Master's thesis

NTNU
Norwegian University of Science and Technology
Faculty of Humanities
Department of Language and Literature

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Young Adult Fiction Tackling American Race Relations

Understanding the Black Lives Matter Movement Through The *Hate U Give* and *Dear Martin*

Master's thesis in English Literature
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Abstract

This thesis unpacks what the young adult novels *The Hate U Give* and *Dear Martin* convey to adolescent readers, deliberately or unintentionally, concerning race relations in the United States. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is used as a critical lens in order to understand how these novels enlighten certain issues to create a better understanding of the premise of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement.

The CRT approach to *The Hate U Give* shows that the novel presents important counter-narratives that provide a different perspective on how race is perceived in contemporary society. These narratives show a nuanced picture of the dynamics between the police and young black people in urban areas, the circumstances surrounding police killings of black people, and how black people are posthumously portrayed by the media. The novel also enlightens the intersection of race and other forms of insubordination and that the misfortune of black Americans in urban areas is primarily caused by a lack of opportunities for upward mobility. The CRT perspective shows that *Dear Martin* emphasizes the more unrecognizable forms of racism in society and shows how they impact marginalized people. These topics include racial profiling, internalized racism, white privilege, colorblindness, and implicit bias. The novel uses a counter-narrative to shed light on how these issues severely affect people of color.

Together, these novels emphasize that police brutality and police killings of black people are just a fragment of America's race issue. Instead, instances of police violence are used to introduce and underline other significant racial issues. Consequently, the novels reflect that the purpose of Black Lives Matter is about racial justice and social transformation.

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Chapter 1: Black Lives Matter, Young Adult Literature and Critical Race Theory

Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown are the names of the two black teenagers considered the catalysts of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. While Martin's death is often called the spark, Brown's death and the tragic circumstances that followed started the fire and the full establishment of "Black Lives Matter" (Ransby 29). On February 26, 2012, seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin was walking home late after buying snacks when he crossed paths with the neighborhood watch volunteer, George Zimmerman. Zimmerman found Martin's behavior suspicious and immediately assumed the worst. He called 911, and although the operator instructed him not to pursue Martin, he did so regardless. An encounter occurred between them but what exactly happened next is still unclear. However, the result of the confrontation was that the young Trayvon Martin was gunned down, and Zimmerman claimed that it was self-defense. The story of the black teenager who had simply been returning from a quick trip to the local convenience store when he was killed made an impact, and especially black people were furious. Like Martin, many had experienced racial profiling, which made them identify with him. His death was the spark that people needed to take to the streets and make their voices heard. Furthermore, organizations like Million Hoodies Movement for Justice, Dream Defenders, and Black Youth Project 100 formed as a response to Martin's murder (Ransby 29-30).

In the weeks that followed, it became increasingly clear that Florida authorities did not intend to prosecute George Zimmerman, despite the questionable circumstances of Martin's death. This called for the organization of the largest march yet. In March 2012, nationwide protests broke out, and they went by the name "Million Hoodies," in reference to what Martin was wearing on the night of his murder (Ransby 30). With widespread protests, it became evident that people's anger was not directed toward one individual but at the system that once again had failed to prosecute. Some protesters argued that the police at the scene treated Zimmerman as the victim, not the unarmed teenager lying dead on the street (Ransby 31). The many protests, social media, and Martin's family forced the authorities to reconsider the decision not to charge Zimmerman. Still, in July 2013, George Zimmerman was officially found not guilty of the murder of Trayvon Martin (Ransby 32).

On August 9, 2014, Michael Brown was walking down the street with a friend. Previously that day, he was involved in a minor altercation at a local convenience store. As they were walking, police officer Darren Wilson drove by and asked them to walk on the sidewalk and not in the middle of the street. The two men talked back to him and said they were almost at their destination, so they would be off the street soon. Then, Wilson allegedly realized that Brown fit the description of the man involved in a shoplifting and shoving incident earlier that day. From there, things escalated quickly (Ransby 47). Only Wilson could give a full testimony of what happened, and his description freed him from any wrongdoings in the case. He stated that he had simply asked the men to walk on the sidewalk, and they refused, which caused a heated argument. During the argument, Brown allegedly reached into the police car, fully aware that Wilson was armed, and threatened him. Wilson was then forced to shoot and kill the eighteen-year-old. Wilson’s statement is questionable and has been subject to criticism. Regardless of the circumstances, the outcome of the brief exchange was that an unarmed teenager was killed in the streets of Ferguson, Missouri (Ransby 48).

Michael Brown’s body was left in the street for hours, which fueled the collective anger substantially. As his body was lying there, crowds gathered around, and the news of his murder spread across social media. People were baffled by the lack of basic humanity the police showed for Brown and the grieving community (Ransby 48). Shortly after his body was removed, hundreds of protesters poured into the streets (Ransby 49). Following Brown’s death, the Ferguson Uprising became a defining moment in shedding light on the racist behavior many black Americans already endured (Ransby 6). The protesters in Ferguson stood up to what they experienced as a notoriously racist local police force. This perception would later be confirmed by the Department of Justice when it was discovered that harassment, arrests, and fines of African Americans had become a revenue source for the essentially all-white police force (Ransby 66). This information exposed what most people outside the black community wanted to ignore: the existence of racial capitalism and systematic racism. As the demonstrations continued, it became clear that Brown’s murder was just a small piece of a much larger problem. The Uprising unveiled the reality of the black working class of Ferguson and their anger towards systematic oppression (Ransby 6).

One of the chants roaring through Ferguson’s streets was “Hands Up, Don’t Shoot,” which was based on the reports that Brown was in a surrendering position when Wilson shot him. Although this slogan was frequently used and held a powerful message, it was the more far-reaching “Black Lives Matter” that eventually stuck and would become the name of a more significant movement. The name had a deep resonance among black people. It represented the systematic criminalization and devaluation of black life. BLM is a response to the frequent indications that the lives of black people of urban and poor communities do not matter (Ransby 50). The name “Black Lives Matter” comes from the Twitter hashtag by the same name. It was created by Alicia Garza in 2012, together with Opal Tometi and Patrisse Kahn-Cullors, as a response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman (Ransby 5). This illustrates that the Ferguson Uprising had close connections to the murder of Trayvon Martin two years prior.

The resistance that arose after 2014 resulted from police violence and other forms of systematic violence against black people. The protests were substantially heightened during a two-year period by the occurrences of a dozen high-profile police killings. The additional failure to convict was also at the center of anger among many of the protesters. However, the BLM movement is much more expansive than this. It is rooted in a long history of oppression of black Americans. Primarily, the movement organizers emphasize five causes for the slow deaths of thousands of black people: the lack of affordable housing, low wages, gradual demolition of public services, lack of jobs, and spiraling personal debt (Ransby 8). BLM fights for racial justice and social transformation (Ransby ix). Furthermore, the movement and its activists are characterized by their direct course of action, which involves visible street protests and uprisings that call for reforms and systematic and fundamental change (Ransby 4). According to Lebron, "'Black Lives Matter' represents a civic desire for equality and a human desire for respect, the intellectual roots of which lie deep in the history of black American thought" (xiii). A lot has happened since 2012 and the first glances of the new movement. Many more black people have become victims of unnecessary deaths (Dungca et al.). Most recently is the death of George Floyd, which started a nationwide protest against the United States police force and a worldwide protest against racism. With the constant reoccurrences of injustice for black lives, there is an increasing focus on addressing racism in the public eye, including popular culture.

Recent years see an upsurge of books, music, movies, television series, and podcasts that explore issues of racism. The streaming services see a pattern where shows that portray the experiences of black people top the charts. Furthermore, black artists are inspired to join the movement by releasing new and socially motivated music and videos (Griggs). Among these artists, a few stand out. Rapper Kendrick Lamar made and performed the song that in many ways became the anthem of the BLM protests in Cleveland, Ohio, in July 2015. The protesters shouted, "WE GONNA BE ALRIGHT!" to signal to the police that they would not be defeated. The song "Alright," from the album *To Pimp a Butterfly,* depicts the struggles of the black community, but most notably, it addresses the police brutality that primarily targets black people of a particular background (Lebron 35). Beyoncé's halftime show at the Super Bowl in 2016 celebrated black American culture and called attention to the social injustice many black Americans face today (Gammage 716). In 2018, Childish Gambino also released the political and controversial music video for the song "This Is America." Within three days of the video's release, it had over fifty million views on Youtube. In the music video, Childish Gambino demonstrates the contradicting expectations of black males as both hyper-violent and hyper-talented. The performance does this through a juxtaposition of gun violence with African and African American dance. "This is America" captures and criticizes contemporary issues like police brutality, the hip-hop industry, and how popular media portray black people (LeMesurier 139). These are just a few examples of how the music industry and black artists have joined the socio-political wave of Black Lives Matter.

There is an increasing focus on addressing various forms of racism and discrimination against black Americans within the film and television industry. This includes Netflix's mini-series *When They See Us* (2019), which is based on the true story of the Central Park Five. The story portrays the tragic failure of the justice system and racism within the police force that caused five innocent teenagers to get falsely convicted and imprisoned for the brutal rape and assault of a woman in Central Park in 1989 (DuVernay). Next, the critically acclaimed biographical film *Fruitvale Station* (2013) is based on the true story of Oscar Grant, who was killed by police on New Year's Day in 2009. The film received attention for its use of actual footage of the incident (Coogler). Finally, another film that is frequently mentioned in relation to this topic is the film adaptation of the book *The Hate U Give* (2018). As opposed to the two others mentioned, this film is not based on actual events. However, it paints a familiar picture of a teenage black male being shot and killed by a police officer during a traffic control (Tillman Jr.). In 2020, Netflix created a collection of shows and films that promoted "Black Lives Matter" to their viewers, and the numbers showed that content depicting racial injustice had a considerable increase in viewers (Griggs).

Within the world of literature, there are also frequently new publications that address racism and race relations. Still, it is only recently that fiction and nonfiction books about race topped bestseller lists. In June 2020, just weeks after George Floyd died in police custody and the protests began, fifteen of the twenty bestselling books on Amazon tackled race, racism, and white supremacy in the United States. Most of the books on the list cover the historical context of racism and its role in poverty, mass incarceration, healthcare, and politics (Andrew). Moreover, people were encouraged to educate themselves on their role in upholding systematic racism, which caused titles about anti-racism and white privilege to sometimes be out of stock (Griggs). One of the fiction books that got a new bump was *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas. The book has been a great success since its publication in 2017, but in 2020 it was once again considered relevant, and the sales increased. As of February 28, 2021, *The Hate U Give* has been on the New York Times Best Seller list for 207 weeks under the category "Young Adult Hardcover." Furthermore, three of the ten books on the list for that date are about racism and anti-racism in America (NYT "Young Adult Hardcover"). *Dear Martin* by Nic Stone was on the same New York Times Best Seller list on November 12, 2017, and in February 2020, it was the number one sold book within the category of "Young Adult Paperback" (NYT "Young Adult Paperback"). In other words, young adult fiction novels that address race relations in the United States have been popular for years now, and they continue to thrive.

Young adult (YA) literature has become an influential literary genre because it enables real teenagers to resonate with fictional young adults. Through the sympathetic portrayal of the ups and downs of being young, authors make their readers confront different political and social issues. The interrogation of social constructions and how it influences individuals distinguishes YA literature from children's literature. Where children's literature focuses on the self and self-discovery, YA literature depicts the relationship between society and the individual (Hill 7). The social problems of these books are typically categorized within colonialism, political injustice, environmental concerns, sexuality, mental health, and death. Recently, critics have started to recognize that these texts create a parallel between young individual's desire to grow and society's need to improve (Nikolajeva and Hilton 1). Young adult books are primarily written by adults, which means that they do not give an absolute portrayal of what it means to be an adolescent. Instead, these books show how it might or should be like, thereby instructing young readers into adulthood. The portrayal of adolescent characters in fiction novels is made according to what adults want or need teenagers to believe about themselves and the world, and this makes YA literature an effective ideological tool (Nikolajeva and Hilton 8).

Young adult literature's use of political and emotional instability to criticize society is not new; in fact, many of the most acclaimed books for adolescents throughout history have, in one way or another, had an underlying social, political or ideological message. In the nineteenth century, *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott depicted the powerful sentimental ideology of family. The secure and harmonic family was set in contrast to the cruel outside world (Nikolajeva and Hilton 2). During the first half of the twentieth century, there was a frequent moralizing focus on the importance of hard work and prosperous businesses. These books included classics like the book series of *Nancy Drew*, *The Hardy Boys,* and *The Bobbsey Twins* (Nikolajeva and Hilton 4). After World War II, the publication of *Anne Frank's Diary* introduced the genre to an autobiographical side where the anxieties and experiences of the war could be addressed in a way that was more comprehensible and sensible for a younger audience (Nikolajeva and Hilton 6). Moreover, *The Catcher in the Rye* has received acknowledgment within the young adult genre for establishing the metaphorical connection between the troubled minds of adolescents and the ongoing injustices and cruelties of society. This connection has since been used and developed by many young adult fiction writers (Nikolajeva and Hilton 7-8).

According to Adami, young adult novels are essentially about power (130). The protagonists must learn about the social structures that make them who they are. During this process, they learn how to manipulate the power levels within their own society, which typically include social institutions like family, school, government, and church, and social constructions such as sexuality, gender, race, and class (130). Power is also expressed through the frequent portrayals of empowered young protagonists who, for different reasons, must take responsibility and act in order to prevent oppression or repression (Adami 131). Adami stresses that this is where the pedagogical value of YA literature lies; the novels can educate young adults into being better and more active citizens by showing them that they have the power to change the world (131).

The protagonists in YA novels have the most impact on young readers. They often serve as neutral ground between fiction and reality. More specifically, identity formation within these characters is often the central theme in young adult fiction and how this happens while the character is experiencing a type of crisis. Typically, the protagonist's crisis is either directly or metaphorically connected to a political and social issue. This means that the character's quest for identity is heavily intertwined with society's pressing issues (Adami 130). The reader can experience the connection between social issues and identity as both provocative and empowering. This can happen although the fictional character's experiences are much more intensified than the reader's reality. Nonetheless, the knowledge that the reader acquires through the fictional character presents transformative possibilities (Nikolajeva and Hilton 47). Moreover, the protagonists play an essential role in making YA an influential genre because they make young readers identify emotionally with the characters. This bond creates a notion of the reader and character being in this together. Nikolajeva and Hilton call this "double exposure" (146), which entails reading about what someone else does, thinks, or feels and simultaneously comparing and identifying with the character. Double exposure is important for readers of YA literature because the behaviors described in the literature work as a demonstration of what someone like them would do in a given critical situation without them pursuing any danger (146). Thus, as the characters in YA literature introduce different scenarios, adolescents have the opportunity to develop and test their intuitions and consider their actions (Nikolajeva and Hilton 147). Furthermore, Stephens argues that identifying with the narrator or the protagonist makes readers susceptible to the ideologies of the text, particularly the less articulated or implicit ideologies, because they believe that they are in control of the text (Hill 15). In other words, young adult literature is a powerful tool for projecting ideologies on young readers.

Young adult novels offer the possibility to introduce young readers to different kinds of difficult situations, including political injustice, drugs, suicide, and premature sexuality. These are situations that most of them will never have to experience, but through the works of skillful writers, they are still exposed without being at risk. This offers possibilities in helping teenagers reflect on how society is built and be critical of familiar topics such as popular culture, stereotyping, and more profound and challenging subjects like oppression and injustice (Nikolajeva and Hilton 15). According to Smyth and Hansen, adolescents often struggle with reading informational texts when learning about social and political issues, which is why YA novels provide a different approach for young adults to receive background knowledge and insight into a specific subject area, time, or culture (340). For instance, *Anne Frank's Diary* gives a window into how it was like to be young and Jewish during World War II, thereby providing the reader with a different angle and perhaps a more profound understanding than an informational text. Furthermore, Smyth and Hansen suggest that these types of YA books open possibilities for critical thinking and comprehension development, which is the foundation of understanding social change and justice (340).

There is a common conception among critics today that young adult novels have matured. The genre's focus on themes that matter to all ages, not just to teens who struggle with adolescence, indicates that it is evolving. Other evidence includes the selection of genres, multiple points of view, multiple creative formats that advance the story (e.g., letters), inventive plots, crucial contemporary issues, and new and exciting characters (Hill 2). Consequently, YA literature is beginning to stand on its own terms as an independent and evolving genre that creates authentic representations of the human experience (Hill 16-17). YA literature's new respected status makes it an attractive field among literary scholars of feminism, psychoanalytic criticism, post-colonialism, and post-structuralism, and they are particularly interested in how the genre responds to issues such as oppression and power (Nikolajeva and Hilton 10).

The Hate U Give and *Dear Martin* are two examples of contemporary realistic novels where pressing social and political issues are significant to the plot. These YA fiction novels explore American race relations, a challenging subject that has ignited an extensive debate and a widespread movement. Police brutality and shootings of young black males dominate the public debate on the subject, and this is also the premise of both novels. However, the primary function of portraying instances of police violence is to uncover the underlying issues that cause these tragic events to reoccur. The novels reflect on various explanations, including stereotyping, racialized poverty, media coverage of black bodies, racial profiling, white privilege, the color-blind ideology, and anti-black bias. This way, the novels demonstrate *why* black people continue to experience injustice and excessive force from law enforcement.

In exploring *The Hate U Give* and *Dear Martin*, Critical Race Theory (CRT) serves as the theoretical lens. Unlike other traditional literary theories, CRT is a fundamentally productive theory, which entails an equal focus on analyzing literary works and encouraging response and action (Garcia 46-47). This theory aims to create a better understanding of the ways race connects with the experiences of everyday life (Garcia 46). It is a common conception among scholars of CRT that racism is so deep-rooted in society that it is sometimes challenging to recognize (Hill 99). As a way of disclosing and understanding the complexity of race in society, CRT searches for answers within storytelling. Stories offer the opportunity to shed light on marginalized people and their cultural experiences and perspectives that may differ from the dominant discourse (99). These stories are typically known as counter-narratives, and their primary function is to challenge the master narrative, which exists in all societies and influences how the majority understand and interpret the world. The master narrative is perceived as the socially accepted discourse as it supports the maintenance of dominant groups (Stanley 14). Hence, it is essential to consider the insight the counter-narratives of *The Hate U Give* and *Dear Martin* provide concerning race and racial issues.

In addition to storytelling, the following tenets from CRT are explored when approaching the novels: 1. the intersection between race and other forms of oppression, insubordination, and marginalization; 2. the work to actively challenge dominant ideologies; 3. the commitment to actively work for social justice; 4. a transdisciplinary perspective, which includes ethnic, historical, and sociological studies (Garcia 47). Together, these tenets from CRT can be used to examine and challenge how race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact social structures, practices, and discourse (Garcia 49).

Thus, through the critical lens of CRT, this thesis unpacks what two books convey to adolescent readers, deliberately or unintentionally, concerning race relations in the United States. In doing so, it explores how *The Hate U Give* and *Dear Martin* enlighten certain issues to better understand the premise of the Black Lives Matter movement. Given the powerful impact young adult fiction potentially has on its readers, it is essential to consider what readers of these novels can learn about the topic and to what extent they can be used as a source of knowledge. Moreover, the productive aspect of CRT introduces the necessity to address how these YA novels encourage young readers to respond and act to racism.

Chapter 2: *The Hate U Give*

The CRT approach to *The Hate U Give* uncovers four topics that stand out in terms of relating to race relations and the Black Lives Matter movement. The first and perhaps most apparent topic is police brutality because the book begins with the shooting of the protagonist's childhood friend, Khalil. This topic covers much ground but focuses mainly on black people's distrust of the police and police killings of black people. The second highlighted topic is the media coverage of violent deaths of young black men. More specifically, it focuses on how the media influences public perception and shifts the blame away from the offender to the victim. The third topic the novel emphasizes is the cycle of racialized poverty. The citizens of Garden Heights serve as an example of how poverty and the lack of opportunity affect a community. Finally, the fourth topic related to American race relations and the BLM movement is the ongoing focus on activism and protests.

One of the first scenes of the novel introduces a counter-narrative that shows black people's fear and distrust of law enforcement. This scene challenges the master narrative because it negates the dominant perception of the police as protectors of the people. Starr and Khalil are born and raised in Garden Heights, a neighborhood with a reputation for crime, poverty, and drug abuse, which suggests that they fall into the category of people who are typically more skeptical of police behavior. Starr and Khalil's encounter with One-Fifteen demonstrates two types of distrust: Khalil's frustration of what seems like a baseless stop of two black teenagers and Starr's fear of what the police officer might do if they cross him. Khalil's immediate reaction is annoyance, and he does not want to cooperate. He keeps insisting on learning why they are being stopped, but the police officer initially ignores his request, which makes Khalil hesitant to give him his documents (Thomas 25). According to Holmes and Smith, there is widespread skepticism and mistrust of the police forces among many racial and ethnic minorities (1). This is caused by a long history of differential treatment in the criminal justice system (1). Research shows that many black Americans see the police as oppressors who only protect the interests of the white community (Holmes and Smith 2). Khalil proves to be a symbol of this skepticism as he keeps rejecting the officer's demands and does so with a hostile attitude. Besides, when the police officer rejects Khalil's request to explain why they are being stopped, he grows even more suspicious of the officer's intentions. Research suggests that people of impoverished neighborhoods are more likely to be deeply cynical and hostile toward the police (Holmes and Smith 5). This attitude is justified knowing that officers are statistically more likely to stop black drivers for no apparent reason and use unnecessary force (Behnke 86). Thus, Khalil's behavior in this situation is understandable as he believes that Starr and himself are being subjected to a racially motivated traffic stop.

Starr, on the other hand, has a different way of showing distrust. She is frightened and cooperative and insists that Khalil do what the officer says. Unlike Khalil, Starr has received strict instructions on how to behave in these situations from her father, Maverick:

> The other talk was about what to do if a cop stopped me. Momma fussed and told Daddy I was too young for that. He argued that I wasn't too young to get arrested or shot.
>
> "Starr–Starr, you do whatever they tell you to do," he said. "Keep your hands visible. Don't make any sudden moves. Only speak when they speak to you." (Thomas 24)

For many racial or ethnic minority groups, parenting means to adequately prepare their child to anticipate harassment by the police or other law enforcement (Bryant-Davis et al. 860). The little systematic research implemented on police brutality suggests that minorities have more reason to be skeptical of police behavior (Holmes and Smith 5). When considering the secondary material provided, it becomes evident that Starr and Khalil's encounter with One-Fifteen serves as a counter-narrative because it shows that there is a profound distrust of law enforcement among black Americans. These characters' responses illustrate how many people of the same background would behave in a similar situation and can, thus, be perceived as a realistic representation of the dynamic between young black people and the police in contemporary America.

The encounter with officer One-Fifteen turns deadly when Khalil opens the car door to check on Starr. By opening the door, Khalil disobeys the order to stand still, and he is shot three times as a result. Starr, who was inside the car and did everything she was told, rushes to Khalil's side after he is shot (Thomas 27-28). Starr and Khalil are minors, and yet the officer treats them as dangerous criminals. From Starr's account of the incident, there is no doubt that One-Fifteen acts with unnecessary deadly force:

> The officer walks back to his patrol car.
>
> My parents haven't raised me to fear the police, just to be smart around them. They told me it's not smart to move while a cop has his back to you.
>
> Khalil does. He comes to his door.
>
> It's not smart to make a sudden move. Khalil does. He opens the driver's door.

> “You okay, Starr —“
>
> *Pow!*
>
> One. Khalil’s body jerks. Blood splatters from his back. He holds on to the door to keep himself upright. (Thomas 27)

CRT’s commitment to social justice includes addressing issues that affect minorities (Solorzano and Bernal 313). According to Hadden et al., the United States sees an alarming rate of police shootings of unarmed black males (336). In a study of the ten largest cities, African American or black victims were overrepresented in police shootings. Furthermore, these shootings affect low-income and middle-class African Americans or blacks, both inside and outside of minority neighborhoods, and they are often the result of routine encounters (336). A different study that focused on the period between 2010 and 2012 showed that black or African American males aged fifteen to nineteen were twenty-one times more likely than white people to be shot by law enforcement (Hadden et al. 337). When considering these facts, Khalil’s death is not incidental. He is a black teenager, present in a low-income neighborhood when a police officer stops him due to a broken taillight. This fictional character’s death sheds light on a comprehensive issue that continues to affect a large portion of the American population.

The BLM movement is undoubtedly most known for protesting the deaths of black people at the hands of law enforcement. This is also the premise of *The Hate U Give,* as the protagonist witnesses her childhood friend shot and killed by a police officer. The transdisciplinary aspect of CRT offers the opportunity to examine Khalil’s death from a historical perspective. This perspective shows that there are compelling similarities between Khalil’s death and that of Michael Brown and Trayvon Martin. Khalil is seventeen years old, unarmed, and minding his own business when being pulled over by a police officer. Brown was initially stopped because he was walking in the middle of the street, while Khalil is stopped because his taillight is broken. These are both minor offenses; however, they have deadly outcomes. The similarities between the circumstances of these deaths show how easily a black teenage boy transforms from being just that, a child, to a dangerous criminal in the eyes of a police officer.

Another example that connects Khalil’s death to real-life events is the significance put on the aftermath of the shooting. The chapter after Khalil is killed begins with the following sentence: “They leave Khalil’s body in the street like it’s an exhibit” (Thomas 29). Michael

Brown's body was left in the street for *four* hours. The protesters in Ferguson saw this as a deliberate act, symbolizing the police force's apathy for black lives (Ransby 49).

Furthermore, confusion and contradictions often characterize incidents where law enforcement kills black people. There are still many unanswered questions surrounding Brown's death, and Darren Wilson's questionable and contradicting testimony makes the incident all the more confusing. In *The Hate U Give*, the course of events is clearer, but that does not stop the incident from appearing unclear to the public. Starr's perspective shows that there is never any malintent with Khalil's attitude toward One-Fifteen other than annoyance. One-Fifteen's behavior also indicates that he is frustrated and annoyed that Khalil does not obey his orders, not scared for his life. However, later, in an interview with One-Fifteen's father, he claims that Khalil and Starr had been speeding and looked like they were planning to attack the police officer. Further, he says that Khalil acted threateningly, which is why One-Fifteen thought the hair-brush in the car door was a gun (Thomas 243). Starr's account of the incident shows that this statement is false. Moreover, his statement's credibility is immediately questioned by the community in Garden Heights because they find it highly unlikely that two teenagers like Starr and Khalil could intimidate an experienced police officer to the extent that he was forced to defend himself by *deadly* force (Thomas 255).

The similarities between Khalil's death and particularly the death of Michael Brown show that the fictional world holds significant resemblance to reality and the high-profile deaths that ignited the BLM movement. More significantly, the actual circumstances of Khalil's death serve as a counter-narrative to the dominant perception of how these events play out. The master narrative is the account of One-Fifteen's father, which justifies his son's actions. This account becomes the dominant narrative because it is easier to accept that the police officer responded with deadly force against a dangerous individual than an innocent teenage boy. However, the counter-narrative demonstrates that neither Khalil nor Starr threatened the officer's safety, thereby condemning One-Fifteen's actions. In other words, *The Hate U Give* tells a vital counter-narrative that encourages critical thinking of the circumstances surrounding police killings of black people.

Khalil's death quickly becomes a heated topic in the nation. The first time the media addresses his death, it is with the following title: "Khalil Harris, a Suspected Drug Dealer" (Thomas 106). According to Smiley and Fakunle, a demonizing and criminalizing process often follows the death of an unarmed black man (351). Their research emphasizes that media often focuses on the first impression of these men when describing them posthumously, an impression that either justifies or negates their deaths by law enforcement (Smiley and Fakunle

351). The damaging factor here is that all information is typically not accessible immediately after these incidents, which can easily result in false information and misconceptions of these individuals. Furthermore, although more credible and debunking information may emerge later, it is difficult to alter these perceptions once they have stuck (Smiley and Fakunle 363). The media's portrayal of Khalil serves as an important counter-narrative of how black people are portrayed posthumously. Starr's depiction of him and the community's response to his death show that he was a genuinely good person, but the media's dehumanizing portrayal of him as a "suspected drug dealer" (Thomas 106) strips him from any positive connotations. Consequently, the portrayal of Khalil in the media is the one that people are most likely to remember. Although Starr describes him as her best friend, a jokester, and a boy with a big heart in a nationwide interview (Thomas 282), Khalil cannot escape the thug label.

Smiley and Fakunle's research on the deaths of high-profile shootings of black men found four recurring themes in how these men were posthumously portrayed by the media. The research that included Michael Brown and Freddie Gray presented an overwhelming focus on the victim's behavior, appearance, location, or lifestyle (Smiley and Fakunle 357). In the case of Michael Brown, the primary focus was his behavior and appearance. More specifically, the shoplifting incident prior to the shooting gained attention, thereby insinuating that these incidents were connected. The connection was later denied; however, the damage was done. The shoplifting was renamed a robbery, and it became the broader narrative of Brown's death (Smiley and Fakunle 358). Furthermore, his physical size and lifestyle frequently dominated the media scene. He was 6'4 and 292 lbs. and he had recently started rapping. Together, all these themes contributed to a negative connotation of Brown, as he fit the black stereotype of being dangerous and violent (Smiley and Fakunle 359). In the case of Freddie Gray, it was an emphasis on where he lived, which was a neighborhood in Baltimore known for poverty and serious crime (Smiley and Fakunle 361). Ultimately, the context surrounding these men was given more attention than the fact that they were killed by law enforcement. In *The Hate U Give*, the spotlight is on Khalil's lifestyle, and the media creates a story based on assumptions rather than facts:

> […][T]he news basically makes it sound like it's Khalil's fault he died.
>
> "There are multiple reports that a gun was found in the car," the anchor claims. "There is also suspicion that the victim was a drug dealer as well as a gang member. Officials have not confirmed if any of this is true." (Thomas 140)

Furthermore, in an interview with One-Fifteen's father, there is an emphasis on Garden Heights being "a neighborhood notorious for gangs and drug dealers" (Thomas 242). These narratives make Khalil out to be a dangerous individual when in reality, he was a desperate child who grew up in a tough neighborhood. Hence, the novel serves a counter-narrative that negates the assumption that black people living in urban areas are dangerous and more prone to criminal behavior and therefore encourages critical thinking of how the media posthumously portrays black people.

According to Smiley and Fakunle, the media has significant power in influencing the initial assumptions of the victim and, thus, can shift the perspective of how the public views these victims (362). The potential harmful outcome of these stereotypical depictions of racial or ethnic minorities in the media is that they shift the blame away from the perpetrators and thereby blame the victims for their own deaths (Dukes and Gaither 791). The effect of the media's portrayal of Khalil becomes evident when Starr's best friend, Hailey, refers to Khalil as "the drug dealer" (Thomas 114). This is when Starr realizes that everyone who did not know him will only see him as nothing more than a thug (Thomas 115). The term thug has become a way of dismissing black lives as less valuable due to their associations with negative and criminal connotations (Smiley and Fakunle 351). The novel reflects the negative connotations of the thug label through Hailey, who does not consider Khalil's death important enough to care about as he is to her just a drug dealer, an inconvenience to society.

Michael Brown's death became a turning point on how black bodies were portrayed in the media as it sparked a debate on who is and who is not considered a sympathetic victim of injustice. Some factors indicate that Brown was not a saint. However, many protesters insisted that he did not have to be a saint in order to deserve to live (Ransby 49). This shift is also noticeable in *The Hate U Give* when Starr is still uncertain of Khalil's associations with the local gang and drug dealing. Despite this, she looks past the speculations of the media and makes a point: "Does it matter though? He didn't deserve to die" (Thomas 140). Although the media does not explicitly say it, they keep perpetuating the black stereotype of a thug, which is associated with an expendable citizen. During the Ferguson riots, the protesters insisted that Brown, or any other black person, did not have to be a church-going, law-abiding, or proper-speaking citizen in order for his life to matter (Ransby 49).

In a conversation with Starr, Maverick attempts to encourage Starr to question the idea of value by focusing on the meaning behind the concept of "THUG LIFE" and how it relates to Khalil and the people living in Garden Heights (Thomas 166). This acronym was first introduced by rapper and activist 2Pac and breaks down to the phrase: "The Hate U Give Little

Infants Fucks Everybody." At the beginning of the book, Khalil explains the phrase to Starr: "Meaning what society give us as youth, it bites them in the ass when we wild out" (Thomas 21). Maverick wants Starr to fully comprehend the extensiveness of the concept and how it can be applied to Garden Heights and its challenges. In order to understand, Starr tries to make sense of why people in her community are in a constant cycle of poverty. CRT perspective shows that this part of the novel addresses and examines the intersection of race and other forms of insubordination. According to Payne and Brown, statistics concerning income, employment, and high school graduation rates show that black people are consistently behind other racial groups (790). Black people living in low-income urban areas are even further behind, and they also tend to resort to extra-legal means to survive, which causes many of them to end up in the criminal justice system (790). Garden Heights is known for poverty, drugs, and violent gangs, which puts it at the center of these poor statistics. Thus, the fictional neighborhood represents one of the darkest parts of American society, which is a never-ending cycle of public suffering.

Maverick emphasizes the lack of opportunity as the reason that people in Garden Heights are suffering (Thomas 168). In contemporary American society, access to resources and services that enable stability and advancement is not available to everyone (Hartman 5). In fact, the barriers to upward mobility are increasing for everyone except for the wealthiest Americans. The people who suffer the most from these increasing barriers are the less educated and economically strong, and in particular, those Payne and Brown refer to as "street identified" (790), people living in low-income urban neighborhoods. From this definition, it is clear that Garden Heights fits into the category of being a place that lacks opportunities. Further, Payne and Brown's research suggests that the lack of opportunity is caused by the perception that blacks in urban communities belong to the "undeserving poor" (790), and especially those who break the law are responsible for their own socioeconomic marginalization. The deeply embedded stereotype of black people as lazy, criminal, irresponsible, and in opposition to middle-class values reinforces this perception and makes the public less likely to advocate for greater opportunity for this part of the population (Payne and Brown 790). In other words, not only are the current opportunities in neighborhoods like Garden Heights bleak but there are serious objections to change their course. Knowing this, the fictional neighborhood of Garden Heights demonstrates how people of low-income urban areas have slight chances for upward mobility and are, therefore, stuck in a never-ending cycle of poverty and desperation.

In American society, opportunity prospects are heavily associated with different institutions (Hartman 5), and Maverick highlights the school system and job market as the two primary issues of Garden Heights (Thomas 168). First, Maverick illustrates how the schools in

Garden Heights cause black people to be held behind (Thomas 168). The chance of academic success of low-income urban black Americans is far lower than that of Hispanics and whites. Although there has been an increase in high school graduation rates amongst all racial groups, studies show that blacks are far less likely to graduate (Payne and Brown 791). Extensive research on low-income urban areas suggests that the high drop-out rates in this particular group result from the poor education offered in these areas. The primary factor that causes this outcome is unqualified teachers and staff who are unprepared to work with these youths. However, other emphasized factors are poorly developed curricula and inadequate academic support (Payne and Brown 792). Maverick tells Starr that the schools' poor quality and inability to prepare students for life are the reason that he and Lisa decided to send their children to Williamson (Thomas 168). However, very few people in Garden Heights have the financial ability to send their children to a private school. Everyone that Starr knows in her neighborhood goes to the public school in Garden Heights. The consequence of the schools' inability to adequately prepare students for college or employment increases the chances of students engaging in street activity. This happens because they do not see the value in the education they are receiving. More significantly, illegal activity increases the likelihood of incarceration, which has severe implications on future job prospects (Payne and Brown 793).

Extensive research shows that the labor market is particularly tough for young black males living in under-resourced urban communities. Payne and Brown point to several factors for this outcome, including education levels, available jobs in the community, hiring discrimination, and implications with the criminal justice system (791). Maverick tells Starr how some of these factors apply to Garden Heights:

> "Corporate America don't bring jobs to our communities, and they damn sure ain't quick to hire us. Then, shit, even if you do have a high school diploma, so many of the schools in our neighborhoods don't prepare us well enough." (Thomas 168)

Maverick demonstrates the hopeless reality of living in these communities: although you do everything right, your opportunities are few, especially if you are male. Hiring discrimination is more likely to affect males as employers often see black men as lazy, irresponsible, and hostile, and thus prefer to hire black women or men or women of other ethnicities (Payne and Brown 794). Moreover, previously imprisoned individuals have even more bleak job prospects. A report from 2010 concluded that previous incarceration among all races had a substantial effect on future employment and the opportunity to earn a living wage (794). However, blacks with a criminal record were least likely to get a call-back, an interview, or be hired. More shockingly, black men *without* a criminal record were less likely to be considered for employment than white men *with* a criminal record (Payne and Brown 794-795). The novel reflects issues of employment after incarceration through Maverick. He was incarcerated for three years after taking the blame for King, and according to Starr, Mr. Wyatt was the only one willing to hire him after his release (Thomas 41). This indicates that luck played a significant role in Maverick and his family's current situation because he could have easily returned to the King Lords out of desperation. Mr. Wyatt gave him a chance, and he was able to return to society. By all indications, Maverick's fortune is rare.

The feeling of hopelessness is the one that eventually gets to Khalil. As a result of his mother, Brenda, being a drug addict and his grandmother losing her job after being diagnosed with cancer, Khalil becomes the family's main provider (Thomas 22). Bolland states that the feeling of hopelessness among adolescents living in low-income neighborhoods might be one of the most pressing issues in American inner cities today (145). Khalil had considerable responsibility for his family at just seventeen, and he says to Starr that he began dealing drugs because he was tired of choosing between lights and food (Thomas 22). From a CRT perspective, Khalil's family is a specific example of how race is intersected with other forms of insubordination. The people of Garden Heights are not only marginalized because most of them are black, many of them are also poor, suffer from drug abuse, or have serious health issues. By depicting Khalil's family's issues as a mixture of poverty, forms of physical challenges, and race, the novel shows that racism does not occur in isolation.

Typically, when inner-city adolescents experience negative expectations surrounding opportunities and outcomes, they tend to abandon conventional and long-term approaches to success. Instead, they favor things that are achievable in the short term (Bolland 146). In Khalil's case, drug dealing becomes a highly attractive alternative as it is the best short-term solution for his financial problems as opposed to the minimum wage job he had at Maverick's store. On top of everything else, DeVante reveals that Khalil started dealing because Brenda stole from King. So, in order to save his mother, Khalil was dealing drugs to pay off her debt (Thomas 234). DeVante also fits into the category of adolescents who resort to extra-legal means due to a lack of opportunities elsewhere. By joining the King Lords, DeVante and his brother, Dalvin, found a sense of security. "'They bought us clothes and shit our momma couldn't afford and always made sure we ate. […] It was just cool to have somebody take care of us for a change, instead of the other way around'" (Thomas 235). Hopelessness, desperation, and bleak future prospects made them choose the socially unacceptable and risky path of joining a gang. Despite their knowledge of the dangers of gang life, it appears as the most attractive choice. According to Bolland, children living in impoverished and violent neighborhoods are more likely to conclude that risky alternatives, such as joining a gang, are their best choices for a lasting positive outcome (146). The novel reflects the potential risks of gang life through Dalvin, who gets killed by a member of the rival gang, Garden Disciples.

The essence of the conversation between Maverick and Starr is that those living in low-income urban areas lack opportunities. The educational system, job market, and criminal justice system are all designed against people like Khalil. Maverick believes that the meaning behind the 'Hate' in the THUG LIFE acronym is the lack of opportunities. Stripping these communities for opportunities for upward mobility leaves people in a state of hopelessness and desperation and pushes some people to resort to crime or other forms of socially unacceptable means to get by. It is the 'Hate' from a young age that creates new Khalils, Dalvins, and DeVantes every day, people who society considers a liability and a threat, and this is THUG LIFE (Thomas 167-169).

In addition to depicting police brutality, media coverage, and the lives of young people in black low-income neighborhoods, the CRT lens reveals that *The Hate U Give* is committed to social justice by showing a community's response to injustice and one person's path to activism. Similar to reality, these responses initially occur as a result of law enforcement killing a black person. However, one black body does not explain the extensive protests. During the car drive, Maverick makes Starr understand that people are protesting and rioting due to a much larger problem than one individual police killing. Starr concludes in a somewhat untraditional manner, but she grasps the essence: "So I guess the system's still giving hate, and everybody's still getting fucked?" (Thomas 169). More specifically, Maverick makes Starr understand that people keep protesting because society ignores the underlying reasons these shootings happen regularly, and they have to keep protesting to make a change. This part of the novel addresses the misconception of Black Lives Matter as only concerned with high-profile police killings of black males. The movement's philosophy is equally about addressing the well-established historical circumstances and structures that cause these deaths to happen repeatedly (Banks 710). Ransby quotes scholar and journalist Marc Lamont Hill concerning this aspect of the movement and regarding the late Michael Brown:

> To be Nobody is to be considered disposable. . . . Underneath each case (of state violence) is a more fundamental set of economic conditions, political arrangements, and power relations that transform everyday citizens into casualties of an increasingly intense war on the vulnerable. (50)

Khalil was a product of the neighborhood he grew up in, and it made him become one of the disposables. Starr's friend Hailey even says this right before Starr hits her: "The cop probably did everyone a favor. One less drug dealer on the—" (Thomas 337). Khalil symbolizes the casualties of the underlying historical and structural issues of contemporary American society.

The historical perspective of CRT shows that the protests and riots in *The Hate U Give* mirror past protests of high-profile deaths. After the deaths of Michael Brown and Trayvon Martin, protests erupted immediately after and continued to varying extents until they escalated after the indictment (Ransby 32 and 73). In the novel, small and large riots and protests emerge right after Khalil's death, but when the grand jury decides not to indict officer One-Fifteen, it ignites the largest protest in Garden Heights (Thomas 382). The fictional protests and riots are characterized by peaceful marches, chants, and speeches, but also vandalism, looting, and violent encounters between civilians and police. Starr gives the following description of Garden Heights:

> When my eyes aren't closed I see what my neighborhood has become. More tanks, more cops in riot gear, more smoke. Businesses ransacked. Streetlights are out, and fires keep everything from being in complete darkness. People run out of the Walmart and carry armfuls of items, looking like ants rushing from an anthill. (Thomas 410)

Her description resembles a war zone. Ferguson, Missouri, was also referred to as a war zone during the protests of Brown's death (Ransby 120). Most people protested peacefully; however, a small number unleashed their anger on parked cars and local businesses, and there was looting (Ransby 51). Thus, *The Hate U Give* gives a nuanced picture of the nature of these demonstrations as both organized and chaotic.

The police force's response to the protests in the book also holds similarities to reality, or more specifically, Ferguson. During the Ferguson Uprising, the police used teargas, pepper spray, and rubber bullets to control the protesters, and even the National Guard stepped in (Ransby 68). The rough handling of peaceful demonstrators gained attention because, according to some, it revealed the true colors of law enforcement (Ransby 6). In *The Hate U Give,* the police's use of tear gas against protesters is important because it shows that they do not differentiate between the ones who are protesting peacefully and those who are rioting. An example of this is when Starr is holding a speech for Khalil, and the police demand that the protesters disperse. They refuse as they are not doing anything illegal, but the police still throw tear gas to disperse the crowd (Thomas 408).

In CRT, the commitment to social justice includes empowering people of color (Garcia 47). In *The Hate U Give,* this empowerment happens through Starr, who goes from being scared and quiet to becoming a loud and powerful voice in the protests. This character development reflects the presence of female voices and activists in the BLM protests. Ransby gives black feminist voices much of the credit for BLM's current prosperity (59). The majority of the most coherent and consistent voices of the movement are women (59). It started with the three founders Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Kahn-Cullors in 2012, but since then, numerous others have been visible on the streets, on social media, or other types of media. One example is Johnetta Elzie. She found her activism after Michael Brown's death. She took to the streets and selected Twitter as her platform to express her political opinions and mobilize others to act (Ransby 60-61). Elzie's story resembles many other stories of black feminists, which include the fictional character, Starr. Although Starr was devoted to the cause before Khalil, his death was the catalyst that made her come into her own as an activist. At the end of the novel, she makes a powerful speech and inspires her fellow protesters: "'Everybody wants to talk about how Khalil died,' I say. 'But this isn't about how Khalil died. It's about the fact that he lived. His life mattered. Khalil lived!'" (Thomas 406-407).

Another prominent and empowered female activist in the book is April Ofrah. She is a civil rights lawyer, a community organizer, and leader of Just Us for Justice. Moreover, she advocates for Khalil throughout the story and encourages Starr to speak up. As opposed to the rioters, Ms. Ofrah is organized; she motivates and inspires the protesters to demand change. She also has a larger goal which becomes evident when she says in response to the vandalism: "You can destroy wood and brick, but you can't destroy a movement" (Thomas 404). Her devotion to the cause puts her in line with other prominent female activists in the BLM protests, such as Brittany Ferrell, who became one of the most formidable voices during the Ferguson Uprising (Ransby 52).

By examining *The Hate U Give* through the lens of Critical Race Theory, it becomes clear that the YA novel reflects and explores matters of race in a way that creates a solid understanding of race relations in the United States. Starr's portrayal is undoubtedly an essential factor in engaging the reader about social and political issues. She is a sympathetic character with whom readers can resonate and identify, making the readers more susceptible to the novel's ideology. Starr serves as neutral ground between the real and the fictional world, and through her, readers are introduced to a counter-narrative. *The Hate U Give* tells a recognizable story: a black boy gets killed by a police officer. However, the counter-narrative challenges the typical portrayal of these stories and explores other ways of understanding why these shootings happen repeatedly. The novel does this by demonstrating how this tragic event fits into a series of underlying issues. The CRT perspective shows that the novel recognizes racism as a challenging and extensive issue intersected with other issues like discrimination, marginalization, and dehumanization. In other words, the counter-narrative of *The Hate U Give* offers opportunities for readers to explore the nuances of race and racial issues and what they mean in contemporary society.

The actionable aspect of CRT entails exploring how literature can act as a portal for addressing, challenging, and improving sociopolitical contexts (Garcia 53). From a CRT perspective, *The Hate U Give* encourages readers to respond and act against racial injustice by addressing a crucial racial issue, namely police killings of black people, and does so by introducing a counter-narrative that makes readers understand the comprehensiveness of the issue. Nevertheless, the novel's impact particularly lies in the portrayal of Starr, who grows into an empowered activist and spokesperson for Khalil. Consequently, she becomes the embodiment of the idea that one individual has the power to make a significant change. Adami emphasizes that novels can educate young adults into being better and more active citizens by showing them that they have the power to change the world (131). Considering the potential impact empowered protagonists have on young readers makes *The Hate U Give* a powerful tool in addressing and fighting racism and empowering young readers to do the same.

Chapter 3: *Dear Martin*

The CRT perspective shows that *Dear Martin* creates a solid understanding of the ways race and racism connect with experiences of everyday life. The novel introduces the issue of racial profiling in law enforcement and how the practice affects its victims. Justyce's experience with racial profiling works as a gateway into other significant racial issues. First, it reveals Justyce's internalized racism, and he must painfully recognize that he is not exempt from racist treatment despite following the norms and values of the dominant group. Second, Justyce becomes aware of the significance of race and racial inequality in America at a more extensive level, which makes him seek answers and guidance in the teachings of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Furthermore, Justyce's newfound awareness opens his eyes to the attitudes and actions of his peers at Braselton Prep, who demonstrate how white privilege, colorblindness, and implicit bias play out in daily life. Finally, the novel makes strong connections to two deaths that have been significant for the BLM movement, namely Trayvon Martin and Jordan Davis.

The CRT approach to *Dear Martin* discloses how race and racism implicitly impact practices within law enforcement. The practice of racial profiling is evident from the novel's first scene when the protagonist, Justyce McAllister, is arrested while attempting to keep his ex-girlfriend, Melo, from driving while under the influence. Racial profiling is defined as "the discriminatory practice by law enforcement officials of targeting individuals for suspicion of crime based on the individual's race, ethnicity, religion or national origin" (The American Civil Liberties Union qtd. in Behnke 6). Studies in the United States show that racial profiling typically targets African Americans, but the practice also affects other minorities like Latinos and Native Americans (Behnke 6-7). Typical instances of racial profiling of African Americans include stopping and searching people if they are driving an expensive car or if they are present in a neighborhood that is not their own or is believed not to be their own (Bryant-Davis et al. 862). In *Dear* Martin, the unfolding event occurs in a wealthy neighborhood, a place where police officer Castillo decides that Justyce does not belong, although many of his classmates live there. Consequently, Justyce's race, combined with his clothing, makes Castillo decide that he is prone to criminal behavior and thereby deserving of distrust (Stone 7-9). People of color are subjected to higher levels of suspicion from law enforcement and private security and are therefore more likely to experience unjust detentions, interrogations, and searches without any incriminating evidence (Behnke 7-8). The primary characteristic of racial profiling is that it typically occurs before any offense is committed or in the absence of evidence of any offense is committed (Behnke 8). In this particular scene, Castillo reveals his presumptions about black teenage males when he says:

> "Don't you say shit to me, you son of a bitch. I knew your punk ass was up to no good when I saw you walking down the road with that goddamn hood on. […] I know your kind: punks like you wander the streets of nice neighborhoods searching for prey. Just couldn't resist the pretty white girl who'd locked her keys in her car, could ya?" (Stone 8)

In his utterances, Castillo clarifies that he bases his actions on the prejudices he holds towards young black males, which is constructed through the stereotypical black male. According to Behnke, black males are often stereotyped as irrational, hypersexualized, violent, and more likely to commit crime (10). This stereotype influences the perception of black males and contributes to prejudice and racism (10). Castillo's generalization is evident as he refers to Justyce as "punks like you." Consequently, these preconceived notions cloud Castillo's judgment and make him read the situation wrong. Collective prejudices are powerful and harmful as they can influence laws, business policies, and other institutional practices. Furthermore, these attitudes and practices tend to remain long after the people who made them are no longer involved. In other words, the complete insertion of these practices influences other individuals' behavior, which creates racially biased systems (Behnke 11). Castillo represents people in law enforcement who are fed by stereotyping, prejudice, and racism, and consequently, racial profiling persists as a practice. As a result of a practice based on emotion rather than facts, Castillo unjustly arrests Justyce.

In Castillo's utterances during the arrest, it is evident that the hoodie played an essential role in why he decided to pursue Justyce (Stone 8). The historical perspective of CRT reveals that Justyce's hoodie is much more than a piece of clothing; it is a symbol with ties to past events. Trayvon Martin was wearing a hoodie on the evening he was shot and killed by George Zimmerman. In the aftermath of the killing, the choice of attire was appointed equal blame as Zimmerman for Martin's death. As a result, the hoodie became a nationwide political statement, and it initiated the Million Hoodie March in New York City (Obasogie 163-164). By wearing a hoodie, people protested against the assumption that a black person wearing one is prone to criminal behavior. In *Dear Martin*, Justyce's black skin and hoodie were the reason Castillo suspected he was "up to no good" (Stone 8), and these words are the exact same words Zimmerman used to describe the black and hooded Martin to the 911 dispatcher (Obasogie

163). The hoodie is a detail that connects Justyce to the real-life Martin and demonstrates how profiling works and how unreliable it is as a practice. Like Zimmerman, Castillo only needs to check off two boxes to assume that a black teenager is up to no good.

The CRT lens shows how race and racism can influence social practices within the police force and make them wield unnecessary force against people of color. Bryant-Davis defines police brutality as "a form of unwarranted physical violence perpetrated by an individual or group symbolically representing a government sanctioned, law enforcement agency" (853). With this definition, there is no doubt that Justyce falls victim to police brutality at the hands of officer Castillo:

> His upper body slams onto the trunk with so much force, he bites the inside of his cheek, and his mouth fills with blood. Jus swallows, head spinning, unable to get his bearings. The sting of cold metal around his wrists pulls him back to reality. Handcuffs. […] "Officer, this is a big misundersta—" he starts to say, but he doesn't get to finish because the officer hits him in the face. (Stone 7)

Although Justyce is respectful and does as he is told, Castillo is hostile and wields unnecessary force. The cause of this rough treatment is based on Justyce being young and black, which puts him in the category of people who are more likely to be treated with force regardless of behavior. According to Bryant-Davis, racial stereotypes are to blame for this treatment as they assume that particularly African Americans, Latinos, and Arab Americans are violent criminals (859). When law enforcement adopts these racist views, they are more likely to assume that a person of color is dangerous even though no observation of criminal activity has occurred (859). Fortunately for Justyce, the encounter with officer Castillo does not have fatal consequences. However, by examining Justyce behavior after the incident, it becomes clear that the experience has left him with deep psychological scars. Justyce's response is typical and can be seen in many victims of police brutality. According to Bryant-Davis, the emotional consequences of these experiences can lead to complex traumas in individuals (861). More specifically, she lists distrust, fear, anger, shame, PTSD, isolation, and self-destructive behavior as possible consequences of an individual who has directly or indirectly experienced racially or ethnically motivated police violence (866). In the time after the incident with Castillo, there are indications that point to that Justyce struggles psychologically as a result of his experience. Throughout the novel, he keeps rubbing his wrists when reminded of the event, he is wary of violence and guns in video games (Stone 15), he struggles with anger and shame, and he later refers to the incident as “his own profiling trauma” (Stone 78). However, the most evident proof that Justyce has suffered from a traumatic and life-altering experience is that he slowly develops self-destructive behavior. This way, the CRT lens demonstrates that racist structures in society have a severe negative impact on minority citizens.

Critical race theorists claim that racism is so ingrained in society that it is sometimes challenging to identify (Hill 99). Internalized racism is an example of hidden racism as it manifests within marginalized people. The term is defined as “the acceptance, by marginalized racial populations, of the negative societal beliefs and stereotypes about themselves” (Williams and Williams-Morris qtd. in Speight 129). Although internalized racism is often unrecognizable, it comes to light in the letter that Justyce writes to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. after the profiling incident:

> I’ve seen some pictures of Shemar Carson, and he did have kind of a thuggish appearance. In a way, I guess I thought I didn’t need to concern myself with this type of thing because compared to him, I don’t come across as “threatening,” you know? I don’t sag my pants or wear my clothes super big. I go to a good school, and have goals and vision and “a great head on my shoulders,” as Mama likes to say. […] I thought if I made sure to be an upstanding member of society, I’d be exempt from the stuff THOSE black guys deal with, you know? (Stone 12)

According to Speight, contemporary internalized racism is primarily due to persisting negative portrayals of minorities in the media (130). The previous excerpt shows how a particular picture can influence Justyce’s perception of another black teen as *thuggish*. Stigmatized people are considered flawed, compromised and therefore regarded less than fully human (Speight 131). Therefore, due to the stigma surrounding the label thug, Carson is considered less than “normal” people. It is crucial to consider that Justyce’s internalized racism comes as a result of growing up in a society that favors the dominant group’s culture. It is this group’s values, norms, and ideas that determine what is considered “normal” or “correct” (Speight 130). This is the reason that Justyce makes a clear distinction between himself and “THOSE black guys” (Stone 12) because, as opposed to them, he pursues the dominant culture’s ideal. Hence, Justyce’s attitude towards Carson is an example of what happens when the dominant group’s culture is successfully imposed on the subordinate group.

Internalized racism is also seen through Trey and Quan. When Justyce tells Trey that he has been accepted to Yale, he responds: "'You'll be back, smart guy. Once you see them white folks don't want yo black ass at they table. They not down with you bein' their equal, dawg. We'll see you soon'" (Stone 65). According to Speight, an individual who is aware that he or she belongs to a stigmatized group has some predictable psychological, social, and behavioral traits (131). As an example, she introduces the study where African Americans, who were aware of the stereotypes of their intellectual inferiority, performed worse on tests believed to test their intelligence (131). Trey consistently refers to Justyce as "smart guy," an insult served as a compliment. This way, he both emphasizes that Justyce is an exception to the rest of the neighborhood in terms of intelligence and implies that Justyce believes that he is better than them because he is smart. However, Trey also makes sure to stress that intelligence is never enough to succeed for people like them and that Justyce should not think otherwise. Quan also tries to convince Justyce that there is no hope for people like them and, therefore, no point in trying:

"It's fucked up—there's no escaping the BMC," Quan says.

"The BMC?"

"Yeah. The Black Man's Curse." (Stone 144)

Quan and Trey accept that black people do not have the privilege of upward mobility. According to Speight, the acceptance of 'this is how things are', the internalized racism, is one reason that the vicious self-perpetuating cycle of oppression continues to spin (131).

The racial profiling incident opens Justyce's eyes to the attitudes of his peers at Braselton prep. At the center of these realizations is Jared. Throughout the book, Jared represents ways in which racism manifests itself in contemporary society and influences how the dominant group thinks and acts in regard to race. The first time Jared's attitudes become visible is during the debate in Societal Evolution class. The topic is "all men are created equal," but the debate quickly shifts toward Shemar Carson and the circumstances of his death:

Jared: Doesn't change the fact that the guy'd been arrested before. You don't get arrested if you're not doing anything wrong. Bottom line, he was a criminal.

SJ: The charge on his record—which is public, so you can go look it up—was a misdemeanor possession of marijuana.

Jared: So? Do the crime, do the time.

SJ: Jared, you bought an *ounce* of weed two days ago–

[…]

Jared: Maybe I get away with it because I'm not dumb enough to get caught. (Stone 27-29)

Critical race theory involves scrutinizing whiteness, including white privilege (Hill 99), which Jared demonstrates in this excerpt. Behnke defines white privilege as "the institutionalized advantages that white people (European Americans) encounter in all aspects of American society and that translate into disadvantages for people of color" (12). SJ demonstrates how white privilege benefits Jared by comparing him to Carson. While Jared can buy drugs without getting caught, Carson is more likely to get caught for doing the exact same offense. SJ's response: "You get away with it because you're white, asshole" (Stone 29). In order to understand this comparison, it is essential to look at racial profiling in combination with white privilege. Concerning racial profiling, white privilege entails that a white person is far less likely to be suspected of criminal behavior than a person of color. Furthermore, if arrested or found guilty of a crime, a person of color is more likely to receive harsher treatment (Behnke 12). Thus, in this case, Jared's white privilege is that he is not considered suspicious of criminal behavior.

A tenet of CRT is to challenge dominant ideologies, which includes the color-blind ideology (Garcia 47). Jared's exclusion of the idea that the reason he does not get caught has anything to do with race suggests that he is a product of the color-blind ideology. According to Obasogie, colorblindness sees race as a socially constructed idea, which means that race is solely based on skin color (115). This definition matches with Jared's: "This is a color-blind society, my bretheren… People are judged by the content of their character instead of the color of their skin" (Stone 32). Although this may sound terrific in theory, it is problematic in practice because colorblindness encourages a disassociation with the social significance of race. This entails that racial differences in any way are not to be recognized, despite there being clear evidence that race still plays an essential role in social and legal decisions (Obasogie 116). When Jared suggests that the only difference between himself and Shemar Carson is that Carson was dumb to get caught, he uses colorblindness to defend his white privilege. The practice liberates white people from any blame for the misfortune of black people because how can they be discriminated against based on the color of their skin when society does not see color? Therefore, the dominant group believes that any problems or experiences black people may have today are their own doing (Ferber 65). Jared emphasizes his perception of black people to be responsible for their own misfortune when he says: "'Black people have the same opportunities as white people in this country if they are willing to work hard enough. Manny's parents are a perfect example'" (Stone 25). This remark illustrates Jared's ignorance of the social connotations of race. Furthermore, when it all comes down to it, Jared benefits from undermining the possibility that race is significant because as long as law enforcement officials have their eyes on boys like Shemar Carson, he can continue with his illegal behavior without the fear of getting caught.

The CRT perspective involves recognizing types of racism that are challenging to identify (Hill 99). Implicit bias is an example of hidden racism as it refers to a type of bias in judgment that occurs unconsciously (Blakemore 38). Jared shows a tendency of implicit bias when he says that Carson should "do the time" (Stone 28) for the same criminal offense that he is free to do regularly. Jared instantly believes that it is fair to prosecute Carson, but not himself, for buying marijuana because he categorizes the black Carson as more of a threat to society. Blakemore writes that the systematic structures of racism influence the brain's instinct to categorize, and this is where implicit bias arises (40). This may lead white people to make false connections to groups of people, for instance, African Americans, and categorize them as threats (Blakemore 40-41). Furthermore, implicit stereotypes of people of color are predominantly negative, making people assume the worst about them in a given situation. In comparison, implicit bias will favor white people and assume that they have good intentions. This assumption benefits white people because they have the luxury of the benefit of the doubt (Blakemore 42). Knowing these facts, it is possible to conclude that Jared's attitude towards Carson comes as a result of what society has taught him about white people versus black people. Even though the two boys have committed the same crime, Jared still concludes that only Carson should be punished. This is due to Jared's assumption that as a black teenage boy, Carson is more prone to criminal behavior and, thus, should be treated like a criminal. Moreover, Jared's implicit bias speaks in his favor because he is white, wealthy, and well-educated, thereby not fitting into the category of being a danger to society.

CRT actively seeks opportunities to challenge dominant ideologies (Garcia 47). *Dear Martin* presents an opportunity to challenge the color-blind ideology through Jared when he introduces the following idea:

> "Bros," he said, "let's all dress as different stereotypes for Halloween, and then go out *together.* It'll be this massive political statement about racial equality and broken barriers and shit." (Stone 39)

Jared's costume idea demonstrates why the advocacy for a color-blind society is both problematic and damaging. Since the color-blind perspective assumes that all forms of racism and discrimination are things of the past, it also rejects any notion of a vertical hierarchy among the races today and promotes the idea of a horizontal power dynamic (Obasogie 116). Jared, Kyle, and Tyler have grown up with Manny, and since his parents are successful, they are, according to Jared, "proof that things are equal now" (Stone 31). Thus, they do not see anything wrong with wearing a Klansman costume because what it represents belongs in the past and does not apply to contemporary society. When they do not acknowledge the costume's history, they also ignore that it represents an unequal power structure in American history that affects present-day black Americans. It becomes evident that this perception is not shared by everyone when the boys arrive at the Halloween party. Blake, dressed like a member of the Ku Klux Klan, gets punched almost immediately upon arrival. Blake is punched because, unlike the Equality Brigade, Trey and his gang accept the significance of the past in relation to race and racial inequality in America today. As a result, they find Blake's costume extremely offensive, and they demand that the group leaves the party.

Similarly, Jared's reaction to Yale admitting Justyce and not him for early action reveals a few things about him that relate to implicit bias. First, he assumes that he got higher test scores than Justyce and thereby concludes that the *only* reason Justyce got in, and he did not, is because Justyce is black and he is white. When Justyce reveals that he indeed has a higher score on the ACTs, Jared does not believe him at first (Stone 59). This proves that Jared is implicitly biased because he has a hard time believing that Justyce, a black boy who grew up in a poor neighborhood, can achieve a higher score than himself. SJ suggests the following explanation for Jared's disbelief: "Because it negates his assumption that because he's white and you're black, he's more intelligent than you are" (Stone 60).

The second thing Jared reveals about himself is that he believes affirmative action discriminates against the majority (Stone 59), namely white Americans. This claim raises an interesting aspect concerning racial bias among whites. According to Obasogie, research on racial bias shows that white respondents believe that today's discrimination against whites is more of a problem than prejudice against blacks (115). The same research found that white people connect the *decreasing* levels of anti-black bias to the *increasing* levels of anti-white bias (115). This means that measures created to make upward mobility among minority groups possible, like affirmative action, are perceived as a step backward (Obasogie 117). Although no research supports these claims, whites believe that their losses are connected to blacks' gains. On the contrary, there is much empirical evidence that disapproves of this sentiment. Racial disparities in health, education, employment, and wealth show that the outcomes of blacks are still significantly worse than that of white people. In other words, the study did not find any clear evidence that would establish why whites believe they are victims of discrimination (Obasogie 115). During the debate in Societal Evolution class, Jared confirms that this notion is based on feeling rather than hard facts, as he is unable to provide any evidence that supports his claim that institutions discriminate against the majority (Stone 58-64).

Justyce's story serves as an important counter-narrative as it explores alternative ways of knowing and understanding how subtle forms of racism affect its victims. The master narrative influences the majority into believing that only evident and severe instances of racism impact marginalized people. However, this counter-narrative offers a different perspective by showing that subtle forms of racism also have serious consequences for the victims. After the profiling incident, Justyce is increasingly aware of the racial attitudes circulating among the people around him. Simultaneously as his awareness grows, his discouragement to living a good life as a black man increases. This impression is reinforced when Manny's dad reveals that he has experienced racism and still does despite his status:

> Frankly, it's pretty discouraging. To think Mr. Julian has all that authority and *still* gets disrespected? Hearing it made me realize I still had hope that once I really achieve some things, I won't have to deal with racist BS anymore. (Stone 114)

This conversation occurs at a time when Justyce has already endured police brutality from law enforcement and racist remarks from the guys in Manny's gang. When Mr. Julian rejects Justyce's idea that the racist treatment ceases to exist once he achieves something, he begins to lose hope. In a way, the feelings that Justyce is having at this moment can be viewed as modern-day slavery. Akbar writes that this form of slavery "captures the mind and incarcerates the motivation, perception, aspiration, and identity in a web of anti-self-images, generating a personal and collective self-destruction" (qtd. in Speight 132). This is the road that Justyce is headed. The constant reminders that people around him base their perception of him on the color of his skin makes him question whether there is any point in trying to achieve something. Akbar claims that this type of slavery is worse than shackles, as it invades the mind and destroys their loyalties to themselves, surrendering to the system that oppresses them (Speight 132).

Although Justyce does not give in to his self-destructive thoughts, he is dangerously close. The meeting with the Black Jihad's leader, Martel, symbolizes his rock bottom, but he rises again, knowing that he has people around him, like SJ and Doc, who believe in him.

The CRT approach to *Dear Martin* shows a connection between racist attitudes and the reluctance to acknowledge their significance. Knowing that many white people refuse to acknowledge racism in contemporary society makes it likely that people of color must continue to endure racist treatment. According to Obasogie, the popularization of the color-blind ideology is problematic because it disassociates race from its social significance and thereby prevents people from understanding that group privilege and group disadvantage exist (117). Moreover, it disassociates the meaning of history concerning current and future group outcomes (117). Essentially, colorblindness reinforces and reproduces systemic racial inequality by denying its existence (Ferber 66). As long as people like Jared and Blake believe that America is a color-blind country, people like Manny and Justyce will continue to endure racism. Nonetheless, Manny's tragic death proves to Jared that he was wrong to believe that racism in America is a thing of the past. Moreover, it shows that trivializing the issues will not make them go away. Despite their differences towards the end, Manny was one of Jared's closest friends, and knowing that his murder was racially motivated strikes Jared hard and wakes him up. To Jared, Manny's murder symbolizes the presence of racism in contemporary society, and by recognizing this, he shows that everyone is redeemable.

The transdisciplinary aspect of CRT offers the opportunity to look at Manny's death from a historical perspective. By making Manny's death (Stone 115-119) almost identical to the murder of seventeen-year-old Jordan Davis, *Dear Martin* sheds light on how racism manifests itself in contemporary America. In 2012, Davis and three friends were driving home from the mall when they stopped at a gas station in Jacksonville, Florida. As three of them were waiting in the parking lot, Michael Dunn, a white, middle-aged man, asked the boys to turn down the music. Davis refused, and an argument ensued. Suddenly, Dunn pulled out a handgun and started shooting, striking Davis twice and killing him (Behnke 101). By recreating this murder through Manny, the novel emphasizes that severe instances of racism have occurred and still do, making it crucial that the work against racism continue.

An examination of *Dear Martin* through the lens of Critical Race Theory shows that the novel addresses various contemporary racial issues, but particularly the damaging effects of ignorance. The election of President Barack Obama in 2008 and the re-election in 2012 sparked claims of a post-racial era and a color-blind society (Hill 92). The idea of a post-racial America silences the conversations about race and reduces social responsibility, making it harder to solve the existing inequality and inequity (Hill 92-93). *Dear Martin* challenges this perception of contemporary American society. More specifically, the CRT lens reveals that the novel challenges the dominant ideology of colorblindness. Furthermore, it challenges social constructions like white privilege and how racial profiling and implicit bias affect people of color. Principally, the novel confronts these issues through Justyce. The racial profiling incident makes him question his place in society as a black man and introduces him to a series of issues concerning race. Thus, identity formation connected to social issues is a central theme in the novel, a typical theme of young adult novels (Adami 130). Knowing that the reader typically identifies emotionally with characters in YA fiction makes it a powerful tool to convey the harmful effects of socially constructed issues. For instance, the counter-narrative in *Dear Martin* serves as an example of how the popularization of the color-blind ideology affects people of color. The novel demonstrates a typical outcome of colorblindness by showing that Jared and Blake's perception of an equal society does not reflect the reality of Justyce and Manny. Jared and Blake's racist and ignorant remarks come as a result of color-blind practices, and the novel depicts how these actions make Justyce angry and self-destructive. This way, *Dear Martin* interrogates social constructions and how they influence individuals, a typical trait of the YA genre (Hill 7). By doing so, the book encourages critical thinking concerning matters of race. This makes the novel important because critical thinking and comprehension development are the foundation of understanding social change and justice (Smyth and Hansen 340).

From a CRT perspective, *Dear Martin* is committed to social justice by addressing and enlightening issues that are challenging to identify. Making readers aware of the significance of these issues is one step in the right direction to confront and solve them. Empowering people of color is also a way to commit to social justice. As a person of color, Justyce is empowering and inspirational because he takes control of his life. Despite being constantly reminded that the odds and the expectations of others are against him, he keeps moving forward toward his goals. These qualities are within Justyce, and their significance is conveyed through his name. He is faithful to himself and what he believes in, but most importantly, he is persistent and does not give up. These are qualities that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. believed would lead to racial justice. This is the concluding message of the novel and one that is conveyed to readers.

Chapter 4: Concluding chapter

Nine years have passed since Trayvon Martin was killed after a quick snack run, and seven years have gone since Michael Brown was gunned down on his way to a friend's house. These deaths mark the beginning of the movement that inspired to act against the injustice of black Americans. Since then, too many people have suffered the same fate, making Black Lives Matter more relevant than ever. The movement and its activists are visible in street protests and uprisings, actively making their voices heard and demanding change. In popular culture, support of the movement happens through music, television shows, movies, and literature, which shows that creative fields take social responsibility. Many authors of young adult novels have embraced this responsibility, and the public wants to read and learn more about race relations. As a result, YA books like *The Hate U Give* and *Dear Martin* have become national bestsellers.

The Hate U Give and *Dear Martin* are examples of young adult literary works that focus on the significance of race in the United States. By examining these novels from a CRT perspective, it becomes clear that they both challenge the impact race and racism have on social structures and practices. They do this by showing that police brutality is just a fragment of a series of issues related to race in contemporary society. Both books use police brutality to introduce other underlying and significant issues that cause these tragic killings to happen repeatedly. In order for readers to understand the significance of these issues, the novels present counter-narratives that challenge the dominant perception of race and racism in contemporary society. *The Hate U Give* does this by showing the problematic dynamic between law enforcement and young black people in urban areas. Distrust of the police force in these communities causes parents to give strict instructions to their children on how to behave in interactions with police. This counter-narrative shows that people of color do not have the privilege to believe that the police will serve and protect them. Instead, they perceive officers of the law as a threat to their safety.

The insight into the actual circumstances of Khalil's death serves as a counter-narrative because it gives a different perspective on how these events play out. The novel shows that One-Fifteen's actions were excessive and wrong because Starr and Khalil did not pose a threat to his safety. However, this does not stop One-Fifteen's father from distorting the narrative in a way that justifies his son's actions while simultaneously reinforcing the dominant perception of the police as protectors, not killers. This way, the counter-narrative shows nuances of the circumstances surrounding instances where law enforcement kills black people.

Furthermore, as a response to the frequent dehumanizing portrayal of black bodies in the media, *The Hate U Give* offers a counter-narrative that emphasizes that these people were real and their lives mattered. Khalil is portrayed as a good son, grandson, and friend, and he was kind, funny, and intelligent. However, he lived in Garden Heights, which for outsiders, is almost exclusively known for poverty, drugs, and gang activity, and in a desperate attempt to provide for himself and his family, he started dealing drugs. Together these pieces of information become the broader narrative of the event and portray Khalil as a dangerous criminal. It is easier to accept this narrative because it makes sense that a police officer would use deadly force on a criminal. The people who have the privilege to believe that the police are there to protect and serve want to believe the media's story because the alternative reveals a dark reality they would rather not accept; that a police officer is capable of murdering an innocent boy. Consequently, the media projects the label thug, which is associated with a disposable citizen and a liability to society. This way, the media reinforces the master narrative and influences the public to believe that Khalil's death was justified, a perception which is shared with other cases like Michael Brown and Freddy Gray.

In *Dear Martin*, Justyce's self-destructive behavior comes as a result of becoming more aware of the racist attitudes among his peers and the significance of race in society. Justyce begins to think that there is no point in trying to achieve something or become someone great if people are only going to reduce his character to the color of his skin. Thus, Justyce's story serves as a counter-narrative because it shows that racist attitudes and subtle forms of racism also substantially impact marginalized people to the extent that they lose motivation and aspiration to achieve something in life.

Together, the counter-narratives presented in *The Hate U Give* and *Dear Martin* offer a different perspective in exploring and understanding the significance of race in contemporary society. These stories give voices that have been historically silenced an opportunity to make their side heard and thereby show nuances of how race and racism affect marginalized people. Consequently, the different perspectives show that racial issues are comprehensive, which is an aspect that is essential to know in order to understand why activists keep protesting for racial justice and fundamental social change.

The historical perspective of CRT shows that both novels have strong connections to black men who have suffered the consequences of racial injustice. These are primarily Michael Brown and Trayvon Martin, but also Jordan Davis and Freddy Gray. This connection demonstrates that the fictional world in significant ways mirrors the real world. Together, counter-narratives and subtle references to actual victims of racial injustice create a better understanding of the depth of racial issues in the United States. The master narrative shows one reality, but the counter-narratives in these novels offer another reality that implicitly encourages critical thinking of the significance of race in contemporary society.

The Hate U Give introduces other issues that show how social constructions of race affect marginalized people. Particularly, there is an emphasis on the intersection of race and other forms of insubordination. This issue is portrayed through Khalil and his family because their struggles come from a mixture of poverty, forms of physical challenges, and race. This way, the novel shows that racism does not occur in isolation, and it has severe repercussions for the people it affects. The misfortune of black Americans in urban areas is further explained by applying the meaning of 2Pac's THUG LIFE to Garden Heights. The message of this connection is that people living in low-income urban areas lack opportunities for upward mobility, which leaves them in a cycle of poverty and desperation. The poor education and few jobs in these areas are particularly crucial in making people lose hope for a better life in a socially acceptable way. Consequently, young boys like Khalil, DeVante, and Dalvin seek other alternatives to earn money and security. Typically, this means joining a gang or start dealing drugs. Either way, they take serious risks to cover their basic needs. By turning to socially unacceptable means, these people become what society considers a threat and a liability.

The Hate U Give makes a clear connection between activism and how it relates to matters of race. It shows how one young woman finds the courage to speak up for her friend and against the injustice affecting her community. Starr's character development reflects the strong presence of powerful female voices in the fight for racial justice and fundamental social change. During the BLM movement's existence, the majority of the most coherent and consistent voices have been women. Thus, by making Starr's path to activism and April Ofrah's encouragement to activism an ongoing topic, the feminist aspect of the movement becomes clear in the novel.

Dear Martin relates to BLM and the work for social change by depicting how different social constructions of race affect people of color. Racial profiling introduces this thematic in the novel, and the protagonist's experience unveils a series of unjust practices, attitudes, and actions directed toward black Americans. Justyce's encounter with officer Castillo shows how racial profiling works and how unreliable it is as a practice. This incident reveals the typical prejudice of young black males as more prone to criminal behavior, making them more likely to experience distrust from law enforcement. Castillo assumes that Justyce shares characteristics with the stereotypical black male, and therefore wields excessive force and arrests him on the spot. This particular event sheds light on the fact that people of color are subjected to higher levels of suspicion from law enforcement and private security, causing them to have distressing experiences with authorities.

By examining *Dear Martin* from a CRT perspective, it becomes clear that the novel emphasizes how subtle and less recognizable racism affects marginalized people. Justyce's traumatic experience with law enforcement makes him more aware of the significance of race in society and among his peers at Braselton Prep. However, the incident also reveals Justyce's internalized racism. He believes himself to be superior to the deceased Shemar Carson and the members of the Black Jihad because he follows the norms and values of the dominant culture. Hence, he is more deserving of respect than they are. This shows that Justyce is part of the problem as he maintains the dominant culture's ideal. Justyce's perception of these people as inferior shows what happens when the dominant culture is successfully imposed on the subordinate culture. Nevertheless, the encounter with Castillo rejects the idea of a clear difference between Justyce and other black males. Instead, Justyce must recognize that his black skin holds negative connotations for people like Castillo, meaning that he risks being treated like the people he wants to distance himself from. Internalized racism presents itself as an expansive issue in the novel, as it can also be seen in Trey and Quan, who do not believe black people of their background have the privilege of upward mobility. By accepting the racial hierarchy of white supremacy, the vicious self-perpetuating cycle of oppression continues to spin.

Dear Martin also introduces implicit bias, another type of racism that can be challenging to recognize but still profoundly impacts marginalized people. The novel identifies and challenges anti-black bias through Jared. He demonstrates how implicit bias works when he claims that only the black Shemar Carson should be treated like a criminal, although they have committed the same crime. Jared makes this claim because he assumes that Carson is more prone to criminal behavior. Jared is also implicitly biased when he assumes that he has higher test scores than Justyce and therefore concludes that the only reason Justyce was admitted to Yale is that he is black. He would rather accept this as the truth than recognize that Justyce might be more intelligent than he is. Moreover, Jared's claim that affirmative action discriminates against the majority sheds light on a growing perception among whites that equality has gone too far. Although various studies disapprove of this notion, white people continue to believe that they are increasingly becoming victims of discrimination (Obasogie 115).

Dear Martin challenges the popularization of the color-blind ideology by showing its destructive impact. From the beginning of *Dear Martin*, Jared clarifies that he firmly believes that America has become a color-blind country. For him, this means that people are judged by their character and not by the color of their skin. However, Jared continuously demonstrates the consequences of advocating for this ideology. He shows that white people can use the premise of colorblindness to defend their white privilege while simultaneously liberate them from any blame for black people's misfortune. Thus, Jared shows how the popularization of the color-blind ideology reinforces and reproduces systematic racial inequality by denying its existence. The Klansman costume on Halloween illustrates a harmful consequence of colorblindness. The Black Jihad members' response shows that race is still relevant for people affected by the unequal power structure that this costume represents.

Together, racial profiling, internalized racism, white privilege, colorblindness, and implicit bias illustrate an unequal power dynamic between white people and people of color. The focus on more subtle but significant issues shows the extensiveness of America's race issue. Justyce must painfully recognize that these are fundamental issues that will take time to resolve because, in order to solve a problem, everyone must acknowledge that the problem exists. As long as Jared and Blake and other majority members believe America is living in a post-racial era, black people will continue to experience racial injustice. By acknowledging the significance of these issues in contemporary society, Justyce understands that he will most likely become a victim of injustice despite his academic and professional achievements. However, the teachings of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. tell Justyce that this is not a reason to give up. Justyce has the same qualities needed to achieve racial justice and social change, namely persistence, faith, and action.

The examination of *The Hate U Give* and *Dear Martin* through Critical Race Theory demonstrates that these young adult novels give a solid understanding of American race relations and the premise of Black Lives Matter. By using police brutality to introduce other underlying significant issues, it becomes evident why the BLM movement began and why activists are still working for racial justice and fundamental social change. These novels are written for young adults, which influences how issues of race are conveyed and received. Principally, the sympathetic portrayal of the teenage protagonists, Starr and Justyce, makes the stories impactful for readers. These characters are inspirational and empowering for readers; Starr because she becomes a strong voice in fighting for justice for Khalil and Justyce because he chooses to overcome the hardships in his life rather than letting them overcome him. These character portrayals present the empowering message to readers that they have the power to make a change. Moreover, the protagonists have the ability to make readers resonate and identify with them, which is a compelling way of introducing social and political issues. This way, the novels introduce readers to an important counter-narrative that can make them reflect and be critical of the significance of race in their own society. Knowing the potential impact young adult literature has on readers makes these novels a force to be reckoned with.

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Professional Relevance for this Thesis

Within the time I have written this thesis, there have been multiple reports of police violence against people of color in the United States. Most recently were twenty-year-old Daunte Wright and sixteen-year-old Ma'Khia Bryant, who were both killed by law enforcement. The trial for George Floyd's murder has also received widespread attention in different types of media. In other words, black people are still experiencing injustice, making the issue of racism highly relevant. When George Floyd was killed last year, it was clear from the several marches throughout the world that people are passionate about this issue. As a future English teacher, all these factors are clear indicators to dare to talk about race and racism in the United States. Addressing these issues benefits the students as they can lead to critical and insightful conversations that create a better understanding. More importantly, not addressing these issues can alienate the students and make them unprepared to meet these issues in the world. Thus, the fear of saying anything wrong should not trump the importance of addressing race and racism.

Nevertheless, in order to teach my future students, I must have substantial knowledge about the subject. This thesis has been a step in the right direction in retrieving knowledge and insight, but there is still much to learn. The secondary material and the two novels have made me more aware of racial issues in the United States. Furthermore, they have made me understand the significance of race and, more importantly, that it takes time and effort to understand. However, the most important thing is to be open to knowledge, *try* to understand, and dare to speak about it. An important lesson from these novels is that *not* speaking of uncomfortable issues will not make them go away.

The purpose of writing about *The Hate U Give* and *Dear Martin* was to explore how they present the American race issue and whether they could be used as a reference point when teaching students about race. While learning about these novels, I found that they present the different issues in a sensible and comprehensible way for a younger audience. Moreover, they offer many opportunities for encouraging students to think critically about their own experiences and perceptions of race in society.

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