

Maya Shelton

Dr. EvenNur

Lang 120

29 January 2024

The Hate U Give

The first time I watched *The Hate U Give*, I was with my parents. We had all gone in with varying degrees of knowledge surrounding the movie but we all knew one thing: that it was going to hit close to home. Thankfully, we had not- at least to my knowledge, known anybody who had found themselves in a situation of police violence. Of course, being your typical black family: we have known racism and prejudice and have understood how to be conscious of ourselves; specifically where our hands are and if everybody around us is comfortable. When we got to the scene where Starr's friend, Khalil, was murdered, there was a change in the air. All of us grew tense and sullen like we were realizing how any one of us could be in Khalil's place. I remember having a conversation with my parents when the movie ended about how unfair Khalil's death was. One thing they said that stood out to me was, "Yeah it was, but if that's ever you, don't do anything stupid and stay still." It was then that I realized that the sullen feeling I thought my parents were also experiencing was actually fear. Fear that the same thing would happen to their children.

The Hate U Give follows Starr, a 16-year-old black girl who keeps her personality split into 2 parts; both appropriate for whichever place she is in. She is forced to reevaluate how she views herself and others after party one night when she and her childhood friend, Khalil, are pulled over by the cops and become victims of police violence. Unfortunately, Khalil is killed

during their interaction with the cops and Starr has to decide on whether she wants to speak out against the cop that murdered Khalil in order to bring him justice at the cost of her no longer being able to keep her sides separate. *The Hate U Give* deals with themes of police brutality, gun violence, and the effect of hate on society as a whole.

Following watching the movie, I found myself stuck on the story and how well it relates to current issues of police brutality and the BLM movement. While scrolling through my local bookstore, I was able to find a copy of the book and purchased it- hoping to expand my knowledge of this universe. There were two major differences that the novel and the movie made right in their versions. In the movie, Khalil's death scene (25:18) didn't seem to hold as much power as it did in the book. No matter the circumstance- Khalil's death was completely unjustified. In both the novel and movie, Khalil and Starr meet up at a party where they both live in Garden Heights. After the party gets disrupted, Starr and Khalil leave together in his car and get pulled over by the police on the way home. In the novel, the motions leading up to Khalil's death go as follows from Starr's perspective, "It's not smart to make a sudden move. Khalil does. He opens the driver's door. 'You okay, Starr-' Pow!" (Thomas 23). What Angie Thomas depicts here is the unfair and harsh reality that many victims of racially motivated police brutality face. Khalil doesn't get a warning to move or drop a weapon as you would expect- he only gets shot. In an article published by the Statista Research Department, it was stated that

Sadly, the trend of fatal police shootings in the United States seems to only be increasing, with a total 71 civilians having been shot, 6 of whom were Black, as of January 25, 2024. In 2023, there were 1,160 fatal police shootings. Additionally, the rate of fatal police shootings among Black Americans was much higher than that for any other ethnicity,

standing at 5.9 fatal shootings per million of the population per year between 2015 and December 2023. (Korhonen)

Black Americans are victims of fatal police violence at higher rates than other ethnic groups. This is a major issue regarding the public health and safety of black children and adults. Statistics such as the one previously mentioned are not there to excuse or normalize violence against Black Americans; moreso, they exist to showcase the harm that's done to the black community as a whole. The knowledge that Khalil didn't grab anything- unlike in the movie when he grabs a hairbrush- makes the impact of his death larger and gives less reason to characters in the story trying to justify or make sense of it.

The other scene I believe the movie did better takes place at the very end (1:58:51). In this scene, Starr's youngest brother, Sekani, takes their father's gun in an emotional scene where the cops arrive, and the meaning behind the phrase THUG LIFE is stated clearly- 'The Hate U Give Little Infants F's Everybody'. In the article *'Racially Motivated Police Brutality is a Community Public Health Issue in the United States'*, it is stated that "The aftereffects of police violence and brutality in American society are a public health matter because police ferocity is not undergone proportionately. On the other hand, it has a lop-sided and unequal influence on the mental health of ethnic, racial, and sexual minorities" (Burton et al 2). Sekani is 7 years old. Throughout the movie, we witness him in the background of many scenes that include either police or gun violence. The movie allows viewers to understand the THUG LIFE line more as we see the impact it has on Sekani in the final scene. In the novel, Sekani does not appear in the final scene; instead, we are given some sort of comeuppance when the entire neighborhood comes together to speak out against King- the leader of a major drug ring in Garden Heights.

One of the main themes in *The Hate U Give*, both novel and film, is the idea of identity and belonging. Starr, our main character, struggles with her identity as she tries to find a balance between her “preppy” Williamson self and her “ghetto” Garden Heights self. This relates to previous texts we’ve discussed in class, such as Roxanne Gay’s “Dreaming in Drag”. In the novel, Starr brings up how she’s constantly watching what she says or how she acts around her white peers and states that according to them, “It’s dope to be black until it’s hard to be black” (Thomas 11). Following the death of Khalil, Starr becomes aware of the fact that it is impossible to separate the two main components of her identity completely and that she must bring those worlds together. Starr also uses the circumstances of Khalil’s death to reevaluate her friendships and relationships. Starr begins to notice that her friends will use slang and dress a certain way that is stereotypically black, but when it comes down to social issues relating to the black community, they will turn a blind eye. One friendship in particular is with a girl named Hailey, whom Starr considered one of her closest friends at Williamson. Hailey shows blatant disrespect towards Khalil and his death by repeatedly referring to him as a drug dealer while reaping the benefits of his death and using it as a “get out of class free” card when she participates in a schoolwide protest. Starr begins to reevaluate her friendship with Hailey after multiple instances of her making racist comments without an apology when called out.

Another theme in *The Hate U Give* is the role of the criminal justice system in the lives of minorities. For example, when Starr is in the police station being questioned about the night of Khalil’s murder, the topic turns from the actual events of the night to whether or not Khalil was a drug dealer. Starr’s mother, who is there for moral support, cuts off the cops by stating, ““You keep asking her about Khalil, like he’s the reason he’s dead. Like she said, he didn’t pull the trigger on himself”” (Thomas 103). Starr recalls receiving two important talks when she was

twelve, one about the birds and bees, and the other about what to do when stopped by a cop.

While Starr's mom is hesitant to talk about the police with Starr, her father says that she isn't too young to be shot or arrested.

Throughout *The Hate U Give*, the media is used as a powerful force in shaping events. Following Khalil's death, Starr is faced with a harsh reality regarding her community. She states, "People like us in situations like this become hashtags, but they rarely get justice" (Thomas 59). With the rise of the BLM movement, we continue to see hashtags like 'say their name' which highlights the need to acknowledge those killed by police violence. These hashtags help bring light to the issue by also highlighting that these same people we are talking about are not receiving justice in any way, shape, or form. This is a common issue presented in the Black Lives Matter movement, with the hope that the names of those killed will eventually bring justice. Starr is afraid that when the news of Khalil's death gets out, he will only be viewed as a drug dealer. Unfortunately, her fears do come true. In both depictions, the cop who kills Khalil is put on a paid leave of absence and Starr later finds out that he was acquitted by the grand jury. In an emotional moment, Starr realizes that any effort put into getting justice for those who share Khalil's story is in vain when the system made for justice is corrupt.

In conclusion, *The Hate U Give* is a powerful novel and movie that brings to light some of the issues in the black community. Starr is forced to come to terms with the unfair circumstances surrounding Khalil's death as well as reevaluating the way she lives and who surrounds her. As a young black woman, I found myself agreeing and understanding where Starr stood when she wanted to keep her two lives separate. Growing up, I understood very quickly that I was different than the majority of people I went to school with and that sometimes people didn't like me due to those differences. I had to adapt a plethora of different personalities in order

to ensure that everybody would be comfortable and that I wasn't seen as "dumb" or "too black". In reality, I know I am smart and have a love for everything surrounding my culture as well as things that don't: like my extensive knowledge of One Direction. Towards the end of the movie, Starr forgoes her "version 2" self and decides to just be Starr. This spoke to me and helped encourage me to not hide who I am and where I've come from- my parents, grandparents, and ancestors who fought and made it so that I have a choice and a life that matters within this world.

Works Cited

- Burton, Sharon, Grace McGrath, and Darrell Burrell. "Racially Motivated Police Brutality is a Community Public Health Issue in the United States." *International Journal of Health Systems and Translational Medicine*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2023, pp. 1-15. *ProQuest*, <https://login.proxy177.nclive.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/racially-motivated-police-brutality-is-community/docview/2904484479/se-2>, doi:<https://doi.org/10.4018/IJHSTM.315296>.
- Korhonen, Veera. "People Shot to Death by U.S. Police, by Race 2024." *Statista*, 29 Jan. 2024, www.statista.com/statistics/585152/people-shot-to-death-by-us-police-by-race/#:~:text=In%202023%2C%20there%20were%201%2C160,between%202015%20and%20December%202023.
- Thomas, Angie. 2017. *The Hate U Give*. New York, NY: HarperCollinsPublishers