



# **Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights (America and the Long 19th Century)**

*Robin Bernstein*

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In *Racial Innocence*, Robin Bernstein argues that the concept of "childhood innocence" has been central to U.S. racial formation since the mid-nineteenth century. Children--white ones imbued with innocence, black ones excluded from it, and others of color erased by it--figured pivotally in sharply divergent racial agendas from slavery and abolition to antiblack violence and the early civil rights movement.

Bernstein takes up a rich archive including books, toys, theatrical props, and domestic knickknacks which she analyzes as "scriptive things" that invite or prompt historically-located practices while allowing for resistance and social improvisation. Integrating performance studies with literary and visual analysis, Bernstein offers singular readings of theatrical productions from blackface minstrelsy to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*; literary works by Joel Chandler Harris, Harriet Wilson, and Frances Hodgson Burnett; material culture including Topsy pincushions, Uncle Tom and Little Eva handkerchiefs, and Raggedy Ann dolls; and visual texts ranging from fine portraiture to advertisements for lard substitute. Throughout, Bernstein shows how "innocence" gradually became the exclusive province of white children--until the Civil Rights Movement succeeded not only in legally desegregating public spaces, but in culturally desegregating the concept of childhood itself.

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