

YALSA Board of Directors Meeting  
ALA Midwinter Meeting, Boston  
January 15 – 19, 2010

**Topic:** Morris Fund Use Evaluation

**Background:** A taskforce was established in 2004 to determine how best use the interest from the then newly established Morris Endowment. As stipulated by Bill Morris, YALSA may only use the funds "for the purpose of funding programs, publications, events or awards in promotion of young adult literature." At the 2004 Annual Conference, the YALSA Board approved three uses of the funds: to establish a debut author award; to establish a conference with a focus on YA literature; and to support Teen Read Week activities. The Board also recommended the use of the funds be evaluated every five years. In 2006, the YALSA Board also approved using the Morris funds to cover start-up costs for the Odyssey Award. Five years have passed and the 2009 Task Force has been charged with evaluating the use of the Morris Endowment funds and to make any recommendations as to future use. The money has been invested in the ALA Endowment Fund and only the interest generated by the endowment may be used.

**Action Required:** Discussion

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**2009 Taskforce Preliminary Report**

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6. Establish and support a publicity award to the publisher or vendor who develops and launches a distinguished promotional campaign for a YALSA book selection awards.  
\$500
7. Support YALSA advertising and public relations of YALSA awards and activities.  
\$2,000

**Proposal for Morris Endowment Funds:  
Work-in-Progress Grants for YA Authors from Diverse Backgrounds**

Establish work-in-progress grants for YA authors from diverse backgrounds, loosely modeled on the Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI) work-in-progress grants. ([http://www.scbwi.org/Resources/Documents/wip\\_grant.pdf](http://www.scbwi.org/Resources/Documents/wip_grant.pdf)) The grants could potentially be co-sponsored by a publisher or publishers wishing to increase the diversity of their YA publishing program.

This proposal strongly connects to two of YALSA’s Core Values:

- Excellence and innovation
- Equity of access for young adults

It responds to these Assumptions in Demographics and Social Values/Politics from YALSA’s Strategic Plan:

- Culturally diverse populations using the library will continue to grow
- There will continue to be a need to attract diversity into the profession to better reflect the populations being served
- A conservative political climate may impact risk taking by publishers

And to these elements of YALSA’s Vision:

- Evaluates and promotes materials of interest to adolescents through special services, programs and publications
- Supports equality of access to the full range of library materials and services
- Promotes reading and supports the literacy movement

**Need for the Grants**

Since 1997, through the Spectrum Scholarship Program, ALA has “worked to address under-representation of critically needed ethnic librarians within the profession while serving as a model for ways to bring attention to larger diversity issues in the future.” YALSA has contributed to this work by supporting Spectrum Scholars.

Working to ensure that the profession of librarianship reflects the diversity of our communities is critically important. It is equally important that young adult literature reflect this diversity. And in 2009, it emphatically does not.

In 2008, just slightly over seven percent of the 3,000 children's and YA books received by the Cooperative Children's Book Center were by authors of color.<sup>1</sup> K.T. Horning writes: "These statistics represent only quantity, not quality or authenticity. A significant number—well over half—of the books about each broad racial/ethnic grouping are formulaic books offering profiles of various countries around the world. Additionally, the number of books created by authors and illustrators of color does not represent the actual number of individual book creators, as many created two or more books." (<http://www.education.wisc.edu/ccbc/books/choiceintro09.asp>, accessed 12/21/09)

Many talented authors of color report their struggles to break into mainstream publishing and the barriers they've faced. One example: Zetta Elliott's YA novel *A Wish After Midnight* was just bought by the Amazon Encore imprint, but only after a lot of advocacy from bloggers, educators and librarians who saw it in the original self-published edition, which was a significant investment for her to produce.

Additional background on the lack of diversity in contemporary children's and YA publishing can be found in author and independent bookseller Elizabeth Bluemle's *ShelfTalker* post:

"Where's Ramona Quimby, Black and Pretty?"

<http://www.publishersweekly.com/blog/660000266/post/1020047702.html>

and the post and comments on the *Chasing Ray*

**How will it benefit YALSA:**

Helps to position YALSA as innovative, forward-thinking, and proactive in supporting young adult literature and the increasingly diverse population of contemporary teens

And while this proposal has emphasized the need for young adult literature by and about people of color as a way to reach teens from underrepresented groups, the production and promotion of this literature is equally important for teens from the majority culture.

In an interview on the *School Library Journal* site, Zetta Elliott comments on the power of literature to combat racism and increase tolerance: “Literature gives us access to the inside lives of people we might otherwise dismiss or assume that we know; books counter the use of stereotypes as a kind of shortcut to truly knowing someone who’s different than us. Literature nurtures our capacity to dream, and I think many of the problems facing our society today are caused by a simple failure of imagination..”