing up, the stories were not as good or as exciting. What I am doing you have given me \_\_\_\_\_ [00:05:32] what it is really available. They have an opportunity with all the books that are out there. With the multicultural reference and you are articulating the integration in the classrooms was very helpful. I found them \_\_\_\_\_ [00:06:01] for children and for adults. It is like finding the song of a wonderful gallery and museum, it is there you just pick it up. You do not have to an admission fee, you just enjoy it. It really supports the balance with the stories. Anyway, they have inspired me, they are inspiring me now and they are giving me a sense of everything that is out there for kids. In fact, I enjoy them so much that I am giving books away to adult friends and children and hoping that particularly my adult friends will understand even more what they are doing and will pick these books up and share them with others and assist in reading and literacy.

Now, I would like to, it is my honor and privilege to give Mr. Cole \_\_\_\_\_ [00:07:25]. [Applause]

Unidentified Male: The books of course are both symbolic and important for not only the Library of Congress but for this, very center and I also would like to take the opportunity to thank the panel and say for one second what this panel has contributed already to our idea for the reader center. We are fortunate that we are working the Children's Book Council.

Unidentified Male: Oh, yes.

Mr. Cole: For the National Ambassador Program. Our first three ambassadors have been John Chaska, Catherine Paterson and \_\_\_\_\_ [00:08:09]. This young reader's center is a home away from home for them. When they are in Washington this is their place, this is where they will be featured. Secondly, two of our speakers have of course to the National Book Festival and this is a major Library of Congress outreach effort, which the Center for Book is deeply involved. We are featuring in our media streams, which you will see during the reception children's authors from the National Book Festival. You have contributed not only through the conversation, but also through your presence in furthering this wonderful young reader center. For that, I thank you and for RIF, I think you so much for the books and the inspiration. It has been a pleasure being close to you here to.

Unidentified Female: Thank you John and thank you to our audience for being here with us today. Another bright milestone in RIF's life. Now we are going to adjourn and we have one room where there will be signing; we have one room where there is a reception and we can visit anywhere. Thank you to all of you. Thank you very much. [Applause]