

Little Black Sambo and the Tigers are still going 'round and 'round

"But I thought Little Black Sambo was outlawed", someone said to me not too long ago. I had to catch my balance and remind them of that little paragraph called The First Amendment and explain that this is America, and you can't "outlaw" books. I had the feeling this was a nowhere conversation.

Long long ago, Little Black Sambo fell into serious disrepute as being racist and demeaning. Although it never went out of print, bookstores and libraries withdrew copies from their shelves. The original story, written and illustrated by Helen Bannerman, enjoyed enormous readership beginning with its publication in 1899.

Now, Fred Marcellino, winner of numerous awards for his illustrations, has retold the tale written by Bannerman who was born in Edinburgh in 1863 and lived in India for thirty years and wrote Sambo as a gift for her own children. It clearly is set in India, and in this "redo" the characters are given Indian names, the Indian characteristics are emphasized, and the demeaning qualities of the original are eradicated. So, if you're ready to read this restored classic, look for [The Story of Little Babaji](#) (HarperCollins/Michael

diCapua Books, \$14.95).

If perhaps the idea grates but the story still calls, look for an entirely Americanized version, Sam and the Tigers, written by Julius Lester and illustrated by the incomparable Jerry Pinkney (Dial, \$15.99). It's about little Sam who lives in SamSamSamara where the people and the animals cooperate and don't know they aren't supposed to. But Sam's outrageously splendid clothing causes a ripple of strife, and with great style and aplomb, he prevails over large teeth and snarling striped tigers. It's filled with Pinkney's characteristically stunning pictures, and rolls along with Lester's smooth and accomplished storytelling style proven so durable in his dozens of other African American themed books, many of which he collaboratively produced with Pinkney. They are as unbeatable as Sam, or Babaji as the case may be.

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gwynnespencer@aol.com