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Title: 'The Hate U Give' provides a window into conversations about race. By: Katie Ward Beim-Esche, Christian Science Monitor, 08827729, 3/1/2017

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'The Hate U Give' provides a window into conversations about race

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Believe the hype:

I guarantee there will be other excellent books in 2017; after all, it's only February. There will be great books without the violence, strong language, drugs, and sexual content. But I struggle to imagine a book that will topple "The **Hate U Give**" from its position atop the Most Important list. It's too timely and too well-written.

Starr Carter constantly shifts between two worlds. By night, she's Starr from Garden Heights, riven with gangs, drugs, and poverty. By day, she's a student at a predominantly white prep school in the wealthy suburbs where her policeman uncle lives. She has two faces, two voices, and two lives; code-switching is mandatory.

When Starr witnesses her best friend, Khalil, die in a police shooting during a routine traffic stop, the veil between her home and school selves falls. Khalil's death, and the ensuing trial of the officer who shot him, become national news and a social flashpoint. Khalil is cast as a drug-dealing gangbanger, despite Starr's testimony to the police and the fact that Khalil had neither drugs nor weapons on him.

Not long after, Starr and her school friends have a series of ugly confrontations. During a pick-up basketball game, one girl yells that Starr would be faster if she pretended the ball was fried chicken. After a brutal face-off **about** casual racism, and Black Lives Matter vs. All/Blue Lives Matter, the friend accuses Starr of hypersensitivity and implies that Khalil deserved to die.

Starr is at a crossroads. Does she go public with her testimony and contradict the court of public opinion? As the sole witness, Starr is the only one who can attest to what really happened. If no one says anything, will anything change? Her attorney tells her, "Your voice is your weapon." But weapons can backfire – speaking out puts her family in danger and threatens to destroy her community.

Thomas tackles the toughest topics without flinching, exploring the slow fade between fear and bravery. She writes with grit and sizzle. Her dialogue is like emotional sandpaper: It hurts and rubs you raw, but it refines. If "The **Hate U Give**" makes you uncomfortable, that's because it should.

The title comes from a backronym coined by rapper Tupac Shakur: T.H.U.G. L.I.F.E., or The **Hate U Give** Little Infants [Effs] Everybody. Simply put, **hate** begets **hate**. When you're fed a steady diet of injustice and vitriol, it destroys you from the inside. The hatred builds up, and when the pressure gets too high, the reservoir of other people's poison explodes outward.

Thomas's cast sparkles with depth and dimension. Each character is fully formed; there's nary a stock character or thoughtless trope in the bunch. Their warts-and-all relationships are electric. That's a feat in any book, let alone one addressing issues this big.

When Starr's dad is manhandled by police in front of his children and neighbors, he keeps his cool until later, when he breaks down in his office. Starr's commentary is searing: "Daddy once told me there's a rage passed down to every black man from his ancestors, born the moment they couldn't stop the slave masters from hurting their families. Daddy also said there's nothing more dangerous than when that rage is activated."

Yes, the Carters are angry. They've watched friends and family suffer for so long. But don't for a second chalk anger up as their defining characteristic. They are funny, loyal, and complicated, strong, smart, sappy, and thoughtful. Beware the reader, writer, or critic who deprives human beings of nuance and reduces them to anger alone.

Throughout the novel, Starr's parents feel as though they're forced to pit their community's future against their children's. With all that's happened, do they stay in Garden Heights or move away? This isn't the first time Starr has watched a friend die; when she was 10, her friend Natasha was killed in a drive-by.

If they stay, the Carters support their neighborhood physically, financially, and emotionally. They're a stabilizing force in a turbulent time, a vote of confidence in the potential for change. Starr's dad feels strongly that they can't abandon their community.

But if they move, they can guarantee a good education for their kids. They would live in a safe area with no drugs, no gangs, no drive-bys, and closer to the schools their kids already attend. They wrestle with the question: Can you change the trajectory of a place without living there? Their debates remind me of Nikole Hannah-Jones's article in The New York Times Magazine last summer.

I don't expect "The **Hate U Give**" to change every reader's mind. But at the least, it **provides a window into** the very real **conversations** happening in homes across the country. It's an opportunity for readers to evolve apathy **into** sympathy, and sympathy **into** empathy.

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By [Katie Ward Beim-Esche](#)

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