

Reading *Cleveland is a Warm, Fuzzy Place* in Tamir Rice's Cleveland: Regionalism, Activism & Response in Picture Books

In 1978, ten years after Cleveland inaugurated the first Black mayor to be elected mayor in a major US city and in the midst of the city's racial demographics and industry transforming dramatically, Dave Cockley's picture book *Cleveland is a Warm, Fuzzy Place* was published and distributed throughout preschools and elementary schools in Northeast Ohio. The book promotes a utopian view of the city's schools, historic landmarks, and sports teams through following a teddy bear who floats in and out of stadiums, museums, and ore mills, above the heads of children who cheer for him. By completely omitting the child activism that occurred during the time period, especially concerning environmental issues and school desegregation and integration, as well as misrepresenting or omitting the lives of Cleveland's children, especially the city's Black and immigrant child populations, the book attempts to redefine the region as a wonderful and welcoming place for all. Cockley's 2015 sequel, *Those Rockin' Cleveland Kids*, published shortly after the 2014 murder of 12-year-old Tamir Rice by an on-duty police officer, similarly erases the stories and lives of children in the city. In this presentation, I will explore these books and increasingly popular state- or city-themed board books, discussing how regionalism featured in picture books can affect our notions of childhood and child activism. Though I will analyze books set in Cleveland specifically, I will set up a framework for further studies into how setting and place influence how children's bodies are depicted in other cities. I will also discuss how other media, including visual art and slam poetry, have allowed children's perspectives about a city to be heard more clearly.