

**Black Lives Matter:
Police Brutality, Media
and Injustice in
*The Hate U
Give, Dear White
People, and On the
Other Side of Freedom***

Francesco Bacci

GSNAS Freie Universität

Francesco Bacci

GSNAS
Freie Universität

Black Lives Matter: Police Brutality, Media and Injustice in *The Hate U Give*, *Dear White People*, and *On the Other Side of Freedom*

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explore the connection between activism and the use of social media in contemporary stories, belonging to different genres. The study scrutinizes two literary works, Angie Thomas' novel *The Hate U Give* (2017), DeRay McKesson's memoir *On the Other Side of Freedom* (2018), and a TV series directed and written by Justin Simien—*Dear White People* (2017). With a methodological approach constituted by works of sociology, history, and cultural studies, this text-focused analysis exposes the intersection of activism, literature, and television. Different genres address the same issues with a common ground: with the support and filter of social media, these stories reveal incidents of police brutality, and episodes traceable to the rise of #BlackLivesMatter. Moreover, the protagonists of these narratives find in activism a way to accomplish personal realization.

All in all, the results of this investigation illustrate how social media are not the primary focus in the narration of moments of crisis or change, but slowly acquire a

Francesco Bacci is a second year PhD candidate in American Studies at the Graduate School of North American Studies at the Freie Universität, Berlin. His research interests are grounded in Black studies, African American literature, and cinema.

Bacci, Francesco. "Black Lives Matter: Police Brutality, Media and Injustice in *The Hate U Give*, *Dear White People*, and *On the Other Side of Freedom*". *REDEN*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2020, pp. 7-22.

Recibido: 11 de diciembre de 2019; 2ª versión: 16 de abril de 2020.

central role in the characters' interactions and in the dynamics connected with forms of protests. McKesson's memoir differs in its personal and specific representation of the use of social networks as an essential instrument for activism in the twenty-first century.

Key Words: Activism; Black Lives Matter; police brutality; social media.

In doing that, this study is focused on the analysis of three primary sources: the novel *The Hate U Give*, the memoir *On the Other Side of Freedom*, and the TV series *Dear White People*.

INTRODUCTION


The rise of the #BlackLivesMatter movement has influenced and changed many narratives and the way in which media portray activism and forms of protests. This paper aims to scrutinize the connection between activism, literature, and television with the purpose of exposing the ways in which different genres and media, such as literature and television, novels, and memoirs, address and represent social issues connected with racial discrimination, and the dynamics behind protest movements. In doing that, this study is focused on the analysis of three primary sources: the novel *The Hate U Give*, the memoir *On the Other Side of Freedom*, and the TV series *Dear White People*; and also examines how social media are an essential part of the characters' development, and their personal realization.

In *The Hate U Give*, Angie Thomas narrates the struggles of a young African American student. In this story, the role of media is essential in leading the protagonist to her future as an activist. In investigating the novel's main themes, this essay points out how contemporary television and social networks discuss activism, cases of police brutality, and racism.


In *Dear White People*, the protagonist Samantha White uses a radio podcast as an instrument of social discussion to share her critical perspective of discrimination inside Winchester University. The scrutiny explores how the characters are affected by an incident in which the campus police are involved, and highlights how this Netflix TV series is commenting on contemporary American race relations.

With *On the Other Side of Freedom*, the civil rights activist and Twitter celebrity, DeRay McKesson, creates a memoir in which he explores the complicated reality of Black people in contemporary America. In his personal storytelling, he illustrates the relevant role of new social media.

The methodological approach through which the analysis is structured consists of a close reading of the primary sources with the support of critical, historical, and political studies such as *The Making of Black Lives Matter*, *Why Are All Black Students Sitting Together in the Cafeteria*, and articles by literary critics and scholars such as Bernard Beck, Vincenzo Bavaro, and Jay Shelat.



In *Dear White People*, the protagonist Samantha White uses a radio podcast as an instrument of social discussion to share her critical perspective of discrimination inside Winchester University. [...] *With On the Other Side of Freedom*, the civil rights activist and Twitter celebrity, DeRay McKesson, creates a memoir in which he explores the complicated reality of Black people in contemporary America.



Indeed, in examining how these stories represent racist incidents and forms of protest, this study aims to compare how the TV show *Dear White People*, Thomas' *The Hate U Give*, and the memoir *On the Other Side of Freedom* present protagonists are all activists, and victims of social injustices and they respond to stressful circumstances with the use of different media: a radio program, TV, and social networks. They are set in the same period, the early and late 2000s.

Besides the aforementioned relevant role of online forms of communication in all these narratives, the choice of Thomas's novel, McKesson's memoir, and Simien's TV series highlights how embracing the civil struggle can lead to a personal realization.

1. A STUDY OF POLICE BRUTALITY AND SOCIAL RESPONSE

To have a better understanding of the fictional representation of these themes, we have to be grounded in the reality of police brutality of the latest decades. The starting point of the investigation centers on the numbers concerning police violence that have been reported. In his book *When Police Kill*, Professor Franklin E. Zimring presents a statistical study, the RTI analysis of the number of police killings between 2003 and 2011. A closer look at the data indicates that it is possible to create an overview by adding a fundamental element: a lot of legal intervention killings in the two decades before 2000 were not considered in the official Vital Statistics reports (26).

Studies by Colin Loftin and his associates demonstrated that the totals for legal intervention killings were consistently lower in the years of 1976-1998 than the volume of killings reported by the FBI(...) They estimate that a total of 7,427 killings actually occurred during the period (2003-2011), an average of 929 each year when the aggregate is divided by eight years covered. (27)

The data gathered by the case study developed by Zimring and Loftin also reveal how, in the time frame of thirty years, the situation has not changed for the better. Indeed, the volume of people killed by legal interventions is exorbitant, and especially in the case of black people, Zimring clarifies that in 1,100 killings, the death rates for African Americans and Native Americans were incredibly more massive than the white population.

In *On the Other Side of Freedom*, McKesson discusses aspects of these sets of findings, and he praises and illustrates the work of the collective database of killings by police, mappingpolice.com. He explains that "mapping police violence sought to build on the work of Fatal Encounters and Killed by Police, the two major databases on police violence that attempted to do what the government could, but seemed not to want to, do. They pioneered a methodology for finding cases online without having to go through the police department themselves" (51). Indeed, the Mapping Police Violence website includes details and a clear overview of the contemporary situation: on 1,111 known police killings in 2013, 1,059 killings in 2014, 1,103 killings in 2015, 1,071 killings in 2016, 1,095 killings in 2017, 1,143 killings in 2018 and 1,099 killings in 2019, ninety-five percent

of the killings in their database occurred while a police officer was acting in a law enforcement capacity, black people were 25% of those killed, despite being only 13% of the population, and that there were only twenty-three days in 2018 where police did not kill someone. In line with their analysis, Black people are three times more likely to be killed by police than white people.

The movement #BlackLivesMatter has gained traction in social media and the cultural discourse, especially after the Ferguson unrest and all the other protests that have been arising in the last decade. With the change of media and the rise of social networks, #BLM is a movement that started in 2013 as a hashtag, #BlackLivesMatter, on Twitter. Patrisse Cullers originated this online conversation in response to outrage amongst the black community caused by Trayvon Martin's death. Garza created a Facebook post, and then along with Opal Tometi, the three decided to set up social media accounts for the movement, also making their presence tangible in the offline community, by organizing a march. Their presence on the streets, along with a large number of people rioting, led to the use of this slogan by politicians.

Trayvon was a seventeen-year-old African American teenager, and George Zimmerman shot him in Sanford in Florida, causing his tragic death. Zimmerman was the neighborhood watch coordinator, and he claimed that he acted in self-defense. He had not been arrested or charged.

The movement's manifesto illustrates that their purpose is to fight for all the victims of social crimes, police misconduct, or direct episodes of racism that were ignored by society and by the appropriate authorities. Furthermore, on the movement's website, founders declare that this "is an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of Black folks' humanity, our contributions to society, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression."¹ In his *The Making of Black Lives Matter*, Christopher J. Lebron points out that the essential common factor in all these African Americans' police-related killings, is that in almost every case, the tragedy seemed unnecessary, in each case, it is clear that another resolution was possible (96). In examining its impact, it is relevant to emphasize how Black Lives Matter wants to do more than correct for a deep history of oppression, and their primary aim is to create a community based on the values of resilience and resistance.

Black Lives Matter has caught the attention of generations of activists and has set in motion a popular mobilization in reaching a wide group of people. As Amanda D. Clark argues in "Black Lives Matter: (Re)Framing the Next Wave of Black Liberation," the movement's use of social media amplified its message: "BLM has been a significant factor in drawing attention to Black identity in the United States and mobilizing action against police brutality through social media platforms" (142). In his memoir, McKesson emphasizes the relevance of social media in the change that protesters attend: "In uncertain terms, Twitter saved our lives" (155). The salvific role of a platform derives from an increasing sense of frustration and hopelessness caused by these recurring injustices. Inevitably, there are also significant problems due to controversies and contentions among users. In her analysis, Barbara Ransby draws attention to the controversies

¹ <https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/what-we-believe/>

emerging on social networks: "While Twitter and Facebook have been tools for movement building, they have also been sites for some nasty exchanges, for accusations, for name-calling, and for shaming" (102).

In this complicated social situation, how Thomas's and Simien's stories, along with McKesson's memoir, depict activism and the presence of social media in this discourse? These three narratives represent the consequences of police brutality and institutionalized racism on the lives of their Black protagonists, and at the same time, with the filter of social media, how activism is crucial in their response.

2. THE HATE U GIVE: A BILDUNGSROMAN OF A YOUNG ACTIVIST

Firstly, this paper examines Angie Thomas' novel, *The Hate U Give*. The story focuses on a teenager, Starr Carter, and her path towards activism after she experiences the traumatic loss of her best friend, Khalil, who is an innocent victim of a police shooting that happens in front of the protagonist's eyes. The novel is a bildungsroman set in the 2010s, but it differs from the canonical tropes of the coming-of-age journey, in order to expose the protagonist's experience with institutionalized racism in today's America. *The Hate U Give* also represents how Starr, who has lost any trace of naïveté in her early childhood, gets to her personal realization through activism. Starr's losses are many: Khalil and her best friend Natasha were shot, and she is a witness to these tragic events. As a consequence of all the violence, the acronym THUG acquires an exceptional value for both Khalil and Starr, as it hints at all the suffering that African American teenagers, like them, are enduring. It also refers to a broken system, which Starr gradually gets to know:

The Hate U Give Little Infants Fucks Everybody [...] Khalil said it's about what society feeds us as youth and how it comes back and bites them later. When the Khalils get arrested for selling drugs, they either spend most of their life in prison, another billion-dollar industry or they have a hard time getting a real job and probably start selling drugs again. That's the hate they're giving us, baby, a system designed against us. That's Thug Life. (2017:167-169)

At its core, this narrative has the process of circulation of hatred and the consequences of this phenomenon on Starr's identity. Thomas portrays a character who lives in a dual dimension. Indeed, Starr feels that she has gained self-confidence within a white community by creating an *alter-ego*, and at the same time, she feels a sense of racial anxiety in dividing her life between two groups of people, her Black family, and her white classmates.

Angie Thomas uses the teenager's point of view to discuss and criticize social dynamics that constitute phenomena of discrimination. As the scholar Jay Shelat highlights, "Thomas confronts the racist institutions that determine color lines and implements specifically black cultural symbols and capital to serve as foils to the racist ideologies and hierarchies at the heart of Starr's community" (70). Her coming-of-age journey as a young African-American is filtered through traditional and new media, which affect her self-discovery throughout the story.


Indeed, among the other social networks, Twitter helps Starr to have a more consistent awareness of her friends' hypocrisy and the several racist incidents happening in her country. Instead, the news affects her privacy and exposes Starr's past. In the first part of the novel, the media are an obstacle in her attempt to live a normal life. They contribute to the aforementioned circulation of hatred, from which Starr must find a way to escape. Thomas represents the protagonist's response to the difficulties created by internal and societal turmoils, and consequently, creates an outlook of the teenagers' problems in overcoming violent systems. Discussing how young adult fiction, like *The Hate U Give*, explores racism and discrimination with an unconventional lens, the scholar Zara Rix explains that "the female narrators push the stories toward nuanced depictions of multiple types of violence, both systemic and personal" (53).

The prominent role of social networks in *The Hate U Give* emerges in connection with the psychological forms of violence, she is enduring and indicates to the protagonist a possible escape: activism. In the first part of the novel, the fictional representation of the use of social media as an instrument of aggregation and solidarity clearly reflects the #blacklivesmatter, and from a narrative point of view, it exposes Starr's doubts about her classmates who are showing solidarity. In her high school, students are aware of these episodes of racism, but they stage a demonstration that is utterly inauthentic in the protagonist's point of view. As Shelat highlights, Starr is associated with a social cause: "To her white classmates he's an easy hashtag and a pretext to get out of class on a drummed-up protest; her white best friend's clueless at best response to the situation makes Starr realize that she's been deliberately letting some offensive behavior slide" (72). The protagonist does not give credit to this form of support because she recognizes how privileged classmates do not understand the gravity of these issues. The discussion of racism on social media becomes a way to create or maintain a specific appearance or ideology, not the real manifestation of a possible change. Social networks are supporting Starr's enlightenment about her status within the two communities she belongs to. In the second part of the novel, Twitter and Facebook change the protagonist's attitude towards the difficulties she struggles with: social networks become instruments of support in her journey towards activism.


The question of authenticity can also be considered as an autobiographical element projected within the novel. As an African American teenager, Starr feels a sense of alienation and isolation from her friends and classmates. As a consequence of this condition, she is ready to embrace stereotypes in order not to feel this burdensome label. In connection with Toni Morrison's remarks² about the decision to write for Black readers, Angie Thomas explains how she was writing white characters instead of creating authentic African Americans teenagers: "When I first started writing in that program, I was writing white characters. I was whitewashing my own stories. It wasn't until I started writing "*The Hate U Give*" short story that I realized, wow, I could use my art as my activism."³ Thomas wants her fiction to work as a source of creative activism.

² <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/apr/25/toni-morrison-books-interview-god-help-the-child>

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/17/movies/microaggressions-hate-u-give.html>



The discussion of racism on social media becomes a way to create or maintain a specific appearance or ideology, not the real manifestation of a possible change. Social networks are supporting Starr's enlightenment about her status within the two communities she belongs to.



In her book *Why Are All Black Students Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*, the psychologist Beverly Daniel Tatum illustrates what the psychological mechanisms that guide Black students in high schools are: in a situation of stress, young African Americans look for support in other black students but in doing that, they also “are operating with very limited definitions of what means to be Black, based largely on cultural stereotypes.” (62) These stereotypes are also contributing to the creation of discrimination and the racial divide between students. The start of Starr’s empowerment and self-realization is the loss of her best friend, which ultimately pushes her to become an active member of the online protest movement. *The Hate U Give*’s core is constituted by its representation of contemporary forms of protests, but its origins as well derive from Angie Thomas’ will to contribute to the general discussion around police brutality.

Indeed, in various interviews, Angie Thomas has stated that her primary inspiration was the shooting death of Oscar Grant III, who was killed by a white transit police officer in 2009. Oscar was a twenty-two-year-old African American young man who died in the early morning of New Year’s Day 2009. He was unarmed and was forced to lie face down on the platform. Johannes Mehserle was the police officer who shot him in the back. Everything was captured on cell phone cameras, and the images went viral. Regarding this tragedy, Angie Thomas states to Robert Ito from the New York Times: “many of Thomas’ classmates either weren’t aware of the shooting, or didn’t care about it, or wrote it off. They were like, ‘Well, maybe he deserved it. He was an ex-con, why are people so upset’ I was so angry.”⁴ In her decision to write this story, Thomas wanted to attempt to advocate the rights of young African Americans, often not protected by the system of justice. *The Hate U Give* exposes the writer’s ideology but also represents how social media can serve as a platform in which young African American students can approach activism and embrace it. With this young narrator, the novel exposes a nuanced view of coming to terms with racism, and with the fight against it.

3. DEAR WHITE PEOPLE’S POINT OF VIEW ON CAMPUS POLICE

In its representation of the conjunction between contemporary activism and African American identity, Justin Simien’s TV Series, *Dear White People*, also addresses amongst the many, the same poignant issues: systemic racism and police brutality. The TV series explores these socially relevant issues with the specific use of radio programs as the main instrument to convey social messages.

The story is set at Winchester University, and one of the main protagonists is Samantha White. With her witty radio show, she tries to raise awareness amongst students about the social issues still at play at their university. The program is often used as an instrument of social critique, but it is not the only medium that acquires an important value. All the students are discussing and arguing on Twitter, and their use of this social network exposes the hypocrisy and secrecy that characterize the right-wing sympathizers.

⁴ Ibidem.

Moreover, as in the case of *The Hate U Give*, social media are employed to facilitate moments of aggregation and discussion concerning forms of protest. All the battles, wins, losses are part of an online conversation that affects characters' development. In "Chapter V," there is a critical police incident: the campus officers arrive at a campus party and identify Reggie as a source of violence. They ask for his ID, but he replies, "Guck these pigs, man." A few seconds later, a cop pulls out his gun and points it at him. Reggie is harmless, and a false move could possibly end his life. This crucial moment changes all the characters. As in *The Hate U Give*, *Dear White People* focuses on the relevance and the importance of creating a social debate about relevant injustices in educational spaces. The creator Justin Simien was talking about "Chapter V" months before its release. It was considered a pivotal episode. In an interview with *Mashable*, he declares, "It's a turning-point episode. The show is I think very lighthearted, and then we get to Episode 5."⁵ Barry Jenkins directs the episode, and the *mise-en-scène* highlights the gravity of the moment: the camera cuts to Reggie's fear and then switches on the shock and tears of his friends. They are all aware that he could have died at that party, and as a black man in adverse circumstances, he is utterly helpless. This specific set of events is an explicit reminder to the viewer of many recent episodes in which African American citizens were killed. In his article "Taking Back One's Narrative," Vincenzo Bavaro illustrates that Reggie's sense of helplessness is a reflection of every day's episodes of discrimination within American campuses: "the tangible perception that to some officers a black life "does not matter," the belief that had Reggie been a white student he would never have elicited the drawing of a gun by the officer, is clearly reminiscent of the various smartphone-videos recording police brutality." (32-33)

It is essential to analyze what the consequences of this event are: Reggie starts to question his activism, and also, his identity. As Simien states: "Every black person, every person of color is at an intersection, cause no one's just their race."⁶ The aftermath of this situation exposes the connection of the two main aspects that this scrutiny investigates: Reggie and Sam are affected by rage and terror, and they start questioning the value of activism and the echo of their presence on social networks. Simien describes Reggie living "at certain intersections that make his life difficult and make it harder for him to know who he is, and harder for him to know what identity to put forward."⁷ His personal realization is dismantled: he is in a difficult state of disillusionment.


Sam lives in the same limbo, but she decides to give voice to her feelings and ideals through the radio show, which is a liberating instrument of social critique. Using Baldwin's quote that opens episode five, "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed if it is not faced," Sam has a fervent need to change the social dimension in which she lives.⁸ The importance of her radio shows, or of her tweets and posts, which are central in season two, highlights how characters try to build a change by sharing their message and creating any form of response.

⁵ <https://mashable.com/2017/05/01/dear-white-people-episode-5/?europe=true>


⁶ Ibidem.

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ <http://theculture.forharriet.com/2014/03/revolutionary-hope-conversation-between.html>



Barry Jenkins directs the episode, and the *mise-en-scène* highlights the gravity of the moment: the camera cuts to Reggie's fear and then switches on the shock and tears of his friends. They are all aware that he could have died at that party, and as a black man in adverse circumstances, he is utterly helpless. This specific set of events is an explicit reminder to the viewer of many recent episodes in which African American citizens were killed.



Our analysis of this TV Series can also decipher what the long-term consequences of the characters' abuse of social media are. Especially during the first season finale, in which a backlash explodes, Sam is absorbed by the situation, and the viewer realizes how her role as a leading activist and her online presence are dismantling her life. In describing the dialogue between Samantha and Joelle just after the march on campus, which is organized to fight against the abuse of power by campus police, Bavaro argues that the wave of hate speech and threats to Samantha is changing her personally: "Joelle realizes that Sam has lost herself in the reaction to this backlash and has in turn fallen into a state of silence, overwhelmed by the racist non-sense and by a bundle of accusations entangled in various types of logical flaws and prejudices." (34) Samantha is at a crossroads, and she is staying in an in-between state because social networks opened up a harsher and more difficult reality that clashes with her expectations and her previous view.

In losing herself, Samantha lives in an academic environment characterized by divisions, and she ends up realizing how this polarization affected her identity as an activist. Discussing Simien's film by the same name, Bernard Beck explains the complex mechanisms that set in motion this system: "the cultures created by social divisions reinforce the rules that preserve those divisions. [...] subcultures used by the divided groups also have a great deal of content about the other divisions and their members. They also have a great deal of content about the entire system of divisions and what justifies it." (141) At the end of season one, Samantha is finally aware of the complexity of American race relations present in her college.

In losing herself, Samantha lives in an academic environment characterized by divisions, and she ends up realizing how this polarization affected her identity as an activist.

All in all, Reggie's major incident exemplifies the representation of oppression caused by hidden forms of institutional and structural racism at Winchester university. The characters are forced to react, but also decide how to develop their own future as activists, consciously being in the constant social media's spotlight of the whole community of students. To expose a clear view of the ambiguities and the difficulties that the protagonists have to endure, *Dear White People* do not represent activism without problematizing some aspects of it. As mentioned by Bavaro, "with all its nuances, ambiguities, and unanswered questions, this is certainly not a simple piece of activist propaganda: the big issues coexist and collide with the intimate ones, the personal and the political are intertwined." (34)

Online and offline, *Dear White People's* protagonists-protesters struggle with inequality and discrimination in college, and their problems are a direct consequence of hidden forces that preserve institutional racism.

4. ON THE OTHER SIDE OF FREEDOM: A MEMOIR BASED ON SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVISM

McKesson's *On The Other Side of Freedom* is a memoir that explores the amplification of activism through social media. After being an active member of the #BlackLivesMatter movement, McKesson's activity on Twitter was essential for getting social recognition. McKesson illustrates how Twitter played a significant role in interrupting the media silence about Ferguson and Missouri: "If it were not for Twitter, the elected leaders in Ferguson and Missouri would have tried to convince you that we did not exist, that there were not thousands of us in the street night after night, refusing to be silent." (2018a: 155) He was working in a school administration when in 2014, he decided to join a protest against police brutality in Ferguson and won national prominence. He used social media to share his four hundred days of being "pepper sprayed, smoked bombed and shot at with rubber bullets." (40) This last part of this analysis wants to conclude with this "technology-powered protest": McKesson is the last step in our exploration of protest movements and social media.⁹

In McKesson's case, social media are essential in his personal realization as a protester: with his exposure, he accomplished many important social objectives. In discussing how he got to become a national leader of civil rights, McKesson illustrates how rapidly things changed because of the use of Twitter: "I had to figure out how to tell the story of what was happening to us because it was happening so quickly. It was the strength of Twitter that helped me find the words in a way that made sense, and the book was a recognition that I just needed more space to tell these stories." (45) McKesson uses his memories and his personal battles as mirrors of society. With his insights into social justice, he explores how movements are deeply affected by social networks, because these platforms amplify engagement and mobilize marginalized or unaware people.

In his view, Twitter undeniably changed the conversation about racial justice in the country: "In our generation, it was the first time that we saw this type of activism on the streets that was widespread and caught on. There were certainly other demonstrations across the country that happened way before the death of Mike Brown, but this one was the phenomenon."¹⁰ This memoir is also a reflection on identity, considering how protest formed McKesson's determination in his pursuit of hope, freedom, and justice. As Henry Louis Gates, Jr. has stated about McKesson's non-fiction work, this book reveals "the mind and motivations of a young man who has risen to the fore of millennial activism." (1) His motivation and belief are the guiding lines of this narrative, along with the presence of online media.

The increasing support of technology has created a change in the protesters' motivation. As McKesson argues, "Technology lined up at the time. The police were so wild in a way that was so concentrated. The community was ready to engage. The media was present. [...] It changed the country. It opened up a wave of activism across a host of areas and focused citizens in a way that

⁹ <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/deray-mckesson/on-the-other-side-of-freedom/>

¹⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/dec/30/deray-mckesson-black-lives-matter-interview>

is truly special.” The contemporary technological changes have given rise to new forms of activism, but also a new consciousness and realization among American people.

With his memoir, McKesson has been able to give his readers an insight into what means to be an activist and what the consequences of his dedication are. Indeed, in discussing race and violence in America, McKesson also analyzes the moment in which BLM emerged: “We took the streets as a matter of life and death. [...] In each generation, there is a moment when young and old, inspired and disillusioned, come together around a shared hope, imagine the world as it can be, and have the opportunity to bring that world into existence. Our moment is now.”(123) Without fictional elements, *On the Other Side of Freedom* fully explores the history and implications of contemporary activism and its connection with social media, which are central. To have precise data concerning the prominence of the online participation, with “Social Media Participation in an Activist Movement,” a group of scholars examined the connection between the Black Lives Matter movement and Twitter, getting to the conclusion that:

Over 28M Twitter posts show continued participation in the conversation around this movement. [...] Another important finding of our work is that activism on social media predicted future protests and demonstrations that commenced on the streets throughout the country. [...] we observed BLM participation on social media to indicate an emergent collective identity. (100-101)

By analyzing how the media can influence, activate, or create strong fervency in relation to activism and protests, this paper exposes the inextricable link between Twitter, forms of protests, and activists. *The Hate U Give*, *Dear White People*, and *The Other Side of Freedom* all convey how powerful the connection between social media and the #BlackLivesMatter can be, and consequently, how this union becomes part of a discussion about Black identity and contemporary forms of racism in the United States.

In the specific, it is essential to highlight how, in the fictional cases, the protagonists seem to find solace not on social media, but on personal realization and expression. The conjunction between activism, social media in these three cases of study propounds the view that the incredible amount of social pressure, deriving from both discrimination and need of being recognized as a member of a community, leads to alienation. Starr, Sam, and Reggie are not consoled by external agents; instead, they overcome the trauma by rediscovering their activism and also by becoming aware of the hidden forces that guide systemic racism. These key components help to have a more accurate view of the presence and role played by activism in African American students' contemporary fiction. This study advances the claim that social media, when employed in order to aggregate a large group of people for a cause, have the power to create solidarity and mobilize a large group of people. Still, they also can affect one's own personality and amplify hate speech and personal attacks. Their presence in these three narratives set in motion a series of changes, moments of turmoil, and reflection, but at the core remains a nuanced vision of institutional racism and the consequences that this phenomenon has on young African Americans.

References

- Baldwin, James. "A Report From Occupied Territory". *The Nation*. 11 Jul. 1966.
- Bavaro, Vincenzo. "Dear White People, Cultural Appropriation, and the Challenge of Anti-essentialism". *RSA/JOURNAL*, vol. 29. 2018.
- Beck, Bernard. "Black Like Who?: The Class of 2014 Considers Race in Dear White People". *Multicultural Perspectives*, vol. 17, no. 3, 2015, pp. 141-144.
- Bhatia, Monish, et al. *Media, crime and racism*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.
- Clark, Amanda, et al. "Black Lives Matter: (Re)Framing the Next Wave of Black Liberation". *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*, edited by Lisa Leitz. Emerald Publishing 2018, pp. 145-172.
- De Choudhury Munmun, et al. "Social Media Participation, and Local Politics: A Case Study of the Enschede Council in the Netherlands". *Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media*, 2016, pp. 92-101.
- Ito, Robert. "Microaggressions at School? The 'Hate U Give' Team Has Been There". *The New York Times*. 17 Oct. 2018.
- Khosla, Proma. "'Dear White People' confronts police brutality in the episode everyone needs to see". *Mashable*. 1 May 2017.
- Lebron, Christopher J. *The Making of Black Lives Matter*. Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Mapping Police Violence*. 10 Dec. 2019.
- McKesson, DeRay. *On the Other Side of Freedom: Race and Justice in a Divided America*. Vikings, 2018a.
- . "The Credo of Black Lives Activist". *Kirkus Review*. 30 Jul. 2018b.
- Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark*. Harvard University Press, 1992.
- Ransby, Barbara. *Making All Black Lives Matter: Reimagining Freedom in the Twenty-First Century*. University of California Press, 2018.
- Rix, Zara. "How YA books reflect the black lives matter movement". *Booklist*, vol. 113, no. 21. July 2017.
- Shelar, Jay. "'I swear those things are so fresh': Sneakers, Race, and Mobility in *The Hate U Give*". *CEA Critic*, vol. 81, no. 1, 2019, pp. 70-74.
- Sentas, Vicki. "Beyond Media Discourse: Locating Race and Racism in Criminal Justice Systems". *Media, Crime, and Racism*, edited by Monish Bhatia et al. Palgrave MacMillan, 2018, pp. 359-379.
- Simien, Justin. *Dear White People*. Netflix, 2017. TV Series.
- Smith, David. "DeRay Mckesson on Black Lives Matter: 'It changed the country'". *The Guardian*. 29 Dec. 2019.
- Tatum, Beverly Daniel. *Why Are All Black Students Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*. BasicBooks, 1997.
- Thomas, Angie. *The Hate U Give*. Walker Books, 2017.
- Zimring, Franklin E. *When Police Kill*. Harvard University Press, 2017.
- "What We Believe". 2013.