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still do everything right and things still go wrong." I think black parents are having to have that unfortunately hard conversation, that sometimes it doesn't even matter, and for us to even have to say that, there's no other way to put it because that's what it feels like. It feels like no matter what we do, nothing is stopping this. We can do everything right, and it will still go wrong. So how do we make it? How do we survive that? What do we do?

I was just pulled over the other day in Louisiana, backwoods. Scared to death. I had my hands on the dashboard. My mom was driving, actually; she had her hands on the steering wheel, and we were doing everything right. I guess the officer could tell we were terrified because all of sudden he went from being very agitated to, "I'm sorry I did this to you." This is the state we're in right now.

E.L.: *What can this country do to fix that?*

A.T.: I'm not even putting this issue on black America. We didn't cause this; they did. The system did this. They need to fix it.

E.L.: *There were times I had to take a break and put the book down. With everything happening, as a black woman, it was too much for me to read. To your credit, it felt quite real.*

A.T.: I've had people tell me that a lot, and I understand it. I honestly had to put it down when I was writing it, so I totally get it.

E.L.: *Why does Starr consistently refer to the officer who killed Khalil by his badge number even after she finds out his name?*

A.T.: For someone like Starr who has been taught by her father that names have power, she did not even want to give him that power because she felt like he took something from her. He took Khalil's life, yes, but he took a big part of this girl's childhood because, at the end of the day, you're 16; you're still a child. He has ruined her childhood in a way. She will never for the rest of her life forget that when she was 16 years old, she saw this happen to her best friend.

E.L.: *There's all kinds of black experiences, but you specifically have Starr straddling two worlds – her home life in Garden Heights and at school, which is very white. She utilizes code-switching as a survival mechanism. Why have Starr move between these two very different worlds?*

A.T.: That's the experience of so many of our kids nowadays. I know it was for me in college. I went to a mostly white, upper-class, private, liberal arts school in conservative Mississippi. I lived in the hood. I had to be two people, and I know a lot of kids have to deal with that. It's not addressed enough.

I've had so many black girls tell me thank you for this because I've been accused by my friends at home of acting too white, but then if I go to a white school, they think I'm too black. That balance of trying to figure out who you are, where you are, then trying to figure out does my circumstance define my blackness. So often that question gets raised.

I've had white kids who tell me I've never been to a neighborhood like Garden Heights



PHOTO BY ANISSA HADOUK/COURTESY OF UCI ILLUMINATIONS

Angie Thomas is the author of "The Hate U Give." Her debut novel is No. 1 on The New York Times' YA hardcover best-sellers list.

in my life. They are still connected with Starr when it came to her to experience at school. I'm like how? They said I still have to figure out who I am at school versus when I'm at home. Of course, it's not on the same scale, but they still connected and saw themselves in Starr.

E.L.: *Who do you recommend should read this book?*

A.T.: If my young black girls can – because I've had a lot of them tell me I'm afraid to read this book – if they can, I'd ask them to. I had a young lady recently in Austin, Texas – her brother was killed by police, and she said she started reading the book and it was hard, but she was pushing through because so much of what Starr said speaks to her, and that means everything to me.

I'd ask cops to read it. My book is not anti-cop. It's anti-police brutality; there's a difference. I have law enforcement in my family. I'd ask politicians here in Mississippi to read it.

I wrote it for the kids I see in my neighborhood. I wrote it for a young black boy in Philadelphia who told me, "Yo ma I don't like reading, but I read this in a day."

I've had so many kids who tell me I don't like reading but I love this. I told my publisher this just proves that publishing has been wrong. You guys assume black kids don't read – they will when you give them something they like.

E.L.: *Hopefully this starts a wave of more black YA novels. How many are out there?*

A.L.: There are more than people may realize; they're not getting the attention they should. Publishing has assumed black books don't sell. The root of that assumption is black kids don't read or white kids don't want to read about black kids, and that's a lie. So now they're trying to fix this. Now they're giving more attention to black authors that should've been lead titles.

Jason Reynolds is a phenomenal young-adult writer. This brother has won just about every award there is. His books speak to our kids and speak to other kids and show them our kids in such an authentic way. I want more and more people to read his books.

E.L.: *I just read that your book is going to*

be made into a film with Amandla Stenberg playing the role of Starr.

A.T.: That came about not long after I got my book deal. My book agent connected me with a film agent, and she absolutely loved the book, loved it almost more than my mom, which is saying a lot. She said, "I want this to be made into a film, and I'm going to do everything I can to see this happen." It was a lot like with my book process. She submitted it to producers, and all of a sudden we had like 10 or 12 production companies that wanted the option to this book. We went with Temple Hill and State Street. Everybody knows Temple Hill for doing the John Green movies and "Twilight." State Street is George Tillman's production company, and he's actually directing the movie. It's been a great relationship from jump and going well.

E.L.: *Has there been anything along the way since the book has been published that's surprised you?*

A.T.: I've been surprised at how many people are actually interested in the story of a young black girl. I've had events where older white women and older white men have told me, "I love this book. Thank you for opening my eyes." I never thought that would happen.

I got an email from a lady. She was raised by white supremacists and in recent years realized that her father's world view was wrong and she wanted to change and she wanted to educate herself on things, and somebody told her to read my book, and it opened up her eyes even more. That shocked me.

Teenagers listen more than we give them credit for. They understand more than we give them credit for. And they have more empathy than we give them credit for.

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"As a black woman going into publishing that is mostly white, my question was how diverse do you really want it? Can I be unapologetically black? Can I not hold back on some things? Or are you guys calling for diversity because that's what looks right at the moment?"

ANGIE THOMAS,
AUTHOR OF 'THE HATE U GIVE'