

SHARMA, MICHELLE DIVYA, M.A. Agency for the Child in *Esperanza Rising*. (2018) Directed by Dr. Mark Rifkin. 31 pp.

There is a possibility for children's literature to exist without colonizing the child. There is a future for this genre that encourages the child to reclaim his or her agency by recognizing the child's capability to think critically and by producing literature that addresses the child as an equal to the adult. Pam Muñoz Ryan in *Esperanza Rising* (2000) does this, specifically, by recognizing the child's political potential. I demonstrate how Ryan makes an effort to open up a political dialogue with the child, inviting the child into the public sphere to speak up for his or her own political beliefs. Ryan recognizes the political capabilities of the child to understand the plight of undocumented Mexican immigrants in the United States. Rather than engaging with the child as an inferior to herself, Ryan address the child as a politician appealing to a voter. Ryan brings to the child the issue of undocumented Mexican immigration and persuades them to sympathize with the violence enacted on undocumented Mexican immigrants. In creating a narrative about an undocumented Mexican immigrant, Ryan uses the children's novel as a political platform to speak to the child as a future activist and voter.

SHARMA, MICHELLE DIVYA, M.A. *The Hate U Give: A Call to Young Non-Black Readers*. (2018)

Directed by Dr. Mark Rifkin. 29 pp.

The Hate U Give (2017) acts as a guidebook for non-black youth wanting to get involved with the Black Lives Matter movement. First, she educates the reader on how the myth of black criminality influences the criminal justice system and allows officers to use excessive force on black folks while then acquitting these officers despite their actions. Second, Thomas informs the reader of the issues of generational trauma and code-switching, discussing the intricacies of black life in the United States. Third, Thomas teaches the reader how to access political agency as young adults to advocate for black lives. Thomas shows the young non-black reader how they can support the Black Lives Matter movement without imposing their non-black privilege onto black activists. In looking at how Thomas speaks to the young non-black reader, I argue that she utilizes the narrative to make accessible the current scholarship on the criminal justice system, on anti-black state violence, on black life in the United States, and on different forms of protesting. Thomas simplifies the language of scholarship and politics that discusses the disenfranchisement of black folks by making it readily available through the narrative of a young black woman. She uses the appeal of the young adult genre and first-person narration to make the discussion of police brutality accessible to all readers.

AGENCY FOR THE CHILD IN *ESPERANZA RISING*
AND
THE HATE U GIVE: A CALL TO YOUNG NON-BLACK READERS

by

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Committee Chair

To everyone in my life who has encouraged me
to do more than I could imagine.

APPROVAL PAGE

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AGENCY FOR THE CHILD IN *ESPERANZA RISING*

The presence of the adult in children's literature has, for many scholars, discredited the genre completely. The adult, whether author, publisher, or distributor, is seen as imposing his or her idealistic notions of a positive childhood onto the unsuspecting consumer. The adult creates children's literature with the hope that the child reader will implement the adult's whimsical fantasies of juvenility. The adult in children's literature interferes with the child's perception of childhood without acknowledging the consequences of such actions. In "The Case of Peter Pan or the Impossibility of Children's Fiction," Jacqueline Rose argues that "children's fiction sets up the child as an outsider to its own process, and then aims, unashamedly, to take the child *in*" (2). Though the child reader is left out of the construction of children's texts, he or she is expected to utilize what the adult deems necessary for the child to learn. In "The Other: Orientalism, Colonialism, and Children's Literature," Perry Nodelman takes Rose's argument a step further by accusing the adult of colonizing the child. Citing Edward Said's *Orientalism*, Nodelman argues that children's literature dominates, restructures, and aims to have authority over children. Characterizing children's literature as "inherently adult-centered" (30), Nodelman writes that children's literature teaches children how to be docile and compliant. The primary purpose of children's literature then becomes to control the child, centering the adult's happiness in the process. In furthering this discussion, Karin Lesnik-Oberstein argues that children's literature has

always been constructed by the adult and is not really “children’s” literature. The desire to create the ideal submissive child influences the adult to write, publish, and distribute texts that manipulate the child. The adult is then producing literature with this ideal submissive child in mind. Lesnik-Oberstein argues that this child “does not exist” but is constructed by the adult, reiterating that the adult is both the producer and consumer of children’s literature (9). As a result, the adult takes away the child’s agency in being able to interpret the world independently and forces the child to conform to a designated experience of childhood.

I argue that there is a possibility for children’s literature to exist without colonizing the child. There is a future for this genre that encourages the child to reclaim his or her agency by recognizing the child’s capability to think critically and by producing literature that addresses the child as an equal to the adult. Pam Muñoz Ryan in *Esperanza Rising* (2000) does this, specifically, by recognizing the child’s political potential. I demonstrate how Ryan makes an effort to open up a political dialogue with the child, inviting the child into the public sphere to speak up for his or her own political beliefs. Ryan recognizes the political capabilities of the child to understand the plight of undocumented Mexican immigrants in the United States. Rather than engaging with the child as an inferior to herself, Ryan address the child as a politician appealing to a voter. Ryan brings to the child the issue of undocumented Mexican immigration and persuades them to sympathize with the violence enacted on undocumented Mexican immigrants. In creating a narrative about an undocumented Mexican immigrant, Ryan uses the children’s novel as a political platform to speak to the child as a future activist and voter. She is

driven by the need to combat the dehumanizing rhetoric perpetuated by California's 1994 Gubernatorial Election, in which candidates Pete Wilson and Kathleen Brown worked to expel undocumented Mexican immigrants from the state of California.

Through educating the child on the historical complexities of undocumented Mexican immigration, Ryan parallels the anti-Mexican immigrant rhetoric which led to Mexican Repatriation in the 1920s with the rhetoric surrounding undocumented Mexican immigrants in California's in the mid-1990s. Ryan shows the reader how the United States had once before attempted to remove Mexican immigrants from the country but ended up losing their workforce and subjected more than 500,000 Mexican immigrants to detainment and deportation.¹ As a warning to future voters, Ryan informs children of the United States' past transgression, encouraging children to not make the same mistakes within their own lifetimes. She then confronts the dehumanizing political rhetoric that created anti-undocumented Mexican immigrant sentiments both in the 1920s and in the 1990s. She offers a new, positive image of the undocumented Mexican immigrant. Esperanza, a young female child who comes from a wealthy background, who becomes an ambitious laborer, and who promotes good citizenship, challenges dominant images of the undocumented Mexican immigrant as a poor, unambitious, adult male with criminal tendencies. Though there are issues of colorism and classism that come into play with centralizing Esperanza in this novel, Ryan does provide the reader with enough information about these isms to recognize her shortcomings within the novel. In

¹See Guerin-Gonzales.

analyzing the ways Ryan uses the novel as her political platform to defend the lives of undocumented Mexican immigrants, I argue that Ryan uses her narrative to speak to the child as an equal. Ryan negotiates with the child as a voter, attributing political agency to the child and recognizing them as capable of making “adult” decisions about tolerance. Instead of colonizing the child, Ryan includes him or her in an accessible conversation about the undocumented Mexican immigrant. Ryan is not identifying or recognizing a new ability for the child to understand the world around him or her. Instead, she looks to bring the political opinions of the child, that are ignored by adults, into public discourse as a way to encourage a true democracy.

Ryan recognizes the power of a narrative to make inaccessible ideas accessible to a broader audience and employs this potential by writing a narrative about the life of an undocumented Mexican immigrant child. This is not to say that the debate around undocumented Mexican immigration is inaccessible to children because they are children; instead it is to acknowledge that political debates are often elitist and uninterpretable by the general public. In “Narrative Authority,” Anthony F. Lang Jr. writes that for a political debate “to be used by a wider civil society and not just by philosophers, it needs to be recast in terms of narrative rather than rules” (135). Lang reiterates that this helps larger audiences structure and judge political debates. In creating this narrative about an undocumented Mexican immigrant child living in California during Mexican Repatriation, Ryan is able to educate the child reader through a familiar dialogue on the historical interactions between the United States government and undocumented Mexican immigrants.

Ryan sets her novel during Mexican Repatriation to show how anti-Mexican immigrant voters worked to deport mass numbers of documented and undocumented Mexican immigrants in the 1920s. Ryan writes “county officials in Los Angeles, California, organized ‘deportation trains’ and the Immigration Bureau made ‘sweeps’ in the San Fernando Valley and Los Angeles, arresting anyone who looked Mexican, regardless of whether or not they were citizens or in the United States legally” (Ryan 254). In the novel’s afterword, Ryan tells the reader that her grandmother, on whose life the novel is based, migrated to the United States during the time of Mexican Repatriation. Ryan observes that even after becoming an American citizen, her grandmother continued to be afraid of being deported due to the mass deportation of both citizens and non-citizens. Ryan writes that “government officials thought this [mass deportation] would solve the unemployment associated with the Great Depression (it didn’t)” (254). Her use of the words “it didn’t” tells the reader that Mexican Repatriation decreased the size of the American work force and harmed Mexican immigrant families. Mexican Repatriation proved to be detrimental to the American economy. The reemergence of anti-Mexican immigrant rhetoric in the 1990s allowed Ryan to parallel anti-Mexican immigrant sentiments from 1920s to anti-undocumented Mexican immigrant sentiments in the 1990s.

In the 1920s, California was at the forefront of the debates over Mexican Repatriation because of the state’s fast-growing Mexican immigrant population.²

² See Hoffman.

Debates around Mexican Repatriation in this state focused on two issues. The first was that Mexican labor was taking away job opportunities from American citizens. In *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression: Repatriation Pressures, 1929-1939*, Abraham Hoffman writes that pro-border restriction lobbyists tried to appeal to public discourse by framing the presence of Mexican immigrants as “a dismal and distressing race problem” (28). In other words, the presence of Mexican immigrants was contaminating American society. The second argument made was that Mexican labor was valuable and, therefore, Mexican workers should have been allowed to migrate in and out of the country. Anti-border restriction lobbyists such as George P. Clements, the Head of Agriculture for the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce from 1918-1939, argued that the border should remain open because the best laborer was “the ‘man who had no idea of becoming a citizen or a menace,’ the Mexican” (Hoffman 29). Anti-border restriction lobbyists suggested that the docility of Mexican immigrants was the main reason why Mexican labor was valuable. The Mexican laborer was seen as a worker who accepted low wages, poor living conditions, and back-breaking labor. Mexican laborers were perceived as naturally able to handle this back-breaking labor because “their crouching and bending habits are fully adapted, while the white is physically unable to adapt himself to them” (Hoffman 10). This false claim was not to insult the white male on his inability to work hard, but to imply that the white male was too good for this type of labor. Instead, the claim concluded that labor was natural for the Mexican immigrant. It implies that the undocumented immigrant’s body had naturally adapted to be the role of disposable laborer, so the white man would not have to do such work. These comments

by Clements contribute to a rhetoric that dehumanized Mexican immigrants. Although Clements's comments aimed at keeping Mexican immigrants in the United States, they worked similarly to the arguments of pro-border restriction lobbyists by racially othering the Mexican laborer. Where one argument condemned the worker's foreignness as a threat to American society, the other argument valued the existence of this "naturally" complacent worker. When pro-border restriction lobbyists won, and Mexican immigrants were forcibly removed from the United States, this event was not seen as inhumane because Mexican immigrants were not considered to be human.

In setting *Esperanza Rising* in the 1920s, Ryan places Esperanza in the middle of this conversation about Mexican immigrants. While the reader experiences racism and oppression through Ryan's narrative, he or she is also learning of the historical displacement of Mexican migrants. As Ryan indicates in her discussion of Mexican Repatriation, it did not work to save the country money and create more jobs for American citizens. Instead, it backfired and caused the United States to lose its valuable agricultural laborers. Ryan encourages the reader to listen the discourse around undocumented Mexican immigrants carefully, because the country had a habit of falling back into discussions of mass deportation as the only solution. She urges the future voter to pause and remember that this did not work before and it will not work again.

Ryan saw that California's 1994 Gubernatorial Election was foolishly turning to mass deportation as a solution to the state's large population of undocumented Mexican immigrants. One example of this discussion comes from Pete Wilson's infamous campaign ad that framed California's undocumented Mexican immigration issue as an

invasion.³ The ad begins ominously: “they keep coming” the narrator says over menacing and foreboding music. Images of border patrol agents in pursuit of undocumented Mexican immigrants flash onto the screen. The narrator continues by claiming that two million illegal immigrants are in California and that the federal government has done minimal work to aid the state in its war against undocumented Mexican immigrants. The narrator notes that Pete Wilson, however, had done a considerable amount to help California flush out these illegal aliens. Wilson himself then appears on the screen, interrupting the images of undocumented Mexican immigrants running across a busy freeway. Appearing as the saving grace for the state, Wilson says, “for Californians who work hard, pay taxes, and obey the laws, I’m suing to force the federal government to control the border. And, I’m working to deny state services to illegals. Enough is enough.” The ad ends with an image of Pete Wilson’s name for governor of California. Wilson’s ad allied him with Proposition 187 (1996), which demanded that undocumented immigrants be publicly screened for citizenship and be denied health care, public education, and other social services.⁴ While Proposition 187 was trying to take away basic human rights from undocumented immigrants, Wilson’s ad tried to take away their humanity. All the ad lacked was the all too familiar “X-Files” theme music.

The use of hyperbolic rhetoric in the discussion of undocumented immigrants was not exclusive to Wilson, however. California’s entire 1994 Gubernatorial Election thrived off of it. Wilson’s democratic counterpart, Kathleen Brown (who was California’s State

³ See PeteWilsonCA.

⁴ See Alvarez.

Treasurer) also participated in this questionable rhetoric. In response to the 14,000 undocumented state prisoners in California's 10,000 county jails, Kathleen Brown reassured the *San Francisco Chronicle* on July 26 of 1993 that she had solutions to this problem, saying, "We need to deport these criminals and negotiate agreements requiring that they do their time in their own countries." She perpetuated the belief that all undocumented immigrants were criminals deserving of punishment. While running for governor in 1994, Brown framed herself as "the good cop" in comparison to Wilson and his policies. Brown would later criticize Wilson for his public screening process which called for Mexican immigrants to carry citizenship paperwork on them at all times. Brown concluded that this process of public screening did not represent an equal and just democracy. Instead, she searched for an ethical compromise. Brown "proposed a tamperproof Social Security card to be used only when people are looking for work" to screen undocumented immigrants and keep them out of the workforce. She presented herself as the gentle-handed punisher.⁵ The discourse of this election suggested that California had fallen ill to a plague and that the government was working to rid the state of this malady. Though the entire nation was caught in the debate over undocumented immigration, California was at the forefront of this issue because, as a border state, California had a high population of undocumented Mexican immigrants.

In using Mexican Repatriation as the back drop of her novel, Ryan comments on the rhetoric of California's 1994 gubernatorial election and Prop 187 in addressing the

⁵ See Ayers.

issue of undocumented Mexican immigration. Ryan is able educate the child on the country's historical past with Mexican immigration and encourage him or her to learn from this history. In demonstrating the effects of Mexican Repatriation both through Esperanza's narrative and her grandmother's real-life experience, Ryan teaches the reader about the intense fear that comes with anti-undocumented immigrant sentiments. These harmful sentiments lead to physical brutality and displacement. The reader not only learns of Mexican Repatriation as a historical moment, but also learns of the emotional trauma it caused Mexican immigrants. Esperanza often expresses in the novel that she is afraid because she does not want anyone in her family to be harmed or deported. When she reaches the farm, she is to work at after leaving her home in Mexico behind, Esperanza learns that *La Migra* (immigration) deports people who strike on the farm, even immigrants who are citizens. After one particular raid, Esperanza is fearful that she will be separated from her mother, but then is reassured that because she chooses to work and because the farmers rely on her labor, she will not be taken away. Only the strikers who cause trouble are deported. At one point a woman tries to tell an immigration official that she is American, but he "took the papers from her hand and tore them into pieces" (Ryan 206). Esperanza is troubled at how carelessly the woman's citizenship is ignored. Ramona then explains to her that most families end up returning with their detained family members and the government calls this "voluntary deportation" (Ryan 206). Esperanza notes that "something seemed very wrong about sending people away from their own 'free country' because they had spoken their minds" (Ryan 208). Through this narrative, the reader experiences firsthand the fear of deportation. The narrative places

the reader in Esperanza's shoes, and the reader feels and learns with her throughout the novel. Ryan recognizes that during and after California's 1994 Gubernatorial Election, children would be listening and learning from "adult" political discussions around undocumented Mexican immigration. She provides the child reader with an alternate perspective, so that the reader can listen and learn from a different side of the discussion on undocumented Mexican immigration. By recognizing the child's capability to observe the same way adults do, Ryan appeals to them as a political audience capable of understanding a damaging political event such as Mexican Repatriation, its effects on both non-immigrant and immigrant populations, and the importance of turning away from such rhetoric as to not make the same mistakes.

Ryan also explores specific stereotypes from the 1990s and 2000s that worked to other and harm undocumented Mexican immigrants in order to encourage the future voter to sympathize with this marginalized community. California's 1994 Gubernatorial Election furthered existing stereotypes about undocumented Mexican immigrants. More specifically, the rhetoric around this election worked to dehumanize undocumented Mexican men. Lisa A. Flores in "Constructing Rhetorical Borders: Peons, Illegal Aliens, and Competing Narratives of Immigration" writes, "Mexican immigrants were generally conceived of as male" (372). From the Immigration Act of 1990 to the publication of *Esperanza Rising* in 2000, this decade relentlessly built upon previously held stereotypes of undocumented Mexican immigrants as a threat to the safety and sanctity of American society. In California, the Immigration Act of 1990, the 1994 Gubernatorial Election, and Proposition 187 (1996) all worked to demonize undocumented Mexican immigrants. The

Immigration Act of 1990 worked to further the stereotype that undocumented Mexican immigrants were poor by restricting passage in the United States to immigrants with degrees in higher education or to immigrants with the potential to work white-collar jobs. Temporary work was not seen as benefitting the United States workforce, and many Mexican immigrants were denied access to work in such states as California. The implications of temporary work or jobs that require physical labor as being work done by the poor also perpetuated the belief that undocumented Mexican immigrants were unambitious and were, thus, comfortable living in poverty. Since they were not making the effort to come into the United States as educated or skilled workers, they were seen as complacently living in poverty. This interpretation is contradictory in that it suggests that a poor undocumented Mexican immigrant should strive for higher paying jobs without being able to afford the resources that would get him there. Proposition 187, which demanded that undocumented Mexican immigrants be publicly screened for citizenship and be denied health care, public education, and other social services, furthered this idea that undocumented Mexican immigrants were unambitious. This initiative kept undocumented Mexican immigrants trapped under the government's control and blamed these immigrants for their struggles. If a Mexican immigrant came into the country illegally, they were seen as forfeiting the ability to access the resources that would enable them to get a white-collar job or a college education, such as the ones Prop 187 denies.

The undocumented Mexican immigrant is seen as undeserving of these privileges because he or she starts a new life in a new country on the wrong foot. As seen in Wilson's campaign ad, the illegal way in which undocumented Mexican immigrants

come into the United States posits them as dangerous criminals that need to be removed from the country immediately. The unlawful crossing of the border by undocumented Mexican immigrants contributes to the rhetoric of the Mexican Problem which saw the growing population of the Mexican immigrants as a threat to the racial purity of the United States.⁶ Ryan talks about the stereotypes these policies create to show the reader that the state enacts this racialized violence on undocumented Mexican immigrants. The state stereotypes the undocumented Mexican immigrant as a poor male criminal with little to no ambition. Ryan challenges this stereotype through Esperanza by narrating the life of a formerly wealthy female, turned ambitious laborer. Ryan aims to reframe, positively, the lives of undocumented Mexican immigrants to encourage the reader to explore perspectives outside of the state's perspective when participating in political conversations.

Esperanza's access to education challenges the state's preconceived notions of the undocumented Mexican immigrant as uneducated. The language of the Immigration Act of 1990 separated the educated immigrant from the uneducated immigrant. The Act restricted entry into the United States through employment.⁷ Entry was contingent upon one's education level. Preference was given to immigrants with degrees or trade certification. Primary preference was given to priority workers such as professors, researchers, and executives. Secondary preference was given to professionals with degrees in higher education. Tertiary preference was given different types of skilled

⁶ See Flores.

⁷ See Barkan.

workers with appropriate certification. Temporary or seasonal work, like that of many Mexican, Central American, and Southern American laborers was deemed unacceptable for entry. In limiting entry to professionals as a way to cut down on immigration from Latin America, the language of this act implied that these immigrants were too poor to afford an education that could make them professionals. This association of Latin American persons with poverty contributed to the racialization of LatinX immigrants in the United States. The restrictions this act placed on Latin American immigrants, meant that they would be unable to find a way to legally enter the United States. This act separated the poor Latin American immigrant from the wealthy immigrant. Before Esperanza has to flee Mexico, Ryan's narrative notes that Esperanza was wealthy enough to have access to education as young girl in 1920s Mexico. When Esperanza is forced to leave, Ryan parallels the loss of Esperanza's education with the loss of her Abuelita, Papa, and her friends. Ryan writes "sadness and anger tangled in Esperanza's stomach as she thought of all that she was leaving: her friends and her school, her life as it once was, Abuelita. And Papa." (Ryan 56). For Esperanza the loss of her education is as heart-wrenching as leaving behind her Abuelita, her school friends, and her father's legacy.

School was where Esperanza spent her time outside of the home when she lived in Mexico, and for her to lose her ability to go to school is to lose the promise of a future. When she arrives in California, Esperanza tells her new companion Isabel that she plans to go to high school as soon as her grandmother arrives. Esperanza looks to this dream throughout the novel as a way of establishing permanence in the United States. To counteract the image of the undocumented Mexican immigrant as too poor to access

education, Ryan shows the reader that Esperanza is passionate about her education, but for reasons outside her power, she has to put it on hold. Immigrating to the United States was not going to stop her from continuing her education, however. Whether the young American reader is or is not aware of the Immigration Act of 1990 and its intentions to keep Mexican immigrants out of the country, Ryan addresses these claims within the novel. Esperanza's friend Miguel tells her that "people here [in the United States] think that all Mexicans are alike. They think that we are all uneducated, dirty, poor, and unskilled. It does not occur to them that many have been trained in professions in Mexico" (187). Though Ryan does not explicitly cite the act in the novel, she discusses the ways that its language imposes ideas of poverty and unworthiness onto the undocumented Mexican immigrant. In addressing the child as an equal to herself, Ryan's narrative works to provide context on how the state legislation can perpetuate harmful racialized stereotypes about undocumented Mexican immigrants.

State legislation also perpetuates the stereotype that undocumented Mexican immigrants are unambitious and Ryan challenges this by narrating Esperanza's aspirations throughout the novel. Undocumented Mexican immigrants were perceived as "unlikely to save money either to move into semi-skilled positions or to be able to buy land or other permanent residences in the United States" (370). This stereotype worked to confine undocumented Mexican immigrants to servitude by denying them the innate human feeling of desire. If undocumented Mexican immigrants were unambitious it meant that they were complacent in performing back-breaking labor. Prop 187 took this stereotype a step further by denying undocumented Mexican immigrants the chance to

have access to education or healthcare in the United States, confining them, even more so, within the bounds of poverty. In *Shifting Borders: Rhetoric, Immigration, and California's Proposition 187*, Kent A. Ono and Joseph M. Sloop write that “the *Los Angeles Times* articles on Proposition 187 portray immigration as a fundamental threat to the character of the U.S. Nation” (50). More specifically, undocumented immigration was a threat that needed to be kept under surveillance and away from the general population. For this reason, the rhetoric around Prop 187 reiterated that undocumented Mexican immigrants were unambitious even though it was state initiatives such as this proposition that kept undocumented Mexican immigrants from integrating into U.S. society.

Esperanza’s desire to reunite with her Abuelita at the end of the novel works against this stereotype because Esperanza saves money to achieve this goal. When her mother falls ill, Esperanza takes on the role as the sole breadwinner of her family and saves money to send for Abuelita who is still in Mexico. The text notes that “every other week, with the small amounts she saved, she bought a money order from the market and put it in her valise. She figured if she kept working until peaches, she would have enough for Abuelita’s travel” (Ryan 179-180). Esperanza eventually makes enough money to pay her mother’s hospital bills and to pay for Abuelita to travel to the United States. When Abuelita arrives, Esperanza looks to the future “with the anticipation of dreams she never knew she could have, of learning English, of supporting her family, of someday buying a tiny house” (Ryan 250). Esperanza imagines herself moving beyond the life of a laborer to build a better life for herself and her little family. Ryan narrates Esperanza as ambitious enough to try to achieve upward social mobility. Ryan shows the reader that

Mexican immigrants were restricted to life on a farm until they were able to save enough money to leave the farm. Isolating undocumented Mexican immigrants to camps on a farm worked to concentrate populations of Mexican immigrants into one poor community. Ryan speaks to the reader by exposing the ways in which the state isolates and oppresses undocumented Mexican immigrants to deny them upward social mobility while then claiming that undocumented Mexican immigrants are not ambitious enough to move up in class.

The state perpetuates the stereotype that undocumented Mexican immigrants are dangerous criminals. To combat this, Ryan does not specify whether Esperanza enters the country legally or illegally. Ryan leaves Esperanza's immigration status open to interpretation by the reader. Pete Wilson's campaign ad, which ran while he was still governor, encouraged voters to think of Mexican immigrants as criminals. As a representative of the state, he contributed to the state's rhetoric that worked to oppress and other undocumented Mexican immigrants. He refers to undocumented Mexican immigrants as "illegals" in his ad. Terms like "illegals" or "illegal alien" play an important role in dehumanizing and criminalizing undocumented Mexican immigrants by implying that they come to the United States with the intention to invade and destroy. The act of crossing the Mexican-American border illegally is a crime, but campaign ads like Pete Wilson's conflate the illegality with which undocumented Mexican immigrants enter the United States with a belief that they will continue to break the law. "Illegal alien" means more than entering the country illegally; it means that the "alien" who already committed the crime of unlawfully crossing the border would commit other

crimes in the future. Douglas Massey and Emilio Parrado in "The New Era of Mexican Migration to the United States" write that "immigrants were connected symbolically with invaders, criminals, and drug smugglers, who were pictured as poised menacingly along the lightly defended two-thousand-mile frontier dividing the United States from Mexico" (521). This lightly defended border that creates distinct boundaries between Mexico and the United States represents the safe-keeping of American citizens by keeping out criminal Mexican immigrants. In the act of violating this border, undocumented Mexican immigrants commit a crime that is seen as threatening the safety of American society. This act of border crossing leads the state to scare citizens into believing that once an undocumented Mexican immigrant commits the crime of crossing the border illegally, he will be more prone to participating in illegal activities in the United States. Wilson's campaign ad reiterates this message by showing images of undocumented Mexican immigrants being chased across the border, implying that if they are not detained that they will bring criminality into the United States. Esperanza's immigration status is ambiguous. Ryan's narrative shows the reader that even though Esperanza fraudulently crosses the border by entering with "discreet duplicates", she is not coming to the United States with criminal intent.

Since Esperanza's immigration status is ambiguous, readers are able to decide whether they want to read Esperanza's character as a documented or an undocumented Mexican immigrant. When confirming with her servants Hortensia and Alfonso that she would like to cross the border with Esperanza and Abuelita, Ramona, Esperanza's mother, tells them that their paperwork is gone. Ramona says, "but crossing the border is

more difficult these days. You have your papers but ours were lost in the fire and they forbid anyone to enter without a visa” (Ryan 48). Abuelita then reassures her, “I will arrange it...my sisters, in the convent. They can discreetly get you duplicates” (Ryan 49). These duplicates are not implied to be legal or authorized as visa documents. Their paperwork is of questionable origin because they are “discreet duplicates” from a convent, made over the course of a few days. Furthermore, when Esperanza and Ramona go through the immigration line at the Mexicali border, they are wary of being caught and sent back to Mexico. Their interaction with the immigration official is full of tension as Esperanza and her mother are visibly nervous: “She looked at her papers and hoped they were in order. What if the officials found something wrong? Would they send her back to her uncles? Would they arrest her and put her in jail?” (Ryan 81-82). The immigration official upon seeing their paperwork is hesitant, until Ramona pretends that they can verify their jobs in the United States. Once Esperanza and Ramona pass through the border and board another train, they watch, through a window, groups of people being sent back to Mexico. Ramona tells Esperanza that this happens for many reasons. “They had no papers, false ones, or no proof of work. Or there might have been a problem with just one member of the family so they all chose to go back instead of being separated” (Ryan 83). The thought of being separated from her mother is discomfoting to Esperanza. The way that Ryan narrates this scene implies that Esperanza and her mother are not entering the country legally. Though they go through border patrol and hand the border agent what looks like legal paperwork, the origin of this paperwork is questionable

and their anxieties over being sent back or separated implies that this paperwork may be illegal copies of their visa documents.

Ryan leaves Esperanza's immigration status open to interpretation. This engages with child readers by reminding them that they have the agency to read and interpret a text the way they want to. To figure out that Esperanza's immigration status is ambiguous, the child has to read closely to find the clues. Ryan disguises their illegal crossing of the border by using the phrase "discreet duplicates" and by describing the way Esperanza and Ramona go through United States Customs. Esperanza is "documented" but is still "illegal." This act of border crossing counteracts the images of undocumented Mexican immigrants running across the freeway in Wilson's campaign ad. The novel does not include the words "undocumented" or "illegal" because the use of these words would limit the novel's audience. Ryan is cautious of how the adult pays a role in choosing literature for children. If Ryan's novel blatantly discussed undocumented Mexican immigration, parents with negative perceptions towards these immigrants may prevent their children from reading such literature. To get around the adult, Esperanza's immigration status is left to the child reader to decipher, giving agency to the child. Ryan recognizes the divisive power in using words like "undocumented" or "illegal" when discussing Mexican immigrants. In *Deconstructing Public Discourse on Undocumented Immigration in the United States in the Twenty First Century*, Kwadjo Owusu-Sarfo writes, "indeed, 'undocumented' and 'illegal' are more than just descriptive words for those in the country without permission. They are loaded terms that serve as code words for the two dominant ideological positions on immigration in the United States" (84).

Using “undocumented” implies that one is sympathetic towards undocumented Mexican immigrants and using “illegal” implies that one is unsympathetic towards undocumented Mexican immigrants. Understanding how these terms could deter the adult distributor who uses the term “illegal” from exposing a child to her text, Ryan omits these terms completely from her novel as a way to appeal to the adult. She uses ambiguity to bypass the adult and speak to the child in order to allow them access to learn about undocumented Mexican immigration themselves. Ryan is able to make a case for the undocumented Mexican immigrant through a children’s novel that is seemingly unthreatening to the adult. This narrative choice is a way for the child to reclaim agency by presenting him or her with the issue of undocumented Mexican immigration directly, without interpretation from the adult.

Ryan challenges the hyperbolic stereotypes about undocumented Mexican immigrants created by the state to urge the child reader to question what the state’s political motives are in perpetuating these stereotypes. Ryan opens up this discussion to remind the reader that he or she has the agency to critique the state and its involvement with anti-undocumented Mexican immigration sentiments. Through Esperanza, the reader learns how undocumented Mexican immigrants and the United States government have interacted. Ryan recognizes that “cultural narratives serve to outline ideological positions and to garner assent for those public stances” (Flores 367). So, Ryan creates Esperanza to provide an alternate narrative to combat that of the state.

Unfortunately, in working to move away from the image of the undocumented Mexican immigrant as poor, unambitious, and criminal, Ryan upholds another

problematic image of the undocumented Mexican immigrant within her novel. The novel promotes (whether advertently or inadvertently) colorism and classism. Ryan does address issues of colorism and classism in the Mexican community in the novel, through Miguel, but perpetuates these issues herself. Miguel, a dark-skinned poor laborer, teaches Esperanza that “full bellies and Spanish blood go hand in hand” and that “those with Spanish blood, who have the fairest complexions in the land, are the wealthiest” (Ryan 79-80). In response, Esperanza admits to never having thought about these issues of colorism and classism and assumes that things will be different in the United States. Because Ryan centers the novel on Esperanza, a Spanish-descent, fair-skinned, formerly wealthy child, she urges the reader to sympathize more readily with this image of the undocumented Mexican immigrant and ignores the diverse skin-colors and classes within the undocumented Mexican immigrant community. Miguel’s character and the lessons he teaches Esperanza are often cast aside to discuss Esperanza’s hardships and achievements. However, if Ryan entrusts the child with interpreting and understanding Esperanza’s “undocumented” status, she also entrusts the reader to take on Miguel’s criticism of colorism and classism and apply it to her own novel. Ryan’s novel not only works to include the child reader into the conversation about undocumented Mexican immigrants, it also gives the child the opportunity to apply the information given to them by the novel onto the novel.

In speaking to the child as a future voter and activist, Ryan encourages a democracy in which children are seen as capable of political thought. Jessica Kulynych, in “No Playing in the Public Sphere: Democratic Theory and the Exclusion of Children,”

argues that “the failure to include the voices of children in the political public sphere is a violation of justice and an obstacle to the achievement of a genuinely deliberative democracy” (246). Children exist within the state’s control. In contrast with the adult who can identify how state violence affects him or her and protest accordingly, children are denied political agency and do not have the freedom to act in support or against state violence. Kulynych argues that to grant the child political agency offers them citizenship into the public sphere to participate political discussion. Ryan attempts to include the child in the public sphere as a citizen through *Esperanza Rising*. Rather than writing for the imagined child reader, Ryan writes her novel for the citizen, future voter, and thinker. David Buckingham, in “The Making of Citizens: Young People, News and Politics,” writes that children are “active participants in constructing their own social lives and identities” (13). Ryan acknowledges the child’s active role within his or her own life and gives the child the opportunity to learn and interpret undocumented Mexican immigration without assistance from a parent or guardian. What the reader chooses to conclude about undocumented Mexican immigrants is left up to him or her. Ryan makes the case for the undocumented Mexican immigrant but does not expect her audience to blindly follow her. Ryan utilizes the narrative because it “create[s] visions, desirable or not, of possible futures” (Flores 367). Ryan’s novel creates a vision of a future where American citizens sympathize with undocumented Mexican immigrants and enact legislation that is inclusive. Though Ryan tries to persuade the child reader to be more tolerant towards undocumented Mexican immigrants, she is largely encouraging the child to participate in political discourse. She does so by introducing her readers to a narrative that counters

negative stereotypes about undocumented Mexican immigrants and encourages them to pull from her novel in political discussions. By writing this narrative, Ryan politically engages children to remind them that they are citizens of a state that can manipulate them. She discusses how the state enacts state violence and reminds them that they have the agency to decide how they feel about what the state does. Buckingham, in discussing R.W. Connell's study on children's political development, states,

While children are dependent upon political information that has already been processed by adults, Connell argues that they do not simply reproduce adult ideas. On the contrary, they are active agents, selectively appropriating what is available; socialization is not a passive process, but a matter of 'conscious creative activity' on the part of children themselves. (13)

Ryan's ability to recognize children as active agents opens up a new possibility for children's literature that does not colonize the child but involves them in the public sphere as equals to adult authors, publishers, and distributors. The adult will always be an active participant in children's literature. Instead of trying to remove the adult, I encourage the adult participant to think of children not as inferior to them or in need of control, but as people who create their own social realities and are productive members of society. Rather than using children's literature to create a power dynamic between adult and child, or between the colonizer and the colonized, Ryan uses children's literature to create a partnership with children as active citizens in society.

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THE HATE U GIVE: A CALL TO YOUNG NON-BLACK READERS

Angie Thomas's *The Hate U Give* is a revolutionary young adult novel inspired by the real cases of police brutality that affect young black men and women throughout the United States. The novel follows sixteen-year-old Starr Carter and her life after she witnesses an officer kill her best friend Khalil. Since Starr is the only witness, she gets pulled into the ensuing trial and is forced to deal with the criminalizing rhetoric that blames Khalil for his death. In writing this text, Thomas reminds young black readers affected by police brutality that their stories of pain matter. Representing an experience of adolescence that involves trauma reminds all young readers that coming of age in the United States does not pose the same obstacles for everyone. What the novel addresses with respect to black youth is something that many non-black youths do not experience. While this novel does the important work of representing black youth and their coming of age stories, the other work it does is to teach non-black youth how to understand and support black communities terrorized by police brutality.

For the purposes of this paper, I refer to the "reader" of this novel as the young non-black reader, because Thomas is trying to educate young non-black youth on how to listen to black youth. This term refers to both young white readers and young non-black readers of color because the issue of police brutality, although not exclusive to the black

community, affects black men and women the most.⁸ Thomas's novel acts as a guidebook for non-black youth wanting to get involved with the Black Lives Matter movement. First, she educates the reader on how the myth of black criminality influences the criminal justice system and allows officers to use excessive force on black folks while then acquitting these officers despite their actions. Second, Thomas informs the reader of the issues of generational trauma and code-switching, discussing the intricacies of black life in the United States. Third, Thomas teaches the reader how to access political agency as young adults to advocate for black lives. Thomas shows the young non-black reader how they can support the Black Lives Matter movement without imposing their non-black privilege onto black activists. In looking at how Thomas speaks to the young non-black reader, I argue that she utilizes the narrative to make accessible the current scholarship on the criminal justice system, on anti-black state violence, on black life in the United States, and on different forms of protesting. In "Narrative Analysis," Catherine Kohler Riessman writes that "the development of narrative analysis has given life to the study of the narrative as a form of information for social research" (v). This utilization allows these readers to participate in and understand social research that is difficult to access. Thomas personalizes and recasts the scholarship around police brutality to make it available to a wider audience, specifically an audience that Thomas sees as having untapped political potential. Thomas simplifies the language of scholarship and politics that discusses the disenfranchisement of black folks by making it

⁸ For the discussion of police brutality on black communities see Alexander; Babson; Berry; Blow; Waldrep.

readily available through the narrative of a young black woman. In “Narrative Authority,” Anthony F. Lang Jr. writes that for political debates “to be used by a wider civil society and not just by philosophers, it needs to be recast in terms of narrative rather than rules” (135). By accessing the young adult narrative, Thomas makes a complicated issue more understandable and, thus, more open for discussion. Furthermore, Thomas’s use of the narrative brings the ignored narratives of black women who witness and experience police brutality into the mainstream. She uses the appeal of the young adult genre and first-person narration to make the discussion of police brutality accessible to all readers.

Thomas’s novel discusses the myth of black criminality and how it operates within the criminal justice system.⁹ The myth of black criminality, as Ta-Nehisi Coates writes, creates an image “of blacks as highly prone to criminality, and generally beyond the scope of rehabilitation” (1). This myth enables the heavy policing of black communities to be seen as a requirement for safe-keeping. Through Khalil’s death and Starr’s experience in the following trial, Thomas educates the reader on the criminal justice system’s reliance on the myth of black criminality through its use of racial profiling, the posthumous demonization of black victims, and the perceived criminality of black witnesses in discrediting black testimonies.¹⁰ To make the scholarship behind these issues more accessible, Thomas uses Starr’s narrative during Khalil’s death, the following interrogation, and the trial’s testimonies as a way to demonstrate to the reader

⁹ For further discussion on the criminal justice system and the policing of black men and women, see Cashmore; Richie.

¹⁰ For further discussion of racial profiling, see Vera Sanchez, et. al.

the injustices the myth of black criminality imposes onto black victims of police brutality. The use of this narrative makes these injustices personal to the reader, inciting a stronger emotional response than academic writing and political writing would.

To educate the reader on how racial profiling works to detain and kill black folks during routine traffic stops, Thomas characterizes the officer who pulls over Khalil and Starr as an officer who relies on the myth of black criminality to presume Khalil and Starr are suspicious. Racial profiling is a form of social control influenced by the myth of black criminality. In “Racial Profiling as Dressage: A Social Control Regime!,” Laura Khoury writes that “the most common, but faulty reasoning for racial profiling is that blacks commit a disproportionate share of crime” (56). Khoury writes that racial profiling separates the lawful person from the unlawful person. The myth of black criminality allows officers to believe that black men and women act with malicious intent simply because they are black. In *African-American Males and the U.S. Justice System of Marginalization: A National Tragedy*, Floyd Weatherspoon writes, “in their zealously to enforce public laws, governmental officials have selected African-Americans, particularly males, on the basis of their race and gender to be stopped, arrested, charged, prosecuted, incarcerated, and put to death” (17). Weatherspoon shows that officers use racial profiling along with the myth of black criminality to justify the use of excessive force on black folks.

To help the reader understand this concept better, Thomas shows how the officer, or One-fifteen as Starr refers to him after memorizing his badge number, racially profiles Starr and Khalil. One-fifteen first shows that he is suspicious of Khalil and Starr through

the use of his flashlight. He watches their every movement. When he first approaches them, Starr says, “as if we aren’t blinded enough, the officer beams his flashlight in our faces” (Thomas 21). Then, when he asks Khalil for his license, registration, and proof of insurance, Starr notes that as Khalil searches through his wallet “the officer follows his movements with the flashlight” (Thomas 22). One-fifteen watches them closely because he expects Khalil and Starr to attack him or run off. One-fifteen apparently believes that because Khalil and Starr are black, they will attack him. Through One-fifteen’s cautiousness, Thomas shows the reader that when officers stop black men and women, they see them as a threat. This threat is furthered if the person who is stopped expresses any irritability. When Khalil verbalizes his irritation during the stop, One-fifteen interprets his attitude as aggression and begins to use excessive force on Khalil for talking back. Acting on the imagined threat that Khalil and Starr pose, the officer interprets irritability as an emotion that causes black men and women to act violently, and therefore, assume that black men and women are in need of physical control. One-fifteen forces Khalil out of his car and pushes him up against it. He then proceeds to say ““okay, smart mouth, let’s see what we find on you today”” (Thomas 23). One-fifteen assumes that Khalil is suspicious of something criminal by expecting to find something illegal on him. Khalil had not given any indication that he was a criminal, nor that he had anything illegal on him throughout the entire stop. Thomas shows that, other than believing in the myth of black criminality, One-fifteen had no reason to suspect that Khalil was carrying anything illegal. This attitude and suspicion is enough for One-fifteen to want to arrest Khalil. As he moves back to his car to get everything ready, Khalil opens his car door to

ask Starr if she is okay. Believing that Khalil was reaching for a gun to shoot him, One-fifteen shoots Khalil three times in the back. In recounting these events with a fellow activist, April O'frah, Starr learns that "Officer Cruise [One-fifteen] claims he saw it [a hairbrush] in the car door, and he assumed Khalil was reaching for it. The handle was thick enough, black enough, for him to assume it was a gun" (Thomas 217). Already expecting Khalil and Starr to harm him from the moment he stops them, One-fifteen readily believes that because Khalil is an irritated black man, Khalil will shoot him. When Khalil moves, One-fifteen acts in self-defense to save himself from an imagined threat.

Thomas demonstrates how the myth of black criminality, through racial profiling, can escalate a situation for an officer who believes that black men and women are inherently criminal. In describing the act of racial profiling within a narrative, rather than in the way that Khoury and Weatherspoon describe it, Thomas, through Starr, familiarizes the reader with how racial profiling enables officers to act on perceived threats. Starr's anxiousness conveys to the reader the fear that comes with being stopped by officers while black. The reader experiences the act of being racially profiled through Starr and learns of the terror this method of policing ignites.

Thomas informs the reader that the myth of black criminality, which influences the racial profiling of black men and women and kills them as a result, can also influence the investigations of cases of police brutality by criminalizing the victim, like it does Khalil. This myth manifests in the investigations that work to acquit officers guilty of police brutality by blaming the black victim for his or her own death. In "From 'Brute' to

‘Thug:’ The Demonization and Criminalization of Unarmed Black Male Victims in America,” CalvinJohn Smiley and David Fakunle write that “black males who are killed by law enforcement are turned into a ‘thug’ (the modern-day ‘brute’), which seemingly tries to justify their death or personal contribution to their demise. Beyond this, a ‘blame game’ effect occurs that shifts culpability from the perpetrator to the victim” (354). If a victim of police brutality holds a criminal record, it is automatically his or her own fault for being murdered by police officers, as it is seen as the officer’s duty to rid communities of criminals. The myth of black criminality endures beyond the deaths of black folks by criminalizing their memory.

Thomas helps the reader understand this concept by showing how Khalil’s murder investigation takes a turn when his past as a drug dealer is exposed. This information clouds the investigation and makes Khalil seem like he is deserving of his death because he had, previously, done something illegal. When Starr is first brought into questioning after the incident, she is confronted with questions about Khalil’s past as a drug dealer. Rather than questioning what transpired between Khalil and One-fifteen, the investigating officer asks Starr if she knew anything about Khalil selling narcotics. Starr stops and thinks, “what the fuck? My tears stop. For real, my eyes get dry with the quickness. Before I can say anything, my mom goes, ‘what does that have to do with anything?’” (Thomas 290). The officer persists in asking questions about Khalil’s life as a drug dealer until Starr’s mother, Lisa Carter, interrupts by asking whether they are putting Khalil on trial or the officer. Lisa says, “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 then reiterates to the officer that the reason Khalil is dead is because One-fifteen shot him. Through this dialogue, Thomas shows the reader that in order to defend an officer for killing an unarmed black person, investigations of cases of police brutality often put the deceased person on trial. This dynamic shifts the blame from the officer to the deceased.

Searching for and exposing a victim's criminality during investigations of police brutality absolves the officer of murder. Assuming that Khalil was deserving of his death because he was a former criminal allows for One-fifteen to be seen as a victim acting in self-defense when subduing someone dangerous. It also allows his actions to be seen as the routine safe-keeping of the community. Through the dialogue between Starr, Lisa, and the investigating officers, Thomas demonstrates how the myth of black criminality punishes black men and women even after death. Moreover, this dialogue shows that defending and mourning Khalil's death is made to be seen as defending and mourning a criminal's death. Black communities who lose members through police brutality are prevented from grieving for these victims as doing so is presented as supporting a criminal. Through this interrogation, Thomas shows the reader that the myth of black criminality influences investigations from the start by only investigating the deceased. Thomas places the reader in the interrogation room to show how law enforcement officials themselves manipulate investigations to fit their own agendas of acquitting fellow officers by criminalizing the victim. The interrogation and Starr's reactions to the questions place the reader on the receiving end of the officer's scrutiny, making this injustice more personal to the reader.

Moving from the investigation of Khalil's death to One-fifteen's trial, Thomas discusses how testimonies that criminalize black victims of police brutality are more effective than the testimonies that defend them. The former testimonies rely on the believability of the myth of black criminality to acquit an officer. The reader knows that Starr's testimony is honest and accurate because he or she was there with Starr when Khalil died. Any other testimony is a lie. However, Khoury writes that "a testimony against whites is 'precarious evidence' and does nothing but assert black criminality" (57), and that is why Starr's testimony is ignored and One-fifteen is acquitted. More importantly, Thomas discusses the role that media portrayals of black victims in the cases of police brutality play by showing the reader how "testimonies" on television specials can influence the decision in the courtroom.⁴ One-fifteen's father provides his testimony on TV and it is readily believed regardless of the fact that One-fifteen's father was not there the night Khalil was killed. One-fifteen's father's testimony posits Khalil as the one who instigated an altercation. His use of the myth of black criminality condemns Khalil's actions, rather than his son's actions, and makes Khalil look guilty. Those who also believe in the myth of black criminality outside of the case side with One-fifteen and his father. While watching this special, Starr's friend, Hailey, is sympathetic to One-fifteen's situation. One-fifteen's father's story is peppered with false details to make Khalil look like he was aggressive towards One-fifteen. He says that Khalil was speeding and that his son had a bad feeling about approaching Khalil from the start. He lies and says that Khalil and Starr cursed at One-fifteen. He further says that "they kept glancing at each

⁴ For further discussion on the demonization of black victims in the media see Page; Rome.

other, like they were up to something. Brian says that's when he got scared, 'cause they could've taken him down if they teamed up" (Thomas 246). Eventually, his father says that Khalil threatened One-fifteen and that is when One-fifteen fired the shots. At the end of the special, Hailey, who does not know that Starr was the passenger that One-fifteen's father mentions, says to Starr that this is an unfortunate situation for One-fifteen. She tells Starr that "his son lost everything because he was trying to do his job and protect himself. His life matters too" (Thomas 248). Through this conversation with Hailey that occurs at the same time as the special, Thomas shows how easily folks outside of the situation will believe that Khalil was acting with malicious intent without knowing what really happened. Hailey, like many others, operates under the assumption that Khalil is criminal. At this point, no one has heard Starr's testimony, and yet, Hailey is able to believe that Khalil was dangerous, and that One-fifteen acted as best he could, without hearing the other side of the story. This testimony also posits Starr as a criminal who was behaving dangerously and discredits any future testimony of hers.

By including this testimony from One-fifteen's father, Thomas shows the reader that testimonies that are aired on television from those who support officers are more persuasive than those testimonies that work against them and support black folks. The myth of black criminality blinds jurors and judges in the novel. The novel shows how both Starr and Khalil are criminalized and how the American judicial system demonizes black men and women. The reader is also able to see how quickly the rhetoric that the myth of black criminality perpetuates transfers from public spaces to private spaces. Rather than seeing the special alone and reading Starr's response, the reader is placed

within the conversation with Hailey, unable to think about anything other than the fact that One-fifteen's father's testimony is false and that the public will willingly believe it. This enables the reader to understand more easily how the myth of black criminality is prevalent not just within the criminal justice system, but in everyday life as well.

Thomas addresses how the criminal justice system relies on preconceived notions of black criminality to police and oppress black communities. The cautiousness with which One-fifteen approaches Khalil and the quickness with which he interprets Khalil as a threat that needed to be put down allows the reader to understand how the myth of black criminality enables law enforcement to employ racial profiling. The way that Starr is assaulted with questions about Khalil's past as a drug dealer rather than how One-fifteen was behaving irrationally during the stop informs the reader that criminalizing black victims helps to frame investigations in the officer's favor. The ease with which One-fifteen's father's testimony is believed shows the reader how the myth of black criminality victimizes the guilty and criminalizes the innocent. Using a narrative to relay these social and institutional dynamics makes these dynamics more interpretable. It places the reader on the receiving end of the anti-blackness within the criminal justice system and forces them to deal with the unjust consequences these anti-black sentiments create.

Thomas's novel provides insight on to the intricacies of black life, specifically inherited black trauma and how it influences the day-to-day lives of black folks. In "A Conceptual Model of Historical Trauma: Implications for Public Health Practice and Research," Michelle Sotero writes that historical trauma is when "populations

historically subjected to long-term, mass trauma—colonialism, slavery, war, genocide—exhibit a higher prevalence of disease even several generations after the original trauma occurred” (93). This idea can also be applied to mental health disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder. Mallory Bowers and Rachel Yehuda in “Intergenerational Transmission of Stress in Humans” discuss how stress can transfer from parent to offspring generationally. Starr’s narrative explores the intergenerational transmission of post-traumatic stress disorder by documenting how black parents teach their children to interact with police brutality. The novel demonstrates how black parents instill within their children the act of policing themselves through code-switching to stay safe. By narrating the intergenerational transmission of trauma through conversations with Starr’s father and through the way Starr employs code-switching as a result of these conversations, the text allows the reader to experience the act of self-policing. The reader learns what Starr’s father indicates is safe and unsafe and learns to apply code-switching as a form of safety . While non-black readers of color also navigate and employ code-switching, the narrative offers them greater insight into how black communities use code-switching to bypass their perceived criminalities, while white readers learn the ways code-switching is employed by marginalized people to pass safely in white society. By learning this through the novel, the reader not only understands the definition of inherited black trauma and code-switching but is able to understand the anxieties that come along with it, an effect that neither scholarly nor political writing can convey.

Thomas shows the reader how the historical traumas from slavery, segregation, and police brutality have weaved itself into the everyday lives of black folks today.¹¹ One example of how this trauma is prevalent in Starr's life is when Starr's parents, who are all too familiar with police brutality, teach her to police herself when interacting with officers. Starr reflects on how she has this conversation with her father at the same time she has the birds and the bees talk. She narrates this memory at the beginning of the novel when her and Khalil are pulled over. As the One-fifteen approaches their car, Starr immediately remembers everything her parents taught her during these conversations. Starr says "momma fussed and told Daddy I was too young for that. He argued that I wasn't too young to get arrested or shot" (Thomas 20). Starr's father, Maverick Carter, tells Starr to comply fully with the officers and to keep her hands visible. She is not to make any sudden movements, and she is to only talk when they talk to her. Starr's father reveals to her without hesitation that if she is caught with someone who has anything on them, Starr will be arrested. He does not humor her by saying that there may be a chance that she would be let go but warns her of the worst possible scenarios. Maverick speaks from personal experience and tells Starr to always "get a good look at the cop's face" and that if she can "remember his badge number, that's even better" (Thomas 22). Star does so when One-fifteen stops her and Khalil. In including this internal dialogue, Thomas demonstrates that black communities have always been cautious when interacting with law enforcement, so much so that black parents teach their children to be compliant with

¹¹ For the discussion on how historical traumas influence black lives today, see Packard; Reichel; Wagner.

officers. Starr's parents warn Starr about the dangers of being stopped by police like any parent would warn their child about the danger of talking to strangers. The reader learns how being pulled over can become a life or death situation for black folks and why young black men and women are taught to behave cautiously. In its ability to inhabit and replay family conversations, the novel illustrates how intergenerational trauma plays out emotionally in private spaces.

This dialogue informs the reader on how deeply imbedded the fear of police brutality is in black communities. In alluding this talk with "the birds and the bees talk," Thomas parallels two different situations where Starr could be taken advantage of and harmed. To talk about police officers as people who may take advantage of a black person's innocence reminds the reader that law enforcement does not work to keep black communities safe in the same way it works for white communities. Young readers who understand that "the birds and the bees" talk is a coming of age conversation, come to realize that the conversation on how to safely interact with police officers is essential to young black men and women's coming of age. By paralleling these two talks, Thomas shows the reader that black folks grow up learning of the ways they have been disenfranchised and how to maneuver through the world safely despite it.

One of the ways in which black youth are taught to police themselves is through the use of code-switching. Linguistically, code-switching is defined as alternating between languages or language varieties in conversations.¹² In the blog "Code-Switch,"

¹² See "Code-Switching."

Gene Demby takes this definition a step further by describing how black men and women have to police their blackness in different settings. Demby looks “at code-switching a little more broadly” (1). He defines it as “hop-scotching between different cultural and linguistic spaces and different parts of our own identities — sometimes within a single interaction” (1). Using the Key and Peele sketch “Phone Call,” Demby emphasizes that black folks use code-switching as a way to pass safely in white society and to neutralize their perceived criminality. Thomas addresses this use of code-switching in the novel as one of the ways Starr polices herself at school. When Starr goes to school after Khalil’s death she is grateful because she can put that part of her life aside. She says

For at least seven hours I don’t have to talk about One-Fifteen. I don’t have to think about Khalil. I just have to be normal Starr at normal Williamson and have a normal day. That means flipping the switch in my brain so I’m Williamson Starr. Williamson Starr doesn’t use slang—if a rapper would say it, she doesn’t say it, even if her white friends do. Slang makes them cool. Slang makes her “hood.” Williamson Starr holds her tongue when people piss her off, so nobody will think she’s the “angry black girl.” Williamson Starr is approachable. No stank-eyes, side-eyes, none of that. Williamson Starr is nonconfrontational. Basically, Williamson Starr doesn’t give anyone a reason to call her ghetto. I can’t stand myself for doing it, but I do it anyway. (Thomas 71)

This passage is essential to understanding why Starr chooses to code-switch at school. Thomas depicts Starr as literally flipping a switch in her mind to be someone else. Starr protects herself by not acting “too black” at school. Having Starr say that this is switching to a normal version of herself indicates that her blackness is perceived as strange, and that in order to be normal, Starr has to put her blackness aside. In comparison with Demby’s discussion of code-switching and the Key and Peel sketch he cites, experiencing code-switching “firsthand” through a narrative like Starr’s incites a different emotional

response within the reader. Rather than just observing that Starr is code-switching, the reader code-switches with Starr, specifically masking blackness.

By employing code-switching, Thomas shows the reader that the consequences of the myth of black criminality are so dire that black men and women have to resort to hiding their blackness in order to be seen as less criminal. While at the beginning of the novel Starr tries to rely on code-switching to avoid thinking about Khalil, his death eventually seeps into her life as Williamson Starr, and she is forced to address her blackness at her high school. Thomas shows the reader that despite trying to hide their blackness and code-switching with One-fifteen, Khalil and Starr were unable to hide their perceived criminality. Their inability to hide their blackness also shows that police brutality does not just affect Starr's "black" part of her life, but affects all versions of herself, even the policed ones that she tries to set apart from these issues. As the novel continues, Starr finds it incrementally more difficult to code-switch every day at school and eventually has to stop doing so. Starr realizes that even though she tries to appease her white classmates, many of them still hold anti-black sentiments, specifically Hailey. Starr confronts the fact that her peers will never understand how police brutality and black communities interact because it is not an issue in their communities. When the school holds a protest to support Khalil, Starr learns that students are only participating to skip class, not because they are standing up against the injustices black folks deal with; they do not have to deal with these injustices themselves. Starr then becomes disconnected from her peers and is unable to continue hiding her blackness. The reader, who previously learns how to code-switch with Starr, now learns that code-switching

does not necessarily hide one's blackness. Instead, the reader learns, through being placed within Starr's narrative, that Starr's employment of code-switching was to make her more palatable to her peers. The non-black reader is implicitly positioned as potentially one of those peers to allow them to understand the ways in which they may force their black peers to code-switch. The novel provides insight into how code-switching functions as a tactic of protection, even if it mainly provides a false sense of security in a racist environment.

For non-black people, the concept of inherited black trauma, or the intergenerational transmission of trauma, may be difficult to understand. By framing the discussion around inherited black trauma through a narrative that implements familial discussions of inherited black trauma and its effects on the interaction between parent and child, Thomas makes this concept graspable for her readers. She places them within the narrative not only to learn from Starr, but to experience these intricacies of black life as personally as they can. Placing her readers within Starr's narrative does not mean that Thomas is letting her them "test" or "wear" blackness for the duration of the novel. Thomas places readers within the narrative to watch alongside Starr, teaching them how to empathize with the effects of inherited black trauma. Thomas invites readers into Starr's narrative as a way both to educate them on what being black in the United States means and to encourage an understanding of that experience.

Moving from informing the reader on the intricacies of black life, Thomas also educates readers on different forms of political protest that enact social change as a way to make political discussions, debates, and demonstrations accessible to them. Thomas

recognizes that her readers are “networking young citizens,” as Brian D. Loader, Ariadne Vromen, and Michael Xenos categorize politically active young adults in “The Networked Young Citizen : Social Media, Political Participation and Civic Engagement.”

They write,

Networking young citizens are far less likely to become members of political or civic organizations such as parties or trades unions; they are more likely to participate in horizontal or non-hierarchical networks; they are more project orientated; they reflexively engage in life-style politics; they are not dutiful but self-actualizing; their historical reference points are less likely to be those of modern welfare capitalism but, rather, global information networked capitalism; and their social relations are increasingly enacted through a social media networked environment. (4)

The networking young citizen is emblematic of the kind of political activism that Starr’s narrative encourages. Thomas wants her readers to become independent and create new forms of political agency that do not rely on participating in a democracy solely through voting. Thomas wants her readers to protest in a way that also helps them. She encourages them to use social media as a political platform to assemble and debate, to use informal and emotional speech in political conversations and speeches, and to continue to use physical protest as a form of stress relief in the face of injustice.

Thomas uses the accessibility of social media to show readers how easily they can participate in political discussions. In *Tweets and the Streets*, Paulo Gerbaudo writes that “social media have been chiefly responsible for the construction of a *choreography of assembly* as a process of symbolic construction of public space which facilitates and guides the physical *assembling* of a highly dispersed and individualized constituency” (5). In other words, social media replicates the act of assembly. The acts of liking and

unliking, sharing and blocking, and following and unfollowing on social media are reminiscent of disagreeing, disengaging, and debating in public forums. These actions on social media position a person within political ideologies, indicating his or her political agendas. By featuring social media within the novel, Thomas connects Starr to her readers through a common pastime. Moreover, engaging Starr within this “public assembly” provides examples for the reader of how to engage in political protest on social media.

Thomas engages and educates the reader on social media activism through Starr’s use of Tumblr and Twitter. After Starr reblogs a graphic image of Emmett Till on Tumblr, she notices that Hailey unfollows her. This incident happens well before Starr learns of Hailey’s hidden anti-black sentiments. The pictures of Emmett Till were so jarring for Hailey, because they depicted images of his horribly decomposed body, after two white men murdered him and threw him into a river. The act of unfollowing is indicative of disagreement. Starr says, “Hailey texted me immediately after, freaking out. I thought it was because she couldn’t believe someone would do that to a kid. No. She couldn’t believe I would reblog such an awful picture” (Thomas 67). Starr is able to gauge Hailey’s political beliefs just by the action of unfollowing alone. Hailey is clearly uncomfortable with seeing images of violence imposed on black folks and is incredulous that Starr would let that pop up on her news feed. Furthermore, by unfollowing Starr, she indicates that she is ready to ignore posts about the reality of black life in the United States. Starr tries not to be upset because “it’s Tumblr. But then, it’s Tumblr” (Thomas 108). Through this line, Thomas acknowledges the importance of social media in

adolescents' lives and that the act of disengaging with someone on social media is indicative of disengaging with someone physically. Thomas includes this memory to educate the reader on the ways in which social media is an important platform for protest and how the reader can engage politically with it as a young networking citizen. This memory emphasizes that the reader has always had access to a platform that gives their voice a chance to get recognized.

Thomas also uses Twitter to address how social media acts as a place for mobilizing activists. Gerbaudo writes that social media gives “shape to the way in which people come together and act together, or, to use the metaphorical language that will be adopted in this book, to *choreograph* collective action” (3). In the novel, Twitter acts as a continuous live-feed that updates Starr on what is going in the black community. Starr refers to this as Black Twitter. After One-fifteen's father testifies, Starr notes that “Black Twitter's been going in on Officer Cruise's dad, claiming his name should be Tom Cruise with that performance he put on. Tumblr too” (Thomas 260). Starr and her friends also use Twitter to stay up-to-date on the protests in which they can take part in their area. Twitter and Tumblr not only act as support systems for Starr, but are also political platforms to form allies, speak out, and organize. Thomas notes Starr's use of Twitter and Tumblr in this way to remind the reader that they have access to news in real time. She encourages readers to stay connected and network, while working to further projects that benefit black communities. Furthermore, by citing Black Twitter in the novel, Thomas encourages the young reader to look to black social media activists as a way to learn to protest for black lives. Thomas accessibly narrates examples of familiar occurrences on

social media to remind the reader that he or she has already been engaging with this platform and can now take it a step further to advocate for black lives.

To help readers move into different forms of protest, Thomas encourages them to utilize informal and emotional speech as a method of political protest by narrating how Starr does so through conversations and public speaking. In “Everyday Online Conversation, Emotion and Political Action,” Daniel Jackson, Scott Wright, and Todd Graham write that “we need to reconceive political talk as less narrow, less normative and rational, and instead embrace the vernacular, expressive and porous characteristics of everyday public speech” (1). These authors further emphasize that making political discussions informal and emotional in both public and private political speech creates more connections between people. Employing this new way of having political conversations within her own political agenda to teach young adults about Black Lives Matter, Thomas recognizes that informal and emotional speech is key in enabling young adults to participate and listen to political messages more attentively. Thomas recognizes that the more accessible a message is, the more easily it will be received by a wider audience. When Starr confronts Hailey through a private conversation about her racism, Starr speaks to her the same way she has always spoken to her. Likewise, when Starr testifies on live television and during the trial, Starr speaks in a way that is familiar to her. This informal way of speaking when discussing politics shows readers to utilize their voices and speak out with the knowledge they have accessible to them.

Thomas narrates Starr’s progression from speaking out on social media to speaking out verbally as a way to show the reader how to use one platform to access

another. As Starr gets more and more comfortable with speaking out on social media, she starts to entertain the idea of speaking out to her friends and to testifying publicly in Khalil's trial. Starr verbally confronts Hailey on the way she relies on the myth of black criminality to blame Khalil for his death. When Hailey sarcastically calls Khalil a drug dealer, Starr says "what the fuck does that got to do with it?" (183). Starr then continues to ask Hailey why she thinks he was deserving of death because he was a drug dealer and asks her why his life does not matter. Hailey becomes aggravated and walks away from Starr. Starr speaks to Hailey informally and emotionally. This emotional reaction on Starr's part helps Starr to come to the conclusion that Hailey is racist. It allows Starr to disassociate from Hailey. Thomas shows how this verbal confrontation allows for Hailey and Starr to create connection through disconnection. Hailey and Starr were once best friends, and Hailey's anti-blackness proved harmful to Starr. By them disconnecting as friends, Hailey and Starr demonstrate an understanding of each other's political beliefs, and Starr finds it best to separate from this toxic friendship. This connection between two people with opposing beliefs exposes Hailey's racism and saves Starr.

Thomas shows how young readers can use this same informal and emotional speech within private conversations to speak out publicly as a way to make their protests more urgent. Speaking out publicly is a huge obstacle for Starr, but after One-fifteen's father speaks up for his son, Starr realizes that she needs to do the same for Khalil. She says "One-Fifteen's father is his voice, but I'm Khalil's. The only way people will know his side of the story is if I speak out" (Thomas 218). This is when she decides that she needs to testify publicly. Starr speaks informally when she meets with the television

personality, Diane Carey. She uses the phrase “you know” multiple times during the interview, making the discussion of Khalil’s death more personal but still making it so that viewers can easily understand what she is saying (287). Likewise, her honest emotional response speaks volumes by making this discussion more intimate. Starr unashamedly admits that she is “ugly crying” while talking to Diane Carey (288). Thomas utilizes Starr’s authentic voice as a way to remind readers that they are networking young adults that do not need to subscribe to elitist and hierarchical forms of speech to make a political point.

Thomas promotes the idea that young adults should participate in political demonstrations through Starr’s movement into physical protest. Thomas does so to encourage readers to access their agency as political bodies in a democracy to elicit change and to gain relief from the stress of activism. In “Impacts of Adolescent and Young Adult Civic Engagement on Health and Socioeconomic Status in Adulthood,” Parissa J. Ballard, Lindsay T. Hoyt, and Mark C. Pachucki, write that political activism presents young adults “with opportunities for coping with stress, generating empowerment, developing a positive sense of purpose and identity, forming connections and building social capital, and effecting systemic change” (4). Starr uses physical protesting within the novel to cope with the trauma that the verdict of Khalil’s case causes her. Star does so by throwing tear gas at police officers in riot gear.

The can of tear gas sails toward us from the cops. It lands beside the patrol car. I jump off and pick up the can. Smoke whizzes out the end of it. Any second it’ll combust. I scream at the top of my lungs, hoping Khalil hears me, and chuck it back at the cops. It explodes and consumes them in a cloud of tear gas. All hell breaks loose. The cops stampede over. (Thomas 412)

By physically confronting the officers, Starr puts her body on the line for Khalil. The reader learns that physical protesting is essential in speaking for the disenfranchised. All of the anger and frustration at the injustices faced by Khalil and Starr manifest in the moment when Starr throws the tear gas, and the reader immediately feels Starr's emotional relief. In acknowledging how protest can help with stress relief within young adults, Thomas narrates how Starr is relieved momentarily when she protests physically. Thomas uses Starr's pent up frustration to convey to the reader how protesting can be a form of emotional release.

In narrating the ways that Starr acts as a young networking citizen, Thomas hopes to make accessible these new ideas of protest that she implements in her novel. Thomas channels informal platforms, informal speech, and informal actions to show young readers that they have the ability to protest with the resources they have readily available to them. More importantly, since this novel acts as a guidebook for young non-black readers, Starr is the one who teaches them how to engage with these different forms of protest, and she provides examples of what to do in each form of assembly. In doing this through Starr, a young black female, Thomas encourages her readers to look to black folks as authorities on police brutality and leaders of revolution. If readers are to participate in political protest with the black community, they must step back and look to black folks as facilitators of change. Making the scholarship around new forms of protest accessible to the reader, Starr's narrative widely distributes this knowledge.

As a guidebook to young non-black readers, *The Hate U Give* not only makes accessible the scholarship around police brutality, the intricacies of black lives, and the

forms of protest best for youth, it also makes accessible that narratives of young black women. Often ignored, the narratives of young black women who interact with police brutality are essential in communicating the effects that the death of a black person at the hands of law enforcement has on black communities. This builds on what Felicia C. Smith argues in “African American Female Narratives and Identity Development: A Case Study of Language, Literacy, and Identity Development in the Beauty Salons.” Smith writes that “African American women build and shape their identities through language” (ii). Thomas does this by taking the inaccessible language of scholarship and building her own narrative to convey this knowledge more easily to her young adult readers. She makes both her narrative and the knowledge of scholars available to the wide audience. Elaine B. Richardson in *African American Literacies* writes that “storytelling remains one of the most powerful language and literacy practices that Black women use to convey their special knowledge” (82). Angie Thomas’s use of storytelling to change the inaccessible language scholarship on police brutality, black life in the United States, and political activism makes her novel more revolutionary. *The Hate U Give* is a story that uses a young black female narrative to distribute knowledge on police brutality to anyone who can read and understand American young adult literature.

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