

“Dress[ing] up in White” to Play Tennis: Representations of Athlete Althea Gibson in *Nothing But Trouble* and *Playing to Win*

The histories of Black female athletes as told in children’s non-fiction picturebooks are often inundated with stereotypes. This presentation examines two biographical picturebooks about Black American female tennis player Althea Gibson. I will contextualize my analysis by discussing the longstanding criminalization of Black Americans, noting how these stereotypes appear in the two texts about Gibson. In the picturebook *Nothing but Trouble* (2007), author Sue Stauffacher and illustrator Greg Couch make central to the story the fact that Gibson is “nothing but trouble.” Throughout both the written text and illustrations, they demonstrate a transformation that she must undergo in order to succeed in tennis. The text celebrates Gibson learning to change her identity in order to fit into white hegemonic notions of what it means to be a female athlete. I argue that this uncritical depiction of Gibson’s success is also found in *Playing to Win* (2007). Author Karen Deans and illustrator Elbrite Brown more complexly depict Gibson’s wildness by explaining through the text and illustrations that Gibson grew up in Harlem. While white author Deans’ explains through the text and illustrations that Gibson grew up in Harlem where no one should expect Gibson to be anything but wild, Brown illustrates Harlem as a place where children are being supported. I analyze how the interplay of the text and visuals offer a more complex picture of Gibson’s upbringing, context, and personality, while still relying on dehumanizing language of Gibson as “wild.” This presentation discusses the parallels between the two picturebooks and widespread narratives about Black female tennis pro Serena Williams as angry and unfeminine, examining how Black female athletes, such as Gibson and Williams, are frequently marginalized and misrepresented in literature and media.