

**BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT IN  
CONTEMPORARY AFRO-AMERICAN  
FICTION: RE-READING THE POST  
TRAUMATIC SLAVE SYNDROME**

**BY**

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**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF MODERN LANGUAGES**

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## THESIS AND DEFENSE APPROVAL FORM

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## ABSTRACT

### **Title: Black Lives Matter Movement in Contemporary Afro-American Fiction: Re-Reading the Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome**

This research is aimed at contributing to the discourse of Black Lives Matter movement by unveiling the impact of racial trauma experienced by African American people as a result of racial profiling, police brutality, and institutionalized racism through Joy DeGruy Leary's theoretical framework of post traumatic slave syndrome. Post traumatic slave syndrome (PTSS) is a condition experienced by the African American population resulting from transgenerational racial trauma. This study explores the post traumatic slave syndrome experienced by African American people in the aftermath of police brutality through contemporary African American literature. My research is limited to two texts from YA fiction, namely Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give* and Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely's *All American Boys*. While adopting the qualitative research paradigm, the data for this study has been scrutinized through Alan McKee's research method of textual analysis. The data from the selected narratives has been anatomized in accordance with the three symptoms of post traumatic slave syndrome i.e. vacant esteem, ever-present anger and racist socialization. Due to considerable differences between the narratives of both of the novels, the conclusions derived from these texts have certain differences among them. As Thomas' *The Hate U Give* has been narrated from the perspective of an African American girl Starr, the novel manifests the racial trauma experienced by Starr and other African American people associated with her as a result of an incident of police brutality. On the other hand, Reynolds and Kiely's *All American Boys* substantiates the reaction of both African American and white American protagonists towards police brutality.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
<b>THESIS AND DEFENSE APPROVAL FORM.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>AUTHOR’S DECLARATION.....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>ABSTRACT.....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS.....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>DEDICATION.....</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 The Origin of Black Lives Matter Movement.....	1
1.2 Lynching of Emmet Till and Black Lives Matter.....	3
1.3 The Trauma of George Floyd’s Murder.....	4
1.4 Black Lives Matter Movement in Contemporary African American Fiction.....	5
1.5 Thesis Statement.....	6
1.6 Research Questions.....	7
1.7 Significance of the Study and Rationale of the Study.....	7
1.8 Delimitations.....	9
1.9 Organization of the Study.....	9
<b>2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....</b>	<b>10</b>
2.1 Author Interview and Book Reviews.....	10
2.1.1 Angie Thomas and the Origin of <i>The Hate U Give</i> .....	10
2.1.2 The Collaboration of Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely.....	12
2.1.3 Book Reviews on <i>The Hate U Give</i> .....	13
2.1.4 Book Reviews on <i>All American Boys</i> .....	14
2.2 Trauma, PTSD and PTSS.....	15
2.2.1 Trauma.....	15
2.2.2 Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.....	17
2.2.3 Formulation of Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome.....	18
2.2.4 Critique on Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome.....	19

2.3 Racism and the Black Lives Matter.....	20
2.4 Black Lives Matter: A Global Social Revolution Portrayed in African American Fiction.....	22
2.5 Existing Scholarship on Selected Texts .....	23
2.5.1 Existing Scholarship on <i>The Hate U Give</i> and <i>All American Boys</i> .....	23
2.5.2 Existing Scholarship on Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome.....	31
<b>3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>41</b>
3.1 Research Design.....	41
3.2 Theoretical Framework.....	41
3.2.1 Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome.....	43
3.2.2 Vacant Esteem.....	45
3.2.3 Ever-Present Anger.....	48
3.2.4 Racist Socialization.....	49
3.3 Research Method.....	54
<b>4. POST TRAUMATIC SLAVE SYNDROME IN <i>THE HATE U GIVE</i>.....</b>	<b>55</b>
4.1 Introduction.....	55
4.2 Synopsis.....	56
4.3 Vacant Esteem .....	57
4.4 Ever-Present Anger.....	67
4.5 Racist Socialization.....	72
<b>5. POST TRAUMATIC SLAVE SYNDROME IN <i>ALL AMERICAN BOYS</i>.....</b>	<b>80</b>
5.1 Introduction.....	80
5.2 Synopsis.....	81
5.3 Vacant Esteem.....	81
5.4 Ever-Present Anger.....	86
5.5 Racist Socialization.....	91
5.6 Reaction of White Americans towards Police Brutality in	

<i>All American Boys</i> .....	96
5.6.1 Quinn's Initial Impression of Police Brutality.....	96
5.6.2 Quinn's Guilty Conscious.....	98
5.6.3 Quinn Realizes Paul Galluzzo's Slave Master Mentality.....	100
<b>6. CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>104</b>
6.1 Recommendations.....	107
<b>WORKS CITED.....</b>	<b>109</b>



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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to my mother who dwells in the heavens and must have been feeling proud of me for accomplishing this task. I also dedicate this thesis to my father who fulfilled the responsibilities of a father and a mother after my mother passed on to the eternal world. I love you both!

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

The ever increasing number of incidents of police brutality targeted towards African American people has turned into a matter of grave concern for the American society. In their 2018 study “Trayvon Martin: Racial Profiling, Black Male Stigma, and Social Work Practice”, the researchers Martell Lee Teasley, Jerome H Schiele, Charles Adams and Nathern S Okilwa argued that although black people experience racism on an almost regular basis, the protest against this racism got triggered in the form of Black Lives Matter movement when an African American boy became subject to police brutality in 2012 (37). George Zimmerman, who was working as a neighborhood watch captain in Sanford, Florida, shot Trayvon Martin under the suspicion that the boy was “up to no good” when Martin was walking down the street after purchasing some food items from a local grocery store. Zimmerman got charged with first degree murder but later on, he got acquitted. Zimmerman’s acquittal triggered massive protests at local and international level (Teasley et al. 37). According to the statistics revealed by a research group called “Mapping Police Violence”, almost 9,179 people lost their lives due to systemic racism between the period of January 2013 and May 2021 (Haddad). Furthermore, the number of people who lost their lives to police brutality reached 1,068 after the brutal killing of George Floyd (Haddad). The targeted shooting of African Americans not only created an aura of uncertainty and panic among the African Americans living in America but also impacted their psychological health in the form of racial trauma. This trauma became more intense when the incident of George Floyd took place on 25th of May, 2020 (Jaye). I have selected two American narratives in order to analyze the trauma experienced by African American people as a result of targeted police shootings, racial profiling and institutionalized racism.

### 1.1 The Origin of Black Lives Matter Movement

A major change took place in America’s socio-political scenario on 13th of July, 2013 when George Zimmerman got acquitted in Trayvon Martin murder case. In their article “The social media response to Black Lives Matter: how Twitter users interact with Black Lives Matter through hashtag use”, the researchers Jelani Ince,

Fabio Rojas and Clayton A. Davis articulated that Zimmerman's acquittal was granted even after months of protests against Trayvon Martin's murder, his "criminalization" on media and the reluctance of police officers to arrest Zimmerman (1814). Eric K. Arnold stated in his article "The BLM Effect: Hashtags, History and Race" that the acquittal of George Zimmerman by Florida jury resulted in the appearance of words "Black Lives Matter" for the first time on social media (9). This acquittal triggered the worst kind of public outrage in Oakland where people expressed their anger by marching out on the streets at night, damaging the property by spraying anarchist graffiti, setting fire to the trashcans and breaking the shop windows (Arnold 9). While this protest was taking place, the community organizer for *National Alliance of Domestic Workers*, Alicia Garza took the initiative of making a major change to America's history (Arnold 9). She logged on Facebook and typed a post that contained these historical words: "Black people. I love you. I love us. Our Lives Matter" (Arnold 9). Garza's post soon went viral with the help of her friend Patrisse Cullors, who typed *#blacklivesmatter* under Garza's post and started tagging all of her friends who also repeated this hashtag (Arnold 9). The very next day, Garza, Cullors and their friend Opal Tometi who also worked as an activist, announced the formation of Black Lives Matter project through social media (Arnold 9). Being a decentralized movement, Black Lives Matter was not just used for the purpose of raising a voice against the incidents of police brutality involving African American people, but also to address the racial inequality experienced by black people in various other aspects of life (Ince et al. 1814 & 1815). With the passage of time, this movement has not remained restricted to the American boundaries but has quickly spread to different parts of the world. Currently, this hashtag is used by black people on social media every time they experience an incident of racial injustice.

Irrespective of the global popularity acquired by *#BlackLivesMatter* trend in the contemporary period, the trend was not quite prominent during its early days. This trend made its first appearance on Twitter during mid-2013. Up until March 2016, it has been used in 11.8 million tweets (Anderson). This hashtag was tweeted for almost 5,106 times during the second half of the year 2013 which was slow progress considering the gravity of the problem (Anderson). However, the trend became famous after the murder of Michael Brown in August 2014 that also led to the prominence of the Black Lives Matter movement (Anderson). The authors Nicole

Dungca, Mark Berman, Jenn Abelson and John Sullivan revealed in their article "A Dozen High-Profile Fatal Encounters That Have Galvanized Protests Nationwide" that Michael Brown case took place in Ferguson on the 9th of August, 2014 when Officer Darren Wilson stopped Michael Brown on a street in the suburban area of St. Louis (Dungca et al.). The teenager was completely unarmed and had his hands in the air when the officer shot and killed him on the spot. Police was of the opinion that Brown was wanted in a cigar robbery case. However, Brown's friend Dorian Johnson revealed some disturbing details when he affirmed that Brown had his hands above his head and was about to sit on the ground when Officer Wilson approached him and shot him numerous times (Dungca et al.). A series of protests was initiated by the enraged African American community as a result of Brown's death. During the protests, people kept on shouting the slogans like "Hands up, don't shoot!" in order to emphasize the desperate condition of Brown right before his death (Dungca et al.). According to the argument made by the researchers Danielle K. Brown, Rachel R. Mourao, and George Sylvie in their article "Martin to Brown", like all the other police officers involved in the cases of police brutality, Officer Wilson also testified that he shot Brown because his life was under threat (415). The most distressing aspect of the Michael Brown case is that Officer Wilson was not indicted by the jury because of differences in the evidence presented and testimonies provided by the witnesses.

## **1.2 Lynching of Emmet Till and the Black Lives Matter**

One of the most prominent cases of institutionalized racism was the lynching of a fourteen year old boy in 1955, Emmet Till that laid the foundation for Black Lives Matter. The weekend editor at *Courier Journal*, Keisha Rowe states in her 2020 article "Painful echoes: How Emmett Till's death paved the way for Black Lives Matter 65 years later" that Emmett Till was brutally murdered by a white American and owner of the Bryant Store, Roy Bryant and his stepbrother, J.W. Milam who tortured Till after kidnapping him from his great-uncle's house in Mississippi (Rowe). While testifying in court, Bryant claimed that Till not only whistled at his wife Carolyn Bryant Donham but also harassed her by fondling her hand and waist. However, witnesses revealed that Till only whistled, he did not touch the woman. Till's body was recovered from the Tallahatchie River a few days after his murder (Rowe). Keisha Rowe further reveals in her article that Emmett Till's case gathered a lot of media attention due to two major factors i.e. his murderers got acquitted

because all of the jury members were white and his mother decided to have an open-casket funeral so she could show her son's mutilated body to the entire world (Rowe). It is claimed that Emmet Till's murder and the photos of his open-casket with his mutilated body proved to be the main reason that initiated the civil rights movement (Curry). On the 60th anniversary of Emmet Till's death, his cousin Deborah Watts, who co-founded the *Emmet Till Legacy Foundation*, declared: "It's not exactly like Jim Crow, but when you have confessed murderers go free, a sham of a legal process and people not being held accountable ... When we reflect back, we're seeing things that are very similar, black lives do matter. They mattered then, and they matter today. Emmett's death ... helped to wake up America" (Whack). The brutality suffered by Emmet Till after being abducted, the acquittal of his murderers by an all-white jury and the open-casket funeral of his mutilated body are some of the factors that still trigger the rage of the African American community almost sixty-six years after his death.

### **1.3 The Trauma of George Floyd's Murder**

The authors Larry Buchanan, Quoc Trung Bui, and Jugal K. Patel professed in their news article "Black Lives Matter May Be The Largest Movement In U.S. History" that George Floyd's death caused a major change in the course of Black Lives Matter movement as not only the black but white Americans also took part in Black Lives Matter protests after watching the video of police brutality against George Floyd (2). George Floyd was a 46 years old African American man who died on 25th of May, 2020 in Minneapolis when Officer Derek Chauvin pinned Floyd to the floor by putting his knee on Floyd's neck ("George Floyd: What Happened"). The bodycam footage revealed that Floyd pleaded almost 20 times that he was unable to breathe but Officer Chauvin and other officers at the scene did not listen to him ("George Floyd: What Happened"). Where the George Floyd incident triggered a national debate, it also traumatized a large number of African American people. In his news article "For Many Black People, George Floyd's Death Has Triggered A Wave Of Trauma", Craig LeMoult inquired the mental health counselor Brandon Jones about his reaction towards George Floyd's death. Brandon Jones, who is black, confessed that he instantly felt numb after watching the video (LeMoult). He further declared that despite his six foot and seven inch physique, he had a premonition that he would also end up in a similar way (LeMoult). Brandon Jones is not the only one

who had this premonition as it is commonly known how African American men living in economically backward areas are routinely stopped, investigated and restrained by the American police. According to a recent study “‘That’s My Number One Fear in Life. It’s the Police’: Examining Young Black Men’s Exposures to Trauma and Loss Resulting From Police Violence and Police Killings” conducted by Jocelyn R. Smith Lee and Michael A. Robinson, black people residing in the American states where the incidents of police brutality occurred in high ratio, reported experiencing more psychological issues compared to white people residing in the same areas (146). This trauma and anger compelled black people to take political action in order to cope with the threat of police brutality.

#### **1.4 Black Lives Matter in Contemporary African American Fiction**

After the acquittal of George Zimmerman, the issue of targeted police shootings of African American people evolved into a widespread movement. This movement was not only discussed in the media and trended on social networks but various American writers also supported this movement through their works. The major aspect of this movement was the trauma experienced by African American people living in America as a result of racial discrimination and multigenerational slavery. This study analyzes the racial trauma experienced by people dwelling in America as presented by Angie Thomas, Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely in their novels in order to demonstrate the effects of routine racial trauma experienced by African American people in the form of PTSS resulting from police brutality and institutionalized racism in American society. Angie Thomas’ novel *The Hate U Give* and Reynolds and Kiely’s *All American Boys* present the narratives that unveil racism, police brutality and systemic injustice experienced by African American people residing in American society. Reynolds and Kiely’s novel *All American Boys* was published in 2015 and was originally inspired from Trayvon Martin case. *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas was published in 2017 and is focused on the incidents of police brutality towards black people.

The novel *All American Boys* emphasizes police brutality but it is different from the other novel in that it provides the perspective of both African Americans and white Americans toward the issue of police brutality. While the other novel has been written by a black author, *All American Boys* is the collaborative work of an African American and white American author. The authorial partnership between Reynolds

and Kiely is an important detail for the purpose of my study as both of the authors share similar sentiments towards the incidents of police brutality and wanted to honor the victims of these incidents through their collaborative work (Bates). Their collaboration for *All American Boys* makes it evident that police brutality and institutionalized racism is not only affecting the African American people but the entire American society. The plot of the novel revolves around two American boys, one of whom is black while the other is white. The African American boy called Rashad gets beaten up by a police officer on the false accusation of theft. After the beating, when a pastor visits Rashad and asks him how he felt, the first thing that comes to Rashad's mind is "I felt...violated" (Reynolds and Kiely 89). Rashad is not the only one who suffers trauma after being beaten by the police officer. A white American boy Quinn also experiences the same fear after witnessing Rashad being assaulted by the policeman.

The novel *The Hate U Give* provides the sole perspective of African American people on the issue of police brutality and their reaction towards it in the form of Black Lives Matter. The author Angie Thomas is an African American who based her novel *The Hate U Give* on a short story she wrote while studying in college after the murder of Oscar Grant, another victim of police brutality. *The Hate U Give* revolves around the story of a sixteen-year-old African American girl who gets involved in the Black Lives Matter after the death of her childhood friend as a result of the police violence. The protagonist, Starr Carter, belongs to an African American family residing in America. One night, while travelling in the car with her childhood friend Khalil Harris, a white police officer with badge number one-fifteen stops them in the midst of the road and asks Khalil to step out of the car. Just a few moments later, he shoots Khalil on a mere suspicion that Khalil possesses a weapon. Khalil dies at the spot and Starr experiences trauma after witnessing this incident of police brutality. The data gathered from these novels will be analyzed through Joy DeGruy Leary's critical lens of post traumatic slave syndrome.

## **1.5 Thesis Statement**

The inception of Black Lives Matter in 2013 made it evident that police brutality and institutionalized racism towards black people in America is causing African American people to routinely experience racial trauma. This study analyzes two American narratives through Roy DeGruy Leary's theoretical framework of post



traumatic slave syndrome in order to unveil the effects of trauma including vacant esteem, ever-present anger, and racist socialization experienced by African American people as a result of targeted police shootings, racial profiling and institutionalized racism. Furthermore, this study also unearths the negative impact of police brutality on the white community and their support of the Black Lives Matter as a result of white guilt.

## **1.6 Research Questions**

- How institutionalized racism triggers racial trauma in Thomas, Reynolds and Kiely's narratives?
- In what ways racial trauma manifests in the narratives of Thomas, Reynolds and Kiely?
- What are the implications of racial trauma on the American society in the context of Black Lives Matter movement?

## **1.7 Significance and Rationale of the Study**

Edward Said asserts in his book *Orientalism* that racism has remained embedded in European people as the most innate human trait because of the component of superiority of European culture in comparison to non-European cultures (Said 7). This cultural hegemony compelled the European people to develop an idea of collective identity where they recognized themselves as "us" Europeans versus "those" non-Europeans which laid the foundations for racial discrimination (Said 7). Due to racial discrimination by white people, people of color were deprived of their social rights, legal rights, right to education, right to proper jobs and even the right to live peacefully in the American society. Richard Wormser claims in his book *The Rise And Fall Of Jim Crow* that the Jim Crow laws were the greatest examples of racial segregation in America and the problems experienced by African American people in America (8). The intensity of this racial discrimination has increased to such an extent during the last few years that targeted police shootings, racial profiling and institutionalized racism has turned into a routine problem for the African American people. Due to the recurrence of systemic racism, the African American people continue to experience racial trauma in their routine lives. This experience of racial trauma on routine basis has compelled a significant number of African Americans to exhibit the symptoms of PTSS. Resultantly, the brutal death of George Floyd on 25th

May 2020 emboldened the Black Lives Matter (Buchanan et al. 2). This study aims to inspect the routine racial trauma and its effects experienced by African American people as a result of police brutality and institutionalized racism in American society. Due to this study's focus on YA fiction, it will also prove enlightening for the young readers as it will analyze the impact of the aforementioned issues on the psychological health of the African American youth in the context of PTSS which will be a novel addition to the race and trauma studies.

Racism is a universal issue, it is not bound to a specific geographical sphere. It exists all around the world, be it South Asia, Africa, or America. As a literary researcher, it is my duty to highlight a human experience that is being experienced by a large number of people and their narrative is being depicted in fiction. South Asian narratives, particularly from the genre of novel such as *The God of Small Things* (1997), *The Namesake* (2003), and *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) have spoken about racism but much literary research has been done on these works. Hence, I shifted my focus towards the American novels that are recent, as the issue of racism is under scrutiny in America after the infamous George Floyd incident. Due to the advancement in the information technology, it has become easy for us to receive awareness regarding social issues happening in other societies which is leading to global activism. Being a person of color and seeing other people of color being treated unfairly made me feel their pain. This is why, the incidents of police brutality involving African American victims triggered my intellectual curiosity and compelled me to explore this area. The works I selected for this study are unique in nature as the fiction and reality collides in them. Apart from mentioning the fictional characters, the authors of both of the selected novels also mention the real victims of police brutality in America throughout the years. Nic Stone, the author of *Dear Martin* (2017) claims "When it comes to the heavier issues, fiction gives you this bubble, where you can grapple with things without somebody in your face" (Alter). Through her words, Stone implies that fiction creates a safe space for the writers to talk about their painful real-life experiences for the purpose of unburdening themselves without violating their privacy and causing awareness among general public. This study not only includes the fictional aspect of police brutality and racial trauma experienced by African American people but also includes the real-life narratives of African

American victims so that the true intensity of their sufferings can be conveyed to the entire world.

## **1.8 Delimitations**

For the purpose of studying the impact of police brutality, racial profiling and institutionalized racism in American society, this study is delimited to two American novels: Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give* and Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely's *All American Boys*. I have utilized these texts in order to achieve the desired research objectives.

## **1.9 Organization of the Study**

This dissertation has been organized into six chapters. The first chapter introduces the context of the study, purpose of the study, the research questions that I have answered through the analysis of Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give* and Reynolds and Kiely's *All American Boys* and the significance of the study in context of the Black Lives Matter. The second chapter of the dissertation reviews the literature on Leary's theoretical framework of post traumatic slave syndrome and the selected primary readings. The third chapter presents the research methodology including the theoretical construct and the method of textual analysis by Alan McKee that I have adopted for the analysis of the selected texts. The fourth chapter presents the existence of post traumatic slave syndrome in Thomas' *The Hate U Give*. The fifth chapter of the dissertation extracts the symptoms of post traumatic slave syndrome from Reynolds and Kiely's *All American Boys* by dividing the acquired data into two parts as the novel focuses on the issue of police brutality from the perspective of two different narrators. The sixth and final chapter offers my concluding remarks on the significance of PTSS in the two novels.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this chapter, I assess and critique the existing scholarship pertaining to my topic of study. This literature review is divided into five parts. In the first part, I have introduced the authors of the selected texts and their stance on the Black Lives Matter in order to stress the relevance of their novels to this study. The second part of the literature review discusses the different perspectives on post traumatic slave syndrome, which is the focal point of my study as it foregrounds the transgenerational racial trauma suffered by African Americans. The third part establishes the relation between institutionalized racism and Black Lives Matter. The fourth part substantiates the controversies experienced by American authors while addressing Black Lives Matter and police brutality in African American fiction. The fifth and last part of the literature review has further been divided into two parts: the first part engages with previous studies conducted on selected texts, whereas the second part conducts a detailed review of above-mentioned studies concerned with the post traumatic slave syndrome. The literature reviewed in this chapter enables me to develop the foundation for my study on racial trauma experienced by certain characters in Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give* and Reynolds and Kiely's *All American Boys* as a result of systemic racism targeted towards African Americans in the form of police brutality.

#### **2.1 Author Interview and Book Reviews**

Before advancing towards the scholarly discourse on my topic, it is obligatory for me to introduce the authors of my selected texts and the perceptions of different critics on their books to justify the significance of Black Lives Matter in relation to the police brutality being practiced against African Americans in America.

##### **2.1.1 Angie Thomas and the Origin of *The Hate U Give***

Born and raised in Jackson, Mississippi, Angie Thomas is an African American writer who gained fame from her debut novel *The Hate U Give*. In an article published in *The Guardian* in 2017, Thomas was introduced by the author Afua Hirsch as “a 29-year-old woman from Jackson who has written a novel that is a strident and utterly compelling march into the most sensitive and contentious

subjects in America today: race, privilege and the killings of unarmed black people at the hands of the police” (Hirsch). According to Hirsch, Thomas has changed the entire meaning of young adult fiction, a genre that is still known for the novels like the *Harry Potter* series and the *Twilight* trilogy. The most interesting outcome of Thomas’ novel is that it got sold out completely just within the first few days of its publication (Hirsch). Thomas’ novel *The Hate U Give* presents the story of a sixteen-year-old-girl who resides in an inner-city area of America. The protagonist Starr Carter dwells in two different worlds where one of them is poor and black and the other is rich and white. The neighborhood she lives in is quite poor with majority of the African American people dwelling there. On the other hand, the school she attends is located in a suburban region populated mostly by white people. A life-changing incident occurs one night when Starr is travelling in a car with her childhood friend Khalil. The car is pulled over by a police officer who shoots Khalil on a sudden impulse. Witnessing a hate crime against her best friend by a police officer traumatizes Starr (Hirsch). Various parts of *The Hate U Give* are inspired from Thomas’ own childhood experiences. While talking about growing up in Jackson, Thomas reveals that she witnessed a shootout between two drug dealers at the age of six. In order to expose Thomas to the positive side of the world, her mother took her to the library next day (Hirsch). Her mother’s initiative to distract Thomas from the violent incident evoked in her the urge to express her traumatic experiences through words.

The shootout incident proved to be an inspiration for Thomas to start her journey as an author. The first piece of literature authored by her was a Mickey Mouse fan fiction story. Almost a decade later, Thomas got the idea of writing the story of Khalil and Starr. At the time, she was studying at a university in Jackson where the majority of the students were white. Thomas got infuriated when she heard the news about a police killing of a twenty-two year old African American boy in 2009 (Hirsch). The boy called Oscar Grant was unarmed when he was taken into custody by the California police and shot in the back (Hirsch). Thomas revealed that she was not only disturbed by the brutal killing of Grant but also by the narrative that surrounded his incident. She felt perturbed by the way people discussed Grant’s background as she heard them confessing that Grant might have deserved such a death because of his past (Hirsch). She claimed “But Oscar could have been any of

the young men I get up with, who were maybe doing things they shouldn't have been doing. They are all [seen as] thugs. They are put on trial sometimes, for their own death" (Hirsch). Oscar Grant was not the only African American who experienced this fate. There were many others who became victims of police brutality and were labelled criminals after their death.

Apart from *The Hate U Give*, Angie Thomas' YA novel *On the Come Up* also addresses the issue of systemic racism and social oppression. In his article published in *The Guardian*, Tim Lewis commented that Thomas' novel *On the Come Up* is quite similar to *The Hate U Give* in many ways. Just like *The Hate U Give*, the plot of *On the Come Up* is also set in Garden Heights. The area called Garden Heights holds special significance in Thomas' novels as it is a fictional place that depicts the social problems experienced by African American people (Lewis). The majority of the population in Garden Heights is black and deprived of the facilities that are enjoyed by whites (Lewis). In comparison to *The Hate U Give*, Thomas has added a personal vibe to *On the Come Up* as the protagonist of the novel Bri Jackson, short for Brianna, is a sixteen year old girl and is as obsessed with hip-hop as Thomas (Lewis). Bri tries hard to become a rapper so she may improve the financial standing/circumstances of her family. She experiences personal problems because of the death of her rapper father who passed away twelve years ago (Lewis). Her mother leads a drug-free life for almost eight years but Bri fears that her mother might experience a relapse any time (Lawrence). Apart from Bri's personal problems, the social issues of routine/systemic racism, endless poverty and police violence are also evident in Thomas' *On the Come Up*.

### **2.1.2 The Collaboration of Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely**

The co-authors of *All American Boys*, Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely, wrote several independent books but *All American Boys* is their first collaborative writing project. Reynolds and Kiely were on a group tour for their publishing company Simon and Schuster when George Zimmerman got acquitted in the Trayvon Martin case. Reynolds, who is an African American, was barely familiar with Kiely. When he heard about Martin's case, he got extremely angry and irritated at travelling with a "white stranger" (Bates). However, when he talked to Kiely, he was surprised to discover that he and Kiely shared similar emotions about police brutality and

institutionalized racism despite the fact that he was white. Reynolds and Kiely decided to pursue the novel *All American Boys*, but they did not start writing until the Michael Brown case began, when Brown was murdered in 2014 (Bates). During an interview with an educator and author Renee Watson, Reynolds made it clear that *All American Boys* was not an anti-police book. He asserted that he wanted to use this book for the purpose of honoring the victims of police brutality. Kiely shared similar sentiments during the interview as he stated that there are a large number of unarmed young African American people who were either badly assaulted or murdered by the American police (Watson 2). The collaboration between Reynolds and Kiely symbolizes the awareness and activism among white Americans regarding the routine racial injustice against African Americans.

### **2.1.3 Book Reviews on *The Hate U Give***

Angie Thomas' novel *The Hate U Give* unveils the underlying racial tensions of modern American society where African American parents have to guide their children at an early age regarding the type of behavior they need to demonstrate when confronted by law enforcement officials. While writing his book review of *The Hate U Give*, Alex Wheatle states that the most unnerving part of the novel is when the protagonist Starr Carter gets told by her father to keep her hands visible and not to make any sudden moves if she gets stopped by a police officer (Wheatle). One of the most moving incidents of the novel is when a police officer forces Starr's father to lie down on the ground as he searches his entire body. Although Starr's father readily submits to the police officer, the officer continues to humiliate him and makes him keep his face down. Starr witnesses this entire incident with a heavy heart (Wheatle). Wheatle further elucidates that this book is "a stark reminder that, instead of seeking enemies at its international airports, America should open its eyes and look within if it's really serious about keeping all its citizens safe" (Wheatle). Irrespective of the overemphasis Wheatle lays on African Americans being targeted from within American boundaries, the killings continue to date such as Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Breonna Taylor and George Floyd. The Black Lives Matter is an aftermath of this perpetuation and a cry for help by the African Americans.

According to a review by Minushree Pattnaik, *The Hate U Give* proved to be a huge milestone in Angie Thomas' authorial career as it acquired her international

acclaim. When the novel got awarded with the Waterstones Book Prize during 2018, the managing director James Daunt stated that “*The Hate U Give* should have a readership far beyond a core audience of young adults. Ours is a children’s prize, but there is no upper age limit to being stunned by beautiful writing of this visceral power” (Pattnaik 83). *The Hate U Give* is a novel that enabled Thomas to cope with her childhood trauma that she experienced when two unarmed black boys got unjustifiably killed by the police (Pattnaik83). During the review by Deborah Stevenson, she focused on the “offensive behavior” that Starr ignores in her quest of code-switching (Stevenson 297). While attending Williamson, Starr strives hard not to convey the urban aura or reveal her “ghetto” identity (Stevenson 297). However, she realizes the intensity of racism directed by white people towards her people when following Khalil’s killing, he turns into a mere hashtag (Stevenson 297). While giving her remarks on *The Hate U Give*, Stevenson proclaims, “In this book inspired by the Black Lives Matter, Thomas effectively marries the legitimate rage at injustice with real-world complexity: Starr’s uncle the cop is a colleague of the guy who shot Khalil; Khalil may not have had drugs in the car but he did deal; Starr’s family finally, ambivalently, moves out of the old neighborhood that houses so much of their history” (297). In general, this novel addresses various problems experienced by African American people in addition to racism such as poverty, forced involvement of African American boys in drug dealing business due to lack of opportunities, lack of access to proper education, drug addiction, and gang wars.

#### **2.1.4 Books Reviews on *All American Boys***

Although based on the Black Lives Matter, Reynolds and Kiely’s *All American Boys* is quite an unconventional novel. According to Anita Catlin, the editor of the *Journal of Pediatric Surgical Nursing*, “In this time of protest and reflection, we are thinking of how to be better people. In addition, if we have teenage children, nieces, nephews, or neighborhood friends, we may wonder how to explain and guide them in their own thinking” (94). She further reveals that the “expanding consciousness” of characters of the novel proves to be a life-changer for the black protagonist. The novel also reminds its readers of a quote by a South African priest Desmond Tutu, where he states that if a person remains neutral during injustice then it clearly means he has decided to support the oppressor (Catlin 94). After reading *All American Boys*, the *New York Times* writer and blogger Kekla Magoon confessed that



this book strives to be “a reminder and a call to action” (1). Magoon was inspired by the incorporation of two different narrators by the authors as they successfully provided “an intriguing insider-outsider look at an instance of police brutality” (1). Furthermore, this book helps people understand the trauma hidden beneath the police brutality and racial profiling as fiction enables a reader to scrutinize the world through a completely different perspective.

## **2.2 Trauma, PTSD and PTSS**

Reviewing the discourse relevant to the post traumatic slave syndrome is imperative to my study as it enables the readers and researchers to understand the difference between trauma, PTSD and PTSS in addition to elucidating the formulation of PTSS. Understanding the differences between trauma, PTSD and PTSS is central to putting the reaction of African Americans toward the incidents of police brutality and institutionalized racism in context while reading the selected texts.

### **2.2.1 Trauma**

According to Katherine Kirkinis, Alex L. Pieterse, Christina Martin, Alex Agiliga and Amanda Brownell, the etymology of the word “trauma” has been derived from the Greek word τραῦμα that means “wound” (3). According to the *American Psychological Association* “Trauma is an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape, or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships, and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea” (“Trauma”). In their work “The Study of Trauma: A Historical Overview” published in the *APA Handbook of Trauma Psychology* in 2017, the researchers Charles R. Figley, Amy E. Ellis, Bryan T. Reuther, and Steven N. Gold scrutinized the historical evolution of the word “trauma” and its meaning in the medical sciences. During the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, trauma was used to refer to the extensive physical injuries sustained by a person as a result of any accident or encounter with the weapon (Figley et al. 2). At that time, the trauma was treated by the physicians through surgical procedures. However, the meaning of trauma expanded during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as it not only remained limited to physical injuries but also included the “psychological and emotional impact of catastrophic events” (Figley et al. 2).

Psychologists are of the view that trauma occurs in the form of the acute stress that overcomes a person's coping mechanisms as a result of his exposure to a specific event or events (Kirkinis et al. 3). This clearly indicates a strong association between stress and trauma because there are numerous life events that are stressful enough to cause psychological wounds to the people experiencing them. However, there are various instances where two people experiencing similar stressful incidents tend to react differently towards that situation. For instance, if two people have lost a close family member then one might be able to cope with this stress while the other might feel overwhelmed and experience serious trauma (Kirkinis et al. 3). In her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, Cathy Caruth presents a more modern and holistic description of trauma. Caruth writes:

In its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena. The experience of the soldier faced with sudden and massive death around him, for example, who suffers this sight in a numbed state, only to relive it later on in repeated nightmares, is a central and recurring image of trauma in our century (11).

Caruth's explanation of trauma takes as its premise that trauma is a condition that a person experiences as a result of exposure to any sudden disastrous event due to which a person might feel overwhelmed. The sudden nature of a disastrous or painful event is a major factor that makes it traumatic for the person experiencing that event. When a person experiences a traumatic event, in most of the cases, he/she will enter a numb state and will not be able to demonstrate appropriate reaction at the time. However, later on, that person will start experiencing symptoms of PTSD such as hallucinations or repeated nightmares (Caruth 11). Trauma incurs harmful impact on a person's physical or emotional health as a result of an independent event or series of events. The traces of Trauma are quite evident in both of my selected texts. In Thomas' novel *The Hate U Give*, Starr experiences trauma at two different occasions i.e. when Natasha is shot during the gang wars and when Khalil is shot by Officer One-Fifteen. On the other hand, in Reynolds and Kiely's novel *All American Boys*, Rashad experiences trauma when Officer Paul Galluzzo assaults him on the wrongful allegation of theft.

### 2.2.2 Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

PTSD or posttraumatic stress disorder is considered to be the most probable response to a traumatic event. According to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders – fourth edition (text revision)*, a person suffers from posttraumatic stress disorder after witnessing or experiencing a life-threatening incident, a threat to one's physical integrity or safety or experiencing the feelings of helplessness or fear ("Posttraumatic stress disorder"). PTSD was introduced by the American Psychological Association in the *DSM* when its third edition was published in 1980 (Pai et al. 1). The criteria for PTSD changed with the arrival of each version of *DSM* as the research conducted on PTSD raised various questions regarding its relation with trauma and with the passage of time new symptoms were also associated with this disorder (Pai et al. 1). A major change was made to the status of PTSD when it was moved from the category of "anxiety disorders" and placed under a new category called "Trauma and Stressor-related Disorders" in *DSM-5* (Pai et al. 2). The symptoms of PTSD are conditional as they are directly linked to one's exposure to trauma. Due to the conditional nature of PTSD, it is considered to be complex in comparison to other disorders discussed in *DSM* (Pai et al. 3).

According to the clinical review published in 2015 by professor of Psychiatry Jonathan Bisson, public representative Sarah Cosgrove, and psychologists Catrin Lewis and Neil P. Roberts, PTSD gets triggered only in specific traumatic incidents involving interpersonal trauma or impersonal trauma (1). Incidents like rape or physical assault are regarded as interpersonal traumatic incidents, whereas impersonal trauma includes the incidents like natural disasters and accidents (Bisson et al. 1). The researchers Monnica T. Williams, Isha W. Metzger, Chris Leins, Celenia DeLapp in their article "Assessing Racial Trauma Within a *DSM-5* Framework: The UConn Racial/Ethnic Stress and Trauma Survey" (2018) emphasized the notion that people experiencing interpersonal trauma are more prone to experiencing PTSD in comparison to the victims of impersonal trauma. The researchers referred to a 1993 study according to which only 9% of the Americans ended up developing the symptoms of PTSD after experiencing impersonal trauma (Williams et al. 243). On the other hand, a 1998 study from Detroit revealed that almost 20.9% of the cases of interpersonal trauma resulted in the development of PTSD (Williams et al. 243). As racial trauma is considered to be an interpersonal trauma so the probability of its

victims developing PTSD is considerably higher in comparison to other types of traumas.

While examining the diagnostic criteria of PTSD in *DSM-5*, it becomes evident that the trauma experienced as a result of racial oppression or violence is not registered as one of the reasons leading to PTSD. The symptoms of PTSD are usually exhibited by the people who have directly or indirectly encountered a single traumatic event (Pai et al. 2). As the trauma experienced by African American people is atypical and the nature of their stressors is quite ambiguous, it has been suggested by numerous scholars that a new category called “oppression-based trauma” should be introduced in the *DSM* (Lebron et al. 11). The introduction of such a category is crucial for understanding the pathology of oppression and its impact on the psychological health of African Americans (Lebron et al. 11). Due to the lack of such a category in the *DSM*, I have adopted Joy DeGruy Leary’s theoretical framework of post traumatic slave syndrome in order to highlight the symptoms and implication of systemic racism and racial profiling and the resulting trauma among African Americans.

### **2.2.3 Formulation of Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome**

Dr. Joy DeGruy Leary introduced her new conceptual framework of post traumatic slave syndrome in 2001 in her PhD dissertation titled “A Dissertation on African American Male Youth Violence: ‘Trying to Kill the Part of You that isn’t Loved’” (Leary, “African American Male Youth Violence” 1). In the abstract of her dissertation, Leary states that apart from adopting social learning theory, sociocultural theory and trauma theory, she has used a “new theoretical framework” which is the post traumatic slave syndrome. While establishing her premise for PTSS, she discusses the difference between PTSD and PTSS. According to Leary, due to the “cumulative and continued stressors” experienced by the African American people on regular basis, the symptoms demonstrated by them do not meet the criteria of PTSD (“African American Male Youth Violence” 38). There is a significant difference between PTSD and PTSS as PTSD can be diagnosed clinically and can be treated with the help of different therapies such as cognitive behavioral therapy, cognitive therapy, cognitive processing therapy and medication such as paroxetine, venlafaxine or sertraline (“Treatments for PTSD”). On the other hand, PTSS is triggered due to

certain “social-psychological-environmental factors of oppression, racism, and other stressors of human design” (Leary, “African American Male Youth Violence” 40). There is a vast literature available on the symptoms of PTSD that provides in-depth information on the causes that lead to the occurrence of this psychological disorder. As mentioned in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders – fourth edition (DSM-IV)*, there are certain types of people who are prone to PTSD, such as the survivors of natural disasters, the victims of rape or incest, the people who survived the holocaust or the people who came back from the war. The list of people prone to PTSD is quite long, yet it does not include the African American slaves and their future generations (Leary, “African American Male Youth Violence” 40). As the direct trauma of slavery occurred too long ago, it cannot be claimed that the African American people surviving in present times are suffering from PTSD. In such a situation “PTSS theory proposes that residual stress-related effects were passed along through generations” (Leary, “African American Male Youth Violence” 40). Leary’s discussion regarding the PTSD and PTSS emphasizes that the current generation of African American people is suffering from PTSS as it frequently experiences the stressors of systemic racism.

#### **2.2.4 Critique on Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome**

Joy DeGruy Leary’s theory of post traumatic slave syndrome has been critiqued by numerous intellectuals. While reviewing the History channel’s new miniseries *Roots*, Ibram Kendi argued that “The logic and progressive flair of PTSS does not make it true. PTSS theorists rely on anecdotal evidence. And in customary racist fashion, they generalize the anecdotal negativities of individual Blacks in order to establish the problem of negative Black behaviors. PTSS theorists have not proven these negative behaviors are a Black problem; that Black people behave more negatively than other groups, let alone that these negative Black behaviors largely stem from a heritage of trauma” (Kendi). Kendi does not believe in the validity of PTSS because according to him this theory solely relies on personal accounts of black people that might or might not be true. Kendi’s critique on PTSS has been challenged by the philosopher K J. Lang. According to Lang, when a ship overloaded with slaves reached Americas during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the slaves aboard the ship were in pathetic conditions as they “slept, ate, defecated and menstruated within the same few feet of space”(Lang 1). Lang further claims that people contradict Leary the moment she

renders 246 years of slavery as the underlying cause for the behavior demonstrated by the African Americans in the current age. These people are not willing to believe that racism and oppression that were considered to be a part of the past are still prevalent in the American society in different forms. For instance, while showing some of the images captured during the Katrina hurricane of 2005, Leary highlights the fact that an African American man's act of holding a bag while walking through the water was branded with the label of "looting", whereas it was said that a white American couple was trying to "find" bread and soda for their survival (Lang 1). This slave-master mindset of some white Americans sets black people back in overcoming the transgenerational trauma of slavery. Even though blacks gained freedom in 1865, they still bear the scars of slavery because shockingly, even in modern day America, they continue to encounter white Americans who do not let them forget that blacks were once their slaves. In Thomas' novel *The Hate U Give*, when Starr is interrogated about Khalil's death, none of the police officers accept that Khalil became a victim of police brutality. Instead they shift the entire blame on Khalil by claiming that Officer Brian shot Khalil because Khalil was a drug dealer (Thomas 103 & 104). Similarly, in Reynolds and Kiely's *All American Boys*, when Rashad enters Jerry's in order to purchase some chips, the man behind the counter looks at him in a suspicious manner (Reynolds & Kiely 17). The same man later on labels Rashad as a thief without even verifying the entire situation (Reynolds & Kiely 21). The police killing of Khalil in *The Hate U Give* and the allegation of theft on Rashad in *All American Boys* make it evident that even today African American people experience systemic racism on routine basis.

### **2.3 Racism and the Black Lives Matter**

In his seminal work *The Souls of Black Folk*, W. E. B. Du Bois (1868– 1963) highlights the racism experienced by African American people and writes:

He (Negro) simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face (9).

In this quote, W.E.B Du Bois talks about a Negro's desire to maintain his double identity as both a Negro and an American without experiencing any sort of racism. The innate desire of an African American man to maintain his double identity

in American society has caused problems for him throughout the history. Irrespective of America's status as a modern state that advocates human rights throughout the world, its own African American citizens are being deprived of their basic rights in the form of racial profiling and institutionalized racism. The Tamir Rice case is one example of the systemic racism suffered by African American people in the modern-day America. Although Tamir was a twelve-year-boy playing with a toy gun, the video footage from the incident revealed that Officer Loehmann shot Tamir without even giving him the three time customary warning to raise his hands (Dewan, and Oppel Jr.). Incidents of such a nature serve to further provoke the insecurities African Americans experience in their own country as they lose trust in their own police and justice system.

The social media movement *#BlackLivesMatter* was initiated in 2013 when George Zimmerman was acquitted in the Trayvon Martin shooting case. According to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, the trend *#BlackLivesMatter* appeared on Twitter in almost 11.8 million different tweets during 2013-16 (Anderson). Various African American celebrities and activists such as Zendaya, Uzo Aduba, and Regina King also supported this movement (Liao). According to a news article authored by CNN correspondent Deena Zaru, American singer Beyoncé triggered a socio-political controversy through her performance at half-time during the 50th Super Bowl that was held in 2016. Just one day prior to her performance, Beyoncé released her single video called "Formation" that was shot in New Orleans. The video not only made references to the disasters of the Katrina hurricane but it also showed clear support for the Black Lives Matter by presenting Beyoncé sitting on the top of a police car floating in the water (Zaru). There were also images of words "Stop Shooting Us" sprawled across the wall while a young Negro danced in front of the police officers (Zaru). While this particular video made a formidable impact on Beyoncé's fans, it also triggered a lot of controversy as the former mayor of New York Rudy Giuliani expressed his concern over Beyoncé's attempt to defame the police officers through various symbols in the video (Zaru). Irrespective of the allegations raised against Beyoncé's "Formation", she accomplished her goal of using her video to raise a voice against police brutality towards African American people at a global level.

John Lewis, the renowned civil rights leader, also showed his support for the Black Lives Matter in the last essay “Together, You Can Redeem the Soul of Our Nation” that he wrote just a few days before his death. His last essay was published in *The New York Times*. Lewis, who passed away on the 17th of July, 2020, was admitted in hospital when he went to visit the Black Lives Matter Plaza located in Washington. He declared, “I just had to see and feel it for myself that, after many years of silent witness, the truth is still marching on” (Lewis). In his essay, he reveals that even though his life has almost reached its end, he feels deeply inspired by the movement that has been initiated by the American people in order to make a difference in their society. He also talked about the racial trauma that he experienced during his life despite being secured by the love of his parents and extended family members. He not only experienced the “unholy oppression” outside his home but the death of George Floyd reminded him of Emmett Till who was killed in 1955 just at the age of fourteen (Lewis). Even after so many years, he proclaims that “I will never ever forget the moment when it became so clear that he could easily have been me” (Lewis). The words expressed by John Lewis in his last essay depict the emotions harbored by every African American.

## **2.4 Black Lives Matter: A Global Social Revolution Portrayed in African American Fiction**

Institutionalized racism and police brutality demonstrated against African American people turned into a matter of grave importance due to which some of the most prominent YA authors started addressing this issue through their writings. While addressing this issue through their literary works, the authors Angie Thomas, Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely experienced serious hurdles in conveying their message to the entire world. According to an article published in the *New York Times*, when the list containing the names of “10 most frequently banned or challenged books of 2020” was released by the American Library Association, Angie Thomas’ *The Hate U Give* was included in it for the third time (Waller 2). Thomas claimed that her book has been on this list since it was first released. In response to her book being banned in her own country, Thomas jokingly says that there are only two lists where people can usually find her book i.e. the list of most banned books and *The New York Times*



(Waller 3). Thomas' words bring to the fore the bias of the American society towards African American writers.

According to an article published in the *Boston Globe* in 2018, Thomas' novel *The Hate U Give* has been removed from majority of the schools located in Texas, Missouri and certain other places as it has been regarded as an "anti-police" book (Osterheldt 1). However, Thomas asserts that when three different people will be asked to provide their perspective on Black Lives Matter, we will receive 30 different reactions (Osterheldt 1). While clarifying her book's purpose, she emphasizes that people have developed various misunderstandings regarding her book. Although it is assumed that her book is an "anti-police" book, Thomas claims that her book in fact is "anti-police-brutality" (Osterheldt 1). According to E. Sybil Durand, an assistant professor at Arizona State University, good literature makes people uncomfortable because it provides accurate depiction of the society along with its "ugly parts" (Waller 3). Author Jason Reynolds has also expressed his irritation at these books being banned as his novel *All American Boys* is on this list. In a tweet, Reynolds proclaimed that children should be provided with the opportunity to read these books so they can familiarize themselves with the institutionalized racism prevalent within modern day American society. He further wrote that if anyone disagrees with his stance then they should engage in discourse with him instead of banning his books (Waller 3). The fact that the general public is prevented from gaining access to the works of authors like Thomas and Reynolds makes it evident that even in the current age, some racist white Americans seem concerned about the awareness and activism that might be caused by these books among the African American youth.

## **2.5 Existing Scholarship on Selected Texts**

This part of the literature review is divided into two sections. The first section scrutinizes and evaluates the studies pertaining to selected literary texts, whereas the second section explores and assesses different aspects of post traumatic slave syndrome through existing researches in this domain.

### **2.5.1 Existing Scholarship on *The Hate U Give* and *All American Boys***

A study conducted by Bernard Beck titled "No City for Young Boys: The Hate U Give, When They See Us and African American Youth" analyzes the issue of

social inequality along with its implications experienced by young African Americans and the role of films and TV series in creating awareness regarding this issue which is crucial to my study. Published in 2019, this study scrutinizes the movie based on Angie Thomas' novel *The Hate U Give* and a crime drama television series called *When They See Us*. Beck based this study on the notion that racial inequality has been prevalent in US since slavery due to the constrained relations between law enforcing agencies and racial minorities (Beck 202). Things have become really hard for the African American minorities in America as the presence of police force within these communities tends to induce fear and rage within the police officers and these communities. These feelings of fear and anger then spread across the entire nation. According to a study conducted by Catina Miller and Brigitte Vittrup on the mental impact of police racial bias on African Americans, majority of the participants confirmed feelings of fear and anger due to racial tension (1708 & 1709). During the last few years, the incidents of targeted killings of "unarmed black teenagers" by the police officers have drastically increased (Beck 203). These incidents have also made headlines due to which they have resulted in the initiation of the Black Lives Matter. In order to keep this movement alive and convey the message to the entire world, African American filmmakers have created some influential films on the real or fictional Black Lives Matter events (Beck 203). The plots of these films and TV series have proved quite captivating and enlightening for the entire society. Throughout the history of media, audiences have demonstrated interest towards the films and TV series where an innocent person is unjustly punished and then strives to get justice. The audiences showed strong disapproval towards the films/TV series where the victim failed to get justice, whereas films and TV dramas where the victim is redeemed proved to inspire them. There have been various films including *A Time to Kill*, *Scottsboro: An American Tragedy* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* where wrongful punishments were awarded to African Americans (Beck 204). A primary purpose of the TV series like *When They See Us* and films like *The Hate U Give* is to create awareness regarding the intensity of routine police injustice towards the African American communities (Beck 204). According to many different film reviews, the films produced against the backdrop of the Black Lives Matter have created awareness not only among the general public, but also among the members of law enforcement agencies in America regarding the institutionalized racism experienced by African American people. As my research is about the routine racial trauma

triggered due to the targeted police killings of African American people, it can be considered similar to Beck's study but instead of analyzing the films or TV series, my work analyzes PTSS in selected YA novels, one of which is Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give*.

The study by Adam Levin titled "Finding the 'Herstorical' Narrative in Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give*" scrutinizes the role of African American writers in bringing social change through the female characters in their young adult novels. Published in 2020, Levin selected Angie Thomas' novel *The Hate U Give* in order to conduct this study. Levin chose this novel because the black protagonist goes through a transformation from victim of police brutality to Black Lives Matter activist following the murder of her friend Khalil by a white police officer. Levin refers to Ohio State University's professor of women's, gender, and sexuality studies, Treva B. Lindsey while explaining his perception regarding the status of male victims in the narratives of racial violence (Levin 148). He claims that whether black women are portrayed as victims or activists in the narratives of racial oppression, their presence has always been undermined as opposed to African American men (Levin 148). One of the aims of the Black Lives Matter presented by the founders Opal Tometi, Alicia Garza and Patrisse Cullors is to make this movement more inclusive as compared to other black liberation movements in history (Levin 149). While referring to the role of women in the Black Lives Matter, Levin mentions the name of Rachael Jeantel, a nineteen-year-old high school senior and one of the prime witnesses in the George Zimmerman case. Trayvon Martin was on the phone, talking to Jeantel just a few minutes prior to the shooting. He had explained Zimmerman's movements to Jeantel that led to the shooting. Irrespective of Jeantel's significance in the George Zimmerman case, her testimony was considered inconsequential by the court and the public because of her appearance, her speaking style and her appearance (Levin 149). This profoundly disturbing ruling of the court towards Jeantel is a clear indication of institutionalized racism. In contrast to Jeantel's insignificant role in George Zimmerman's case, Angie Thomas puts great emphasis on Starr's character throughout her novel. She is the only one who not only experiences the trauma of Khalil's brutal police killing but also raises her voice against this injustice.

Another study published by Dowie-Chin et al. in 2020 titled "Whitewashing Through Film: How Educators Can Use Critical Race Media Literacy to Analyze

Hollywood's Adaptation of Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give*" compares Thomas' novel *The Hate U Give* with George Tillman's film adaptation of this novel through the lens of critical race media literacy. This study is similar to my research up to a certain extent as one of the texts selected for my study contains both the African American and white American authorial voices co-writing the novel. The study by Dowie-Chin et al. emphasizes that the major difference between *The Hate U Give* novel and *The Hate U Give* film is that the novel has been written by a black author, whereas the screenplay of the film was penned by a white writer called Audrey Wells who was quite famous for her screenplays of many famous Hollywood movies (130). After the adaptation of Thomas' novel into a film, the differences between both of the media texts became quite evident, as they usually do in instances of book adaptations. These differences are all the more important in the case of *The Hate U Give* because the novel is written from the perspective of a black woman writer who aims to unveil police brutality through her fiction. The fact that the screenplay of the film is written from the perspective of a white author presents readers with the very real possibility of "racial ventriloquism" (Dowie-Chin et al. 130). In their comparison of the novel *The Hate U Give* with its movie adaptation, the authors analyze the authorship, format, audiences, content, and purpose of the novel and the screenplay of the film. One of the major differences between Thomas' novel and the film depiction of this novel is the portrayal of black women. In the film, Lisa Carter, who is the mother of female protagonist Starr, plays a minor role. However, in the novel, her character is of great significance to the story as she dominates Starr's life (Dowie-Chin et al. 134). She not only helps Starr cope with the trauma of Khalil's death but also protects her from the accusing behavior of police officers when she gets called at the police station to give her statement. Furthermore, in the novel Lisa is depicted as a registered nurse who plays pivotal role in the transfer of her family from the Garden Heights to a much better locality (Dowie-Chin et al. 135). The casting of actress Amandla Stenberg instead of a dark-skinned actress for the role of Starr demonstrates anti-black racism as Stenberg is fair-skinned in comparison to other African American actors (Dowie-Chin et al. 136). The actress Amandla Stenberg revealed that she had her blackness questioned for the first time in her life after being casted for the movie adaptation of *The Hate U Give* (Smith). Debra Cartwright, the illustration artist who created the cover of *The Hate U Give* novel, claimed that she was really disappointed upon Stenberg's casting as she was expecting that some brown-skinned actress will be hired

to play the role of Starr as it is already quite difficult for dark-skinned actresses to get major roles in big productions (Smith). The comparison of both the novel and film adaptation through the lens of critical media literacy makes it evident that various discrepancies tend to emerge if the narratives of African American oppression are written by the white authors. For instance, in the novel, there is an entire discussion between Starr and her father regarding the reason due to which Khalil was compelled to become a drug dealer, whereas the film adaptation does not shed light on the struggles of Khalil and simply brand him as a drug dealer. However, my study counters this practice by analyzing the text that not only explores the African American narrative of police brutality but also shares the perspective of a white American boy who takes part in the protest against targeted killing of African American people. This character of white American boy is written from the perspective of white American author Brendan Kiely who empathizes with African American people and supports their cause in his work.

The study by Jay Shelat titled “‘I swear those things are so fresh’: Sneakers, Race, and Mobility in *The Hate U Give*” published in 2019 focuses on the symbolic meaning of Starr Carter’s sneakers in Thomas’ novel *The Hate U Give*, which is important to my research because it discusses Starr’s demonstration of racist socialization. After the sudden incident of Khalil’s death, Starr starts scrutinizing the racial and social distinction between the two worlds she associates with. Although Starr lives in Garden Heights which is a poor neighborhood dominated by African American residents, she studies at Williamson Prep which is completely in contrast to her residential area. Williamson Prep is a private school that is attended by a majority of white students belonging to rich families. So when Starr is at her home in Garden Heights, she is among poor, black people, whereas at Williamson Prep, she is surrounded by rich white students (Shelat 70). In order to adjust to the differences of both the worlds, Starr uses her sneakers. She wears them whenever she is about to crossover to the rich and superior world of white people. Shelat describes the sneakers as the “material representations of the social and racial boundaries she (Starr) traverses daily”(70). I find this study interesting as Starr’s use of sneakers in order to accommodate the differences of both of the worlds fall within the realm of “racist socialization” which is a symptom of post traumatic slave syndrome. The “racist socialization” is a belief that black and all the things associated with black are

inferior, whereas everything associated with white is superior (Leary 116). In *The Hate U Give*, the sneakers demonstrate wealth and upper social class due to which Starr identifies with the rich white students of her school by wearing the Jordans. Starr's identity in relation to her sneakers is also established at the start of the novel when she attends a party at Garden Heights with her friend Kenya. Her friend taunts her for not knowing anyone at the party because she attends "that school" (Shelat 71). In response to Kenya's accusation, Starr claims that her Jordans are quite comfortable and new (Shelat 71). Starr's mention of her Jordans at this point affirms her exclusion from the group of partying youngsters at Garden Heights because even though she lives in that area, she is quite different from them. This study provides critical support to my research as Starr's efforts to keep a boundary between Williamson Prep and Garden Heights implies that she might be suffering from post traumatic slave syndrome. Starr's efforts in trying to adopt the behavior and attire of the white people while wearing Jordans at Williamson Prep seem quite similar to a person who is displaying the symptoms of "racist socialization".

According to Lee M. Pierce's study titled "For the Time(d) Being: The Form Hate Takes in *The Hate U Give*" published in 2020, Starr's role within the novel can be considered as that of a code switcher, for which reason it is directly relevant to my study. Starr's act of code switching enables her to find her voice and challenge the systemic racism targeted towards African American people which is also one of the driving forces of my study. A defining problem Starr experiences during her journey from childhood to teenage is the control imposed over her speech by her parents and the society. Despite being traumatized by the murder of a friend during her childhood by a gangster called King, Starr is prohibited to speak against it by her parents as they want to protect her from King's wrath (Pierce 415). However, Khalil's murder by a white police officer proves to be the crux of the story as it provides Starr with the courage to speak against the injustice experienced by Khalil (Pierce 415). At first, Starr adopts code switching during her transition from childhood to teenage years as she transforms from a silent Starr to a Starr who speaks up. Later on, it turns into a regular occurrence when she starts studying at Williamson. Being a student at Williamson during the day and a resident at Garden Heights after school, Starr strives to keep her white and black identities separate as she wants to appear civilized in front of her school friends but wants to practice her African American identity when she is

at home (Pierce 416). This phenomenon of code switching can be explained through W.E.B Du Bois's concept of "double consciousness" (Pierce 416). Starr strives to maintain this double consciousness by suppressing the rage she experiences after Khalil's incident and by remaining a part of her peer group at Williamson which consists of white students. However, her transformation occurs the moment she gets rid of her desire to become a part of the white people and accept her original identity (Pierce 416). Although the researcher also mentions Starr's childhood trauma, this study's emphasis on Starr's evolving behavior in the form of code switching places it within the parameters of PTSS due to the fact that Starr's act of code switching indicates that she suffers from the symptom of racist socialization. Starr tries to act and dress up like white Americans and hide her African American side while she is at her school which makes it evident that she is ashamed of being considered an outsider while studying at Williamson.

Another study that my research draws upon is "Adolescence, Blackness, and the Politics of Respectability in *Monster* and *The Hate U Give*" by Gabrielle Owen published in 2019. Owen's study explores the discrimination experienced by colored adolescents in comparison to white adolescents. Numerous studies have stressed upon the fact that colored adolescents are denied the benefits of security, dependency and innocence that are usually associated with their age (Owen 236). The concept of "adolescence" was introduced as a racial category during the late nineteenth century (Owen 236). This phenomenon is explained by Claudia Castañeda who focuses on how it was argued by the racial science during the nineteenth century that white and black children tend to share the same level of intelligence (Owen 237). However, the element of racial differentiation was also emphasized when it was argued that this development stops in non-white humans as they enter their adolescence (Owen 237). Claudia Castañeda also explores how the hierarchies of gender, race, class and sexuality were constructed during the nineteenth century in association with children and rendered as facts belonging to the human body (Owen 237). While relating this notion with the contemporary world, Owen asserts that "As a normalizing and regulatory concept, adolescence continues to produce the logic of these social hierarchies today. When young people occupy normative categories and roles, they are imagined to be on their way to maturity and thus on their way to social recognition of their personhood and right to civic participation" (237). However, the work of legal

scholar Patricia J. Williams regarding the Columbine shooters challenges this notion. Although the Columbine shooters Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold (who were both white young men) left the entire white community shocked by committing the inhumane act of mass murder, Williams reveals that their teachers, fellow students and even probation officers kept on claiming that both of them were responsible citizens (Owen 237). This assertion was made regarding Harris and Klebold on the basis of their whiteness, strong financial background and masculinity (Owen 237 & 238). On the other hand, when it comes to African American adolescents, they are rendered as guilty even if they are completely unarmed and innocent as it happened in Trayvon Martin's case and as it happens with Khalil in Thomas' *The Hate U Give*.

Kimberly Feher's dissertation titled "'We cannot be free until they are free': Rewriting the narrative of immersion in *All-American Boys* and *Monster*" published in 2019 analyzes Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely's *All American Boys* in addition to Walter Dean Myer's *Monster* through Robert Stepto's narrative of immersion. The purpose of Feher's research is to study the way African American authors of YA literature have carried on the mission of their predecessors in addressing the impact of systemic racism on the society. Feher states that authors like James Baldwin and Richard Wright addressed the issues like slavery and mass incarceration of African American people in their works so that future generations can be made aware of the traumatic past of the African American people. Being an author of the contemporary African American YA literature, Walter Dean Myer raises the issue that institutionalized racism experienced by black men due to the injustice of America's legal system prevents a large number of African American men from leading a normal life after getting released from the prison (Feher 18). On the contrary, Reynolds and Kiely's *All American Boys* emphasizes upon the fact that the issue of systemic racism in the American society can be voiced through the protests of African American people. However, white Americans also need to develop awareness regarding the rights of the marginalized communities and support them (Feher 50). This study emphasizes on the ever-continuing efforts made by different generations of African American authors in addressing the issues of systemic and institutionalized racism prevalent in the modern day American society. Due to Feher's focus on the role of African Americans and white Americans in raising voice for the rights of marginalized communities in Reynolds and Kiely's *All American Boys*, this study is



essential to my research as I have focused on the impact of police brutality and racial profiling experienced by African Americans on the white American community. While analyzing Reynolds and Kiely's *All American Boys* through the theoretical framework of PTSS, I have discovered that the symptoms of PTSS experienced by black people also incur traumatic impact on white people due to which they experience white guilt. One example of this is present in Reynolds and Kiely's *All American Boys* where the white protagonist Quinn Collins starts fearing his best friend's elder brother Paul Galluzzo after he witnesses Paul beating an African American boy outside a shop. Consequently, a large number of white Americans developed awareness regarding the racial injustice suffered by African American community and took the necessary initiative to support them.

### **2.5.2 Existing Scholarship on Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome**

The post traumatic slave syndrome by JoyDeGruy Leary is a theoretical framework introduced in 2005 that focuses on racial trauma as a result of multigenerational slavery experienced by African American people. In her book *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing*, Leary refers to PTSS as a syndrome that exists within a specific population experiencing multigenerational trauma after remaining enslaved for centuries (Leary 105). Even after being freed, that specific population continues to experience oppression due to systemic racism (Leary 105). In addition to this oppression, this population also holds the belief that they do not have access to the benefits that are offered to others in the society (Leary 105). The criterion for PTSS makes it evident that Leary is referring to African American people and the multigenerational trauma endured by them. Leary further professes that people suffering from PTSS usually exhibit three symptoms i.e. vacant esteem, ever-present anger, and racist socialization (Leary 105). This trauma is quite different from PTSD as PTSD is usually triggered after being exposed to a single instance of trauma, whereas PTSS is triggered when a person endures series of traumas in addition to the multigenerational trauma transferred to him/her. Joy DeGruy Leary is the first researcher who not only diagnosed the multigenerational trauma experienced by African Americans but also published it in the book form for the benefit of future researchers.

In a study conducted by Houston A. Baker in 2011 titled “The point of entanglement: Modernism, Diaspora, and Toni Morrison’s *Love*”, the author examines PTSS in Toni Morrison’s novel *Love* in order to study the black diaspora through journalistic assessment. In *Love*, Morrison focuses on the problems that a black woman experiences in the postmodern world (Baker 2). The author claims that Leary’s theory of PTSS is crucial for all those who want to “get Morrison right” (Baker 5). Leary’s theory of PTSS has not only been used to study Morrison’s novels but it has also been adopted by researchers for the purpose of understanding the impact of slave trade on 21st century African Americans. According to the author, transatlantic slave trade not only enslaved millions of African people but also degraded them to the status of a mere commodity so that white people can enhance their wealth (Baker 3). Through her fiction, Morrison stresses upon the monstrosity of slave masters and rapists and the trauma suffered by African people due to unjust behavior of the American society. There is no particular similarity between Baker’s study and my research. Where my research focuses on the symptoms of PTSS displayed by the African American characters of YA novels as a result of police brutality and institutionalized racism, Baker’s study scrutinizes the PTSS developed by the characters of Morrison’s postmodernist novels due to transatlantic slave trade and colonial violence. However, Baker’s study on Morrison’s novels reinforces Leary’s claim regarding PTSS being a multigenerational trauma.

Shari Renée Hicks’s dissertation titled “A Critical Analysis of Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: A Multigenerational Legacy of Slavery” published in 2015, conducts an in-depth analysis of the sociopolitical aspect of the slavery and its impact on African Americans. Hicks critically analyses DeGruy Leary’s theory of post traumatic slave syndrome in order to understand the behavioral and psychological problems experienced by African Americans during the 21st century (Hicks iv& v). In her dissertation, the researcher studies the transatlantic slave trade that lasted for almost four centuries. Also known as the African holocaust, almost 25 million Africans were kidnapped and enslaved by European traffickers from the African shores (Hicks 1). Hicks asserts that this particular “migration” is rendered as one of the greatest traumas of the history (Hicks 1). She further clarifies that she has focused on the traumatic history of enslavement of African people because in order to move towards a greater future, it is inevitable for the African American people to realize

their true identity and embrace it (Hicks 3). While discussing the intensity of trauma experienced by the transatlantic slaves, Hicks states that nobody can imagine the pain of being forcibly removed from one's own land, deprived of basic human rights, being branded as a slave and considered inferior to the white people (2). Africans were not only enslaved but were also humiliated and inflicted with physical and mental abuse in such a way that their "mind, bodies, souls, psyches, and spirits" suffered severe negative impact (Hicks 2). The severity of this trauma resulted in the intergenerational transmission that can still be seen in the behavior of certain African Americans. The study conducted by Hicks focuses on the trauma triggered by the physical sufferings of the African slaves over a span of four centuries. This study by Hicks lends important insights to understand the PTSS demonstrated by characters in my selected texts, as Hicks's study highlights the underlying circumstances of slavery such as the violent behavior of slave masters and continued oppression of the African people that led to the post traumatic behavior demonstrated by African Americans in the current age.

The study conducted by Sule et al. titled "The Past Does Matter: a Nursing Perspective on Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS)" in 2017 analyzes the discrimination in the provision of health facilities to African American people. During the study, the researchers took account of the mistreatment posed towards African Americans by pondering over the trans-Atlantic slave trade and Jim Crow era. The researchers assert that despite regular encounters of African American people with the issues like police brutality, unfair treatment, discrimination in healthcare facilities and lack of equal employment opportunities, the impact of slavery on daily lives of African American people has constantly been undermined. The desperate conditions that currently exist in the American society where African American people have to suffer due to systemic racism and social inequality in almost every aspect of life are mainly the result of constant denial of racial violence and other racist activities conducted during the history (Sule et al. 780). As a result of these desperate conditions, certain African American people express the symptoms of vacant esteem as they start perceiving the entire society in a negative way. The authors contend that people experience vacant esteem and symptoms of PTSD because they get exposed to unfair legal policies and institutionalized racism (Sule et al. 780). Through the lens of PTSS, the researchers have studied the stereotypes and biases that have strongly

impacted the lives of African American people since the Jim Crow era (Sule et al. 781). Researchers are of the opinion that irrespective of the abolishment of slavery, the African American people are made subject to racism even in the current age due to which they tend to experience the symptoms of PTSS. As this study scrutinizes some of the realistic aspects of institutionalized racism experienced by African American people, it grants important insight for my research. My study particularly draws on the psychological impact of systemic racism on African American community and the failure of healthcare professionals to recognize the symptoms of PTSS in the African American people as discussed by Sule et al. In my study, I emphasize the notion that PTSS in the African community cannot be healed until other members of society realize their pain and start supporting them in bringing about social change at the grassroots level.

The research conducted by Spencer and Perlow in 2018 titled “Sassy Mouths, Unfettered Spirits, and the Neo-Lynching of Korryn Gaines and Sandra Bland” analyzes post traumatic slave master syndrome in order to study patterns between the lynching of black women during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the violence inflicted by the state on black women in order to prevent black women’s resistance during that period. The study conducted by the authors covers the period from 23rd May, 1911 when Laura Nelson, a black woman is thrown in captivity on the charge of committing the murder of a sheriff (Spencer and Perlow 164). Just a night before her hearing, Nelson gets lynched by a mob of forty white men (Spencer and Perlow 164). According to the findings of the researchers, black women were lynched because white male state agents demonstrated “racialized and gendered dominance” over the bodies of African women due to which the resistance was expressed by black women (Spencer and Perlow 171). The researchers renamed DeGruy’s theoretical construct as post traumatic slave master syndrome in order to analyze the behavior of the white men involved in the lynching of black women (Spencer and Perlow 168). This study makes a significant contribution to my research as it highlights the different patterns of white supremacy and savagery that were prevalent during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Almost a century later, the African American people are still losing lives due to those patterns being followed in modern-day America in the form of police brutality and racial profiling. Certain facets of this study are quite different from my research. First of all, Spencer and Perlow slightly altered the title of DeGruy’s theoretical framework

by incorporating the word “master” in it, whereas I have used it in its original form. The second major difference between this study and my research is that this study is conducted on the actual incidents of the lynching of black women during the history, whereas I opted for YA novels written in relevance to Black Lives Matter. One of the more key differences is that the researchers studied the violent behavior of white state agents towards black women in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, whereas my study focuses on the institutionalized racism suffered by the black community as a whole in the contemporary times.

Published in 2017, the study titled “The Trauma Consensus: A Proposed Method for Researching and Writing American Histories” conducted by Taylor Spence focuses on the violent experiences of the indigenous Americans through the history and its impact upon their future generations. The article presents the story of a man called Jim Miller who belonged to the Dakota tribe, narrating a dream he had in 2008. In the dream, Miller travels from South Dakota to Minnesota and witnesses the mass hanging of 38 men. Miller provides complete details of this mass hanging and claims that all of these men joined their hands with each other while they were being hanged. The most astonishing aspect of Miller’s dream was that an actual mass hanging took place almost one and a half century earlier in the same place. The mass hanging that involved 38 men of the Dakota tribe took place on 26<sup>th</sup> of December, 1862 at 10 am. This mass hanging was administered by the federal government of United States and is still regarded as a “largest mass execution” in America’s history (Spence 671). Thirty-eight men were hung as a punishment for their brutal act of murdering 400 white settlers (Spence 671). Later on, two more people were killed for their participation in the murder of 400 white settlers (Spence 671). Miller claims that he was not aware of this incident until his wife told him all about it after which he started commemorating the hangings of these 38+2 militias so that the trauma experienced by Dakota and Minnesota tribe can be healed. These 38+2 warriors were not the only ones who died in the process of settler colonialism as more than 300 militias lost their lives during the captivity and almost one-thousand were killed in the war (Spence 672). The researcher has not only tried to diagnose the American Indian Historical Trauma but also Leary’s theory of post traumatic slave syndrome. PTSS is quite evident in Miller’s case as it was a transgenerational form of trauma (Spence 673). As this study scrutinizes the trauma experienced by a marginalized community,

it is useful for my analyses because my research also focuses on the trauma experienced by a marginalized community i.e. the African American people. The fact that Miller had a dream of the Dakota men being hanged in 2008 indicates that he suffered from transgenerational trauma. In my research, I also study the symptoms of transgenerational trauma, specifically PTSS, displayed by the characters in the selected texts.

Published in 2016, Shaquan Womack's article "I Know I Can't: The Negative Effects of Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome's on the well-being of African American college students" analyzes the impact of traumatic experiences on the psychological health of African American college students through DeGruy's theoretical lens of post traumatic slave syndrome. Being the victims of transgenerational trauma, the symptoms of PTSS demonstrated by African American college students are quite intense as they still experience racism in their everyday life. While referring to Dorothy Robert's 1997 book *Killing the Black Book*, the researcher points towards the fact that slave owners used to rape black women in order to assure their dominance (Womack 119). The numerous strategies adopted by slave owners in order to express their dominance over black people triggered a trauma so strong among the African American people that it transferred to their future generations. The racial trauma originating from the time of slavery was so intense that its effects can still be seen in the "beliefs and behaviors" of the African American college students of the current age (Womack 120). The African American college students suffer severe institutional discrimination and social oppression as a result of which they have to work twice as hard in comparison to white American students to excel in the society. Even if they succeed in getting a college degree, they have to struggle a lot against the systemic racism in order to get high-paying jobs for the purpose of improving their status in the society. Womack states "Black students with college degrees only have two-thirds of the wealth of White high school dropouts" (121). As I have selected YA fiction for my research, Womack's research enables me to understand the underlying factors that contribute towards the intensity of racial trauma experienced by the young characters of my selected novels such as Khalil and DeVante. Womack's research is also pertinent to my study as it helps me relate the circumstances of certain young African American characters of Thomas' novel *The Hate U Give* with the real-life African American youth residing in ghettos. This racial trauma is experienced by Thomas'

young African American characters in the form of PTSS because of their routine exposure to institutionalized racism that prevents them from changing their position in the society. Resultantly, they are forced to indulge in illegal activities such as drug dealing.

Published in 2019, the study by St. Vil et al. titled “Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome, the Patriarchal Nuclear Family Structure, and African American Male–Female Relationships” scrutinizes the failure of patriarchal nuclear family structure among the African American community while adopting DeGruy’s theoretical framework of post traumatic slave syndrome. In order to lay a foundation for their study, the researchers divided the history of racism against African American people into three different generations i.e. the slavery generation, the legalized segregation and discrimination generation, and the race neutral generation. During the era of slavery generation (ranging from 1619 to 1865), the patriarchal nuclear family structure could not be formed among the black people as they were slaves and irrespective of entering a matrimonial relation, the black man did not hold dominance over the black woman. Black women had to earn their living independently and if they were raped or physically assaulted by the slave master, their black husbands did not possess the authority to protect them (St. Vil et al. 140). Although slavery was abolished in 1865, it was still quite difficult for the African American people to create a patriarchal nuclear family structure during the period ranging from 1865 to 1965. There were various policies and black codes that were implemented during this period as a result of which the black men were arrested on minor offenses and were held captive in prison industrial complexes (St. Vil et al. 140). Due to the constant absence of their men, black women were compelled to work and earn living for themselves and their children due to which they were not able to enjoy a proper family life (St. Vil et al. 140). During the third era that started in 1965 and still continues, the African American men are unable to maintain a patriarchal nuclear family structure due to institutionalized racism as a result of which they experience higher unemployment rate in comparison to white Americans and African American women (St. Vil et al. 141). Although this study is admittedly different from the focus of my research, it highlights one of the most crucial issues of the American society quite important to my research: despite their desire, a specific number of African Americans are not able to maintain the patriarchal nuclear family structure because of institutionalized racism

as a result of which they suffer from PTSS and experience failure in their familial relationships. In one of my selected texts *The Hate U Give*, Starr's father Maverick Carter fails to be the patriarch of his family and protect his children from police brutality as police officers racially profile and humiliate him in front of his children (Thomas 189 & 190). Due to incidents like this, Maverick not only fails to protect his family from systemic racism but also suffers from vacant esteem.

Published in 2019, Bria Campbell's study "Past, Present, Future: A Program Development Project Exploring Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS) Using Experiential Education and Dance/Movement Therapy Informed Approaches", combines post traumatic slave syndrome with the concepts of dance/movement therapy in order to enhance the healing process of African American adolescents. The researcher mainly targets the African American adolescents residing in the Roseland neighborhood of Chicago. Campbell opts for dance/movement therapy because dance is used for the healing purposes within the African culture. Dance/movement therapy is considered quite important for the beings suffering from psychological issues as it improves the interpersonal connection, expressivity and bodily movements of a person (Campbell 215). Campbell's study is quite different from the other studies that I have analyzed in this literature review as it puts emphasis on the healing of African American adolescents instead of scrutinizing the symptoms of PTSS demonstrated by them. However, just like all the other studies detailed in this literature review, Campbell also emphasizes the underlying causes due to which the African American adolescents require healing therapy. The researcher claims that where DMT proved to be of great significance in healing the transgenerational trauma of the African American adolescents, merging it with DeGruy's healing domain presented in her 2017 book *Knowing Ourselves* brought more promising results. This methodology can be adopted as a foundational basis for the treatment of transgenerational trauma experienced by African American people due to the racism they face in every aspect of their life.

Published in 2019, the study by Akinlana Burrowes titled "Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: A Literature Review on African American Community Healing and Expressive Arts Therapy" focuses on the significance of the healing of African American community using expressive arts therapy or EAT. The author studies the impact of racial trauma on African people since the time of transatlantic trade when



they were treated as chattel slaves. The author further studies the impact of transgenerational trauma of chattel slavery that is expressed by the current-day African Americans in the form of Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome. Burrowes argues that repeated exposure of a trauma victim to the stimulus plays crucial part in worsening his/her psychological condition which happened in the case of chattel slaves (13). Their trauma intensified to such an extent that it altered their genes and the trauma was transferred to future generations. African Americans continue to experience racism even after the abolishment of slavery in the form of Jim Crow laws and other policies that denied them access to the facilities available to European Americans (Burrowes 17). One of the worst examples of chattel slavery was the formation of slave hospitals during 1840s where doctors treated slaves or performed surgery upon them without washing their hands or administering anesthesia. These slave hospitals resulted in the deaths of a large number of slaves due to improper treatment and lack of medical care (Burrowes 19). In such a scenario, expressive arts therapy is an effective approach through which the transgenerational trauma of African American people can be healed as they have strong association with nature and possess the beliefs and values completely different from rest of the world. The literature review conducted by Akinlana Burrowes is similar to the research conducted by Bria Campbell because both researchers emphasize on healing the trauma of African American people through expressive arts.

In his article “African American Health and Posttraumatic Slave Syndrome: A Terror Management Theory Account” published in 2019, Michael J. Halloran studies the deteriorating social and psychological situation of African American people as a result of cultural trauma suffered by them in the form of post traumatic slave syndrome. This problem is explained by the researcher through the application of terror management theory. The author presents certain statistics according to which the ratio of poverty among the African American people is higher in comparison to white Americans as they are being deprived of employment opportunities. Despite the propagation of color-blind ideologies, the American society is highly prejudiced against the African American people. Due to the ever-increasing level of poverty among the African Americans and their constant experience of systemic racism, the psychological and physical health of African American people suffers negative impact (Halloran 48). While explaining cultural trauma, the researcher states that a group

experiences cultural trauma when it is exposed to an event of unbearable nature that oppresses its cultural values, identity and perception (Halloran 49). In the case of African American people, this cultural trauma has passed through various generations due to which the researcher perceived it through DeGruy's theory of post traumatic slave syndrome. The researcher has further adopted the terror management theory in order to elaborate the social psychological causes of PTSS and their impact on African American people (Halloran 51). This study is similar to my research to a certain extent as it focuses on cultural trauma experienced by African American people because they were deprived of a separate cultural identity throughout history. Another key similarity between this study and my research is that both works discuss the deprivation of employment opportunities to the African American people. African American people suffer from ever-present anger which is a symptom of PTSS, when they are not able to get desired job or attain specific professional goals due to institutionalized racism.

The immense increase in the ratio of the cases of police brutality against black people led people of all races and ethnicities across the world to stand up for the black community during the Black Lives Matter in 2013. This movement inspires scholars and researchers to pause and take note of the racial trauma experienced by the African American people. In this study, I have adopted Joy DeGruy Leary's theoretical construct of post traumatic slave syndrome as PTSS allows me to analyze the racial trauma resulting from multigenerational slavery, institutionalized racism and systemic oppression. My research examines the narratives of Thomas, Reynolds and Kiely as indicative of PTSS, and discusses the racial trauma experienced by African American characters in the novels due to police brutality and institutionalized racism. This study is an important contribution to race and trauma studies as it is the first work of its kind that engages with DeGruy Leary's conception of PTSS to analyze racial trauma in contemporary YA fiction, namely *The Hate U Give* and *All American Boys*.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

As my research falls under the domain of literary studies, I have adopted the qualitative research paradigm because of its association with diverse disciplines. Qualitative research entails the collection of data through senses that is further used for the purpose of explicating “the phenomena relevant to social behaviors in new and emerging theories” (Williams 68). Being a qualitative researcher, I have employed Alan McKee’s textual analysis method as it provides me with the flexibility to conduct interpretation of the selected texts in accordance to the context of Black Lives Matter. I have studied the selected texts through Joy DeGruy Leary’s theoretical lens of post traumatic slave syndrome in order to analyze the impact of racial trauma experienced by African American community due to police brutality, racial profiling and institutionalized racism. As my study falls within the realm of contemporary African American fiction, I have selected two novels that address the issues leading to Black Lives Matter. The textual evidence from the selected narratives aligns with the facets of my theoretical construct as it highlights different symptoms expressed by the members of African American community as a reaction to the routine racism prevalent within the American society and its association with the Black Lives Matter.

#### **3.2 Theoretical Framework**

Introduced by Dr. Joy DeGruy Leary, post traumatic slave syndrome is a theoretical work initially revealed in 2001 in her Ph.D dissertation titled “A Dissertation on African American Male Youth Violence: “Trying to Kill the Part of You that isn’t Loved” that was later on published in the form of a book in 2005 with the same title as her theoretical construct (Leary, “African American Male Youth Violence” 1). Leary’s theory of post traumatic slave syndrome studies the trauma experienced by African Americans living in America as a result of multigenerational oppression experienced by their ancestors. This theoretical construct reveals the darker side of a land that is referred to as a “melting pot” by scrutinizing the trauma of racism experienced by African Americans in the American society. Leary professes “Brutality still exists. The unrelenting violence and harassment that we experience,

both personally and vicariously through the media, serves to dampen much of the hope and anticipation that we will ever be full and equal participants in this land” (*Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome* 93). The initiation of the protests against police brutality in the form of Black Lives Matter in 2013 have inspired my research and led to certain questions about the forms of racial trauma experienced by African Americans in modern day America. The fact that African American people have experienced the legacy of trauma and continue to experience it with each passing day is indeed a disturbing notion. In order to understand the underlying causes of racial trauma and the reactionary symptoms depicted by African Americans in the contemporary society, I have analyzed Angie Thomas’ *The Hate U Give* and Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely’s *All American Boys* through Leary’s theoretical lens of post traumatic slave syndrome.

In order to substantiate the difference between PTSD and her theory PTSS, Leary argues that symptoms of PTSD tend to materialize once a person is exposed to “single traumatic event” in a direct or indirect manner (*PTSS* 99). For instance, if a woman gets raped or witnesses somebody getting murdered then she is most susceptible to experiencing PTSD. However, Leary maintains that PTSS differs in that “PTSD is a clinical diagnosis that when treated with medication, counseling, and other supports is a problem that can be controlled. Yet, the etiology of PTSS as a condition is inextricably linked to the social-psychological environmental factors of oppression, racism, and other stressors of human design” (“African American Male Youth Violence” 40). To put it simply, it can be affirmed that PTSS cannot be cured with any sort of clinical treatment.

In order to elucidate the phenomenon of the transmission of the trauma, Leary ponders deeply into the epigenetics of PTSD. Epigenetics studies the impact of one’s environment and behavior on his/her genes (“What Is Epigenetics?”). The research conducted within the domain of epigenetics has revealed that environment can modify the human genes and that transmission of trauma can take place through various generations (*PTSS* 101). Rachael D. Goodman has referred to this mechanism as transgenerational trauma or multigenerational trauma in her article titled “The transgenerational trauma and resilience genogram” (388). While pondering over the origin of the transgenerational trauma, Goodman reveals that this type of trauma mostly focuses on the trauma suffered by the children of the holocaust survivors, the

families of the war soldiers, the future generations of the families living in oppressive regimes and children experiencing domestic violence (388). The transgenerational trauma not only affects a person at individual level but it holds the capacity to impact him/her at family or community level (Goodman 388). According to certain excerpts quoted by Leary from different researches, a person's DNA might contain the biological memory of the stress endured by his/her ancestors as a result of which it can be proclaimed that stress, trauma and even nightmares can be transmitted from one generation to another generation (Leary, *PTSS* 101). The most significant repercussion of the transmission of trauma is that it starts reflecting in the behaviors and beliefs of the future generations and takes the form of PTSS. This clearly indicates that transgenerational trauma encompasses the intersection between historical and current trauma that is most specifically evident in the marginalized and oppressed communities such as the African American people who suffered from the trauma of slavery and are now suffering from the trauma of institutionalized racism (Goodman 388). The racial profiling and targeted killing experienced by African Americans on constant basis during the last few years made them re-live the trauma of slavery. They started feeling the insecurity and fear that their ancestors used to experience during the era of slavery. The African Americans started fearing their encounter with the law enforcing agencies because they know that despite their innocence they will be viewed with suspicion due to their African ancestry. All of these feelings make it evident that a large number of African American people are suffering from transgenerational trauma in the form of PTSS.

### **3.2.1 Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome**

While describing the post traumatic slave syndrome, Leary states:

Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome is a condition that exists when a population has experienced multigenerational trauma resulting from centuries of slavery and continues to experience oppression and institutionalized racism today. Added to this condition is a belief (real or imagined) that the benefits of the society in which they live are not accessible to them (*Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*105).

Based on this definition, PTSS can be divided into two different elements: *M* and *A*. *M* stands for the multigenerational trauma in addition to the oppression that is

continuously experienced by the African American people and A stands for the absence of opportunities to lead a better life in the society. These are the opportunities that are available to the rest of the society with the exception of one particular race. American society is divided into a hierarchy that is dominated by whites, whereas the colored communities are placed at the bottom of the hierarchy (Kirkinis et al. 2). The people dominating the hierarchy tend to enjoy all the privileges that are usually reserved for the upper class. On the other hand, the people at the bottom such as colored people experience many forms of oppression and racism in their routine lives. This racism has remained a significant part of their lives throughout the history where they suffered oppression in the form of slavery, Jim Crow laws, mass incarceration, mass lynching and now police brutality (Kirkinis et al. 2). These are the people who are deprived of every type of opportunity due to which majority of them are forced to spend their entire lives in ghettos. Leary holds that racism is the most crucial illness of the American society that is manifested in the form of ever-present racial tension (*PTSS* 12). This racial tension is evident in the form of marginalization experienced by African Americans on daily basis, the intensity of which has led to recent incidents of police brutality. The reaction to these incidents in the form of the Black Lives Matter has provided cause for belief that many African Americans suffer from PTSS. Leary has termed PTSS as a ‘syndrome’ because a syndrome is triggered due to a pattern of specific behaviors that are the result of certain circumstances (*PTSS* 105). She states that continued experiences of oppression, multigenerational trauma and lack of access to better opportunities are the circumstances that compel a person to experience PTSS. When a person is experiencing PTSS, he/she tends to demonstrate specific symptoms such as ever-present anger, vacant esteem and racist socialization (Leary, *PTSS* 105). In the next few pages, I elaborate on these three symptoms in ample detail in order to illustrate their relevance to my study.

Before progressing towards PTSS, it is crucial to understand the role of belief in the development of PTSS. Leary alleges that “belief is intricately woven into the syndrome’s fabric” which clearly indicates that belief plays crucial role in the formation of a syndrome (*PTSS* 105). If we take a look at our routine life, it will become evident on us that belief holds intense power over human perception and thoughts. Belief is so powerful that it can compel a person to develop either a positive or a negative perception regarding his life. In order to explain the significance of

belief in a syndrome, Leary provides the example of poor children living in the neighborhood of Washington DC during the early nineties. Due to their poor living conditions, even the children below the age of ten felt so hopeless that they started believing that they will die at quite an early age. As a result of their belief, they started planning their own funerals by selecting the music that they might prefer at their funeral and the clothes that they desired to be buried in (*PTSS* 105). This type of belief is also depicted by Angie Thomas in her novel *The Hate U Give* when Khalil starts selling drugs because he believes that he will not be able to earn sufficient money from any other source and DeVante becomes a King Lord because he believed that becoming part of a gang will be the only way he will remain protected in a ghetto like Garden Heights.

### 3.2.2 Vacant Esteem

While describing one of the major symptoms of PTSS, Leary states:

Vacant esteem is the state of believing oneself to have little or no worth, exacerbated by similar pronouncements of inferiority from the personal sphere and larger society. Vacant esteem is the net result of three spheres of influence - society, community and family. Society influences us through its institutions, laws, policies and media. The communities in which we live influence us through establishing norms and encouraging conformity to society at large. Our families influence us through the ways in which we are raised and groomed to take our place, as our parents see it, in the community and society (*Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome* 108). Vacant esteem, being a symptom of Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome, is transmitted from generation to generation through the family, community and society (*PTSS* 109).

When a person is experiencing PTSS, he/she exhibits certain symptoms. Vacant self-esteem is one of the major symptoms of PTSS. A person's self-esteem is directly associated with his/her value or his/her worth. His self-esteem is the judgement that he makes regarding his value or worth in other people's life. It becomes quite difficult for some people when they have to measure their own worth as they have to take account of their contributions in other people's lives. They have to analyze the role they play in other people's success (Leary, *PTSS* 107). In other words, a person's self-esteem is dependent on the belief that how other people

perceive him. For instance, if a person belongs to low social status then his belief that others have a negative perception of him will compel him to develop low self-esteem (Hughes and Demo 134). Leary proposes that there is a direct relationship between the development of esteem and the extent to human participation towards themselves and the society. In her perception, healthy self-esteem is developed when a person is praised by his significant others for his presence in their lives, when his efforts and participation in other people's lives is appreciated and when others acknowledge or recognize the meaningfulness of their own lives. On the other hand, a person suffers from vacant self-esteem if his contribution towards the society is not properly appreciated (Leary, *PTSS* 108). Similar correlation can be observed in the case where an offspring is either commended by his/her parents or criticized by his/her parents on the basis of his/her efforts. If the efforts of a child are appreciated, he/she develops a healthy self-esteem but he/she loses his/her self-esteem if he/she is criticized by his/her parents all the time.

Once a person loses his/her self-esteem, he/she also becomes prone to various other psychological issues most of which are specific to PTSD. Sule et al. affirmed that vacant esteem also triggers various other psychological issues such as “depressive feelings, negative self-perception, and hopelessness” (780). As these symptoms occur as a result of transgenerational trauma, they are much intense than the symptoms experienced by patients of PTSD (Leary, “African American Male Youth Violence” 39). A person's family plays crucial role in his/her development of vacant esteem. In the case where parents believe that they do not possess any value, their children also tend to adopt the similar notion that is demonstrated through their behavior. This particular belief is transferred from one generation to other generation through the child-rearing practices adopted by the parents suffering from vacant esteem (Leary, *PTSS* 109). For instance, the African American parents have a particular type of “talk” with their children when they enter teenage. This “talk” that African American parents have with their children is about the way they should behave if they are stopped by a police officer. During this particular talk, African American parents try hard not to villainize all the members of the law enforcement agencies while enlightening their children regarding the harm they might experience (Anderson et al. 475). Although African American parents feel quite uncomfortable while initiating



this talk, they are compelled by the vacant esteem that they experience due to ever-increasing murders of black people during certain police encounters.

Apart from a person's family, his/her community also plays a pivotal role in his/her development of vacant esteem. At the community level, people tend to develop "agreed-upon beliefs" regarding the worth of their members (Leary, *PTSS* 109). These beliefs are depicted through different standards followed by the community members including the attainment of education, the behavior that is rendered acceptable within the society, and the possibilities for professional advancement (Leary, *PTSS* 109). A large number of African American men suffer from vacant esteem due to lack of access to proper education, the compulsion to live in ghettos forced by financial instability and being deprived of every opportunity of professional advancement because of the racial injustice prevalent within the American society. In addition to family and community, society also plays a crucial role in the creation of vacant esteem within a person. Society creates discrimination through its institutions, law, media and policies as a result of which African American people start suffering from vacant esteem (Leary, *PTSS* 109). African American children are compelled to attend separate schools that are not able to maintain the quality of their education due to the lack of proper funds. African Americans also find it quite difficult to purchase their own property or set up their own businesses because the banks tend to charge them higher interest rates (Leary, *PTSS* 109). The media also plays a substantial role in this discrimination by triggering the vacant esteem within African American people by representing them as criminals, illiterate, and uncivilized men/women. Similar scenario can be seen in both of the selected texts as Khalil is depicted as a drug dealer by the media when he is killed by Officer Brian in *The Hate U Give*, whereas in *All American Boys*, Rashad is branded as a thief by the people giving interview to news reporters just because of the way he looked.

While conducting a detailed discussion of vacant esteem, Leary recounts a fight that takes place between two African American boys in 1992 (*PTSS* 110). The two boys get into a fight outside their high school in Portland and one of them pulls a gun on the other. According to eye witnesses, when one of the boys pulls a gun on the other boy, the second one remains fearless. The second boy boldly confesses that he is not afraid to die so the first boy pulls the trigger repeatedly until a bullet is shot at the fourth attempt resulting in wounding the second boy's jaw. Leary regards this incident

as a suicide attempt because both of the boys suffered from vacant esteem (*PTSS* 110). In a study conducted by Freedom Oeur titled “Recognizing Dignity: Young Black Men Growing Up in an Era of Surveillance”, the researcher reveals that certain tough policies were enforced upon the urban communities to gain control over the crime rate during 1980s (2). As a result of these harsh policies, parole, incarceration and probation turned into a regular occurrence especially for the African American men. Such harsh policies incurred a disastrous impact on the self-esteem of African American men (Oeur 2). The impact of these strict policies was also seen in the American schools where almost 20% of black boys were expelled in 2012 which is three times the suspension rate of white boys (Oeur 2). In such circumstances, one can only expect the black boys to suffer from the worst forms of vacant esteem.

### **3.2.3 Ever-Present Anger**

Another symptom that African American people suffer from due to *PTSS* is the onset of sudden anger. Leary asserts that most of the African Americans have anger embedded in their hearts due to which they are considered violent people. However, she raises the question whether African Americans are actually violent or have they just been portrayed as violent people. Referring to an incident when her friend gets angry in response to the misbehavior of a white teenager, Leary states:

It’s as if there is a wellspring of anger that lies just below the surface of many African Americans, and it doesn’t take much for it to emerge and be expressed. This seems to be especially true for many black men. This ever-present anger is one of the most pronounced behavior patterns associated with Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (*PTSS* 112).

Leary’s observation makes it evident that the majority of the African Americans still harbor severe anger against the years of torment their ancestors experienced during the era of slavery. Even though they are currently leading free lives, they find it really hard to suppress this anger whenever they experience any instance of racism. Leary acknowledges that there are various moments in the life of an African American when he/she hears the accusation that he/she is leading a free life since the last one hundred and fifty years so he/she must stop being angry. However, no one understands that irrespective of the freedom enjoyed by African American people, they experience oppression on almost daily basis. Black people

living in different parts of the world were infuriated when the video of George Floyd being pinned to the ground with the knee of a white police officer on his neck went viral on social media. This anger is stemmed from the fact that despite living in a modern world, the systemic racism against black people has dragged them back to the era of slavery. Social scientists have characterized anger as a “mobilizing emotion” as it compels people to develop the belief that a threat can only be resolved if they initiate a political action and then act in accordance to that belief (Banks et al. para 3). Shayla C. Nunnally, a renowned political scientist, affirms that African American people hold extreme distrust regarding the ability of America’s political system to resolve their problems as a result of which they get actively involved in black organizations or plan protests so their racial group can be empowered (Banks et al. para 3). George Floyd’s incident impacted African American people in such a way that they held Black Lives Matter protests in order to demonstrate their anger against police brutality in front of the entire world. The frustration among African Americans against institutionalized racism compels them to express their anger at a transnational level.

While explaining the underlying causes for ever-present anger, Leary discusses the example of a black executive who feels angry every time he is denied the due promotion irrespective of his excellent professional performance. As a result, he becomes aggressively determined to achieve that promotion. However, when he is still denied promotion at the next two opportunities, he gets infuriated as he starts believing that he will never be able to achieve his goal. In such situation, some of the people might believe in working even harder the next time but if a person is denied an opportunity for longer time irrespective of his hard work, working hard no longer remains an option for him (Leary, *PTSS* 113). This is the point where a person starts experiencing intense anger that sometimes culminates in violence. Dr. James R. Samuels also stresses the same point by claiming that “In its simplest form anger is the normal emotional response to a blocked goal. Often, if a person’s goal remains blocked over time, they will begin to consider the possibility of failure and so experience fear, and when we are fearful we also lash out in anger” (Leary, *PTSS* 113). So if a person is prevented from achieving his goals, anger is the most probable reaction that will be demonstrated by him.

African Americans experience ever-present anger because the dominant group has refused their place within the American society. According to Leary “One of the most significant goals blocked consistently by the dominant culture has been that of the African American community’s integration into the larger society, with all the responsibilities, rights, and privileges concomitant with membership” (*PTSS* 114). This has also been emphasized by William Grier and Price Cobbs in their book *Black Rage* where they claim that history of slavery and the failure of American society to “integrate” the black community within America’s socio-political domain, has triggered a long-lasting rage within the African American people (Leary, *PTSS* 114). This rage is triggered in African Americans because for years they are comforted with the lie that they have equal access to every opportunity in America but the fact is that they are at severe socioeconomic disadvantage due to racial injustice in American society (Mabry and Kiecolt 85). Furthermore, they are compelled to believe that they are completely free and possess equal rights. They also have equal access to the basic facilities that are available to the white Americans. Although the situation for African American people has changed a lot in the American society, the fact cannot be denied that they still have a long way to go before acquiring complete equality.

Another major reason due to which African American people experience ever-present anger can be traced back to the time of slavery. White people used to demonstrate violent behavior during the period of enslavement where the slaves were held in captivity against their will, punished through beatings and kept restrained in order to prevent their escape. In her book, Leary describes slavery as a violent and angry process (*PTSS* 114). African people developed this innate belief that if they want their needs to be met then they will have to incorporate anger and violence into their lives. Anger and violence were the two elements that played significant role in the continuation of slavery and they also remained the crucial elements after the abolishment of slavery (Leary, *PTSS* 114). This very anger led them to initiate the Black Lives Matter in 2013 when George Zimmerman was acquitted in the Trayvon Martin murder case and walked out of court with a big smile on his face (Luscombe para 1 & 2). African Americans realize that if they want police brutality, racial profiling and institutionalized racism against them to stop, they need to express their anger.

### **3.2.4 Racist Socialization**

The third symptom an African American person exhibits while experiencing post traumatic slave syndrome is racist socialization. While explaining this aspect of PTSS, Leary writes:

One of the most insidious and pervasive symptoms of post traumatic slave syndrome is our adoption of the slave master's value system. At this value system's foundation is the belief that white, and all things associated with whiteness, are superior; and that black, and all things associated with blackness, are inferior (116).

Through the above-mentioned words, Leary discusses the third symptom of PTSS that is exhibited by a large number of African American people. The African Americans believe that whiteness is associated with superiority and blackness is associated with inferiority so they tend to adopt the attire of slave masters. They adopt this strategy as a defense mechanism in order to protect themselves from the systemic racism and police brutality. They believe that if they dress, behave and talk like white Americans, they might be able to become a part of the white American community. This behavior is demonstrated by the characters of both of the selected novels. In Thomas' *The Hate U Give*, Starr tends to behave like white Americans when she is among her school fellows at the Williamson. On the other hand, in Reynolds and Kiely's *All American Boys*, Rashad's father tries to convince him to dress up properly like white Americans in order to avoid being racially profiled.

Franz Fanon discusses the entire essence of racist socialization in his book *Black Skin, White Masks*. Upon seeing Fanon, a little girl exclaims "Dirty nigger!" (Fanon et al. 82). These words uttered by the little girl demonstrate the disgust that many white people express towards black skin. White people associate blackness of one's skin with something inferior. Racist socialization is a belief regarding the inferiority of blackness that is embedded into the minds of African American people right from their birth. The origin of this belief can be traced back to the discriminatory and abusive behavior that black people suffered during the era of slavery. Blacks continued to experience disgust and hatred on the basis of their skin in the form of institutionalized oppression even after the abolishment of slavery. Fanon writes in *Black Skin, White Masks*:

The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly; look, a nigger, it's cold, the nigger is shivering, the nigger is shivering because he is cold, the little boy is trembling because he is afraid of the nigger, the nigger is shivering with cold, that cold that goes through your bones, the handsome little boy is trembling because he thinks that the nigger is quivering with rage, the little white boy throws himself into his mother's arms: Mama, the nigger's going to eat me up (86).

In this passage, Fanon describes the reaction a white boy demonstrates after encountering a Negro. Fanon uses the word "handsome" for the white boy in order to emphasize the superior looks of the white boy in comparison to the Negro (86). The Negro on the other hand is described through degrading adjectives such as "animal", "mean", "bad" and "ugly" (Fanon 86). Negro is described as a being that is inhuman and harbors evil intentions towards white people. Furthermore, Fanon makes it evident that the Negro is shivering from cold but the white boy feels afraid because he thinks that the Negro is shivering because he is furious (Fanon 86). The way the little boy asserts that the Negro might eat him up makes it evident that he is equating Negro with a beast. Due to such demeaning behavior of white people towards African Americans, they started adopting the beliefs and attitudes of white people. Black people believed that by behaving like white people, the society will spare them from all the racial injustice they experience due to their skin color. While revealing the reason behind black people's adoption of slave masters' attitude, Leary further states:

Whites have consistently been portrayed and perceived as superior, powerful, and right. For those who were educated and could read, book after book asserted that blacks, as well as other people of color, were dirty, lustful, stupid, immoral, and incapable of reasoning...inferior to whites in every way (*PTSS* 118).

Due to the dominant and powerful position of white slave masters, black people wanted to possess the qualities that would make them similar to the white slave masters. Blacks not only wanted to possess the qualities of white people but they also wanted to carry the physical features similar to white people because of the extra privileges that were being enjoyed by them. Leary reveals that when white owners had children with their black mistresses, they would sometimes let those

children work inside the house as they had straighter hair and fairer complexion in comparison to rest of the slaves. This is why black slaves believed that those with straighter hair and lighter skin enjoyed better lifestyle among them (Leary, *PTSS* 117). Even in the current age, racist socialization has turned into a way for African Americans to cope with the racial injustice prevalent against them in the form of police brutality. The African American identity of all the victims of police brutality endorses the fact that American police associates dark skin color with crime and evil intentions. With ever-increasing cases of police brutality in United States, African Americans strive to refrain from showing their African-ness in a white society. However, the problem is that even if blacks adopt the attitudes of white Americans, they cannot change their identity.

The history of police brutality proves that racist socialization cannot help black people gain control over this issue. Police brutality dates back to the time when after the abolishment of slavery, white people rendered it crucial to maintain their control over blacks due to their uncivilized behavior. This objective was achieved with the help of “slave patrols” that maintained control over black people through violent punishments. Leary continues:

Policing continues to represent one of the most pervasive and obvious examples of racial inequality in law enforcement. After slavery there was a paranoid response to the fear of reprisal from freed slaves. A little-known or discussed piece of American policing is its predecessor during and after slavery, the “slave patrols”. These patrols were designed to control, mediate, and restrict the movements of blacks through intimidating acts of terrorism and violence. Most scholars agree that this system of patrols paved the way for what we now have come to accept as American policing (*PTSS* 86).

The killing of African American people in different incidents of police brutality is fairly recent example of slave patrolling. In the current age, the white police officers have taken the place of slave masters who tend to discipline the African American people through the use of their authority. Vacant esteem, ever-present anger, and racist socialization, the three symptoms of PTSS are evident in a large number of African Americans due to the institutionalized racism and systematic oppression experienced by them in every aspect of life.

### 3.3 Research Method

Textual analysis is considered to be an effective method in qualitative research because it involves close-reading of the texts and analysis of the details hidden within that text without making unnecessary assumptions. While explicating the meaning of “text”, Bonnie S. Brennen asserts that “In qualitative research we use the term text to describe more than a printed document, textbook or a written cell phone message. In textual analysis we see texts as cultural artifacts, material documentary evidence that is used to make sense out of our lives” (193). In order to identify the factors that contribute to the racial trauma of African American people in American society, I have analyzed Angie Thomas’ *The Hate U Give* and Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely’s *All American Boys*.

I have adopted Alan McKee’s method of textual analysis in order to study the selected texts. Introduced in 2001, Alan McKee’s textual analysis is a widely used method for the examination of an issue of socio-cultural nature as it enables the researcher to gather information with the help of sense-making practices. Sense-making practices are the practices through which the researchers conduct “forensic analysis” in order to analyze the text and gather clues to interpret the text (McKee, *Textual Analysis* 63). McKee claims “Texts are the material traces that are left of the practice of sense-making” (*Textual Analysis* 15). This means that during textual analysis, researchers use text as the empirical evidence in order to determine how other people develop sense regarding the world. McKee’s method of textual analysis is quite flexible as it does not focus on deriving any particular correct interpretation due to the belief that there are a “large number of possible interpretations” for every text (McKee, “Beginner’s Guide” 4). This method puts a major emphasis on context for the process of analysis. Therefore, in addition to the selected texts, I have also consulted newspaper articles, academic and literary journals, social media content, and different books relevant to my study.



## CHAPTER 4

### POST TRAUMATIC SLAVE SYNDROME IN *THE HATE*

#### *U GIVE*

*“Simply put, white cops are afraid of black men. We don’t talk about it, we pretend it doesn’t exist, we claim “color blindness,” we say white officers treat black men the same way they treat white men. But that’s a lie. In fact, the bigger, the darker the black man the greater the fear. The African American community knows this. Hell, most whites know it. Yet, even though it’s a central, if not the defining ingredient in the makeup of police racism, white cops won’t admit it to themselves, or to others.”(Stamper 92)*

#### **4.1 Introduction**

Initiation of the Black Lives Matter took place in 2013 after George Zimmerman got acquitted in the Trayvon Martin case. From then on, every single incident of police brutality resulting in the death of an African American played significant role in the continuation of this movement. Over the years, many incidents of police brutality made it to the headlines such as the death of Eric Garner on 17<sup>th</sup> of July, 2014 (“George Floyd: Timeline of Black Deaths”). Garner lost his life in a way that can be rendered similar to the George Floyd incident. During his arrest for alleged involvement in illegal sale of cigarettes, Garner was pinned to ground and held in a chokehold due to which he suffocated. While in a chokehold, he pleaded 11 times about not being able to breathe but the police officers did not listen to him (“George Floyd: Timeline of Black Deaths”). Another disturbing incident of police brutality took place on 22<sup>nd</sup> of November, 2014 when a twelve year old African American boy Tamir Rice was shot by police officers while he was playing with a toy gun (“George Floyd: Timeline Of Black Deaths”). These deaths indeed triggered protests at national level but it was the murder of Michael Brown on 9<sup>th</sup> of August, 2014 by a white police officer Darren Wilson that compelled the movement to acquire international status (Ray et al. 1795). Black people in different parts of the world started marching the streets in order to register their protest against racial profiling,

police brutality and institutionalized racism prevalent against them. The major demand of these protestors was to bring police reforms so police brutality against black people can be controlled (Ray et al. 1795). However, the fact is that Black Lives Matter was not just initiated to bring the police reforms but to revolutionize the entire criminal justice system of United States (Simkins). Adopting Alan McKee's textual analysis method, I scrutinize Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give* in order to study the manifestation of racial trauma in the lives of African American people through Joy DeGruy Leary's theoretical framework of post traumatic slave syndrome.

## 4.2 Synopsis

Inspired from the Black Lives Matter, Thomas' *The Hate U Give* depicts the story of Starr Carter who witnesses the death of her childhood friend Khalil Harris when a police officer shoots him three times without warning or reason. The plot introduces Starr at a party with her friend Kenya who is related to her through Starr and Kenya's half-brother Seven. Starr's half-brother Seven shares Starr's father and Kenya's mother, Iesha. Although the party takes place in Starr's hometown, Garden Heights, she still feels isolated because of the conflicting nature of the two worlds she dwells in since she joined Williamson Prep. Due to her enrolment at Williamson Prep, she not only behaves like white people but also avoids using the slang words that are normally used by the African Americans. On the other hand, she feels completely at home in Garden Heights. However, Starr is aware of the fact that Garden Heights is a ghetto due to the infestation of poverty, violence and the rule of gangster King Lord. At the Big D's party Starr comes across her childhood friend Khalil and both of them leave the party together when a fight breaks out. As Khalil is taking Starr home, Officer One-Fifteen stops them on the road and asks Khalil to provide his "License, registration, and proof of insurance" (Thomas 25). Khalil fulfills the police officer's demand but due to a bitter exchange between Khalil and Officer One-Fifteen, the officer asks him to step out of the car and stand against it. While checking on Starr, Khalil makes an abrupt movement as a result of which the Officer One-Fifteen shoots him three times without warning. Starr who is witnessing the entire incident from the car rushes to help Khalil only to find that he is already dead.

After experiencing the trauma of Khalil's targeted killing by Officer One-Fifteen, Starr remains tense around her boyfriend Chris and even her Williamson Prep

friends Hailey and Maya. However, she starts having conflicting thoughts regarding Khalil's innocence when King Lord walks in at Khalil's funeral and puts a grey bandana on Khalil's casket. The grey bandana symbolizes Khalil's association with the King Lord. Starr's doubts are later on clarified by DeVante who tells her that Khalil refused to join King Lord even after King Lord's persistent attempts to convince Khalil. After Khalil's funeral, Starr is approached by an attorney and a human rights activist Ms. O'frah who reveals that she is fighting to get justice for Khalil and that she is willing to represent Starr pro-bono as Starr is the prime witness of the incident. She also speculates that law-enforcement authorities will not convict Officer Brian aka Officer One-Fifteen because they strongly believe that he shot Khalil in self-defense. Later on, Ms. O'frah's speculation turns out to be true when the grand jury acquits Officer Brian in Khalil Harris case. After Officer Brian's acquittal, Starr participates actively in the protests seeking justice for Khalil.

### **4.3 Vacant Esteem**

One of the symptoms of post traumatic slave syndrome mentioned by Leary in her conceptual framework is called vacant esteem which in layman's terms can be explained as the absence of one's worth or having little worth. Leary asserts "Vacant esteem is the state of believing oneself to have little or no worth, exacerbated by similar pronouncements of inferiority from the personal sphere and larger society" (*Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome* 108). When Starr and Khalil are stopped by Officer One-Fifteen, she recalls the instructions given to her by her father as to how she should behave in such situation. She refers to those instructions as the "talk" that her parents had with her (Thomas 24). Due to significant increase in the ratio of incidents of police brutality towards black American people, the black American parents feel compelled to have a "talk" with their children in order to guide them regarding the way they should behave and protect themselves from harm during a racialized encounter with the police officers (Anderson et al.476). This type of talk is specific only to the black people as they tend to experience racial profiling on almost regular basis. Being racially profiled by police on regular basis not only affects the self-esteem of African American people but also triggers various other psychological problems in them including severe anxiety and depression. When African American parents talk about the appropriate behavior in case of an encounter with a police officer, they unknowingly and unfeelingly transfer their low self-esteem to the next

generation. Equipping their children with the notion that police officers might adopt racist behavior towards them makes the African American children feel that they have lesser worth in comparison to white American children. Even before their parents have this talk with them, these children start experiencing vacant esteem because it is genetically transferred to them by their parents.

During her encounter with Officer One-Fifteen, Starr recalls the time when her father wanted to have the talk with her but her mother got angry because according to her, Starr was too young for that type of talk (Thomas 24). However, her father argued that even at the age of sixteen, Starr was in grave danger of experiencing police brutality. While giving instructions, Starr's father told her to do what she was asked to do by the police. He particularly emphasized on the point that she must not make any sort of movement and keep her hands in sight. She must also stay silent until she is asked to answer any particular question (Thomas 24). Starr further narrates, "I remember something else Daddy said. If you're with somebody, you better hope they don't have nothing on them, or both of y'all going down" (Thomas 25). So when she is stopped by the police officer, she strictly follows all of her father's instructions and hopes that somebody also had the similar talk with Khalil so he also remains careful in the presence of a police officer (Thomas 24). However, Khalil exhibits reckless behavior towards Officer One-Fifteen which either means that nobody had the "talk" with him or he does not care about the consequences if somebody did have the "talk". Khalil's reckless behavior can be attributed to the fact that at such a young age, he was the only breadwinner of his family. His father is not mentioned in the novel and his mother is described as a drug-addict who lived on the streets. Khalil lives with his grandmother Ms. Rosalie who is suffering from cancer due to which she also lost her job. Khalil also had a younger brother who was not old enough to earn money so technically, Khalil was the man of the family. This is why when Officer One-Fifteen stops Khalil's car, Khalil demonstrates fearless attitude towards the police officer. When Officer One-Fifteen asks him for "License, registration, and proof of insurance", Khalil starts arguing with the police officer (Thomas 25). He enquires about the actual reason due to which the police officer stopped his car. However, Officer One-Fifteen not only avoids answering him but remains persistent in his demand. Due to Khalil's arrogance, Starr gets terrified and asks Khalil to provide the police officer with the documents he was asking for

(Thomas 25). When Officer One-Fifteen demands Khalil to show the car's documents, Khalil is justified in asking the reason due to which Officer One-Fifteen stopped them. However, Officer One-Fifteen's persistent demand regarding car's documents and his refusal to answer Khalil's questions makes it evident that he was racially profiling Khalil and Starr. Starr's fear at this point clearly symbolizes vacant esteem that is transferred to her from her parents. She knows that if Khalil refuses to cooperate with the police officer or questions his actions, something bad can happen to them.

The moment when Officer One-Fifteen shoots Khalil is so sudden for Starr that she starts screaming. Khalil falls to the ground after getting shot and Starr rushes towards him against her instinct. This entire moment where Khalil gets shot by Officer One-Fifteen and falls to the ground reminds Starr of her childhood trauma when she lost her childhood friend Natasha. "I'm ten again, watching Natasha drop" (Thomas 27). Although Starr is experiencing another trauma in the form of Khalil's death, at the same time she is exhibiting the symptoms of PTSD by getting flashbacks of Natasha's death. The American Psychiatric Association refers to such reactions as dissociative reactions (271). A person usually experiences this symptom right after the traumatic event. While exhibiting dissociative reactions, an "individual feels or acts as if the traumatic event(s) were recurring (American Psychiatric Association 271). The trauma of Khalil's death compels Starr to relive the instance of Natasha's death so when Khalil falls to the ground, she feels as if she is watching Natasha falling to the ground. Starr witnessed the death of her childhood friend Natasha when she was only ten years old. Natasha was also ten at that time and, just like Khalil, she was also shot three times while playing with the water shooting out of a hydrant in Garden Heights. An unknown person with a tattooed arm shot her from his car. The fact that Natasha's murderer had tattoos on his arm indicates that he might be a King Lord or any other gangster. The shootings among the gang members are quite common in the ghetto Starr belongs to. While reflecting on the harsh memories of Natasha's death, Starr recollects:

She looked scared. We were ten, we didn't know what happened after you died. Hell, I still don't know, and she was forced to find out, even if she didn't wanna find out.

I know she didn't. Just like Khalil didn't (Thomas 33).

Sule et al. affirms that vacant esteem also triggers various other psychological issues such as “depressive feelings, negative self-perception, and hopelessness” (780). The incident of Khalil becoming a victim of police brutality witnessed by Starr not only decreases her self-esteem but also makes her experience certain symptoms that are specific to PTSD. According to Leary, the symptoms of PTSD are demonstrated by a person who is exposed to a “single traumatic event” in a direct or indirect manner (*PTSS* 99). As far as Starr is concerned, she does not witness a “single traumatic event” but two major traumatic events, i.e., murder of Natasha and targeted killing of Khalil by Officer One-Fifteen. Her reaction to these traumatic events intensifies due to the fear of racial profiling and police brutality transferred to her by her parents.

Starr is in shock and denial when her parents arrive at the crime scene to take her home. While expressing her feelings, Starr comments “My stomach twists. All of that blood, and it came out of him. Some of it is on my hands, on Seven's hoodie, on my sneakers. An hour ago we were laughing and catching up. Now his blood . . .” (Thomas 30 & 31). Starr's exposure to Khalil's blood is also one of the factors due to which she starts experiencing the symptoms of PTSD. Her mind keeps on recalling the details of Khalil's killing. She feels severe anxiety while thinking about Khalil's blood coming out of his body. While checking up on Khalil, Starr's hands and her brother's hoodie (that she was wearing at the time) get stained by Khalil's blood. The sudden death of Khalil is also one of the factors that contribute towards Starr's onset of PTSD. While riding with Khalil in the car, she is recalling her memories with him with no notion of Khalil's impending death. However, things take a drastic turn after Officer One-Fifteen shoots Khalil because while running towards Khalil and even after watching him die, Starr is unable to comprehend that she has just lost her childhood friend. Even after the arrival of her parents, Starr is in a state of shock and is unaware of her surroundings which according to the American Psychiatric Association is a symptom of PTSD (271). As things gradually become clear in her mind, Starr also starts experiencing further symptoms of PTSD such as flashbacks, nightmare and anxiety. According to the American Psychiatric Association, a person might experience PTSD after “Experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic event(s)” (271). The most common examples of this criterion include the repeated exposure of police officers to the details of child abuse or the

exposure of first responders to human remains (American Psychiatric Association 271). In Starr's case, she was the first one on the crime scene as she was in Khalil's car while he was shot by Officer One-Fifteen so it was quite natural of her to experience PTSD. Later on that night, Starr suffers from another symptom of PTSD when she remains disturbed due to the constant occurrence of nightmares (Thomas 31). According to the American Psychiatric Association, the "Recurrent distressing dreams in which the content and/or affect of the dream are related to the traumatic event(s)" are a symptom of PTSD (271). Starr's nightmares are triggered after Khalil's shooting due to which it is quite evident that they are a symptom of PTSD. Although Starr has already witnessed the death of Natasha, Khalil's tragic death proves too much for her because she not only loses a childhood friend again but also faces a near-death experience during her encounter with Officer One-Fifteen. While explicating the differences between PTSD and PTSS, Leary states that "PTSD is a clinical diagnosis that when treated with medication, counseling, and other supports is a problem that can be controlled. Yet, the etiology of PTSS as a condition is inextricably linked to the social-psychological environmental factors of oppression, racism, and other stressors of human design" ("African American Male Youth Violence" 40). Racism as a social-psychological factor incurs negative impact on Starr. After experiencing police brutality, Starr not only sees Khalil in her nightmares but also Natasha who begs Starr to follow her towards the fire hydrant where she was killed (Thomas 53). Starr's nightmares indicate that Natasha and Khalil are important part of her life and she felt secure with them when they were alive. Their loss represents the sense of insecurity and worthlessness during two important phases of Starr's life. Natasha's death during her childhood compels Starr to feel worthless and fear the possibility that she could have been at Natasha's place at the time of her death. Similarly, Khalil's death during Starr's teenage years also makes her feel extremely insecure as she fears that she could have been killed instead of Khalil. Due to her exposure to sudden deaths of two of her childhood friends, she also starts fearing the possibility of becoming a victim of police brutality in the future. Starr's worthlessness is basically associated with the racial profiling and targeted police killing of African American people at the hands of some white police men. Her self-worth also deteriorates because of the belief that her life could end any second just because she belongs to an oppressed race.

Although it might be argued that Starr's traumatic nightmares indicate that she might be suffering from PTSD, Leary emphasizes that PTSD is experienced by people who have a single exposure to trauma such as a child witnessing the murder of a stranger. Belonging to an African American family, Starr experiences different incidents of racism on regular basis. For instance, when she re-blogs the picture of a fourteen-year-old African American child Emmet Till who was brutally murdered in 1955 for whistling at a white woman, her Williamson Prep friend Hailey unfollows her on Tumblr (Thomas 80). In addition to routine racism, she also inherited racial trauma from her parents who in turn experienced racism in their everyday lives. As stated by Leary, the individuals and families who had first-hand experience with the trauma of slavery raised their children while battling with the symptoms of PTSD ("African American Male Youth Violence" 41). As a result, their children bore the consequences of slavery by adopting the "behaviors and attitudes" of their traumatized parents (Leary, "African American Male Youth Violence" 41& 42). While discussing the stressors that cause PTSD, Leary further states that any one of the stressors can prove sufficient in triggering PTSD (*PTSS* 98). However, African Americans tend to experience more than one stressors of PTSD and a large number of these people have experienced these stressors again and again (Leary, *PTSS* 98). Although it is Starr's first time witnessing the police brutality with her own eyes, due to her father's "talk" and her previous experience with violence in Garden Heights in the form of Natasha's death, the fear of such a traumatic incident lingers in her mind long before the occurrence of this incident. According to Leary "African Americans have continued to experience traumas similar to those enslaved in the past. Once again, even more impactful than the physical assault on their bodies was the daily assault on their psyches" (*PTSS* 100). Just like a large number of people of her community, Starr too continues to experience the trauma of racism in her everyday life which makes her experiences similar to those of the African slaves. The constant assault of these traumas on her mind triggers the symptoms of *PTSS*.

Following Khalil's death, Starr starts contemplating her worth in the gaze of the American society. When she wakes up next morning, she is profoundly worried regarding her future as she is the only witness to Khalil's murder. After she comes out of the room, she asks her mother "What's gonna happen to me when the details do come out?" (Thomas 38). Her mother feels confused and asks her what she means by



that question. Starr's response to her mother's question highlights the fears embedded in her mind as a result of her loss of self-esteem due to the incident of police brutality. She lost Natasha during her childhood and now, she loses Khalil, so naturally she fears that she will be the next one to die. While expressing her fear, Starr says to her mother, "Besides the cop, I'm the only person who was there. And you've seen stuff like this. It ends up on national news. People get death threats, cops target them, all kinds of stuff"(Thomas 38). She is afraid of the impending circumstances as she is the only one who was with Khalil at the time when he was killed. She is the only one who knows that Officer One-Fifteen killed Khalil unjustly due to which the police will stalk her. She feels afraid that she might receive death threats from the cops.

Leary is of the opinion that "society contributes to the formation of PTSS and vacant esteem in a number of ways; through its laws, institutions, and policies, as well as through the media" (*PTSS* 109). The way Officer One-Fifteen kills Khalil and points his gun at Starr without any hesitation, makes it evident to Starr that her life does not have any worth in the American society. Prior to Khalil's killing, Starr was mentally prepared for her encounter with the police due to her father's guidance but never in her dreams had she thought that it could be so gruesome. Starr thought that nothing could go wrong if she followed her father's guidelines during her encounter with a police officer. However, the incident with Khalil and Officer One-Fifteen made her aware of the brutal intentions and hatred carried by some of the white police officers for African American people. After expressing her fears to her parents, Starr thinks:

I've seen it happen over and over again: a black person gets killed just for being black, and all hell breaks loose. I've tweeted RIP hashtags, reblogged pictures on Tumblr, and signed every petition out there. I always said that if I saw it happen to somebody, I would have the loudest voice, making sure the world knew what went down. Now I am that person, and I'm too afraid to speak (Thomas 38).

In the past, Starr uses social media with great dedication to support the injustice against the black people. She shares tweets in support of the African American people who became the victims of police brutality. She signs petitions in order to make a difference as it was her way to raise voice against this injustice. At

that time, she is under the impression that she possessed a worth, that her life mattered. However, the atrocity she experiences as a result of her encounter with Officer One-Fifteen compels her to lose her entire confidence. After Khalil's targeted killing, she is afraid to speak up because she herself has become a victim of police brutality. Starr's fears indicate that she is suffering from vacant esteem which is one of the major symptoms of PTSS.

Starr's fear of police brutality triggers intense psychological distress due to which she starts suffering from severe anxiety whenever she comes across a police officer. When Starr's maternal Uncle Carlos informs her that she is required at the police station for the investigation, she starts feeling anxiety as the mere thought of being in the vicinity of a police officer is traumatizing for her. She wishes that she could say "yes" to her uncle as it is a cop she would be talking to. On the other hand, she feels afraid of talking to a cop because the person who killed Khalil was also a cop (Thomas 58). Although she wants to play her part in seeking justice for Khalil, she is unable to do so because of the fear she experiences as a result of her vacant esteem. While experiencing vacant esteem, Starr is also exhibiting the symptoms of PTSD that make it evident that she has not yet recovered from her previous trauma and yet has to confront another trauma. The PTSD suffered by Starr starts to interfere with her day to day activities in such a way that she is unable to perform the simple act of ironing her Williamson Polo shirt without crying. Furthermore, the day when she is supposed to meet with the detectives, her anxiety increases to such an extent that she feels like she might vomit at any moment (Thomas 70). This symptom of PTSD displayed by Starr is described by the American Psychiatric Association as "Avoidance of or efforts to avoid external reminders (people, places, conversations, activities, objects, situations) that arouse distressing memories, thoughts, or feelings about or closely associated with the traumatic event(s)" (271). Starr is afraid to go to the police stations because they remind her of Officer One-Fifteen who killed Khalil right in front of Starr's eyes. However, at this point, it can also be said that Starr's PTSD-like symptoms might actually be the symptoms of PTSS because for her police station is a symbol of systemic oppression that triggers her trauma of the night Khalil died.

Due to the effects of PTSS, Starr starts losing control over her thoughts. When she is sitting at the police station with her mother, her father's instructions regarding

the police encounter repeatedly echo in her mind. “*Keep your hands visible. No sudden moves .Only speak when spoken to*” (Thomas 97). Starr’s fear of police officers is so contagious that her brother Seven also experiences this fear while driving towards his stepmother (and Starr’s biological mother) from school. Starr narrates that Seven’s behavior suddenly turns cautious when they stop at a red light. Previously, he was teasing his younger brother Sekani but as the patrol car of Riverton Hills Police Station approaches them, he suddenly freezes in his place. There is a sudden tension within the car as both Seven and Starr wait for the patrol car to pass by. Their bodies relax when the signal light turns green and the police car moves forward. Seven’s meticulous attitude clearly demonstrates that Maverick (his and Starr’s father) also had the talk with him and he is also impacted by the trauma his sister experienced just a day ago.

According to Leary, community also plays crucial role in determining the self-esteem of a person. Leary articulates that “at the community level, groups of people establish agreed-upon beliefs about their members’ worth, beliefs that are reflected in the community’s standards and values regarding acceptable behavior, educational attainment, and professional possibilities” (PTSS 109). As far as African American people are concerned, they are compelled to believe that they are worthless due to the lack of opportunities, institutionalized racism and social oppression experienced by them on regular basis. The reason behind the vacant esteem experienced by African American people is discussed in a conversation that takes place between Starr and her father when she returns from Uncle Carlos’s house. This entire conversation is based on famous African American rapper Tupac’s philosophy of THUG LIFE that emphasizes on the oppression experienced by African American people. Before Khalil gets killed by Officer Brian, he explains the meaning of Tupac’s THUG LIFE to Starr. He enlightens Starr that by THUG LIFE, Tupac means “The Hate U Give Little Infants F\*\*\*s Everybody” (Thomas 21). So during their conversation when Maverick asks Starr whether she knows the meaning of Tupac’s THUG LIFE, she acknowledges that Khalil has already told her. When her father inquires about its meaning, Starr responds by stating “Khalil said it’s about what society feeds us as youth and how it comes back and bites them later, I think it’s about more than youth though. I think it’s about us, period” (Thomas 167). Where Khalil claims that Tupac’s words signify the negative impact of the hatred received by the little infants, Starr is

of the opinion that Tupac talks about the sufferings of the entire African American community.

As the conversation between Maverick and Starr advances, they start to discuss the actual reasons that lead African American people to experience vacant esteem. Leary states that “African Americans have been and continue to be disproportionately represented in our penal institutions. African Americans often live in neighborhoods where schools are functionally segregated and lack adequate revenue to sustain them” (*PTSS* 109). Starr and Maverick also raise similar points during their conversation. When Starr tells Maverick she believes Tupac refers to “us” in his THUG LIFE, Maverick asks her that who she is referring to by saying “us”. Starr responds “Black people, minorities, poor people. Everybody at the bottom in society” (Thomas 167). In response to Starr’s words, Maverick claims that it means Starr is referring to the “oppressed” (Thomas 167). Maverick further asks Starr about the type of hate that is being directed towards the “little infants” (Thomas 167). When Starr responds with the word “Racism”, Maverick asks her to conduct a deeper analysis of the problem by broadening her perspective. Tupac’s THUG LIFE is a complete philosophy encompassing the problems experienced by black people living in ghettos. They are the victims of social oppression and racism as a result of which they are not able to improve their living conditions and fall deeper into the pit of crime. As Khalil’s situation is an appropriate example of Tupac’s THUG LIFE, Maverick asks Starr to conduct an analysis of Khalil’s life.

While revealing one of the reasons for the vacant esteem experienced by African Americans, Leary proclaims that media plays crucial role in portraying African Americans as “criminals, disadvantaged, academically deficient, and sexually irresponsible in order to deteriorate their self-esteem (*PTSS* 107 & 108). However, the conversation between Maverick and Starr reveals some of the more disturbing details regarding the elements that contribute towards the vacant esteem of African American people. Maverick suggests Starr to broaden her perspective in order to understand the reasons due to which African American people suffer from vacant esteem. He tells her to analyze Khalil’s life and asks her about Khalil’s situation prior to his death. Starr reluctantly confesses that Khalil used to sell drugs and there is a possibility that he was also a gang member. Maverick then asks Starr about the reason due to which Khalil and a number of other African American people from Garden Heights are

involved in drug dealing. Starr responds to Maverick's question by referring to the financial needs of Khalil and other African American people living in Garden Heights. Furthermore, she states that these people do not have other ways to earn money as Garden Heights is a ghetto. While showing his approval to Starr's response, Maverick claims that lack of opportunities and low quality education are some of the major reasons due to which African American people living in the ghettos are compelled to get involved with the drugs (Thomas 168). The lack of opportunities makes them suffer from vacant esteem as a result of which they either sell drugs or consume drugs. The most distressing outcome of this situation is that once they start consuming drugs, they are not able to get a proper job and if they get involved with the drug selling business, their tainted reputation deprives them of the opportunity to get a white collar job.

#### **4.4 Ever-Present Anger**

The institutionalized racism against black people forces them to express anger sometimes. Such anger is also demonstrated by Khalil when he is stopped by Officer One-Fifteen, as Khalil and Starr were not violating any law and were simply minding their own business. The conversation between Khalil and Officer One-Fifteen clearly indicates his annoyance.

“What you pull us over for?”

“License, registration, and proof of insurance.”

“I said what you pull us over for?”(Thomas 25).

The biggest mistake Khalil makes is that he starts questioning a police officer's actions. He feels irritated that Officer One-Fifteen stops them for no particular reason and he is also aware why he and Starr were stopped by that police officer. Khalil's arrogance can be associated with Tupac's philosophy of THUG LIFE. Adam Levin, while discussing Tupac's philosophy in his article “Finding the ‘Herstorical’ Narrative in Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give*”, renders it to be gendered due to the use of the word “thug” (152). He further states that by using the word “thug”, people generally refer to black men who refuse to live up to the standards of white America and resultantly resort to the life of violence and crime (Levin 152). In order to fulfill his responsibilities towards his family, Khalil becomes a drug dealer at

a young age. His reaction towards Officer One-Fifteen is not that of a teenage boy but of an African American man who is frustrated because he is deprived of all the opportunities to move forward in the society. According to Leary, “Slavery was an inherently angry and violent process. White people modeled anger and violence in every aspect of enslavement. Individuals were forcibly captured, chained, and regularly beaten into submission over hundreds of years. Any group of people living under such harsh conditions would eventually learn the ways of their captors” (*PTSS* 114). Khalil’s demonstration of anger towards Officer One-Fifteen is a clear symptom of *PTSS* because just like all of the other African Americans he had also been experiencing racism on regular basis. Khalil was clearly aware that Officer One-Fifteen stopped him because he was racially profiling him as a criminal which later becomes evident when Officer One-Fifteen shoots him by mistaking the hairbrush in Khalil’s hand for a gun. Such behavior of law enforcement agencies towards the African American people was the major reason that led to the origin of the Black Lives Matter.

The African American people also express ever-present anger when they are unable to meet different goals in their lives due to racial inequality prevalent in American society. While explaining one of the causes of the ever-present anger, Leary professes that “blacks have been told lies about slavery; lies about being free, about inclusion, about equality and justice; about the pursuit of happiness, security, and prosperity; about civil rights, fair housing, education, and jobs (*PTSS* 114). When Starr’s Uncle Carlos asks Starr’s mother Lisa to cooperate with the investigation concerning the Khalil’s case, Maverick gets the feeling that Khalil will never get justice. Carlos repeatedly tries to assure Maverick that police department is striving to find out the truth because they believe in justice and the rule of law. In response, Maverick makes his thoughts quite clear when he accuses the police department of being racist.

“Maverick, don’t make this something it’s not,” Uncle Carlos says.

“A sixteen-year-old black boy is dead because a white cop killed him.

What else could it be?” (Thomas 54).

This conversation takes place between Starr’s father Maverick and her maternal uncle Carlos. Maverick is not wrong in accusing the police department of

being racist because later on when he and Mr. Lewis are having an argument, two police officers approach them and humiliate Maverick right in front of his children. At first, they ask him to show his ID and when they realize that Maverick is Starr's father, they ask him to lay face-down on the ground. Maverick is not able to do anything in their presence due to which he feels severely degraded. He expresses his anger once he is inside his store after they have left. Starr, who witnesses the entire incident, recalls "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" (Thomas 193). The policemen symbolize the slave masters who humiliate Maverick in front of his children and neighbors. Maverick might have been racially profiled by police on numerous occasions but this time it was different as his children were with him and if he resisted, the slave masters could have harmed his children. He feels the worst rage because he was not able to protect his children from the trauma of witnessing their father being abused by the policemen. This is the exact reason due to which various African American families are unable to form the patriarchal nuclear family structure (St. Vil et al. 139). In PNFS, the men assume the traditional gender roles of being the protectors and breadwinners of their families, whereas the women fulfill the domestic responsibilities only (St. Vil et al. 139). Despite being the man of his family, Maverick fails to assume the role of his family's patriarch and protect his children from witnessing their father get humiliated by the police. After the police officers leaves, Maverick tries to take out this rage on his office table by pounding it.

Although African Americans are considered free for the past 150 years, they still suffer the worst form of oppression, racism and violence that continues to intensify their PTSS which is also expressed in the form of ever-present anger. Leary stresses upon the fact that "even when we're feeling good, an ever-present anger resides just below our surface: anger at the violence, degradation, and humiliation" (PTSS 115). This ever-present anger surfaces just with the help of a minor trigger. Starr expresses this symptom of PTSS when Hailey uses a racist slur against her while playing basketball. "Dammit, Starr!" Hailey yells, recovering the ball. She passes it to me. Hustle! Pretend the ball is some fried chicken. Bet you'll stay on it then" (Thomas 113). Starr, who is already disturbed by Khalil's death, instantly gets

triggered when Hailey uses the slur “Fried Chicken” and walks out of the court. She is fuming with anger as she is unable to believe that Hailey adopted racist behavior towards her. Starr’s reaction towards Hailey’s racist slur symbolizes one of the triggers that enrage African American people in the midst of increasing incidents of police brutality. In his article “The Psychological Impact of Racist Slurs”, Kevin Cokley who is a professor of Psychology at the Michigan University, claims that the use of racial slurs or n-word against the African American people contributes towards their racial trauma (Cokley). Although Starr finds it hard to believe that Hailey did it on purpose, she also has a doubt regarding Hailey’s intentions because Hailey unfollowed her on Tumblr when Starr re-blogged Emmet Till’s photograph. Starr’s doubts regarding Hailey are confirmed when she encounters Hailey’s racist comments while sitting at Maya’s house. After watching the interview of Officer Brian’s father, Hailey starts defending Officer Brian because according to her he was only doing his job. When Hailey says that Officer Brian’s life mattered too, Starr instantly gets triggered. She asks Maya to let her leave her house because Hailey’s words clearly meant that Officer’s Brian’s life “mattered more” in comparison to Khalil’s life (Thomas 245). Even when Starr points out Hailey’s mistake, Hailey refuses to acknowledge that she is the one acting wrong. Maya and Hailey both feel shocked when Starr expresses abrupt reaction. However, instead of trying to understand Starr’s reaction, Hailey claims that Starr is blaming her without any particular reason.

One of Starr and Hailey’s most violent encounter takes place in Williamson Prep when Hailey calls Starr a liar for hiding the fact that she was with Khalil the night he was killed. Hailey not only shifts the entire blame of her racist behavior on Starr but also utters some hurtful remarks against Khalil due to which Starr instantly gets triggered.

“Your joke was hurtful,” I say, as calmly

as I can. “If you give a damn about Maya, you’d apologize and at least try to see why it hurt her.”

“It’s not my fault she can’t get over a joke from freaking freshman year!

Just like it’s not my fault you can’t get over what happened to Khalil.”

“So I’m supposed to ‘get over’ the fact he was murdered?”



“Yes, get over it! He was probably gonna end up dead anyway” (Thomas 336 & 337).

Maya, who is an Asian, tries to remind Hailey that she expressed racist remarks regarding her family too but Hailey refuses to accept her mistake and claims that she just made a joke. Seeing that Hailey is behaving in a rude manner, Starr tries to resolve the matter in a calm manner by asking Hailey to reconsider her remarks regarding Maya and apologize. However, Hailey blatantly refuses to accept her mistake and shifts her verbal abuse from Maya towards Khalil. She suggests Starr to get over the fact that he was murdered because he was a drug dealer and it was in his fate to be killed like this. When her words get unbearable for Starr, she slaps Hailey in anger and a huge fight ensues between them.

Starr demonstrates another episode of ever-present anger when grand jury refuses to indict Officer Brian in Khalil’s murder case (Thomas 382). According to Leary “much of the anger is a reaction to our hopes and dreams being continuously undermined by the institutions which govern us, and the racism that permeates American society (*PTSS* 115). When Starr testifies in front of the grand jury, she hopes that Khalil might get the justice he deserves. However, after the indictment of Officer Brian, Starr is compelled to believe that she will not get justice for Khalil from the court of law. After listening to the grand jury’s decision regarding Khalil, Seven asks Starr how she wants to express her anger and frustration. Starr is so angry at that moment that she is willing to do anything even if it is illegal. Seven and DeVante are willing to support her because they can understand the trauma suffered by Starr. However, Chris (Starr’s white boyfriend) tries to prevent her from doing anything illegal. He tries to convince her that if she indulges in any illegal activity like protest or causes a riot, it will not solve anything.

“Starr, think about this,” Chris says. “That won’t solve anything.”

“And neither did talking!” I snap. “I did everything right, and it didn’t make a f\*\*king difference. I’ve gotten death threats, cops harassed my family, somebody shot into my house, all kinds of shit. And for what? Justice Khalil won’t get? They don’t give a f\*\*k about us, so fine. I no

longer give a f\*\*k” (Thomas 384).

In spite of Chris’s effort to persuade Starr, she decides to adopt a revolutionary approach to seek justice for Khalil because her hopes have been shattered by the institutionalized racism prevalent in American Society. Starr demonstrates her anger by taking part in the Black Lives Matter protest that is organized for Khalil by Ms. Ofrah. During the protest, Ms. Ofrah takes Starr to a patrol car and invites Starr to climb it and speak to the mob through the bullhorn. Starr expresses her entire anger at the police when she faces them and shouts the slogans that Khalil’s life mattered. “Everybody wants to talk about how Khalil died,” I say. “But this isn’t about how Khalil died. It’s about the fact that he lived. His life mattered. Khalil lived!” I look at the cops again. “You hear me? Khalil lived!” (Thomas 406 & 407). Starr has no other way to make her voice heard. Right from Khalil’s death, she tries all the ways a normal citizen would have tried. She goes to the police station and cooperates with their investigation, gives an interview at the TV, and answers questions in front of the jury but she is not able to acquire justice for Khalil. The only way left for her to acquire justice for Khalil is to adopt radicalism which she does by taking part in the Black Lives Matter protest organized for Khalil and others who lost their lives as a result of police brutality.

#### **4.5 Racist Socialization**

Just like most of the African American parents try to protect their children from racism and police brutality prevalent within the American society, Starr’s parents also demonstrate racist socialization and send her to Williamson Prep where she can get good quality education and act like white Americans. When Starr starts going to Williamson Prep, she starts leading two completely different lives. She reflects on the difference between her two different lives when her mother is dropping her off at the Williamson Prep.

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 (Thomas 73 & 74).

Here Starr provides complete details of the way she shall behave while studying at Williamson Prep. The line she draws between Williamson and Garden Heights indicates that deep down Starr deals with post traumatic slave syndrome's symptom of racist socialization. She is aware that her lives at Williamson and Garden Heights are a world apart due to the distinction caused by race and social class still like most of the young African Americans living in Garden Heights, Starr too wants to improve her life by leaving Garden Heights. Blending in with Williamson's culture is her only hope of changing her future life. She is aware of the fact that all of her Williamson friends belong to upper social class so she must also act accordingly. She must not use slang words, she must not curse at anyone in order to demonstrate her anger in a traditional African American manner and she must avoid all the habits that can associate her to a ghetto like Garden Heights. After joining Williamson Prep, Starr gradually changes herself to such an extent that she starts to believe that she does not belong in Garden Heights. While attending Big D's party, she thinks "I shouldn't have come to this party. I'm not even sure I belong at this party" (Thomas 7). She also detaches herself completely from the social life of Garden Heights. She dresses differently while attending a party at Big D in order to determine her differentness from the rest of the people attending the party (Thomas 8). Thomas' emphasis on Starr's Jordons is another symbol of Starr's demonstration of racist socialization. Nike's Air Jordans are not only famous for their association with former African American basketball player Michael Jordan but they also contain material wealth due to which they are rendered a valuable possession (Shelat 71). Starr wears Jordans at Williamson in order to blend in with the white elite class but she wears them in Garden Heights in order to present herself as an outcast (Shelat 71). Starr's obsession with her Jordans makes it evident how she uses them to cross the racial and social boundaries between two different worlds.

Starr's reluctance to demonstrate her African-ness while studying at Williamson and striving hard to merge with white Americans makes it evident that she suffers from racist socialization. While explaining this symptom of PTSS, Leary articulates "It is not uncommon for people being held captive to take on the views and

attitudes of their captors. At times, under the stressful conditions associated with being held captive, people can identify so closely with their tormentors that they become like them” (PTSS 116). After experiencing systemic racism on numerous occasions, Starr’s parents decide to protect their children by sending them to an elite school for white American children. They believed that their children will remain safe from systemic racism if they act, dress and behave like white Americans. After going to Williamson, Starr also starts to believe that she is different from the people in Garden Heights and adjusts her behavior in accordance to her school’s culture. However, despite demonstrating racist socialization, Starr becomes a victim to police brutality and institutionalized racism when Officer One-Fifteen points his gun towards Starr after killing Khalil. The fact that she attends Williamson Prep and is a niece of a police officer does not save her from seeing her best friend getting killed by Officer Brian and her father being humiliated by two police officers. Starr’s experiences with police make it evident that even racist socialization cannot save African American people from becoming victim of police brutality still they express this symptom of PTSS in order to hide their African-ness.

As far as the American society is concerned, police brutality towards African American people has remained a constant phenomenon. The high ratio of incidents involving police brutality and racial discrimination became evident in 2010 when it was revealed that Office of Civil Rights for the Department of Justice launched an investigation against seventeen different American police stations in addition to making settlements involving four different police agencies (Chaney and Robertson 483). The major reason for such high ratio of police brutality against African American people and specifically African American men is dependent on the stereotypical notion that African American men are aggressive and criminal-minded people (Chaney and Robertson 483). Almost similar notion has been discussed by Leary when she claims that the “socialization experience” of African Americans has always remained unique due to centuries of slavery and trauma that made them think they are inferior to the white Americans. This symptom of racist socialization continues to intensify due to racial brutality experienced by African American people in their everyday lives. This is the very premonition that leads to Khalil’s killing in *The Hate U Give*. From the conversation that takes place between Khalil and the

Officer One-Fifteen, it becomes evident that the officer is demonstrating racist behavior towards Khalil and Starr just because they are black. Khalil asks the officer:

“What you pull me over for?”

“Your taillight’s broken.”

“So are you gon’ give me a ticket or what?” Khalil asks.

“You know what? Get out the car, smart guy.”

“Man, just give me my ticket-”

“Get out the car! Hands up, where I can see them.”

Khalil gets out with his hands up. One-Fifteen yanks him by his arm and pins him against the back door (Thomas 26).

The white privilege and the sense of superiority have compelled some white American police officers to demonstrate inhumane behavior towards the African Americans including George Floyd, Tamir Rice, Michael Brown and many others. According to Leary “Whites have consistently been portrayed and perceived as superior, powerful, and right. For those who were educated and could read, book after book asserted that blacks, as well as other people of color, were dirty, lustful, stupid, immoral, and incapable of reasoning...inferior to whites in every way” (118). In Khalil’s case, the normal protocol dictated that if his car’s taillight is broken, the officer should have given him a ticket and let him go. The way Khalil demanded ticket from the officer after hearing that his car’s taillight is broken, clearly reveals that he is aware of the law. However, the way Officer One-Fifteen behaved made it evident that he harbors racist thoughts towards Khalil and Starr. Officer One-Fifteen not only stops Khalil and Starr without any proper justification but also uses his force in a wrong manner when Khalil starts questioning his intentions. The officer gets angry and orders Khalil to get out of the car. As Khalil is getting out the car, the officer One-Fifteen gets angry to such an extent that he yanks Khalil out of the car.

Starr feels terrified when Officer One-Fifteen manhandles Khalil. She manages to muster up the courage to speak up in Khalil’s defense but Officer One-Fifteen cuts her words in the midst and orders her to put her hands on the car’s dashboard (Thomas 26). Leary states in her book that in accordance to the belief

associated with the “slave master’s value system”, all of the things that are associated with white people will be rendered as superior, whereas all of the things associated with black people and their skin color will be regarded as inferior (116). When Khalil starts questioning Officer One-Fifteen’s intentions, the officer gets angry because just like majority of the white Americans, he also possesses racist feelings for black Americans. He feels surprised that despite being inferior to him, Khalil was not only questioning his actions but also answering him back in a rude and fearless manner. The fact that Officer One-Fifteen was a white American and was endowed with official power by a law enforcing agency, invoked in him the mindset of a slave master. The way he behaves towards Khalil and Starr clearly indicates that he considers them inferior to him in every aspect. The racist behavior of Officer One-Fifteen starts incurring a traumatizing impact over Starr as her hands start shaking and she feels unable to nod when officer gives her the instructions.

Being aware of everyday racism prevalent within the American society, Starr’s parents had provided her with guidelines regarding the way she shall behave if she is trapped in such a situation. She was told not to fear the police officers but to behave in a smart manner. According to one of the instructions given by her parents, making a movement while a police officer has his back towards you is an act that can result in disastrous consequences. However, Khalil does not bother about the consequences and makes the movement that proves to be the last movement of his life. He comes towards the door of the car in order to check upon Starr and barely speaks a few words when Officer One-Fifteen shoots him three times.

He (Khalil) opens the driver’s door.

“You okay, Starr-”

Pow!

One. Khalil’s body jerks. Blood splatters from his back. He holds on to the door to keep himself upright.

Pow!

Two. Khalil gasps.

Pow!

Three. Khalil looks at me, stunned.

He falls to the ground (Thomas 27).

The entire incident takes place within a matter of few seconds and Khalil falls to the ground. Leary claims in her book that slave owners demonstrated the feelings of “separateness and distrust” by ordering the black slaves to inflict physical punishment over their companions, relatives and friends on different occasions (118). However, this situation proves quite different as instead of ordering any other black slave to punish Khalil, Officer One-Fifteen decides to take the matter in his own hands and punishes Khalil for disobeying his order to stay still.

This sudden incident proves extremely traumatizing for Starr, who has already witnessed the murder of her best friend Natasha when she was only ten years old. Being a black person in an American society exposes you to the darker side of social institutions. Starr was unfortunate that she became a victim of police brutality due to her race. Despite her instinct to stay still, Starr screams and rushes out of the car to check on Khalil as she sees him getting shot and falling to the ground. Internally, she is aware of the fact that by rushing towards Khalil, she is putting her own life in danger still she is unable to control herself as a result of severe trauma. Starr not only screams loudly but also tries to stop Khalil’s bleeding but there is so much blood that she feels helpless.

I blink through my tears. Officer One-Fifteen yells at me, pointing the same gun he killed my friend with.

I put my hands up (Thomas 28).

Apart from Khalil’s killing, another traumatizing scenario occurs when Officer One-Fifteen shouts at Starr while pointing his gun at her. It is the same gun with which he has just killed her friend Khalil. At this point, Starr is so frightened that she quietly raises her hands in the air (Thomas 27-28). The trauma experienced by Starr as a result of police brutality is the same trauma that was experienced by the entire world when they witnessed the police brutality in George Floyd’s viral video. The video showed the police officer Derek Chauvin of the Minneapolis Police Department bent over Floyd with his knee applying pressure on Floyd’s neck for almost 8 minutes 46 seconds even though he was handcuffed (Isaacs et al. 1327). During this entire time,

Floyd kept on pleading that he was unable to breathe, but officer Chauvin continued to ignore his pleas (Isaacs et al. 1327). The similarity between Officer Derek Chauvin and Officer One-Fifteen's behavior foregrounds how American law enforcement's actions towards black people are often fueled by institutionalized racism.

The next few incidents narrated by Starr make it evident that killing Khalil was not enough for the police department as they try really hard to find evidence against him so Officer One-Fifteen's actions can be justified. The police officers keep on searching through Khalil's car after the incident. "One-Fifteen sits on the sidewalk with his face buried in his hands. Other police officers pat his shoulder and tell him it'll be okay" (Thomas 29). Instead of acknowledging his fault, Officer One-Fifteen plays the victim. This entire scenario indicates that institutionalized racism is embedded so deeply in America's law enforcement agencies that instead of properly investigating the incident, the other officers started consoling and supporting Officer One-Fifteen. There was not a single one of them who questioned Officer One-Fifteen's actions. Starr states "They leave Khalil's body in the street like it's an exhibit" (Thomas 29). These words clearly indicate that the police officers treated Khalil like a criminal instead of believing that he was the actual victim. The racism of such extent existed from the time of slavery as certain physical features of slaves such as "dark skin and kinky hair" were disliked by the slave masters (Leary 117). Even in the current age almost one and a half century after the abolishment of the slavery, this hatred of slave masters still prevails in the form of racial profiling and institutionalized racism demonstrated by certain white American police officers. Due to the racist behavior of certain white police officers towards African Americans, the African Americans demonstrate the symptom of racist socialization i.e. they try to behave, dress and talk like the white Americans so they can separate themselves from their African-ness. However, all of their efforts prove futile whenever an incident of institutionalized racism takes place. For instance, in Starr's case, Kenya makes her aware of her demonstration of racist socialization by claiming that Starr feels ashamed of Garden Heights. Starr reflects on Kenya's words and acknowledges the fact that even if she tries hard to change her external appearance and behavior, she will always remain an African American.

Thomas' portrayal of Starr in an incident of police brutality points towards the institutionalized racism that is experienced by a large number of African American



people on almost regular basis. This institutionalized racism is the very reason that triggered Black Lives Matter as police brutality against black people was getting beyond control. The words Black Lives Matter made an appearance on social media after George Zimmerman got acquitted in the case of Trayvon Martin. Trayvon Martin was not the only one who lost his life to police brutality but there were numerous others including Ahmaud Arbury, Rayshard Brooks, Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, who suffered the fate of Khalil (Boucher and Chisholm-Burns 1449). The death of Khalil in a police encounter, the death of Natasha when she was only ten years old, the humiliating behavior of police officers towards Starr's family, racist behavior of her best friend Hailey towards Starr and the indictment of Officer Brian are some of the major factors that play significant role in Starr's racial trauma. However, the analysis proves that Starr's racial trauma is in fact Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome because she expresses all three symptoms of PTSS i.e. vacant esteem, ever-present anger and racist socialization. Starr copes with the symptoms of PTSS by starting a social media campaign against the lynching of black people and indulging in the Black Lives Matter Protest against the police brutality suffered by Khalil and many other African American people.

## CHAPTER 5

### POST TRAUMATIC SLAVE SYNDROME in *ALL AMERICAN BOYS*

*“He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face.”*

*(Du Bois 9)*

#### 5.1 Introduction

The revival of Black Lives Matter occurred with the circulation of a video in May 2020 depicting an African American man George Floyd being pinned to the floor by Officer Derek Chauvin of the Minneapolis Police Department, who had his knee on Mr. Floyd’s neck (“How George Floyd Died” 1). The reaction to this video was so intense that even F.B.I was compelled to initiate a civil rights investigation (“How George Floyd Died” 1). This video not only revived the Black Lives Matter but overnight turned it into one of the largest movements of the American history because this time, the movement also acquired massive support from the white Americans (Buchanan, Bui & Patel 2). In this chapter, I have conducted analysis of Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely’s *All American Boys*. This novel is considerably different from Angie Thomas’ *The Hate U Give* because just like the aftermath of George Floyd incident, this novel also demonstrates the support of white Americans for Black Lives Matter. The story has been narrated from the perspective of two different narrators so I have also divided my analysis into two parts in accordance to Rashad and Quinn’s experiences throughout the novel. By applying Joy DeGruy Leary’s theory of Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome on *All American Boys*, I have

scrutinized the symptoms of racial trauma exhibited by African American characters as a result of their exposure to police brutality. Furthermore, I have also analyzed the impact of police brutality involving African Americans on white Americans and the reason behind their involvement in the Black Lives Matter.

## **5.2 Synopsis**

The novel revolves around the story of two American boys. Rashad Butler is an African American boy, whereas Quinn Collins is a white American boy. Rashad and Collins are leading parallel lives and are not even aware of each other's existence until their lives collide due to an incident of police brutality. Rashad is buying chips at a local store where a white woman trips over him and the policeman present at the incident thinks that Rashad was trying to steal those chips. The police officer Paul Galluzzo gets infuriated at Rashad and beats him so badly that he ends up at a hospital under police custody. When that police officer is beating Rashad, Quinn Collins accidentally witnesses the entire incident. Paul Galluzzo is not only Quinn's best friend Guzzo's elder brother but also like a father-figure to Quinn who lost his father at an early age. Initially, Quinn stays silent but disturbed by Paul's brutal behavior. However, as the students start to talk at Springfield Central High School about Rashad's absence and the reason behind it, Quinn starts feeling guilty. Gradually, his guilt overcomes his fear and respect for Paul and Quinn takes the most difficult decision of his life by raising voice in support of Rashad.

## **5.3 Vacant Esteem**

While explaining vacant esteem, Leary claims that people often tend to confuse their self-esteem with self-efficacy or personal confidence. She further clarifies "while self-confidence and self-efficacy have to do with our beliefs about how effective and competent we consider ourselves to be, self-esteem, though related, refers to our beliefs about our value, our value to our families, friends, community, and the world at large (*Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome* 107). Rashad's conversation with his father and later on, his encounter with Officer Paul Galluzzo play major role in deteriorating his self-esteem. Although Rashad is a privileged member of the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC), his father is not satisfied with his progress because instead of going into the army, Rashad's elder brother Spooky works for the United Parcel Service (UPS). While explaining the reason behind his father's

behavior, Rashad states, “He’s one of those dudes who feels like there’s no better opportunity for a black boy in this country than to join the army” (Reynolds & Kiely 6). Rashad’s father Mr. David Butler is well aware of the racism prevalent in American society against the African Americans due to which he strongly believes that getting into the army is the only safe haven for black people. He regularly tells Rashad about the time when after his high school graduation, his father asked him to leave the house. As Rashad’s father did not have many options, he joined the army. Rashad’s father stayed in the army for four years then he went to work in the police department for the next four years but later on, he switched to office job (Reynolds & Kiely 7). It is quite obvious from Mr. Butler’s talk that he suffers from vacant esteem due to his own father’s behavior and now by forcing Rashad to join army, he is transferring this vacant esteem into Rashad.

After every few days, Rashad’s father will repeat this cycle of having a conversation with him during which he will try to convince Rashad to work hard so he can be selected for the army.

“Look, can you just try it for me, Rashad? Just in high school. That’s all I ask.

I

begged your brother to do it, and he needed it even more than you do. But he wouldn’t listen, and now he’s stuck working down at UPS.” The way he said it was as if the lack of ROTC had a direct connection to why my older brother worked at UPS. As if only green and blue uniforms were okay, but brown ones meant failure (Reynolds & Kiely 9).

Every time, after having this conversation, Rashad will feel like a complete failure. Although Rashad’s elder brother was leading a great life but according to his father’s perception, Spoony was working at UPS because he did not have any other option. Rashad was unable to comprehend why his father was so obsessed with him joining the army. Leary stresses on the notion that society, community and family, are three major elements that are consequential to the development of vacant esteem in a person (*PTSS* 108). The conversation between Rashad and Mr. Butler shows the role of family in Rashad’s development of vacant esteem. Irrespective of the fact that

Rashad was an ROTC cadet and always got excellent grades at school, his father never felt proud of him or Rashad's elder brother Spoony. He would always complain that instead of going into the army, Spoony went to work for UPS. He would try to convince Rashad to try for the army because in his opinion getting into any other profession apart from the army meant failure. Mr. Butler's provocative talk not only irritated Rashad but he would also feel that whatever he does, his father will never feel proud of him. Mr. Butler demonstrates similar behavior towards Rashad when he gets brutally attacked by a police officer at Jerry's after getting into a small accident while buying chips.

Officer Paul Galluzzo assaults Rashad to such an extent that he ends up in the hospital. When Rashad regains consciousness, instead of being compassionate towards his son Mr. Butler acts as if Rashad is not in the room. Despite being aware of his son's consciousness, Mr. Butler prefers to ask his wife "He up?" instead of directly talking to his son (Reynolds & Kiely 46). Rashad feels really annoyed at his father's attitude because if his father had simply looked at him then he would have seen that Rashad was indeed awake. When he finally talks to Rashad, there is no compassion in his voice or his facial expressions do not express any sort of concern for his son. On the contrary, he is almost sure that Rashad must have done something wrong as a result of which Officer Paul Galluzzo attacked him. The reason for doubtful behavior of Mr. Butler towards his son is explained by Leary as one of the symptoms of PTSS. In her discussion of vacant esteem, Leary ponders over the dilemma according to which African American people start feeling anxious whenever they are made aware that a black person is caught doing something wrong. She claims that the main reason behind this dilemma is the notion that if a black person is involved in any wrongdoing then it will result in the "collective humiliation" or "collective blame" of the entire African American community (*PTSS* 111). Same reaction is demonstrated by Mr. Butler when Rashad is presumably caught stealing a packet of chips from the local shop called Jerry's. Even when Rashad tells him the truth, Mr. Butler finds it really hard to believe him. On the contrary, he is quite certain that Rashad must have stolen something due to which he had to bear such repercussions. Mr. Butler feels that by ending up in hospital under police custody, Rashad not only humiliated his family but also proved his worse fears.

The way Mr. Butler investigates Rashad makes it obvious that he is not willing to believe in Rashad's innocence. Apart from scrutinizing Rashad in a strict manner, he continues to accuse Rashad that he must not have cooperated with the police due to which he ended up in this condition.

"If you didn't do anything wrong, why would you resist arrest?" His voice began

to rise. "And how many times have I told you and Spoony, I mean, since y'all were young we've been going over this. Never fight back. Never talk back.

Keep your hands up. Keep your mouth shut. Just do what they ask you to do, and you'll be fine" (Reynolds & Kiely 49 & 50).

Mr. Butler also accuses Rashad of not following the instructions that are provided to every African American by his parents. These instructions make him aware of the precautions that he needs to take whenever he is stopped by a police officer. When Mr. Butler starts accusing Rashad of not following the instructions, Rashad reveals to the readers that he and Spoony have been hearing these instructions since their childhood so they have them memorized like a song. Like every other African American child, Rashad is also instructed by his father to show extreme precaution whenever he is stopped by a police officer. His father tells him and his brother to not talk or fight back. However, Mr. Butler is oblivious to the fact that even Rashad's strict adherence to his father's instructions did not protect him from the brutality of Officer Paul Galluzzo.

Apart from his father's behavior, the attitude of society towards Rashad also plays significant part in making him devoid of his self-esteem. As if assaulting Rashad in a brutal manner in the presence of a large gathering was not sufficient for Officer Paul Galluzzo, he made sure that Rashad remained handcuffed and under the police custody even when he was being treated at the hospital in an unconscious condition.

*Custody.* They brought me into the hospital, handcuffs still on, blood still pouring from my nose like a faucet with rusty pipes. My head pounding.

Every breath hurt. My jacket, the one my brother gave me, now torn (Reynolds & Kiely 43).

The fact that he is brought to the hospital in a badly wounded condition with his handcuffs tightly strapped to his wrists, indicate the inhumane nature of American police system. Leary affirms that society impacts a person's self-esteem through the help of its "institutions, laws, policies, and media" (*PTSS* 108). Previously, Rashad's esteem is only affected by his father's lack of self-esteem. However, after his brutal encounter with Officer Paul Galluzzo, he completely loses his self-esteem because he is treated as a criminal by the very institution that is meant to protect him from the criminals. Although being physically battered by Officer Paul Galluzzo was sufficient for Rashad to suffer from vacant esteem, the behavior of the Springfield PD after taking him to the hospital also incurs negative impact on his psychological condition. Remaining completely oblivious to his painful physical condition, one of the police officers take his fingerprints and then guard his hospital room like he is a dangerous criminal. Instead of conducting proper investigation before branding Rashad as a criminal, the police officer tells his parents that Rashad has been arrested because he was found stealing (Reynolds & Kiely 44). Rashad is badly wounded so he does not possess the energy to protest against all the false allegations imposed upon him.

Due to the constant degradation by his father and the brutal incident with the Officer Paul Galluzzo, Rashad starts to suffer from a severe form of vacant esteem. While lying in the hospital he starts thinking about the party that he was about to attend on the same night when he got assaulted by Officer Paul. He thinks about all the fun that he missed.

No biggie. I'm just a punk-ass kid. I have no rights. Just got body slammed for no reason. Just got my life threatened, while lying flat on the sidewalk. A broken nose, broken ribs, and a knee in the back is way more exciting than fine-ass girls checking for me (after they finished checking for English) (Reynolds & Kiely 86).

While Rashad reflects on the incidents of that day, he feels bad that he missed the party. However, in the very next instance, he starts feeling worthless. He thinks

that nobody will consider it a matter of significance that he missed the chance to attend a party with his friends. He further thinks that it is also not important that he got assaulted by a police officer because he was nothing more than a “punk-ass kid” (Reynolds & Kiely 86). When he sees himself on the TV along with the police officer that assaulted him, his PTSS starts getting worse. He states “My throat dried. My stomach boiled” (Reynolds & Kiely 94). It was not easy for him to see himself portrayed as a victim of assault on the Television. He also starts demonstrating “fight or flight response” whenever anyone asks him even a simple question which indicates that he was also suffering from PTSD. The DSM-5 of American Psychiatric Association states “exaggerated startle response” as one of the symptoms of PTSD (272). He expresses this symptom when he goes for a walk in the hospital and enters a gift shop where he is ponders over different objects. The woman behind the counter asks whether she can help him and at this simple question, Rashad not only panics but also raises his hands in the air. He starts explaining himself like he is caught doing something wrong and then repeatedly starts apologizing to the woman behind the counter (Reynolds & Kiely 150). Rashad also feels quite confused at the sudden change in his behavior because prior to the incident with Officer Paul, he was a confident person.

#### **5.4 Ever-Present Anger**

When Spooky arrives at the hospital, he asks Rashad about all the details regarding the incident that happened at Jerry’s. However, Rashad is only halfway through the story when Spooky suddenly gets angry. Spooky’s reaction makes it evident that he has experienced racism and racial profiling on numerous occasions. When he says “See? This is that bullshit!”, it clearly indicates he has already told his parents about all his racist encounters but they never believed or supported him (Reynolds & Kiely 52). The words he uses make it apparent that he has been experiencing racism for a long time but seeing his brother become a victim of this social curse makes him lose his patience. His mother tries to calm his sudden outburst of anger but he argues that remaining calm is of no use as it only makes things worse for the black people. He feels angry at the audacity of white people especially white policemen because he claims that they treat black people like animals. Spooky feels disturbed at the fact that his brother is attacked by a white police officer without any particular reason. This anger demonstrated by Spooky on the assault of his brother



was the main reason behind the Black Lives Matter. Irrespective of all sorts of powerful emotions demonstrated by the BLM protestors, they still are not able to put an end to this cruelty against African American people. According to the famous American writer James Baldwin “Black rage is not rare or sporadic; it is constantly simmering below the surface of black existence, driven by the routinized police brutality toward black people, the latent discrimination of voter identification laws, the quotidian hardships of systemic discrimination, sabotage by white liberals, and the thousand other ways that the experiences of African Americans are different, more difficult, more dangerous, more exhausting, and more infuriating than those of white society” (Thompson 460). Baldwin’s words make it evident that the rage experienced by black Americans is constant because they continue to suffer from different forms of systemic racism in their daily lives. They do not get a chance to heal from the effects of this trauma as a result of which their anger continues to intensify. Spooky’s angry reaction over Rashad’s assault is not a one-time thing but he has been holding this anger for a long time while personally experiencing systemic racism.

Spooky is not only angry that Rashad had to experience police brutality but he is also angry over the ignorance of his parents regarding the severity of the situation. While arguing with his parents, Spooky claims “Do you know the stats? It’s something like black people are twice as likely to have no weapons on them when they’re killed by cops” (Reynolds & Kiely 53). Spooky refers to the statistics in order to make it evident that black people who are without weapons have higher chances of getting killed by the police. The validity of the statistics provided by Spooky can be determined from the report published in NBS News according to which the ratio of black people who lost their lives due to police brutality increased after the George Floyd incident (Bunn). The statistics from *The Washington Post* reveal that almost 1055 people lost their lives in different incidents of police brutality in 2021 (Bunn). If one takes a look at the last few years then it becomes evident that almost 999 black people lost their lives in 2019, whereas the number of black victims in police brutality cases reached 1021 in the year 2020 (Bunn). The comparison of the number of police brutality victims who lost their lives during the last three years reveals that instead of decreasing, the number of black victims is increasing every year which is a point of grave concern. Spooky’s entire argument with his parents especially his father was also based on the gravity of this situation.

Spoony's anger is also fueled by the actual reason due to which Rashad was assaulted. He argues with his Dad by pointing out that Rashad could have been killed but his Dad responds "But he wasn't" (Reynolds & Kiely 53). Seeing that their Dad was not a bit concerned about Rashad experiencing police brutality intensifies Spoony's rage. He exclaims:

"But he could've been! For a bag of chips that he was gonna pay for! For having brown skin and wearing his jeans a certain way. And guess what, Dad, that ROTC uniform was right there in that bag. The bag was open so that cop probably saw it. But did it matter?" Spoony's voice fanned, the anger breaking him down (Reynolds & Kiely 53).

Spoony feels enraged at the disturbing fact that his brother became a victim of police brutality when he was completely unarmed. Another thing that angers him is that his brother almost lost his life over a mere bag of chips that he was about to pay for. While discussing the reasons behind ever-present anger in African American people, Leary states "one of the most significant goals blocked consistently by the dominant culture has been that of the African American community's integration into the larger society, with all the responsibilities, rights, and privileges concomitant with membership" (*PTSS* 114). Even in the current age, majority of the African Americans have to work twice as hard in order to compete with the white Americans for white-collar jobs. Spoony highlights this fact by mentioning Rashad's ROTC uniform that was in his bag and the bag was open when the cop attacked him. If being an ROTC did not protect Rashad from racism then nothing can protect him.

Rashad also demonstrates the symptom of ever-present anger when Pastor Johnson comes to visit him and pray for his health. After making the prayer, Pastor Johnson tells him that the God is always with him. Rashad feels enraged because he was violated by a white police officer and the God did not protect him even though he was innocent.

I believe in God. At least I think I do. I just wondered where God was when I was being mopped by that cop. And I knew that's what the pastor had come to tell me. That God was there. That God was always there. Which, to

me, is the wrong thing to say, because if he or it or whatever was there and didn't do nothing, then that would make God my enemy (Reynolds & Kiely 89).

In the above mentioned quote, Rashad starts contemplating his relationship with God and God's role in his life as Rashad's protector or savior. According to Leary "when the true target of a person's feelings is deemed to be out of reach, the person will take their feelings out on safer targets" (*PTSS* 113). Rashad is angry that he was assaulted by Officer Paul but he is also aware that there is no way he can take his revenge from Paul Galluzzo so he takes out his anger on a safer target. He starts complaining to God about the pain he bears and the humiliation he encountered without any crime. He was completely innocent yet nobody protected him. He thinks that if the God was with him at the time of incident and still He did not do anything to protect Rashad then it means that the God is his enemy. His anger compels him to think that it would have been better if Pastor Johnson would have said that God was busy at that moment due to which He was not able to save Rashad.

Spoony and Rashad's mother also expresses ever-present anger when Rashad provokes her by saying that some of the people think that the police officer was justified in assaulting him as he was simply doing his job (Reynolds & Kiely 193). While trying to contain her anger, Mrs. Butler asserts "You're not some animal that they can just hunt. You're not some punching bag, something for them to beat on whenever they feel like it" (Reynolds & Kiely 193). As soon as Rashad tells his mother that people think Officer Paul Galluzzo was just doing his job, Mrs. Butler loses her temper. This is the first time she expresses her anger over something irrespective of her calm and composed disposition. Mrs. Butler's outburst in this particular instance also reveals that she is completely different from her husband who openly expressed that Rashad became a victim of police brutality because he might have done something wrong. Her words clearly represent the pain she feels as a mother of a son who has been brutally and unjustly assaulted by a police officer. She considers Rashad to be a perfect son because he always gets excellent grades and is a ROTC. She gets so angry that she uses the word "a\*\*hole" for Officer Paul Galluzzo which is a great deal because according to Rashad, his mother never curses (Reynolds & Kiely 194). Her abrupt reaction compels one to think whether she also became

victim of systemic racism at any time in her life. Despite being a silent housewife, Mrs. Butler's outburst indicates that she also suffers the impact of the PTSS due to the systemic racism experienced by her husband and her sons. Her silence can be understood as a camouflage through which she is hiding the symptoms of PTSS.

The ever-present anger experienced by Rashad, his brother, his mother and his friends prove so contagious that it spreads to other students of Springfield Central High School. When Rashad is in hospital, Spoony shows him a picture of the protests going on against the police brutality experienced by Rashad. Upon holding Berry's cellphone, Rashad narrates "On the screen was a picture of my school. And on the sidewalk was some writing. I enlarged the image and did a double take. RASHAD IS ABSENT AGAIN TODAY" (Reynolds & Kiely 197). The anger expressed against the police brutality experienced by Rashad seems quite similar to the one expressed by the African American people after George Floyd's incident. According to an article published in *The Los Angeles Times*, the graffiti and mural artist, Jules Muck got restless the night she heard about George Floyd's death. As she was not able to sleep, she wandered the streets of Venice at night and painted murals of George Floyd in order to show her support for the Black Lives Matter (Pineda 1). In the novel, Rashad's friend Carlos takes the initiative and starts painting slogans like "RASHAD IS ABSENT AGAIN TODAY" using graffiti (Reynolds & Kiely 197). Although they are just words, they end up making a lot of difference. These words make Quinn feel guilty for not standing up for Rashad when Officer Paul was assaulting him. So Quinn also takes the decision to participate in the protest organized in support of all the black people who lost their lives to police brutality. The protest takes place when Rashad is released from the hospital. On the day of the protest, all the people supporting Rashad and other African American victims of police brutality, initiate their walk from the Jerry's and walk towards the Springfield police station (Reynolds & Kiely 281). During the protest, they keep on chanting the slogan "Spring-field P-D, we don't want brutality" (Reynolds & Kiely 306). This slogan indicates that they do not want any sort of violence and want to peacefully convey their message to the society. After reaching the police station, the protestors perform a die-in where they lie down on the ground and Berry chants the names of all the victims of the police brutality while the protestors respond by saying "Absent again today!" (Reynolds & Kiely 306-308). The major purpose of this protest was to make the Springfield PD

realize that Officer Paul performed an illegal offense by assaulting Rashad so instead of protecting him, they should conduct fair investigation against him and punish him accordingly. The use of graffiti to support Rashad and the protest organized by African American and white American students of Springfield Central High School show that the ever-present anger of black people resulted in the start of Black Lives Matter protests.

## **5.5 Racist Socialization**

Being an African American, Rashad was accustomed to experiencing racism on almost regular basis. Since his childhood, his father had been telling him about the way he should behave whenever he encounters a policeman because being an African American, experiencing racism was inevitable for him. In order to protect Rashad from racism, his father expresses the symptom of racist socialization. He would pressurize Rashad to behave like a model teenager. He would always want Rashad and Spoony to dress like respectable adults (Reynolds & Kiely 52).

Dad was all about discipline and believed that if you work hard, good things happen to you no matter what. Of course, part of working hard, to him, was looking the part, dressing the part, and speaking the part, which Spoony didn't really vibe with (Reynolds & Kiely 51).

Due to Mr. Butler's practice of racist socialization, he and his elder son Spoony share a strained relationship. Rashad explains that his father is quite strict about maintaining discipline and believes that if people work hard then they are rewarded appropriately. He specifically emphasizes on dressing appropriately which means NOT to dress like the way African Americans usually do. He prefers that people dress in a civilized manner like the white Americans so they are considered respectable by the society. On the other hand, Spoony prefers to contradict with his father's rules by dressing like a native African American. While describing Spoony's appearance, Rashad explicates that Spoony has "eight or nine locs sprouting from his head" (Reynolds & Kiely 51). He further claims that he finds those locs to be interesting but his father disapproves of them. In contrast to his father's instructions, Spoony likes to dress like the hip-hop African American generation of nineties. His clothes are always larger than his actual size and he prefers to wear hoodies (Reynolds & Kiely 51). Spoony thinks that people deserve the right to dress according to their

preferences. However, Mr. Butler would always criticize Spoony and tell him that he looks like a drug-dealer (Reynolds & Kiely 52). Mr. Butler's infatuation with appropriate dressing expresses his racist socialization. He hates demonstrating his African-ness in any way because he associates African-ness with weakness, inferiority and even bad reputation. When Rashad regains consciousness in the hospital after his incident with Officer Paul, Mr. Butler thinks that Officer Paul might have assaulted Rashad due to his dressing so he asks Rashad "were your pants sagging?" (Reynolds & Kiely 49). In response to Mrs. Butler's confusion, Mr. Butler explains that one's dressing plays crucial role in representing his character. If one is dressed like a thug then obviously the other people will not consider him a decent person.

Rashad was aware of the racism prevalent against black people within the society that's why he always adhered to the instructions provided by his father. However, he never expected that irrespective of following his father's instructions, he would still become a victim of police brutality. Before going to Jill's party, Rashad decides to get some chips from Jerry's where he experiences racial profiling.

I pushed the door to Jerry's open. It chimed like it always did, and the guy behind the counter looked up like he always did, then stepped out from behind the counter, like he always did.

"Wassup, man," I said. He nodded suspiciously. Like he always did (Reynolds & Kiely 17).

Upon entering Jerry's, Rashad greets the man standing behind the counter. However, the man leaves the counter and nods in response to Rashad's greeting in a suspicious manner. The major reason for his suspicion is the regular occurrence of theft at Jerry's and Rashad was an African American boy so that guy naturally thought that Rashad entered the store with a malicious intent. While explaining the reason behind racist socialization present in the American society, Leary articulates that throughout the history white people have been considered stronger and superior in comparison to the blacks (*PTSS* 118). The white people rendered themselves to be civilized, whereas the black people were considered uncivilized, immoral, and disgusting (Leary, *PTSS* 118). As associating an African American person with crime

or any other sort of negative incident is quite common in American society, the African Americans tend to demonstrate racist socialization in order to protect themselves.

After entering Jerry's, Rashad detects a woman and a police officer inside the store. He ignores them and moves on to find the chips of his choice. As he entered the store just to purchase the chips and leave, he does not give a thought to the suspicious looks of the man behind the counter or the presence of a police officer in the shop. He confidently moves towards the aisle where chips are placed and selects one for himself. Then he moves his hand towards his pocket so he can take out his cellphone and inform his brother that he will be arriving in a little while. However, he realizes that his cellphone is in his ROTC uniform which is in his duffel bag. He places his duffel bag on the floor and squats on the floor in order to open it and take out his cellphone. In the meanwhile, he has the packet of chips tucked under his arm (Reynolds & Kiely 19). The woman, Rashad previously detected buying beer, is not aware that Rashad is squatting just behind her so she almost falls over him. As she falls, Rashad puts his hand on the floor in order to prevent his face from hitting the floor. During this effort, his packet of chips spring from under his arms and swipes down the aisle. Although Rashad is able to save himself, the woman falls partially on the floor and partially on Rashad. The bottle of beer that is in that woman's hand falls on the floor and shatters into pieces (Reynolds & Kiely 19 & 20). The aftermath of this accident proves disastrous for Rashad. Everything happens so suddenly that he feels confused at the things happening around him. The lady apologizes to him but the man behind the counter thinks that Rashad was trying to steal the chips so he starts shouting at Rashad.

Just after the accident, the shopkeeper starts shouting while pointing in Rashad's direction. At first, Rashad thinks that the shopkeeper is shouting at the lady for breaking the bottle but later on, he realizes that the shopkeeper thinks that he was stealing the chips. Rashad suddenly realizes that the shopkeeper is looking at the bag of chips that flew down the aisle and Rashad's duffel bag which is lying open. The entire scenario made it seem like Rashad was trying to steal the chips by putting them inside his bag. So the shopkeeper starts questioning Rashad's intent. Rashad gets severely confused over shopkeeper's accusing attitude.

“Me?” I put my finger to my chest, confused.

The cop perked up, slipping between me and the clerk to get a better look.

But he wasn't looking at me at all. Not at first. He was looking at the lady, who

was now on one knee dusting off her hands.

“Ma'am, are you okay?” the officer asked, concerned.

“Yes, yes, I'm—(Reynolds & Kiely 20).

The shopkeeper's loud voice captures the attention of the police officer within the shop. Without even giving Rashad a chance to explain himself, both the shopkeeper and the police officer start accusing him of theft. The police officer gets concerned about the lady who fell over Rashad because he thought that she might have caught Rashad stealing the packet of chips and resultantly, Rashad must have attacked her. When the woman who fell on Rashad tries to clear his position, the shopkeeper intervenes and yells that Rashad was trying to steal the chips. In the midst of this chaotic situation, Rashad feels extremely confused and struggles to comprehend with the things that were happening around him. He tries to clear his position by telling them that he was just trying to get his phone out of the bag but the police officer interferes in the midst of his sentence due to which Rashad is unable to explain the entire situation.

The police officer starts treating Rashad in an extremely rude manner. There is no solid proof that Rashad was stealing the chips. Even the woman who fell on top of Rashad tries to tell the officer that she was alright but the police officer and the shopkeeper do not pay any heed to her words. In such situation, Rashad tries a lot to explain that he is completely innocent and that all of this was just a great misunderstanding but every time he tries to speak, the officer would silence him. The police officer then grabs Rashad by his arm and starts dragging him towards the door. At the same time, he uses his walkie talkie to ask for a backup. Rashad is shocked that a police officer was asking for a backup because of him. This clearly meant that the officer was racially profiling him because of his African American identity. Rashad does not resist the arrest but he constantly tries to prove his innocence.



“No, you don’t understand,” I pleaded, unsure of what was happening. “I have money right here!” With my free hand, I reached into my pocket to grab the dollar I had designated to pay for those stupid chips. But before I could even get my fingers on the money, the cop had me knotted up in a submission hold, my arms twisted behind me, pain searing up to my shoulders. He shoved me through the door and slammed me to the ground. Face-first (Reynolds & Kiely 22).

The most devastating aspect of the entire incident is that Rashad was being accused of something that he never thought of doing. He was a well-mannered child who always got good grades. He was an ROTC and always stayed away from bad habits because he didn’t want to disappoint his father who always begged him to join the army. He clearly knew that being accused of theft will ruin his chances of getting into the army or might get him expelled from ROTC so indulging in any illegal activity was completely out of question for him. When Officer Paul drags him out of the store in order to cuff his hands behind his back, Rashad tries to take out the money that he had in his pocket in order to pay for the chips. However, Officer Paul does not even give him a chance to take out the money. He just twists his arms behind him and throws him face down on the ground. At first, Rashad was only feeling the pain in his shoulders and arms but when Officer Paul throws him to the ground, Rashad feels excruciating pain in his nose. Rashad even hears the crunching sound as the bones in his nose break due to the fall (Reynolds & Kiely 22). Officer Paul starts searching Rashad for any sort of weapon after cuffing his hands. He keeps on hitting Rashad despite the fact that Rashad was handcuffed and pinned to the ground. Officer Paul not only expresses hatred for Rashad through his actions but also through his words. While whispering in Rashad’s ear, he mockingly claims “F\*\*kin’ thugs can’t just do what you’re told. Need to learn how to respect authority. And I’m gonna teach you” (Reynolds & Kiely 23). Throughout the incident, Rashad never challenges Officer Paul’s authority still he spews hatred like Rashad is his greatest enemy. Officer Paul’s behavior towards Rashad makes Rashad aware of the institutionalized racism prevalent within the American society that he wasn’t able to avoid despite adhering to his father’s demands that were made as a result of racist socialization.

## **5.6 Reaction of White Americans towards Police Brutality in *All American Boys***

An article published in New York Times on 3<sup>rd</sup> of July 2020 declared the Black Lives Matter to be the largest movement in the history of United States. The major reason behind this revelation is the fact that despite being focused on raising voice against the systemic racism prevalent against African Americans in the US, this movement has also gotten support from the white Americans. According to the statistics revealed by researchers from the Crowd Counting Consortium and Texas State University's associate professor Edwin Chow, almost 20,000 people participated in BLM protest at Chicago's Union Park, 50,000 gathered in Philadelphia, and 10,000 turned up at the Golden Gate Bridge (Buchanan, Bui & Patel 1). These numbers only represent the BLM protestors that gathered on 6<sup>th</sup> of June, 2020 (Buchanan, Bui & Patel 1). Almost 40% of counties in US have successfully organized BLM protests and out of those counties, 95% contain majority white population (Buchanan, Bui & Patel 2). These numbers clearly indicate that the BLM protests organized in the year 2020 (just after George Floyd's murder) received massive support from white Americans in addition to being supported by the African Americans. University of Pennsylvania's professor, Daniel Q. Gillion professes that this increase in the number of white American BLM protestors was registered because people were locked in their houses due to coronavirus pandemic and majority of them saw George Floyd's video (Buchanan, Bui & Patel 2). The content of that video was so strong that it stimulated massive reaction not only from African Americans but also from white Americans. Similarly, in *All American Boys*, Rashad's incident triggers a massive response and support from the white American boys especially Quinn who witnesses the entire incident. However, Quinn does not support Rashad instantly after witnessing him becoming a victim of police brutality as he shared a close bond with Officer Paul Galluzzo who assaulted Rashad.

### **5.6.1 Quinn's Initial Impression of Police Brutality**

The way Quinn Collins was raised and treated by the society is quite different from that of Rashad's. The same Officer Paul Galluzzo who assaulted Rashad in the most inhumane manner, adhered fatherly behavior towards Quinn because Quinn is white and was the son of a soldier who lost his life in Afghanistan. Everybody

respected Quinn's father so it was natural for Quinn to possess a higher self-esteem. However, when he accidentally witnesses Paul beating Rashad, Quinn feels intense fear because for the first time in his life, he sees a completely different side of Paul's personality.

But the man I'd watched grind a kid  
into the sidewalk—I don't know—was like someone else. Someone I couldn't  
place, some hulking animal stalking the shadows of my mind all night. I could  
hear his voice, and yet it wasn't him. I could see his face, and yet it wasn't him  
(Reynolds & Kiely 62).

At first, Quinn simply runs away from the incident. He feels so afraid of Paul that he does not tell anyone except his friends Guzzo and Dwyer. Guzzo is not only Quinn's friend but also Paul's younger brother. However, Quinn is not able to forget the way Paul was beating that boy and that there were a lot of people watching the incident but nobody came forward to stop Paul. Quinn's fear of Paul Galluzzo is quite justified as the behavior of white police officers is completely different when they are dealing with people of either race. The people of color or African American people experience more encounters with police officers in comparison to white Americans. Whenever, black Americans or African Americans are stopped by the police officers, they are usually stopped for the purpose of being frisked, arrested, or questioned (Drakulich et al. 229 & 230). However, in the case of white Americans, they are usually the first ones to initiate contact with the police officers and they usually initiate this contact to ask the police officers for help (Drakulich et al. 230). There is also the difference in the way police officers deal with African Americans and white Americans. The African Americans are usually dealt with in an insulting manner and in certain situations the police officers even use "coercive force", whereas the behavior of police officers towards white Americans is completely opposite (Drakulich et al. 230). Quinn was quite oblivious to this fact due to which Paul's violent and merciless behavior shocks him. He feels afraid of Paul so instead of intervening in the fight, he decides to run away.

The first impression that Quinn gets after seeing Paul beating Rashad is to help Paul instead of helping Rashad. It is a common perception among the white

American people that if a white police officer is beating a black person then it clearly means that the black person was doing something wrong. Before the Paul-Rashad incident, Quinn, Guzzo and Dwyer are waiting for someone old enough to buy beer for them when Quinn sees a suitable man and walks towards Jerry's to meet him. However, after reaching outside Jerry's, he witnesses the practical demonstration of police brutality. Paul is like a father-figure to Quinn so seeing him beating an African American teenager is unbelievable for him.

Holy shit! Paul! Paul was hitting the other guy, again, and again, smashing his face into the sidewalk. The blood kept coming. I wanted to move; my gut wanted me to rush to help Paul. But I knew enough to know that you stayed out of police business, plus Paul didn't need my help because he was pummeling the guy (Reynolds & Kiely 38).

Quinn is shocked to see Paul beating another guy in such a brutal manner still he does not move forward to help that boy. Instead he thinks about helping Paul but then he thinks that Paul does not need any sort of help because he is beating the boy by pinning him to the ground. Furthermore, he is aware of the fact that it is not appropriate to interfere in the police business. As Paul is a policeman and he is beating an African American boy so naturally, Quinn thinks that African American boy must have done something wrong to deserve such punishment. Just like every other white American, Quinn also stereotypes African Americans which later become evident when he is talking to English (Rashad's friend) in the Gym. While working on a leg machine, Quinn starts talking to English and tells him that Guzzo (Paul's younger brother) is angry that somebody scrawled a line in favor of Rashad on school's wall. He further states that Guzzo thinks "someone did it to make a statement" (Reynolds & Kiely 173). At this point, Quinn is not sure whether Rashad is innocent or not but English gets furious when Quinn shows his doubt regarding Rashad's innocence. However, Quinn is extremely confused as he saw an extremely brutal side of Paul outside Jerry's so he is not able to believe in Paul's innocence either.

### **5.6.2 Quinn's Guilty Conscious**

Next day, Quinn takes his younger brother Willy to Mother's Pizza where he also encounters Jill. While all three of them are peacefully eating pizza, a fight breaks out inside the restaurant. "People started yelling around them, and when one of the guys pushed one of the guys in line, they broke into punches" (Reynolds & Kiely 80). Quinn's first instinct is to protect his brother so he hides Willy behind him. People in the restaurant not only call the cops but also gain control over the men who were fighting with each other. Police comes and arrests four of the men. Although Quinn is at Mother's Pizza, his mind starts thinking about the incident that took place the night before. He starts conducting comparison of the way police acted at Mother's Pizza and the way Paul treated that particular black boy at Jerry's.

The crowd outside Mother's was white, black, Latino, Asian, just like Springfield. The four guys being cuffed were white. The cops, almost all of them were white, but two of them were black. It was impossible not to think about this as Paul slamming that black kid into the sidewalk the night before replayed in my mind (Reynolds & Kiely 81).

It is impossible for Quinn to see both the arrests and not make a comparison between them. The way police arrests the four white men at Mother's Pizza is the normal way to arrest a culprit but the way Paul arrested that black boy was not something that can be rendered normal. Due to Paul's demonstration of uncontrolled hatred and violent behavior towards that black boy, Quinn also starts fearing him. It can be claimed without doubt that Quinn was traumatized by the entire situation and was feeling the guilt of not helping that boy. Quinn's condition after witnessing Rashad's assault can be described by referring to the study conducted by Lisa B. Spanierman, Nathan R. Todd, and Carolyn J. Anderson in 2009 titled "Psychosocial Costs of Racism to Whites". According to the researchers, racism has different psychosocial effects on white people in comparison to the people of color. The title of Spanierman et al.'s study is inspired from the phrase *costs of racism to Whites* introduced by Paul Kivel which refers to "negative psychosocial consequences that Whites experience as dominant group members in a system of societal racial oppression" (Spanierman et al. 2). One of the negative psychosocial consequences is the feeling of guilt regarding the unearned privilege (Spanierman et al. 2). The

researchers Patrick R. Grzanka, Keri A. Frantell, and Ruth E. Fassinger re-introduced this guilt as “white guilt” in 2020 in their article “The White Racial Affect Scale (WRAS): A Measure of White Guilt, Shame, and Negation” by stating that it is usually experienced as a result of unfair or unearned racial privileges (49 & 50). Quinn also experiences this white guilt when he realizes that due to white privilege, he and other white Americans are treated differently by police officers in comparison to the treatment given to the African American people. This white guilt is one of the major emotions that lead him to understand the pain experienced by Rashad and later on show support for black people in Black Lives Matter protests.

### **5.6.3 Quinn Realizes Paul Galluzzo’s Slave Master Mentality**

Paul is not the only one who expresses racism by demonstrating his anger towards Rashad but his family members also protect his racist attitude towards black people by silencing anyone who raises a finger on Paul’s racist behavior. In his article “Slavery in the White Psyche” published in 2019, Ryan N. Parker asserts that:

Silencing within whiteness involves more than muting speech and warnings “not to talk.” It includes the silencing of curiosity and desire. Its function is to stamp out yearning for connection and relationship with racialized others, and to stamp out responsibility. There is a constant invitation within whiteness—laced with relational threat—to turn one’s mind away from racialized experience and reality—from outside and from within (92).

After witnessing Paul and Rashad’s incident, Quinn attends a Party at Guzzo’s house where he comes across Jill (Paul’s cousin) and her mother having an argument regarding Jill’s irresponsible behavior. During their argument, Jill’s mother tells Jill that she should not expect Paul to save her every time she falls in trouble with the law. While referring to Paul, Jill’s mom says “And he’s got bigger and better things to worry about than his little cousins screwing around” (Reynolds & Kiely 115). As a response to her mother, Jill mutters the words “You’re right—he does” under her breathe but everyone around her hears her (Reynolds & Kiely 115). Her words not only make everybody silent but also infuriate Paul’s mother.

“Hey,” Mrs. Galluzzo interrupted, her face going all tight and pissed. “You watch what you say next.” She stepped away from the sink. Everyone else in

the room went quiet, and Jill had gone deep red. “You might have a little respect. Today. In my house. To-day!” (Reynolds & Kiely 115).

Quinn started feeling afraid of Paul since he saw him beating Rashad. However, it was not just Quinn but a large number of people were aware of the fact that Paul exhibited racist behavior towards Rashad. The problem was that no one had the courage to speak up against Paul because Paul was a police officer supported by his law enforcement agency, whereas Rashad was a common teenager. The fact that Rashad was an ROTC got overshadowed by his African American identity. Paul was not only protected by his colleagues and his superiors but also his family members. So when Jill gives a slight indication that Paul did wrong, Paul’s mother instantly gets triggered. She is completely against the idea that her son did anything against the law by beating up an African American boy. According to her, Paul had a difficult job so sometimes he has to make difficult decisions in order to tackle with the situation at hand. Almost similar anger is demonstrated by Paul’s brother Guzzo when Jill teases him about “Paul whaling on Rashad” (Reynolds & Kiely 169). Guzzo’s anger instantly gets triggered and he starts defending his brother. The angry reaction of Paul’s mother and Guzzo towards the people accusing Paul of police brutality points towards the presence of slave master mentality in certain white Americans. These are people who think that practice of police brutality against African American people or racial profiling of African Americans as criminals is justified because they are inferior to them in every way.

Paul and his entire family (excluding Jill) did not feel any sort of remorse over Rashad’s incident because they believed that it was Paul’s right to discipline Rashad through physical punishment. While discussing the context to America’s policing system, Leary states:

A little-known or discussed piece of American policing is its predecessor during and after slavery, the “slave patrols”. These patrols were designed to control, mediate, and restrict the movements of blacks through intimidating acts of terrorism and violence. Most scholars agree that this system of patrols paved the way for what we now have come to accept as American policing (*PTSS* 86).

If Paul's actions are perceived in accordance to the background of American policing provided by Leary then it becomes evident that most of the white people standing there including Quinn thought that Paul was just doing his job. Later on, Paul also provides affirmation to this thought when he approaches Quinn in order to narrate his side of the story. He starts his story by telling Quinn that "People tell a lot of f\*\*ked-up stories" which clearly meant that Quinn should not believe anyone else's story except Paul's (Reynolds & Kiely 209). He further tells Quinn that there was a woman in the store who caught Rashad stealing so Rashad attacked that woman. Paul went inside the store in order to protect that woman but Rashad attacked Paul. He then tries to put words in Quinn's mouth by asking "What was I supposed to do? It's my job, Quinn. I was protecting the lady. I was just doing my job" (Reynolds & Kiely 209). According to Paul, sometimes his job requires him to make difficult decisions. The way he tells the story to Quinn clearly indicates his racist attitude towards African American people due to which Quinn is not able to believe him. Furthermore, Quinn was standing just outside Jerry's when Paul was beating Rashad in an extremely brutal manner. By witnessing Paul's assault on Rashad, Quinn also becomes aware of the institutionalized racism in American society. Just like all the other white people, he did not believe that African American people experienced racism in the current age. However, after witnessing Rashad's incident, he became aware of the institutionalized racism being practiced against the black people in American society.

The racial trauma manifested in Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely's *All American Boys* is quite different from that presented in Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give*. As *All American Boys* has been narrated from the perspective of two American boys i.e. Rashad is an African American and Quinn is a white American so the racial trauma is expressed in quite an unconventional manner. Being an African American who becomes victim to the police brutality, Rashad naturally experiences post traumatic slave syndrome. He loses his self-esteem, feels ever-present anger and even experiences racist socialization. Apart from Rashad, his entire family starts experiencing PTSS when he becomes victim of the police brutality. Where Rashad experiences PTSS as a result of the incident of police brutality, the same incident compels his white American school fellow Quinn to experience white guilt as a result of the negative psychosocial impact of the incident of police brutality witnessed by



him. Quinn's white guilt compels him and his other white school fellows to hold hands with African Americans students and support them in initiating a Black Lives Matter not only for Rashad but also for other victims of police brutality and institutionalized racism.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

*“Brutality still exists. The unrelenting violence and harassment that we experience, both personally and vicariously through the media, serves to dampen much of the hope and anticipation that we will ever be full and equal participants in this land. While white people are less likely to say, “nigger” to someone’s face, are they any less likely to think about saying it? African American males are still accosted by police on a daily basis for no other reason than the color of their skin.”(Leary 93)*

The narratives of Thomas, Reynolds and Kiely are based on the Black Lives Matter that erupted as a result of institutionalized racism, racial profiling and police brutality prevalent in America against the African American people. Angie Thomas’ novel *The Hate U Give* depicts the story of an African American girl Starr who witnesses the incident of police brutality when her best friend Khalil gets killed by Officer Brian. On the other hand, Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely’s novel *All American Boys* depicts the narrative of police brutality from the perspective of two different narrators. One of the narrators Rashad is an African American boy who experiences the police brutality, whereas the other narrator Quinn is a white American who witnesses the incident of police brutality. As my research falls within the domain of qualitative paradigm, I adopted Alan McKee’s textual analysis method through which I analyzed the relevant texts in accordance to Joy DeGruy Leary’s theoretical framework of post traumatic slave syndrome. Leary’s theoretical construct of PTSS is divided into three parts i.e. vacant esteem, ever-present anger and racist socialization that enabled me to study the impact of multigenerational racial trauma on contemporary African American generation in the context of Black Lives Matter.

The results from the analysis answer my first research question in an appropriate manner as institutionalized racism triggers racial trauma in both of the narratives through the incidents of police brutality. In Thomas’ *The Hate U Give*, Starr’s PTSS is triggered when her childhood friend Khalil is killed by the Officer

Brian right in front of her eyes. Starr and Khalil are racially profiled by Officer Brian as a result of which he kills Khalil when Khalil makes a sudden movement to check upon Starr. When Starr runs towards Khalil after he is shot, Officer Brian aims his gun at Starr due to her African American identity (see Chapter 4, p.74, 4.5). Officer Brian does not ask Starr whether she attends Williamson Prep or whether she is the niece of a police officer. He racially profiles her just because she is an African American and is travelling with another African American. Similarly, in *All American Boys*, Rashad's PTSS is triggered when he enters Jerry's to get the chips and becomes the victim of police brutality on the basis of his race (see Chapter 5, p.92 - 95, 5.5.). In their respective narratives, Starr and Rashad suffer because of the racism prevalent within the American society as a result of which they had to bear the consequences of that racism in the form of trauma. The point that needs to be emphasized here is that Starr and Rashad are not the only ones who got traumatized as a result of their encounter with police brutality. The narratives of Thomas, Reynolds and Kiely show that one incident of police brutality incurs strong impact on the entire society. When Khalil is killed in *The Hate U Give*, not only Starr but the entire African American community residing in Garden Heights gets traumatized by his death as a result of which they start protesting against the police brutality (see Chapter 4, p.71 & 72, 4.4). Similarly, when Rashad is assaulted in *All American Boys*, his family members, friends and even school fellows share his trauma due to which they organize a protest against the police brutality suffered by him (see Chapter 5, p.90 & 91, 5.4). These protests against police brutality that are discussed in the analysis of both novels basically symbolize the Black Lives Matter protests.

In order to analyze the racial trauma manifested in the narratives of Thomas, Reynolds and Kiely, I have studied the text through Leary's theoretical framework of post traumatic slave syndrome. As this framework encompasses three symptoms of PTSS, I was able to detect the instances where PTSS is exhibited by the characters of both of the narratives. After witnessing Khalil's death in an incident of police brutality, Starr starts experiencing vacant esteem due to which she depicts the symptoms of depression, anxiety and even nightmares. Starr gets afraid whenever she sees any police officer or even a police car in her vicinity (see Chapter 4, p. 64 & 65, 4.3). She even exhibits the second symptom of PTSS i.e. ever-present anger when Hailey makes fried chicken joke and later on makes racist comments regarding Khalil

(see Chapter 4, p.69 & 70, 4.4). As far as racist socialization is concerned, prior to Khalil's killing, Starr exhibits the symptom of racist socialization by behaving like a white American at her school and like an outcast at her local community in Garden Heights (see Chapter 4, p.72 & 73, 4.5). However, after going through everything, she believed that demonstrating racist socialization will not make any difference to her life as she will continue to experience racism because of her African-ness. Similarly, in *All American Boys*, Rashad starts experiencing vacant esteem after getting assaulted by the Officer Paul as he starts panicking whenever he sees Officer Paul's face on TV (see Chapter 5, p.86, 5.3). He also feels disturbed at the fact that he became victim of police brutality even after adhering to the instructions given by his father that were mostly based on racist socialization (see Chapter 5, p. 91 & 92, 5.5).

Due to the racial tensions rife within the American society since centuries, it is quite common for the African American people to experience the racial trauma. However, in the current era when these racial tensions are no longer hidden behind the curtain, the entire American society is experiencing the impact of racial trauma suffered by a particular community i.e. the African Americans. One of the most prominent examples of collective experience of racial trauma is the reaction of both African American and white American people towards the arrest footage of George Floyd. Similar situation occurs in Reynolds and Kiely's *All American Boys* where after witnessing Paul assaulting Rashad, Quinn starts experiencing the white guilt. This guilt is triggered when Quinn witnesses police officers arresting white guys at Mother's Pizza because they were fighting with each other. The difference between Officer Paul Galluzzo's treatment towards Rashad and the behavior of police officers at Mother's Pizza towards white Americans makes Quinn aware of the unearned racial privileges of the white people (see Chapter 5, p.99, 5.6.2). In order to cope with the symptoms of the racial trauma, the African American people started voicing their concerns through the Black Lives Matter protests. After Trayvon Martin incident, the African American people relied on America's justice system. However, they decided to take the matters in their own hands when George Zimmerman got acquitted. Similar implications have been manifested in both of the narratives because when Jury refuses to indict Officer Brian, Starr turns radical and takes part in the Black Lives Matter protest (see Chapter 4, p.71 & 72, 4.4). On the other hand, Rashad's brother Spoony, his girlfriend, the students at school and even Rashad's teachers,

organize a Black Lives Matter protest for him and for all the other African American people who became victims of Black Lives Matter (see Chapter 5, p.90 & 91, 5.4). Racial trauma has compelled African American people to make their voice heard not only at national level but also at international level.

Due to the Black Lives Matter protests taking place throughout America, black people residing in different parts of the world also became part of this movement by raising their voice against the racism prevalent in their own countries. Although African American people were previously suffering from the symptoms of this trauma, the Black Lives Matter has provided them with a platform where they have converted this trauma into their power. Through this movement, they have demanded police reforms and increased accountability on the state institutions so targeted killings of black people, the incidents of police brutality and institutionalized racism towards African Americans can be controlled.

## **6.1 Recommendations**

This study will pave path for the future researchers to analyze different facets of Black Lives Matter from a transnational perspective, conduct comparative analysis of PTSS in fiction and memoir, study the transgenerational trauma in various historical contexts and conduct further research on the contemporary African American fiction to understand the psychological sufferings of the African American people in the aftermath of institutionalized racism. The concept of “white guilt” discussed in this study can further be scrutinized and studied in detail by analyzing the reaction of white American people towards the systemic racism suffered by African Americans. This study will also prove an important contribution to race and trauma studies as it is the first work of its kind that engages with DeGruy Leary’s conception of PTSS to analyze racial trauma in contemporary YA fiction, namely *The Hate U Give* and *All American Boys*. Furthermore, this study will also prove a significant contribution to race and trauma studies as it will enable the young readers to develop an understanding of the epidemic of systemic racism and police brutality suffered by African American people and its impact on the entire society. Through this study, the younger generation will also develop an understanding of PTSS as an intergenerational racial trauma, the triggers of PTSS and its symptoms so they and the

future African American generations can embark on the path of healing by indulging in social activism against systemic racism prevalent in the American society.

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