

Call for Proposals:
**“Drum Dream Girls and Northern Lights Kids: New Models of Constructing Childhood for
Diverse Children”**

ChLA Guaranteed Session for MLA 2022
(6–9 January, Washington, DC)

In their chilling study “Listening to Black Women and Girls: Lived Experiences of Adulthood Bias,” Jamilia J. Blake and Rebecca Epstein conclude “that adults perceive Black girls as less innocent than white girls as young as 5-9 years old.” While Blake and Epstein centralize Black girlhood, this adulthood bias similarly affects Black boys and other children of color. Children of color’s perception as ‘more adult’ than their white peers does not imbue them with any agency or power, rather, it divests them of childhood, at least within childhood’s contemporary definitions. Yet, these contemporary definitions of childhood are grounded in whiteness and white privilege. In fact, in her influential work *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights*, Robin Bernstein explicitly explains the conflation of innocence and childhood meant that innocence “was raced white.” Other scholars, like William Bush, author of *Who Gets a Childhood? : Race and Juvenile Justice in Twentieth-Century Texas*, agree. Childhood, for children of color, doesn’t come with the Wordsworthian, Romantic notion that children come “trailing clouds of glory.”

In the dominant imagination, childhood is reserved for white (cis, straight, able-bodied) children. In challenging those ideologies, this panel seeks to expand constructions of childhood to be more inclusive, representative, responsive, and equitable. Ultimately, we need a new model of childhood. One that follows less an old dead white man like Wordsworth and someone like contemporary writer Eve Ewing, who writes of the kind of children who “think of Alaska ... the farthest away place you ever saw in a book ... Northern Lights kid” or Margarita Engle’s invocation of the “drum dream girl” who “had to keep dreaming / quiet / secret / drumbeat / dreams.”

Thus, this panel invites papers that construct new models of childhood. Prospective papers might consider such questions as: How does children’s literature and related media construct contemporary, diverse childhoods? What roles do real children and the texts they create play in constructing their own childhoods? What can be done to redress existing notions of childhood as associated with whiteness? Papers that explore similar questions and themes are also welcome.

Proposals of approximately **400-500 words** and inquiries should be submitted to Dr. Cristina Rhodes (CSRhodes@ship.edu) by **March 1, 2021**. Scholars (especially students) from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds are highly encouraged to submit.