

Proposal: Southern Studies Panel (Children's Literature Association, 2014)

Title: Behind the "Paper Curtain": Elise Sanguinetti's *The Last of the Whitfields*, Integration, and the Northern Press

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The 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education*, which opened public schoolhouse doors to children of all races, met organized resistance in the South, in turn drawing the attention of Northern journalists. While much has been written about the press's influence in furthering Civil Rights Movement legislation, little has been written about the Southern perception that, in publishing only certain types of stories, the Northern press drew a "paper curtain" around the South. Elise Sanguinetti's 1962 novel, *The Last of the Whitfields*, explores life behind this paper curtain through the eyes of thirteen-year-old Felicia Whitfield, daughter of a generations-back White Southern family. Sanguinetti, who grew up in Anniston, Alabama, as the daughter of a Southern newspaperman and a Norwegian-born mother, and who was a classmate of Harper Lee, wrote *The Last of the Whitfields* to counter what she saw as articles that portrayed all Southerners with the broad brush of stereotype.

In this paper, I consider examples of 1950s-era Northern journalism and Sanguinetti's *The Last of the Whitfields* in the light of Derrida's paradoxical assertion that ethnocentricity can only be recognized in one's own self by using ethnocentric thinking. As Sanguinetti's work remains largely unstudied—and much remains unpublished—I discuss the implications of the absence of such literature on discussions about diversity.