Sarah F. Layzell, "Entry on: Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry by Mildred DeLois Taylor ", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Daniel A. Nkemleke. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2020). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/977. Entry version as of November 07, 2026.

Mildred DeLois Taylor

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

United States (1976)

TAGS: Aesop Aesop's Fables Egypt





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United States of America, United Kingdom, Worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1976
First Edition Details	Mildred D. Taylor, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. New York, NY: Dial Press, 1976, 220 pp.
ISBN	9780140371741
Awards	1977 – Newbery Medal
Genre	Historical fiction, Novels
Target Audience	Children
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Creators



Mildred DeLois Taylor , b. 1943
(Author)

Mildred DeLois Taylor is an African American author known for the Logan family novels. Born in Jackson, Mississippi, Taylor and her family moved to Toledo, Ohio, when she was four months old. Taylor graduated from the University of Toledo with a bachelor's degree in education in 1965. She then spent two years in Ethiopia with the Peace Corps and later returned to study at the University of Colorado, gaining a master's degree in journalism and helping to establish the university's first Black Studies programme. Taylor's first book, *Song of the Trees*, won the 1974 Council on Interracial Books for Children Award and was published the following year. Taylor's second and best-known novel, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, won the 1977 Newbery Medal, making Taylor the second African American recipient of the award. For the following Logan novels, Taylor has won multiple awards including four Coretta Scott King Awards. The final book in the Logan series will be published in January 2020.

Sources:

Crowe, Chris, *Presenting Mildred D. Taylor*, New York, NY: Twayne, 1999;

"Mildred D. Taylor," (accessed: February 24, 2020).

Bio prepared by Sarah Hardstaff, University of Cambridge, sflh2@cam.ac.uk

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Additional information

Adaptations

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry was adapted as a 1978 made-for-television movie, directed by Jack Smight and starring Morgan Freeman in the role of Uncle Hammer.

The novel is also the subject of many school study guides, activity books and online resources.

Translation

Braille (English): *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, Dial Press, New York (US), 1976.

Chinese: □□□□□ *(Hei se mian hua tian)*, trans. Yixuan Chen, Nan fang chu ban she, 2016.

Dutch: *Donderslagen, Hoor Mijn Klacht*, trans. Johan van Nieuwenhuizen; Bab Siljée, Holland, 1979.

French: *Tonnerre, Entends Mon Cri*, trans. Agnès Kahane, Éditions la Farandole, 1979.

German: *Donnergrollen hör mein Schrei'n*, trans. Heike Brandt, Beltz & Gelberg, 1984.

Persian: *Faryad Mara Beshno*, trans. Soraya Ghezelayagh, Amirkabir, 1365[1984].

Spanish: *Lloro por la Tierra*, Norma, 1992.

[There is also a Japanese edition. Details to follow once the details have been found]

Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry is one of ten novels and novellas telling the story of the Logan family. The other titles are:

- *Song of the Trees* (1975),
- *Let the Circle Be Unbroken* (1981),
- *The Friendship* (1987), *The Gold Cadillac* (1987),
- *Mississippi Bridge* (1990),

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- *The Road to Memphis* (1990),
- *The Well* (1995),
- *The Land* (2001) and
- *All the Days Past, All the Days to Come* (2020).

Summary

Narrated by nine-year-old Cassie Logan, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* tells the story of an African American family living in 1930s Mississippi, an era of racial segregation and economic depression. The Logan family strive to hold on to the land they own, despite coming under pressure from nearby plantation owner Harlan Granger. After local white store holders carry out a violent attack on neighbours of the Logans, tensions between whites and blacks rise throughout the novel. Mary leads a boycott of the Wallace store, but is dismissed from her teaching job, while David's leg is broken in an attack. Meanwhile, these larger-scale struggles and injustices are mirrored by events in the children's lives: for example, they work together to cause the white school's bus to sink into a ditch, and Cassie takes revenge on a white girl who has humiliated her. At the novel's climax, child and adult worlds collide when Stacey's friend T.J. Avery is falsely accused of murdering a white store holder in a nearby town. While a lynch mob gathers, David sets fire to his cotton crop to divert attention away from T.J., who is instead arrested by the authorities. Throughout the novel, the Logan adults teach the children about their society, both through leading by example and by drawing on historical and cultural stories, including a couple which relate to antiquity.

Analysis

The novel's only overt reference to a classical figure is to Aesop. Collections of Aesop's fables are given as Christmas presents to Cassie's younger brothers:

> For Stacey there was *The Count of Monte Cristo*; for me, *The Three Musketeers*; and for Christopher-John and Little Man, two different volumes of *Aesop's Fables*. (Taylor 1976, 126)

After the children have opened their new books, their father David tells them about Alexander Dumas' mixed racial heritage: "Man sold me them books told me these two was written by a black man" (p. 126). The positioning of Dumas alongside Aesop in this context hints at historical debates about Aesop's own ethnicity and national origins,

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suggesting a shared black heritage that the children can take pride in. This is emphasised by the stark contrast between the beautiful new Christmas books and the shoddy condition of the books the children are given at school, worn and dirty from many years of use in white schools and featuring illustrations of white children only. Classical references in this novel thus form one of the ways in which Mary and David Logan teach their children to resist racism and counter white supremacist ideas about history and cultural achievement.

Education is a core theme of the novel. Formal, school-based education is characterised by racial segregation, unequal allocation of resources, outside interference, and tensions between 'official' history and more honest versions of history. Cassie's mother Mary teaches at the local black school, but is fired by the all-white school board, ostensibly for teaching the true history of slavery rather than the textbook-approved version, but in fact for her role in organising the boycott of a local store. As Hyun-Joo Yoo writes (2019), Taylor deconstructs white history both through the content of Mary's lessons and through showing Mary being mistreated. Alongside formal education, oral histories related by elders play a vital role in teaching the Logan children about their family history and heritage (Martin 2011, 2). In addition, the Logan adults provide alternative readings of aspects of history and literature traditionally received through a Eurocentric or white supremacist lens, namely, Ancient Egypt, and as previously mentioned, the novels of Alexander Dumas and Aesop's fables.

Ancient Egypt is mentioned once in the novel, in a scene where the children catch their friend T.J. looking through Mary's desk in the hope of finding her questions for an upcoming test at school:

As we entered, T.J. jumped. He was standing at the desk with Mama's W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Negro* in his hands… "Jus' lookin' at Miz Logan's history book, that's all. I'm mighty interested in that place called Egypt she been tellin' us 'bout and them black kings that was rulin' back then." (Taylor 1976, 66).

T.J.'s comment highlights Mary's teaching style and refusal to promote white supremacist versions of history. Instead Mary provides her students with a different perspective, positioning Ancient Egypt as part of a shared pan-African heritage.

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Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aesop Aesop's Fables Egypt
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adversity Childhood Child's view Coming of age Conflict Family Freedom Friendship Gaining understanding Heritage Hierarchy History Identity Innocence Integrity Justice Knowledge Learning Loss Oppression Parents (and children) Past Peers Punishment Race Resilience Respect Sacrifice School Siblings Society Storytelling Subjectivity Survival Teachers Truth and lies Values Violence

Further Reading

There have been numerous studies of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* and Mildred Taylor's other novels. The selected readings focus on the role and context of Taylor's depiction of education.

Cobb, Cicely D., "The Role of Education in Mildred D. Taylor's *Roll of Thunder*", in Heather Montgomery and Nicola J. Watson, eds., *Children's Literature: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, Milton Keynes: Palgrave Macmillan/The Open University, 2009, 247–253.

Crowe, Chris, *Presenting Mildred D. Taylor*, New York, NY: Twayne, 1999.

Lesley, Naomi, *Fictions of Integration: American Children's Literature and the Legacies of Brown v. Board of Education,* New York, NY: Routledge, 2017.

Martin, Michelle H., "Let Freedom Ring: Land, Liberty, Literacy, and Lore in Mildred Taylor's Logan Family Novels", in Julia L. Mickenberg and Lynne Valone, *The Oxford Handbook of Children's Literature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, 371–388.

Yoo, Hyun-Joo, "Rewriting American History in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*: Metahistoricity, the Postcolonial Subject, and the Return of the Repressed", *Children's Literature in Education* 50.3, (2019): 333–346.

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