

LITERATURE AND RACE

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## Introduction

Literature is in the heart of communities' values, issues, and traditions. It is a creative way for writers to share experiences and start conversations on certain issues in society despite being entertaining. Literature also helps people to be empathetic towards the discourses represented by the writers. The writer expounds the themes vividly under discussion helping the reader understand his thinking and stimulate readers mind on the same. *The Hate You Give* by Angie Thomas is a book written through the lens of a teenage black girl and the experiences fueled by her race. This book explains the dynamism that society perpetrates based on race in other sectors of life. It explores how dating, social life, education, and economic status varies between blacks and whites. The writer takes us through the insecurities that black people face and how they need to work harder than their white counterparts to get what they want.

*I No Longer talk to White people About Race* by Reni Eddo-Lodge is also a book on race and the emotional disconnection that comes with it. The book mainly focuses on the world view of non-white individuals and how it is very different from the way whites view the world. The book explores how the topic of race and racism can be viewed from different angles by different races. One of the main importance of literature is to inform and inspire analytical thinking on social issues, history, and possible solutions.

Race and its dynamism is a societal issue that affects the way people behave and experience life. History shows that race and colourism cannot be brushed off as insignificant since they are part of society<sup>1</sup>. Importance of the themes that literature explores is seen in the conversations inspired by it and the level that readers connect to it. The two books are good mirrors of what society has gone through and is going through which are important aspects today and for future generations. Through the two books, this essay purposes to interact with issues

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<sup>1</sup>. J. K. Nelson, "Denial of racism and its implications for local action," Sage, 2013, 20

that face our society about race and the discourse communities involved. The essay will take an analytical approach towards the two books and connecting them to other related topics to bring the issues affecting a race to perspective. The essay will examine how the fictional book HUG and the real accounts recorded in TAR fit in the big picture regarding race in the 21st century

## **Racism**

Both *The Hate You Give* (HUG), and *I Am No Longer Talking to White People about Race* (TAR) are bestsellers that depict the issue on race in simple but clear words thus make the picture painted about race by society. The fact that the two books received that much recognition since 2017 shows the need for people to talk about race, culture and the issues that stem from them. Race and issue of colourism can be traced from the colonial times and have been inherent in the community up to now.

## **The Hate You Give**

The first chapter of HUG describes a party that Starr the narrator attends with the influence of her friend Kenya. She explains the atmosphere of the party in a vivid manner letting the reader into her world. As she explains, the party is not only a party but a black people's party which is very common compared to a white's only party<sup>2</sup>. Many blacks feel isolated and misunderstood by whites such that maintaining a black family of friends is important to feel alive and loved. It is a sanctuary from the harsh realities of race dynamism in the world which can be mentally straining to the growth of young adults<sup>3</sup>. A comment by her friend Kenya that "those white boujee parties you attend do not matter" further emphasizes the view that society has made

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<sup>2</sup> Roberta K. Timothy, "Racism Impacts Your Health," *The Conversation*, last modified February 28, 2018, <<http://theconversation.com/racism-impacts-your-health-84112>>

<sup>3</sup> Sharon. F. Lambert et al., "Perceptions of Racism and Depressive Symptoms in African American Adolescents: The Role of Perceived Academic and Social Control," *NCBI* 38, no. 4 (2010): 39, <<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2756408/>>

black people feel isolated and out of place<sup>4</sup>. Another striking aspect of the book is how Starr is feeling out of place partly because she is not into parties and also because he is in the middle of the divide between her black life at home and white life in school. Teenage and adolescence are critical stages in healthy development physically and emotionally<sup>5</sup>. Starrs divide shows that her social life is affected by the confusion on where exactly she belongs. Research shows that her situation is very common in Universities around the world. Young people are left with no solace on what 'side' to be<sup>6</sup>. The fact that no citizen should be left with a choice of race as it is an external measure that doesn't mean much. Society has made oriented people think of people in terms of culture and color rather than individual values and achievements<sup>7</sup>.

It is also very clear that the party that Starr and her friends attend has hard drugs and alcohol. She comments that the alcohol was too concentrated for her that she could not even swallow. While talking to her former classmate who is also Kenya's friend, she thinks about the parties she attends in school and admits that the parties also have hard drugs like Morphine. This disputes the common socialization that black people are drug dealers and that whites are not. The picture that society paints of the common black person as a rogue, mostly armed drug dealer<sup>8</sup>. The common perception of black people can be traced from the history of black people among whites. Black people first came to the USA and other western countries as a slave during colonial times. The state of blacks during the colonial slave trade was the lowest in importance hierarchy. Black people have therefore been sidelined in economic activities since the colonial

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<sup>4</sup> Angie. Thomas, *The Hate You Give* (Harpercollins, 2018)

<sup>5</sup> UNESCO, *Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue*, (UNESCO, 2009), [https://www.un.org/en/events/culturaldiversityday/pdf/Investing\\_in\\_cultural\\_diversity.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/events/culturaldiversityday/pdf/Investing_in_cultural_diversity.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Karen. D. Pyke, "What Is Internalized Racial Oppression And Why Don't We Study It? Acknowledging Racism's Hidden Injuries," *Sociological Perspectives* 53, no. 4 (2010).p 557

<sup>7</sup> T. J. Matthews, "The relationship between skin complexion and social outcomes: how colorism affects the lives of African-American women," *AUGUSTANA COLLEGE*, 2013

<sup>8</sup> S. F. Lambert et al., "Perceptions of Racism and Depressive Symptoms in African American Adolescents: The Role of Perceived Academic and Social Control," *NCBI* 38, no. 4 (2010): 40

times. As a matter of history, many black people reside in slums and face hard economic times as proved by research as well as the book. The economic state of individuals affects the way people function as social and emotional beings<sup>9</sup>. Many protests done against racism come from an emotional place. As a result, violence may occur. People tend to make emotional decisions when their realities in economic and social life are threatening. The neighborhood that Starr lives in is poor and cannot be compared to the school she attends. The poverty levels among black people increased the involvement of young people in drugs and thug life<sup>10</sup>.

Black Lives Matter is a movement that stems from the injustices and issues that face and started by black people. Black lives matter is known as a hashtag on twitter that is used to communicate, rebuke and educate people on racism<sup>11</sup>. It has informed the current discussions in media and many neighborhoods. The course is rooted in social media signifying the attempts to gaining freedom in the 21st century from the persistent racism tendencies. Culture shapes how we relate with challenges facing us, and how to interact with the world. It is the lens through which we organize our reasoning and our emotional response<sup>12</sup>. The way Carter acts when stopped by police shows how the society as prepared black people to deal with law enforcers who are victims of prejudices of black lives. Experiences with racism are a common occurrence for African American youth and may result in negative self-perceptions relevant to the

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<sup>9</sup> Keshia Unika. Williams, "Exploring internalized racism: a critical review of the literature and implications for clinical social work,"( master's thesis, Smith College, 2010), p20, <<https://scholarworks.smith.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2379&context=theses>.>

<sup>10</sup> Garret. Chase, "The Early History Of The Black Lives Matter Movement, And The Implications Thereof," Levada Law journal 18 (2018): 1099, <<https://scholars.law.unlv.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1757&context=nlj>.>

<sup>11</sup> The Sentencing Project, "Black Lives Matter: Eliminating Racial Inequity In The Criminal Justice System," 2015, 23,< <https://www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Black-Lives-Matter.pdf>>

<sup>12</sup>Garett. Chase, "The Early History Of The Black Lives Matter Movement, And The Implications Thereof," Levada Law journal 18 (2018): 1102, <<https://scholars.law.unlv.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1757&context=nlj>.>

experience of depressive symptoms. Internalized racism does not impact on black people only since it has negative effects despite race<sup>13</sup>. The white policeman who shoots Starr's friend for reaching out for a comb was affected by the internalized racism that white people have on black people. Thus, for Starr, the horror of seeing her friend killed, inspires her to start a movement against black prejudices.

Historically policies were made without considering race and sensitive practices that pertain individual race. The law is, therefore, one of the loopholes for increased racist prejudice towards black people. Race, ethnicity, and nationality are not mere reflections of neutral classifications but the ideas developed over time about supremacy and subservience<sup>14</sup>. Law enforcers are aware of the nature of security among black people in the slums from the historical development of colonialism<sup>15</sup>. This leads to more suspicion of black people regarding a number of offences. The act of reaching for a brush when stopped by policemen struck the prejudices that already existed on black people.

Police brutality has been a major issue in African-American communities. A study showed that police tend to impulse on shooting a black male compared to a white male whether the policeman is black or white. Preconceived ideas that black people are angry to contribute to prejudice even in law enforcers. Just like Carter, Terrence was killed by police for suspicion yet

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<sup>13</sup> Phia. Salter, Glen. Adams, and Michael. J. Perez, "Racism in the Structure of Everyday Worlds: A Cultural-Psychological Perspective," *The Psychological Analysis* 27, no. 3 (2018).p 153

<sup>14</sup> Bob Carter and Satnam Virdee, "Racism and the sociological imagination," *The British Journal of Sociology*, 2008, xx, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1468-4446.2008.00214.x>.

<sup>15</sup> Katy. Sian, "Being Black In A White World: Understanding Racism In British Universities," *Papeles Del Ceic* 2, no. 127 (2017): xx, <[https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/8841/Being-Black-in-a-White-World-Understanding-Racism-in-BritishUniversities/pdf/Being\\_black\\_in\\_a\\_white\\_world\\_Understanding\\_Racism\\_in\\_British\\_Universities.pdf](https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/8841/Being-Black-in-a-White-World-Understanding-Racism-in-BritishUniversities/pdf/Being_black_in_a_white_world_Understanding_Racism_in_British_Universities.pdf)>

he had no gun<sup>16</sup>. He died innocently just because he was black and that the common assumption is that a black guy always had a gun at night. The issue led to many protests on the street, but despite that, police still feel that black communities pose more threat whether armed or not. This double standards in the race have also affected black females. Black men have been socialized to believe that real beauty is in being a white girl. “I was always cautious not appear too ghetto in school” shows that Starr was always conscious of how white she was among her white classmates.

### **I Am No Longer Talking to White People about Race**

Combating the inequities that result from the beliefs and ideologies that are associated with colourism will only begin with greater awareness of the prejudices we have regarding skin tone as a result of the images to which we are exposed regularly. Reni Eddo bases her book on the realities that face her everyday life yet her white counterparts do not understand or relate to. She started the book from the conversations she had as an online post on how racisms and culture are double-sided when the two groups are interviewed. She explores how the blacks month and fight for independence in Britain relate. In doing so, she realizes that Blacks and Indians were the majority races that fought for Britain during the time yet they are greatly discriminated<sup>17</sup>. She also realized that while that part of history was important for her, her white counterparts couldn't relate to that part of history or its perceived benefits. After oppression continued for a long time, black leaders started to fight for their rights. “As would-be black politicians watched what was happening to communities they came from, they began to push for

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<sup>16</sup> Blau Max, Morris Jason and Shoichet E Catherine, CNN. "Tulsa Police Shooting Investigated by Justice Department." CNN. Last modified May 18, 2017.

<<https://edition.cnn.com/2016/09/20/us/oklahoma-tulsa-police-shooting/index.html>.>

<sup>17</sup> Mathew. Bonick and Antonnio. F. Valleypin, "On the Origin and Consequences of Racism," Constitutional Economic Paper, 2016, 11, <<https://www.wipo.uni-freiburg.de/CENworkpapers/files/on-the-origin-and-consequences-of-racism.pdf>.>

better black representation”<sup>18</sup>. The opposition towards slavery and unequal treatment started at the time of anti-slavery laws and flourished into black lives matter campaign in recent years<sup>19</sup>.

The course which now is known past America and Europe refutes any leadership will have this kind of fluctuation and evolution of values over time. Black lives matter is specific on its quest to bring together black people to support each other<sup>20</sup>. The beliefs and ideologies regarding race can be seen in the discussions of the reality in the book. The writer analyzes the way her race and the problems she faces because of it, cannot be understood by her white counterparts<sup>21</sup>.

African Americans with lighter tones began to purposely reproduce among themselves to create offspring that would be considered "beautiful" and more socially advantaged people since the days of slavery because skin complexion resulted in elevated positions in the social setting. his hue alone can advance one both socially and politically because it has been translated and understood as "better." For African-American women, in particular, it can be a determining factor of social capital. “Neutral is white” is a statement that is so familiar among black kids from when they were young. Human beings are social, and their daily interactions influence the values they hold dearly with various people. For kids, socialization is first administered by

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<sup>18</sup> Renni Eddo-Lodge, *Why I am Not Talking To White People About Race Anymore* (Boomsburry publishing, 2017),

<sup>19</sup> Alvin. Tirelly, "What Kind of Movement is Black Lives Matter? The View from Twitter," *Research gate*, (2018), 5,

<[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323019189\\_What\\_Kind\\_of\\_Movement\\_is\\_Black\\_Lives\\_Matter\\_The\\_View\\_from\\_Twitter](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323019189_What_Kind_of_Movement_is_Black_Lives_Matter_The_View_from_Twitter).>

<sup>20</sup> Brigid Trenerry, Hayley Franklin, and Yin Paradies, *Preventing race-based discrimination and supporting cultural diversity in the workplace*, (t Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, 2012),

<[https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/-/media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/Economic-participation/2012-workplace/CHW\\_Discrim\\_Full\\_Web\\_Final.pdf?la=en&hash=5210E408C5F961D39A6B50C9EDB29AE3A76B87B6](https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/-/media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/Economic-participation/2012-workplace/CHW_Discrim_Full_Web_Final.pdf?la=en&hash=5210E408C5F961D39A6B50C9EDB29AE3A76B87B6).>

<sup>21</sup> The sentencing Project, "Black Lives Matter: Eliminating Racial Inequity In The Criminal Justice System," 2015, 22,< <https://www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Black-Lives-Matter.pdf>.>



guardians, playgroups and entertainment sources through observation<sup>22</sup>. Tv shows star black people as the drug dealers and ratchets women thus depicting a picture that is not true. Young people grow up seeing people who look like them in line with authorities and not good enough for society. Black kids, therefore, grow up with feelings of insecurities and low esteem.<sup>23</sup>

“I told her about an experience of being passed over for a job I’d interviewed for and finding out through mutual friends that the position had gone to a white woman my age with almost identical experience to me.”<sup>24</sup> The experience of the narrator as she explains in the book is true for many black kids. As the report on racism in universities in Britain findings show, black culture is discriminated even in high-level institutions. Black people are treated as outsiders, and they have to work harder to get the grades and treatment they deserved. Black people are ignored and taken advantage of while their Caucasian counterparts do not concern themselves about such. Despite education, people still want to treat black people as outsiders, yet they have earned their place in institutions just like their partners. The issues that arise from racism are not restricted by higher organizations since it goes deep in the laws and policies that used to be there<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> Alison Flaukner, "The Impact of Racism on mental Health," April 2019, xx, <<https://www.nationalelfservice.net/populations-and-settings/black-and-minority-ethnic/racism-mental-health/>>

<sup>23</sup> Nadia. Craddock, Ncoza. Dlova, and Phillipa. C. Diedrichs, "Colourism: a global adolescent health concern," Paediatrics 30, no. 4 (2018): 27, <<https://cdn1.sph.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/1267/2018/10/CURRENT-OPINION-Colourism-a-global-adolescent-health-concern.pdf>>

<sup>24</sup> Renne Eddo-Lodge, Why I am Not Talking To White People About Race Anymore (Boomsburry publishing, 2017).

<sup>25</sup> Eddie, Glaude. "Don't Let the Loud Bigots Distract You. America's Real Problem With Race Cuts Far Deeper." Time. Last modified September 6, 2018. <http://time.com/5388356/our-racist-soul/>. "Racism at Work. The Government Needs to Act!" YouTube. February 14, 2017. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bu3SaKgEa8Y>>

Research also shows that black people face the same prejudice in the workplace. White people are given privilege over black people in any decent work. It is rare to find organizations that choose to pay black people the same wage as their white counterparts. They are stereotyped not to have enough intelligence when compared to their white competitors, yet intelligence is not affected by race. The prejudices in organizations disable any attempts towards breaking the cycle of racism<sup>26</sup>. Black people do not get their qualified professionals, they are not paid enough either, unemployment among them increases, and thus they are more likely to enter shady businesses<sup>27</sup>. The way to stop the cycle is by breaking white privilege and treating black people the way they deserve.

The narrator explains that ‘Throughout my childhood and throughout my early adult life I’ve had a feeling of being different, and a bit strange.’. Most parents want the best out of life for their children. Many black parents sought to protect their children from the fans of the race they know too well by keeping quiet about it. Normalizing society to suppress the issues around racism and culture does more harm than good<sup>28</sup>. The narrator's parents chose to ignore issues on race even though their child was the only black kid in her class. They choose to not to talk about skin color or the prejudices that surround it yet observation would show that most life situations and decisions are made by considering race<sup>29</sup>. The issue with the society is that issues about culture and race are taken lightly such that no one wants to talk about their depth leave alone

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<sup>26</sup> European Union Agency, Racism, discrimination, intolerance, and extremism: learning from experiences in Greece and Hungary, (Office of the European Union, 2013), <[https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2013-thematic-situation-report-3\\_en\\_1.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2013-thematic-situation-report-3_en_1.pdf)>

<sup>27</sup> Jetaka Aeldy, "The Correlation between Racism and Poverty: Income Inequality, Education and Access to Technology," 4. 2015

<sup>28</sup> Martha. Augoustinos and Daniel. Avery, "Accusations and denials of racism: Managing moral accountability in public discourse," 21, no. 3 (2010): p7, [https://www.jstor.org/stable/42889320?seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/42889320?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents).

<sup>29</sup> Karen. D. Pyke, "What Is Internalized Racial Oppression And Why Don't We Study It? Acknowledging Racism's Hidden Injuries," *Sociological Perspectives* 53, no. 4 (2010): 560, <<https://irows.ucr.edu/cd/courses/232/pyke/intracopp.pdf>>

their existence<sup>30</sup>. People don't want to have real conversations with their loved ones or friends about race and how it would impact their life<sup>31</sup>. Ignoring the issues doesn't make them go away as the definition of racism is also vaguely explored. "Growing up, I would have told you that racism is about calling people slurs."<sup>32</sup>, This statement shows how much information young people whether black or white do not know about racism and prejudices that come with race. White parents warn their children from playing with their black friends without giving them the reasons behind that<sup>33</sup>. White kids are thus socialized to fear black kids who are all stereotyped to one unpleasant box. Similarly, black parents do not prepare their kids on how to handle their uniqueness like their color or hair texture<sup>34</sup>. The blurry definitions and conversations about culture eventually lead to adults whose view of culture is different and who think that "Racism was a two-way street, that anyone could be racist."<sup>35</sup>

## Conclusion

Literature whether fictional or based on real accounts should describe the society as closely as possible. It should reflect the societies values, traditions, weaknesses, and strengths in a clear manner to prevent any untrue discussions. Literature should also give light to ways that the discourse community in question can improve on their weaknesses. The two books depict the

<sup>30</sup> Everlyn. R. Carter and Mary. C. Murphy, "Group Based Differences in Perception of Racism. What counts to whom and Why," *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 9, no. 6 (2015): pp 271, <<https://equity.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Carter-Murphy-2015.pdf>. >

<sup>31</sup> Garrett. Chase, "THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT, AND THE IMPLICATIONS THEREOF," *Levada Law journal* 18 (2018): 1096, <<https://scholars.law.unlv.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1757&context=nlj>>

<sup>32</sup> Reni. Eddo-Lodge, *Why I am Not Talking To White People About Race Anymore* (Boomsburry publishing, 2017),.

<sup>33</sup> Jacqueline. K. Nelson, "Denial of racism and its implications for local action," Sage, 2013, <[https://www.uws.edu.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/426960/Nelson\\_2013\\_Denial\\_of\\_racism\\_and\\_its\\_implications\\_for\\_local\\_action.pdf](https://www.uws.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/426960/Nelson_2013_Denial_of_racism_and_its_implications_for_local_action.pdf).>

<sup>34</sup> S. H. Friedman, "Culture, Bias, and Understanding: We Can Do Better," *Journal of American Academy of Psychiatry and The Law* 45, no. 2 (2017): 138, <<http://jaapl.org/content/45/2/136>.

<sup>35</sup> Reni Eddo-Lodge, *Why I am Not Talking To White People About Race Anymore* (Boomsburry publishing, 2017),.>

interaction of black and white people as the discourse community. One of the weaknesses of this discourse is the race/culture divide that disadvantages black communities. The main challenges that black communities face is discrimination in the workplace, institutional prejudices, police brutality, and dire poverty<sup>36</sup>. The essay concludes that the issue of race is complicated but starting a conversation on racism where people are ready to listen without defenses or preconceived ideas would be a great start.

Change is however not only necessary in white settings but also in black ones. Black people need to be empowered to occupy positions of power equal to their white colleagues. Empowerment of blacks will require institutional changes across many industries and government forums. Change in attitudes and prejudices that were rooted years ago would also take time to eliminate<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> Grusky, David, Charles Varney, and Marybeth Mattingly. "the poverty and inequality report." (The Stanford Center, 2017.)

<sup>37</sup> Jason Gainous, "The New "New Racism" Thesis: Limited Government Values and Race-Conscious Policy Attitudes," Jstor 43, no. 3 (2012): pp260, <[https://www.jstor.org/stable/23215212?seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/23215212?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents)>

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