Citation:

Maatita, Florence and Marcia D. Hernandez. 2017. "Racism, Canon and the Controversy Surrounding #BlackHermione." Under consideration for *Harry Potter and the Other: Race, Diversity, and Difference in the Wizarding Worlds*, edited by Sarah Park Dahlen and Ebony Thomas.

Introduction

On 20 December 2015, the cast of the highly anticipated play *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* was revealed. Billed as the eighth installment of a tale created by British novelist JK Rowling, this play chronicles the contentious relationship between an adult Harry Potter and his youngest son, Albus, once the younger Potter goes off to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Not only were fans excited about another opportunity to see Harry Potter after seven books and eight movie adaptations, but they were equally thrilled to reunite with other characters from the Wizarding World, namely Harry's best friends, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger. While the play and the cast generated a great deal of enthusiasm, the announcement also inspired controversy when people learned that Noma Dumezweni, a Swaziland-born English (Black) actor, won the role of Hermione.

In the months between the announcement of the cast in December 2015 and the official London premiere in July 2016, social media, including Twitter, was flooded with commentary and racist criticism about the woman and the character that came to be known as "Black Hermione." Reactions to the casting of Dumezweni, oftentimes signified with #BlackHermione, ran the gamut from pride and excitement to confusion, dislike and even anger that the actor defies canon. Although there was a dispute over whether Rowling ever specified Hermione's skin color, critics were quick to point out that Hermione is white because Emma Watson, a

French-born English (white) actor, played her in the eight movie adaptations that preceded *The Cursed Child*.

Here, we examine #BlackHermione on Twitter and address a multilayered controversy that is not just about the casting of Noma Dumezweni as the beloved Hermione. Rather, these posts illuminate a complex discourse about a number of issues. First, exchanges on Twitter raise the question of who controls canon when it comes to the Wizarding World. Second, critics use adherence to and continuity within canon (which they assert does not include a Black Hermione) as a way to dispute claims of their own racism. Finally, we are interested in why and how JK Rowling emerged as the prime target of her detractors' anger. As we see it, these exchanges highlighted the problems of racism and racial representation in popular culture, as well as the racial and political power that JK Rowling herself wields. We will discuss each question in turn. Before we delve into how the Twitterverse reacted to #BlackHermione, let us address Hermione Granger according to canon.

The Canon of Hermione Granger

Netizens agree that JK Rowling's seven books are canon, but there has been prolonged debate about where the eight movies and the new play fit. Commenters maintain that the movies are movie *adaptations* based on the books, and the play is mere fanfiction. Rowling herself opined on 29 June 2015: "The story of #CursedChild should be considered canon, though @jackthorne, John Tiffany (the director) and I developed it together" (Rowling, Twitter Post). Thus, many of her fans treat the play as canon; here we treat the books and the play as canon.

On 21 December 2015, JK Rowling reminded the Twitterverse of how she wrote

Hermione Granger: "Canon: brown eyes, frizzy hair and very clever. White skin was never

specified" (Rowling, Twitter Post). In fact, what of what we know (and love) about Hermione

stems from her hair and her intelligence. For instance, when we first meet Hermione, all

Rowling tells us is that she "had a bossy sort of voice, lots of bushy brown hair, and rather large

front teeth" (Rowling, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, 105). We see no mention of

Hermione's appearance again until just before she returns to Hogwarts for her second

year: "Harry looked up and saw Hermione Granger standing at the top of the white flight of

steps to Gringotts. She ran down to meet them, her bushy brown hair flying behind her"

(Rowling, Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets, 55). These two examples illustrate how

Rowling does not devote much time to describing Hermione's physical appearance, save for

these fleeting references to her bushy hair.

Hermione's hair[1] is not only a defining characteristic as it also plays a central role in her

development into womanhood. This point is most clear as the characters prepare for the Yule

Ball in their fourth year at Hogwarts. For students, the Yule Ball is not only an opportunity for

them to socialize with one another and with visiting students from two other wizarding schools

(Beauxbatons and Durmstrang), but it provides a context for highlighting emergent trials and

tribulations associated with adolescence and hormones. In this scene, Rowling introduces us to a

character who is maturing and feminine:

It was Hermione.

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[1] Rowling also pays some attention to Hermione's front teeth. As she changes her hair in preparation for
the Yule Ball, she also allows Madame Pomfrey to change her teeth so they are "normal-sized" (Rowling,
Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, 405) after one of Draco Malfoy's spells makes her teeth grow.

But she didn't look like Hermione at all. She had done something with her hair; it was no longer bushy but sleek and shiny, and twisted up into an elegant knot at the back of her head. She was wearing robes made of a floaty, periwinkle-blue material, and was holding herself differently, somehow – or maybe it was merely the absence of the twenty or so books she usually had slung over her back. She was also smiling – rather nervously, it was true – but the reduction of her front teeth was more noticeable than ever; Harry couldn't understand how he hadn't spotted it before (Rowling, Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, 414).

Audiences get another reference to Hermione's hair in *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*. (Though Jack Thorne wrote the script, this play was based on a story by JK Rowling.) In the scene in question, Hermione, who is a mean Hogwarts teacher in an alternate reality, is talking to Ron, her estranged husband:

Ron: […] Have you done something with your hair?

Hermione: Just combed it, I suspect.

Ron: Well…Combing it suits you (Thorne).

Even though 19 years have passed since *The Deathly Hallows* and *The Cursed Child*, Hermione's hair remains her defining characteristic. Moreover, we see her hair as a device that allows Hermione and her husband Ron to flirt with one another.

Rowling does not make specific reference to Hermione's skin color until her third year at Hogwarts, and only then does she make two allusions. First, when the trio meet in Diagon Alley before they return to Hogwarts, Rowling describes Hermione as "very brown" (Rowling, Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azaban, 55). Later on, Rowling writes, "Hermione's white face was sticking out from behind a tree" (Rowling, Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azaban, 401). Some

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readers interpret this description as proof of Hermione's whiteness, while others consider it an indication of the fright that she is experiencing at that moment. It is possible that Hermione's white face is a consequence of fear, although some critics point out that this change would only be possible if Hermione were white (Kirchoff). Regardless, these two passages proved to be central to the controversy surrounding the eventual casting of a Black woman in *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*.

While Rowling spends little time covering Hermione's physical appearance, she devotes more attention to Hermione's smarts and cleverness. Throughout the series, Hermione is consistently the first to raise her hand to answer a Professor's question and she spends most of her time in the library doing research. She figured out the Potions test (Rowling, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone), brewed Polyjuice Potion (Rowling, Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets), took extra classes with the use of Time Turner (Rowling, Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azaban) and her spells and enchantments ensured the safety and survival for herself, Harry and Ron in their quest to find the remaining Horcruxes (Rowling, Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows). Even Remus Lupin and Sirius Black referred to Hermione as "the brightest witch of her age" (Rowling, Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azaban). When we last see Hermione, she is the Minister of Magic (Thorne).

Hermione Granger is a beloved and her fans' adoration is evident in the fanfiction and fan art devoted to her. Moreover, she has inspired a great deal of attention from academics who have examined, for example, whether she is a feminist (Zettel), a role model (Andrade) and a heroine (Heilman and Donaldson 2008). Even the edited volume *Hermione Granger Saves the World: Essays on the Feminist Heroine of Hogwarts* (Bell) features 11 articles just on Hermione, going so far as to argue that the full story truly hinges on her rather than just on Harry Potter.

Bell separates these articles to highlight the four primary identities Hermione takes on: woman; scholar; warrior; and activist.

Although scholars have scrutinized Hermione in reference to gender, sexism and feminism, they have yet to examine her with regard to her race or ethnicity. Fans, however, have done so using her "bushy brown hair" as indicative of her Black or biracial identity. Furthermore, devotees have taken her hair and blood status combined as evidence that Hermione is not white.[2] She is a Muggle, which is why some characters refer to her as a Mudblood. As Ron explains, "It's about the most insulting thing he could think of… Mudblood's a really foul name for someone who is Muggle-born – you know, non-magic parents… It's a disgusting thing to call someone… Dirty blood, see. Common blood. It's ridiculous" (Rowling, Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets, 115-116). While scholars have addressed blood status as an allegory for racial purity (Horne, Whited), they have not addressed Hermione's own racial and ethnic identity. We could argue that these scholars are abiding by canon, especially given that Rowling herself never specified Hermione's race. Regardless, fans worldwide have uncovered her racial and ethnic identity. As @MusicFool_MD tweeted, "Hermione was the brightest witch of her age, not the whitest" (Spice✒).

#BlackHermione on Twitter

To begin this project, we did a search of #BlackHermione on Twitter. After omitting tweets that did not directly reference Harry Potter, Hermione, the play or Noma Dumezweni, we

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[2] There are characters in the books that are not white such as the Patil twins, Dean Thomas and Lee Jordan. Rowling, however, does not show them as the targets of the kinds of prejudice and discrimination. In fact, Dean Thomas is a Black half-blood wizard, but the only time anyone scoffs at him is when Ron sees Dean kissing his sister Ginny (Rowling, Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince).

were left with 1,056 tweets between 8 November 2012 and 20 December 2016.[3] Most #BlackHermione tweets (561) appeared on 21 December 2015, the day after the cast was announced, with a slight drop off the following day with 206 #BlackHermione references. In this article, we focus on tweets from these two days, although we did not completely ignore tweets from before or after this two-day period.

The 14 #BlackHermione tweets we noted prior to the announcement of the cast referred to emergent theories, fanfiction and artwork of a Black or biracial Hermione. This discussion peaked on 1 February 2015 when Alanna Bennett posted "What A 'Racebent' Hermione Granger Really Represents" on Buzzfeed (Bennett). In this post, Bennett used fan art to explain how she – a biracial woman – identifies with Hermione's hair and bravery.

#BlackHermione gained momentum on 20 December 2015, the day of the cast announcement, with 36 references. The majority of posts were in support of Noma Dumezweni, pointed out that Rowling never specified Hermione's race and demonstrated that #BlackHermione was a source of pride. Perhaps the most poignant tweet that day was from @afrokhaleesi: "I AM CANON" (☆*alien-mom-anext*☆). Meanwhile, detractors pointed out the color of Hermione's skin does not matter…or it does not matter as long as Noma Dumezweni does the role justice. Still others pointed out that people on Twitter were arguing over a fictional universe, Hermione is a fictional character and the *Cursed Child* is merely fanfiction rather than canon. In sum, the tweets from this day provided a glimpse into the various directions the discussion on Twitter would take in the ensuing days. Let us now turn our attention to what the Twitterverse had to say on the 21st and 22nd of December.

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[3] The overwhelming majority of tweets were in English, but we also included and translated tweets in ten other languages, including French, Spanish and Finnish.

Exactly Who Controls the Canon?

December 21, 2015 is pivotal not just because of the amount of #BlackHermione traffic,

but because JK Rowling issued her official support for Dumezweni as Hermione: "Rowling

loves black Hermione (kissing face emoji)" (Rowling, Twitter Post). Many people retweeted

Rowling's support with accompanying remarks such as "The Queen has spoken #suckithaters"

(Yarí, Twitter Post). Still others used her tweet along with a screenshot of the passage from *The

Prisoner of Azkaban* where Hermione's white face peeks out from behind a tree. Rowling and

her supporters responded by questioning how some observers could know the Harry Potter canon

better and more than Rowling herself: "White dudes Mansplaining to JK Rowling about the race

of her own character" (Yarí, Twitter Post) and "Why do you question the queen" (Clawson)?

All told, six Twitter users who used #BlackHermione referred to JK Rowling as a queen.

Not only does this title speak to the high regard in which some people hold her, but it also leads

to the question of who has control over canon. Rowling created the world of Harry Potter so it is

logical that she has ultimate control (Parry-Giles). Many tweeters agreed by maintaining that her

21 December 2015 tweet quashed further discussions on the matter. Some tweeters also pointed

out that she had a hand in Dumezweni's casting. For instance, @BronzdBrownGirl exclaimed:

"I love that ya'll think J.K. Rowling had NO say in Black Hermione. You will all be okay"

(Rapid)! Essentially, this camp of tweeters affirms that Rowling can do and say whatever she

wants about her canon.

Concurrently, some tweeters suggested that Rowling's influence over canon is

problematic because she revealed details about key characters *after* the books were published.

For instance, while on a book tour for *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, she revealed that

she imagined Professor Dumbledore to be gay (EdwardTLC). Although she never explicitly identified his sexual orientation in the books, this revelation provided readers with a lens to make sense of (or read into) Dumbledore's relationship with Grindelwald in their youth in the final installment. Whether tweeters were referring to a gay Dumbledore or a Black Hermione, some maintained that these changes after the fact were motivated by political and social pressure:

> devaluing [sic] your own work to appease political correctness, shame. #Hermione #BlackHermione #harrypotter (Barbosa).
>
> I'm not against a black actress portraying her but please don't sweep the fact its [sic] not canon aside because of social pressure #BlackHermione" (Data).

Barbosa also included an image with a caption aimed at Rowling that read: "I have no respect for my own work and will do whatever it takes to get progressive brownie points." The discussion his tweet inspired includes his opinion that the Harry Potter series is anti-white because "the films employed strong anti nazi messages." Furthermore, in response to Data's tweet, @nzeribe asked who gets to decide canon: Data or JK Rowling. Data responded by referencing Hermione's white face and Emma Watson's portrayals. To Data, not only are the books and movies canon, but "social pressure" has prompted Rowling to support anything that challenges that canon. Finally, both Barbosa and Data indicate that canon, to them, includes the movies.

The above tweets also suggest that Rowling's control over canon is limited. While she may have written the Harry Potter books, political and social pressure dictate the direction of canon. Tweeters spoke directly to this point by arguing that #BlackHermione is an economic move. As @BlogHogwarts tweeted, "One can be a fan but not a blind fanatic. You have to be

clear that #BlackHermione looks more like a marketing decision than anything else" (Harry Potter).

The Twitterverse is not in agreement over who controls the canon. While some maintain that Rowling has ultimate control, others argue that ultimate control rests in political, social and economic forces. Still others assert that they, the fans, have definitive control. One side of this perspective suggests that the fans, and not Rowling, created #BlackHermione. For example, @ngenerose wrote, "it was fans of color who wrote, drew, & created #blackhermione. it's them, not rowling, who deserve the praise and affirmation" (❀nicki). While tweeters like @negenerose argued that fans created Black Hermione, others pointed out that the fans made Hermione white: "Hope white racist Twitter saw that @jk_rowling tweet! Like we been sayin....y'all made her white. JK didn't. Stay mad (Zlatanist).

A second dimension to this argument suggests that the fans know more than Rowling about Hermione Granger. Twitter user @dogtainiantastic noted this pattern: "I see @jk_rowling, who, yes, wrote the Harry Potter novels out of her own head, is having her character 'fansplained' to her" (L). Another tweeter, @guiltyx, asked, "Why the fuck are you gaslighting Rowling, you awful awful Harry Potter fans?! #BlackHermione #racism #headdesk" (guiltyx, Twitter Post). Gaslighting refers to some fans' attempts to make Rowling to question her work by presenting her with misinformation (i.e., claims that she wrote Hermione as a white character). Moreover, guiltyx asserts that fans' racism is driving their attempts to dictate canon.

Racism and Continuity

Negative responses to #BlackHermione reveal cracks in the colorblind ideology of Harry Potter fandom. Those who opposed or questioned #BlackHermione declared that their criticisms

were not a result of racism; rather, it was their need for continuity between the books, movies and play (Kirchoff). As @CeceBearz wrote, "I'm not at all against #BlackHermione I just wish she would have been originally cast as such and not changed in the middle of things" (Paye). Also @FatemahJeragh tweeted, "I don't like the whole #BlackHermione thing. They shud [sic] make the characters look like the ones we're used to in the Harry potter films" (Jeragh)! From these tweets, we see that critics argued that Hermione was white in the books *and* the movies, thus continuity (and their interpretation of canon) dictates that she should also be white in the play.

Black Hermione is not the first occasion of discontinuity between the books and the movies, however. Rowling describes Dudley Dursley, Harry's cousin, as blond, but Harry Melling, who played him in the movies, has dark brown hair. Jennifer Smith, a Black actor, played Lavender Brown, a Hogwarts student who is in the same year as Harry, Hermione and Ron, though Jessie Cave, a white actor, took over when Lavender became Ron's love interest in the film adaptation of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. Finally, Larisa Hawley pointed out, "The web is freaking out over #BlackHermione. Harry was 'posed to have green eyes. Ron was 'posed to be tall&thin. Clearly you missed the msg" (Hawley). Yet, while such charges may have raised arguments about continuity, this discourse was neither as apparent nor as combative as the #BlackHermione discussion.

The relative infrequency of complaints about, for instance, Harry's eyes or Ron's stature prompted #BlackHermione users to identify critics as racists. As jan maintained, "Saying 'I've always seen Hermione as white' isn't racist, saying 'Black Hermione is wrong' is racist (jan). Moreover, tweeters identified people's need for continuity as thin veil for racism.

Honestly I don't see how you can justify having an exclusively white Hermione other than for racist reasons. #Blackhermione makes sense (Mahoney).

#BlackTwitter, need help. How do I clapback at someone saying that there shouldn't be a #blackhermione because of continuity (H)?

Here we go again. Racists whitesplaining their racism as simply being sticklers for detail & authenticity #HermioneIsBlack #BlackHermione (Amira).

If you didn't care that they turned Lavender Brown from black to white – stop pretending your issue is with the continuity (McCue).

Not only was there a flurry of commentary on critics' racism, but people took to Twitter to challenge detractors' assumption that white is the default:

Racebending is magical- adding peopleofcolor [sic] characters to classic stories.

Disrupting default imagination of white charcters [sic] (A).

If U default characters who [sic] race is never said as White, but nvr get mad about whitewashing canon POC ur part of the problem (Kyle).

These tweets signify how using colorblindness as an ideology, while holding whiteness in a privileged position in reality and fiction underscores some of the frustration and controversy with the casting of Dumezweni. As Brandon pointed out: "I don't see color == I only see white" (Brandon).

Critics who cried for continuity between the books, the movie adaptations and the play often used the disclaimer "I'm not racist, but..." We did not find anyone who made this claim while using #BlackHermione, but we did see instances in which people who used the hashtag retweeted other posts or posted screenshots of racist commentary in letters to the *Daily Mail* and on Facebook. A commenter to the *Daily Mail* (ArthurK) said, "Maybe they should rewrite jango

[sic] with a white guy or a tupac biopic starring rowan atkinson" (TheDMReporter). Meanwhile, a Facebook user posted that people are not angry that Dumezweni is black, but they are angry about "the lack of continuity to a story that has defined their childhoods and lives" (guiltyx, Twitter Post). This user goes on to equate #BlackHermione to "remaking the fiction literature of *The Color Purple* with a white cast." Such commentary implies that critics cannot be racist if they are merely trying to play devil's advocate. That is, if "jango," characters from *The Color Purple*, Nelson Mandela or Tupac were white, then supporters of #BlackHermione would be pushing for continuity. Of course, this argument is flawed: Django and the people from *The Color Purple* were explicitly conceived of as Black, while Nelson Mandela and Tupac were real Black people.

JK Rowling as the Target of Anger

The Facebook user we referenced above maintained that any discontinuity in the Harry Potter story violates people's "childhood and lives." Cumpătă Lucian echoed this sentiment when he tweeted a response to Rowling's support for Black Hermione: "You ruined my childhood" (Lucian). Another tweeter, Adwitiya Pal, wrote: "This is not about racism, bt [sic] about preserving what we grew up with! How would u react if Princess Leia was cast as black" (Pal)? The tweeters whose lives have allegedly been ruined and compromised have intentionally made serious indictments on JK Rowling. We are left to question how someone so beloved could also be responsible for sullying people's cherished youths.

There are a few ways to interpret Rowling as the primary target of critics' anger, as #BlackHermione users mentioned her name more than they mentioned Noma Dumezweni.[4] First, people revere Harry Potter, and Rowling has the ultimate power to make the sacred profane. This explanation concerns the amount of control she has over canon. Second, Rowling has never shied away from displaying her progressive liberal stances. Her politics are evident in her writings, her comments on social media and in her public service. For this reason, she is a target of dissent, which is indicative of a shift toward Alt-Right politics in North America and Europe. Plus, irrespective of her politics, she has political clout and can influence her fans in myriad ways. As @clariseamala tweeted, "Also, I'm glad J.K. Rowling didn't front on #BlackHermione. But all ya'll that needed a white woman to tell you it was okay are SEENT" (Clarise). Third, Rowling is a woman, whose flaws are responsible for the fall of humankind (much like Eve in Christian theology), or the destruction of childhoods, in this case.[5]

There is another explanation as to why JK Rowling became the primary target of critics' racist anger: *she is white*. To explain, Philosopher Charles W. Mills wrote about a "racial contract" that divides whites as people who matter and who belong from everyone else neither matters nor belongs (Mills). This contract works as long as white people endorse it, thus upholding their racial privilege. Hence, by supporting Noma Dumezweni and maintaining a firm grip on canon, she became a target because she violated that racial contract. Moreover, white detractors who claimed that a need for continuity – rather than racism – fueled their opposition to #BlackHermione were not only adhering to the racial contract, but they were reminding Rowling

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[4] We would never deny that Noma Dumezweni was a target of racist criticism on social media. She addressed the backlash in an interview with *The Sunday Times*: "My name is being tagged into stuff that's not nice, that's not nice… It's ignorance. It drives me crazy" (Wise).
[5] We are unaware if Lin-Manuel Miranda received similar types of criticisms for his race bent production of Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr.

(and other white supporters) of their obligation to do so as well. These three tweets illustrate this point:

> That's why #BlackHermione and @jk_rowling's response is so important. It's challenging the assumption of whiteness entrenched in our culture (Balakumar 2015).
>
> People fighting for Hermione's whiteness because they think she would be lesser if she were black. That's how racism works #blackhermione (Magill 2015).
>
> It's fascinating to see the continuing #blackHermione backlash for @jk_rowling It is LUDICROUS and just proves racism is alive and healthy (Greene 2016).

Essentially, these tweeters have uncovered the racial contract in identifying how both racism and the notion of a Black Hermione as "lesser" are "entrenched in our culture." Moreover, as Greene points out, this backlash has mainly targeted JK Rowling.

Making Sense of #BlackHermione

Harry Potter and the Cursed Child, which began previews on 6 June 2016 and officially premiered on 30 July 2016, opened to positive reviews. Jack Shepherd of *Independent* said that Noma Dumezweni did a "tremendous job" as Hermione (Shepherd), Ben Brantley of *The New York Times* said she was "perfect in the part" (Brantley), while Tufayel Ahmed of *Newsweek* lauded Dumezweni for the "precision and nuance" of her performance (Ahmed). The play was also nominated for 11 Laurence Olivier Awards, which recognize excellence in London theater, winning a record nine awards on 9 April 2017. Noma Dumezweni won the award for Best Actress in a Supporting Role. She also won a WhatsOnStage Award for Best Supporting Actress in a Play, beating out her costar Poppy Miller, who played Ginny Weasley Potter. Some may

wonder if Dumezweni's accolades are vindication for her rightful place in the Harry Potter

canon. Others are not as optimistic.

Controversies such as that which surrounded #BlackHermione are evidence that it will

take much more than theater awards to dismantle racism. They suggest that we, as global

citizens and netizens, still have a long way to go to dismantle the structures that continue to

support racism. Plus, the controversy that emerged upon Noma Dumezweni's winning the role

of Hermione Granger is just one in a long series of public debates about canon, continuity and

racism. For instance, it was not that long ago that people were upset that Amandla Stenberg, an

actor of African American, Danish and Greenlandic Inuit descent, played Rue in the movie

adaptation of Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*. In the book, Collins describes Rue as

having dark skin. Similar to #BlackHermione, fans took to social media to object to Stenberg as

Rue, challenge assumptions that Rue – a young woman whom Katniss Everdeen takes under

wing – is white and even to question why race and representation are even issues in the fictional

country of Panem.

Over 1,000 #BlackHermione appearances on Twitter illuminated a controversy that is

much deeper than objection to a Black actor playing a racially unspecified character. At one

level, the posts we analyzed raised the question of who controls canon. It seems logical that JK

Rowling has absolute control, but it is more difficult to see her outright control independent of

political and economic factors and/or fans' support. Another level of examination suggested the

inherent difficulties in separating racism and the need for continuity. The convergence of these

two justifications got us back to the question of control and political, economic and fan

pressures. Moreover, it led us to examine the severity of violating (un)spoken expectations about

race and racism, a racial contract. This claim is especially noteworthy given that Rowling emerged as the prime target of her detractors' anger, even more so than Dumezweni did.

Casting Noma Dumezweni as Hermione is a necessary step toward dismantling racism and the racial contract. More racial-ethnic diversity in different types of art and literature are equally valuable steps (Slater). As the percentage of racial-ethnic minorities in the US continues to climb, it is imperative that people of color – especially youth – see themselves at the center of the page, the screen or the stage, rather than on the periphery. If the goal is to subvert the racial contract, white audiences must also see these very same representations more often.

Continued conversation and reflection on race are also significant tools for disassembling racism. Such exchanges should not stop at "Who cares?" or "Why does it matter?" The point is that it – be it racism, canon, inequality or lack of opportunity – matters to the people who make up a core of the Harry Potter fan base. Even if some people are not sure whether race matters in this fictional world, it is still evident that race matters to the fans of that world.

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