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Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education

The power of stories in educating citizens for the future

How reading *The Hate U Give* and *Noughts & Crosses* through the lens of Critical Race Theory can foster Critical Thinking and Ethical Awareness

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Abstract

This thesis examines Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give* and Malorie Blackman's *Noughts & Crosses* through the lens of Critical Race Theory, demonstrating that this theory can function as a guide when approaching the theme of racism in the classroom. Moreover, I explore the potential of using Young Adult Literature about racial conflict to foster Critical Thinking and Ethical Awareness in students. These skills are emphasized in the Norwegian Core Curriculum and are considered essential for functioning well in society and being good citizens. My findings suggest that both novels are suitable for fostering critical thinking and ethical awareness. Additionally, comparing the novels revealed some implications for teaching, like *Noughts & Crosses* being more complex and better suited to an older group of students. Generally, applying the lens of CRT uncovered that the novels' nature as counter-stories fosters discussions and helps challenge the socially constructed image of races. By portraying societies where racism is ordinary and institutionalized, and where progress is restricted to cases of interest convergence between the oppressed and the powerful, they also encourage discussions on the persistence of discriminatory practices hidden in plain sight.

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1 Introduction

In a time of global political unrest, I find it more pressing than ever to bring renewed attention to the importance of raising mindful youths who are aware of the history that has led us to the current state. Is racism really a thing of the past, and are we living in a ‘post-racial’ society? I believe there to be a countless amount of evidence indicating that the answer is no – and while some refuse to acknowledge the existence of racism, recognizing it is the first step towards creating sustainable changes in the way we approach racial issues.

Recently, the implementation of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in schools has been met with different reactions, especially in the US. Parents demand it removed from schools, as they claim that it accuses their children of being racists simply by being white. The approach has been banned from classrooms in several states in the USA, as they refuse to teach children this “skewed” view of the situation. However, as we will see later in this thesis, CRT is based upon many different elements, and its overarching goal is to encourage people to think more critically about the way we treat people based on race in our society. As a result of the perpetuation of racism and other forms of systemic oppression, there is an increasing need to educate youths who are aware that there can be more than one “truth” and who will not blindly accept one view as the only right perspective. This need is reflected in the core values of *Critical Thinking and Ethical Awareness*, stating that education should form youths who are “able to understand that their own experiences, points of view and convictions may be incomplete or erroneous” (Kunnskapsdepartementet).

In this thesis, I will argue that approaching literature together with youths can help meet this goal, examining how two young adult novels bring up racial issues and call for critical examination. Although many are working against using CRT in education, the freshest addition to the field brings an optimistic view. The recent study by K. Dara Hill (2024) indicates that pre-service teachers today have a positive attitude toward including a critical approach to current issues and see the potential of using literature in classrooms to promote this. As a soon-to-be teacher myself, I acknowledge my responsibility to educate students who grow up inspired to work against racism and discrimination. Having already felt how it is to be a privileged white teacher talking about oppressed situations I’ve never had to face myself, I understand how uncomfortable and intimidating this could be for some. However, I recognize the potential this kind of focus has, and I do not want my students to be robbed of

this opportunity just because it may be a bit uncomfortable for us all. In this thesis, I have therefore chosen to focus on two literary works that invite conversations about these difficult themes to hopefully shed light on how important and valuable they are to discuss and inspire other teachers to do the same.

The works I will be focusing on in this thesis are the young adult novels *The Hate U Give* and *Noughts & Crosses*. *The Hate U Give* (2017) is a famous young adult novel by Angie Thomas. This was Thomas' debut novel, and it brings up current issues like police violence, the persistence of racism, and the cycle of black youth being held back in society. Having grown up in the US as a black girl herself, Thomas based many of the scenes on her own childhood. In the novel, we get to know Starr Carter, a young girl who is the sole witness of her friend Khalil being shot and killed by a police officer. We follow her on the challenging road towards finding her voice and standing up against the unfair treatment of people of color in the US.

My second work is the somewhat older *Noughts & Crosses* (2001). This novel is also a young adult novel written by Malorie Blackman, a former Children's Laureate. This work was her 50th book, but the first one specifically about race. Born in the 1960s to parents from the Windrush Generation, Blackman also based this book on many of her own experiences growing up as a black woman in the UK. *Noughts & Crosses* tells the story of Callum McGregor and Persephone (Seph) Hadley, who try to navigate a world where race is a crucial factor in everyday life that strongly influences how they live their lives. Society is split up between black Crosses who are in charge and white noughts who are oppressed (the term *nought* will be written with a lowercase "n" throughout the thesis, and I will elaborate on the reason for this). Countless discriminatory practices make up systemic oppression so strong that noughts see no other way out than fighting it with violence.

It was these two novels that originally made me want to write about the topic of racism as portrayed in literary works. A few years ago, I watched the movie adaptation of *THUG* with a class of 9th graders and had an interesting discussion afterward that sparked my interest in looking closer at the many valuable elements of the book. In a somewhat similar way, the story behind *Noughts & Crosses* captured my interest whilst watching the play based on the novel last fall. I was confused by the alteration of roles and races, and throughout the whole play I found myself questioning my own biases. In my head, things were meant to be the

other way around, an unconscious standard I was now confronted with. What made me think so much about these works after first encountering them was how they both got to the core of racism by presenting its perpetuation as a *systemic* issue. Instead of congratulating that individual acts of racism are not as common as they once were, they bring back an important focus on the bigger picture of why racism persists. This eventually inspired me to look at the two in the light of Critical Race Theory (CRT) – that they both challenge the “norm” of how we (and literature) approach and view racial issues. This makes them suitable to teach young adults about topics such as prejudice and racism in an alternative way.

My thesis aims to examine three main research questions. The first is *how are racial issues portrayed and approached in The Hate U Give and Noughts & Crosses*. By *how* I mean both literary-wise through the author’s choice of points of view and plot trajectory and the more social aspect of racial portrayal, like if the novels reuse or challenge stereotypes and which themes are brought up concerning race. The second question I will bring attention to is *what elements from real life are brought up and how do they correlate to current issues in the US and the UK?* I wanted to keep a focus on how the novels relate to the current situation, especially since I apply CRT and discuss its position in society today. Thirdly, I want to examine *how the genres of realistic and speculative fiction lend themselves to approaching the theme of racial issues in the classroom*. I will relate this to how the novels can help meet the educational purpose of students developing *critical thinking* and *ethical awareness*.

1.1 Overview of chapters and claims

So far, the works of *The Hate U Give* and *Noughts & Crosses* have been contextualized, focusing on why they are important to study and use in school curricula. In the next section, I will present the theoretical background needed to carry out the discussion. This includes an introduction to Critical Race Theory, focusing on why this could be a suitable approach to examining literature and elaborating on each of the tenets I will use throughout the thesis. I present what previous research has found when applying the theory to *THUG* and elaborate on what my thesis will add to this conversation. I then introduce realism and speculative fiction before situating critical thinking and ethical awareness in a school context.

Overall, a rather limited number of scholars have engaged in conversations about these novels. Considering its popularity, especially in terms of educational use, it is no surprise that

the conversation on *The Hate U Give* is a bit broader than that on *Noughts & Crosses*. Critics have brought up its close relation to the Black Lives Matter movement and current issues of police brutality in the US, as well as the use of cultural symbols to create or reject stereotypes. Despite the novel being quite new, this wide focus makes the body of critical work fairly diverse. As I will expand on in the following chapter, *THUG* is the only of the two that has been previously studied through the lens of CRT – as I intend to do in this thesis. The body of critical work on *Noughts & Crosses* is, to my surprise, still extremely limited. Mainly three scholars have commented on the work since its publication over 20 years ago. Although they are all important contributions to the field and give valuable insights I will include in my exploration of the novel, the lack of research arguably makes it even more important to include *Noughts & Crosses* in my analysis and give it the acknowledgment it deserves. Because of this lack of conversation, I have chosen to analyze *THUG* first and draw on this discussion when bringing up *Noughts & Crosses*.

After having settled the background, I move on to a closer analysis of the two novels. Both chapters are split into five sections, each discussing one tenet of CRT as it is reflected in the novels. The first chapter will examine *The Hate U Give*. In this realistic novel, Angie Thomas presents ongoing struggles of police violence to indicate how ordinary racism is in society. The portrayal of Khalil as a drug dealer instead of a victim of brutal injustice draws attention to the dangers of the social construction of race. I discuss how the intersection of traits like race, gender, wealth, and language are presented to make readers aware that not only race is used to determine a person's position. After this, I draw attention to the challenges of interest convergence and how the novel uses several situations to demonstrate that racial progress only happens when it aligns with the interests of lawmakers, politicians, and even Starr's white friends – a practice that only leads to the continuation of racism. Lastly, I take a step back and focus on the value of bringing counterstories like Starr's out there. Presenting stories from the unique perspective of voices of color can help give more nuanced and complete versions of stories. Altogether, this novel allows for several discussions on the settled view on black people in the US, prejudice, stereotypes, and the importance of challenging them.

The third chapter will analyze *Noughts & Crosses* along with some comparisons with *THUG*. Basing my analysis on the same ideas of CRT I will argue that *Noughts & Crosses* portrays a society where racism is ordinary in a slightly more visible way than in *THUG*. The enacting of violence is institutionalized like it is in *THUG*, yet in *Noughts & Crosses*, racial

discrimination is more out in the open for people to see. Blackman also presents race as a social construction, with the reversing of traditional racial roles leading readers to confront their subconscious bias. The deaths of both Callum and his sister warn readers about the dangers of socially constructed prejudice. Elaborating on the effects of a socially constructed racial image, I argue that Callum's acceptance and later expulsion from school demonstrates how easily the powerful differentially racialize for their own convenience. This also reveals that those in power are pulling the strings in society, constantly doing what benefits them. Sometimes, this happens to coincide with the interests of the oppressed, as illustrated through Callum being allowed to start school. Other times, like in the case of Sephy's mother paying for the repeal of Ryan's hanging, we are reminded that when the powerful root progress in personal interests, it does not always help the oppressed. Lastly, I argue that the use of a dual point of view in *Noughts & Crosses* demonstrates quite clearly the importance of counterstories. We are presented with some situations where the protagonists are unaware of the other person's perspective, but also get to experience them challenging the status quo of racial representations in their society when they acknowledge that the other person may not be thinking what they assume them to be.

In the last chapter, I do a closer comparison of the novels, discussing the most evident similarities and differences. Although the novels portray similar themes like violence, oppression, and inherently racist power relations, their respective realistic and speculative nature makes them approach these a bit differently. I argue that the themes brought up in *Noughts & Crosses* are a bit more complex by nature, which, along with the reversing of the roles we are familiar with, makes the essence of the book harder for younger students to grasp. *THUG*, on the other hand, is a bit more straightforward and would also suit a younger class. After the general comparison, I link the analysis to how reading these novels could help students develop the *critical thinking* and *ethical awareness* school practice calls for. By connecting the goals presented in the Core Curriculum to my findings in the text focused chapters, I argue that both novels invite reflections on how knowledge is created and where it comes from, allowing students to become aware that their truth may be faulty or incomplete, and encourages them to enact justice by demonstrating the importance of balancing different considerations. In the end, there will be a concluding section where the final implications will be presented based on the reflections done in the main part of the thesis.

2 Historical background and theoretical framework

The following section provides historical context to how and why Critical Race Theory came about and maps out the road towards where we are today considering the portrayal of racial issues in literature. Additionally, I lay the grounds for further discussion on how the two novels differ by introducing realism and speculative fiction. Lastly, I present the skills of critical thinking and ethical awareness and how they can be fostered through reading literature.

2.1 The History of Critical Race Theory

The history of Critical Race Theory must be seen in light of the development of discriminatory and racist attitudes and actions in the past. Racism is known to have grown the most during the Transatlantic Slave Trade in the 1500s. Although the idea of basing human value on skin color dates way back, this was the decade where race became significant in justifying the racist treatment of people of color. When the colonizers needed a workforce, they found ways to subordinate and exploit the inhabitants of Africa. Ever since, the idea has persisted. Unlike what many believe, the idea of one race being less worthy has not disappeared; it has only taken different forms.

In the UK, the Slavery Abolition Act was signed in 1833. This act led to the dismantling of British plantation slavery in the Americas. In the US, slavery was abolished over 30 years later, terminating the Civil War in 1865. Importantly, slavery had, as opposed to the somewhat distanced experience of the UK, happened inside the US itself. It was therefore followed by the Jim Crow laws, segregating black and white people in every aspect of life. About 100 years later, during the 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement took place in the US. Over a couple of years, famous figures such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks took significant measures to gain rights for people of color. Although not as well-known, similar things happened in the UK as well. The movements were somewhat successful and led to, amongst other things, the end of the Jim Crow laws and the bettering of rights for POC. Although there seemed to have been some progress in the physical treatment and oppression of people of color, the years after the “successful” Civil Rights Movement saw a reduction of rights and a continuation of unfair treatment based on the color of your skin. As people began noticing that the progress made during the Civil Rights Movement was not upheld, they

decided something more had to be done. In the 1980s, Critical Race Theory was therefore born, out of a need to react to and understand current societal issues (Delgado & Stefancic 4).

At first, CRT formed part of Critical Legal Studies (CLS). This was a group of law scholars who intended to “expose and challenge the view that legal reasoning was neutral, value-free, and unaffected by social and economic relations, political forces, or cultural phenomena” (Brown & Jackson 12). The group was split on the important issue of how race is constructed, and “Critical Race Theory [...] emerged from this interface as a product of ideological tension between race liberals and their left-leaning critics” (Crenshaw 2299). These two groups were called “idealists” and “realists”. Idealists believe that “racism and discrimination are matters of thinking, mental categorization, attitude, and discourse” (Delgado & Stefancic 21), and argue that we have the power to change this discourse if we change our attitudes, images, or words. Realists, on the other hand, view racism as “a means by which society allocated privilege and status” (ibid.). Although they agree that words and attitudes are important components, they consider race a necessary part of the capitalist system, affecting the hierarchy that decides who gets what considering material benefits (Delgado & Stefancic 21). Nowadays, the idealist view of race dominates the way CRT is applied.

Today, CRT is a movement involving “a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (Delgado & Stefancic 3). It has grown substantially since its beginning as part of legal studies and is now used to study and critically examine discriminatory practices in for instance work-life, school practice, healthcare, and housing, as well as to study literature. It is based upon tenets that partly overlap and together form the whole idea of CRT, as I will soon get back to.

2.2 Race and Racialisation in Literature

Over the years, the themes typically brought up in children’s and youth literature have evolved. As Clare Bradford reminds us, this genre’s growth coincided with the “heyday of European imperialism” (39). The content was consequently shaped by ideas corresponding to the current situation in society and has continued to do so. The way attitudes towards “race, ethnicity, colonialism and postcolonialism” are presented, thereby tend to correspond to “the discourses and practices of the societies where they are produced” (Bradford 39).

Additionally, imperialism led to the spread of such literary works across the world. This

meant that children reading books produced in Europe were fed with ideas that did not necessarily correspond with their perception of things.

Bradford also argues that it can take decades before social change is represented and acknowledged in literature (39). This delay of development is critiqued by movements such as “#WeNeedDiverseBooks” (WNDB), who are working for more diversity in books concerning race, disability, and gender, to mention some categories. This development seems urgent because there is still a significant lack of representation in novels. Studies by the *Cooperative Children’s Book Center* show that only 15% of the children and YA novels published in 2023 were about Black/African people (CCBC). If we add together all books about Black/African, Indigenous, Asian, and Latin people, the number is still relatively low - around 30% in total (ibid.).

The theme of race and ethnicity in YA literature is still widely studied, with scholars like Janet Alsup (2010) focusing on the significance of YAL for adolescent identity. She stresses its unique opportunity to help students feel represented and acknowledged through reading literature that reflects their reality. Along the same lines, Gates and Hall Mark (2010) comment on the use of multicultural and race-concerned literature in school. They make the same point as Alsup about literature functioning as a mirror that helps youths see themselves, but extend this point to include the opportunity of it functioning as a window – an idea initially proposed by Rudine Sims Bishop (1990). Arguably, reading books featuring black people’s experiences together in class through CRT allows students to look through this window– a window out to a world beyond their own little house. In more recent times, the way racial issues are presented has become more varied with authors of different ethnicities writing literature that can represent and critique current social issues. One way to become aware of this and bring it into the light is through applying Critical Race Theory to the readings. This will allow us to be more critical of what is “the truth” and how our perception can differ from that of others based on where we are coming from. It could also challenge the traditional view of racism. To be able to carry out my discussion on using CRT to analyze the books, the next subsection will present the main ideas of the theory, as well as previous research done through this method.

2.3 Tenets of Critical Race Theory

Over the years, Critical Race Theory has been used to study and critically analyze the role of race across many fields. It has later expanded to involve a critical lens through which we can analyze literary works and their approach to racial issues. There is some disagreement on the field in what the tenets are, and which are the most important ones. In the following, I will therefore give an account of the ones I have chosen to include and what ideas they represent. I found that Delgado and Stefancic's book on CRT from 2017 had a good outline of the central ideas, so I've stuck to the main tenets they present.

Firstly, Critical Race theorists believe that racism is ordinary (Delgado & Stefancic 8). It is common and part of everyday life for people of color and has been woven into the systems of society. Because of this implementation, racism is no longer visible to all, which in turn leads to difficulties in both addressing and solving it (Delgado & Stefancic 8). This tenet relates closely to the idea of color blindness. CRT argues that we *think* we are color-blind, but that this is simply because racism has been implemented into societal structures. This is where CRT and liberalism disagree. Where liberals believe the best thing to do would be to just *not see race*, CRT scholars argue that color blindness becomes a façade that avoids the confrontation of the real problem. Since systemic racism leads to people pretending like racism does not exist, only “aggressive, color-conscious efforts to change the way things are will do much to ameliorate misery” (Delgado & Stefancic 27).

Secondly, and crucial when discussing how racism is even possible, is the idea of race as a social construct (Delgado & Stefancic 9). CRT theorists strongly believe that races are “categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient” (ibid.). Although the inventors of CRT acknowledge that people across the globe have different traits, they point out how these differences are minor in comparison to all the things that make each human a distinct person such as “personality, intelligence, and moral behavior” (Delgado & Stefancic 9). It is the continued overlooking of these facts that makes racism possible.

More recently, another tenet has been added as an elaboration on this latter point. This is something called “differential racialization” and is the idea that minority groups are exploited when it is beneficial to the majority, which consequently means that the way a group is viewed can change over time (Delgado & Stefancic 9-10). This is often illustrated through the

Middle Eastern population, who were viewed as exotic across centuries, but made to look like terrorists with evil intentions after the 9/11 attacks by Al-Qaeda. Similarly, the African population was portrayed as simple-minded brutes meant to be subverted when the colonizers needed a workforce, because it was convenient. Later, the stereotypes evolved, and people of African descent (especially men) are now often stereotyped as criminals.

This idea is connected to *intersectionality*; a term used to denote the idea that “no person has a single, easily stated, unitary identity (Delgado & Stefancic 10). It was originally coined by the well-known CRT scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 and was based on the argument that “Black women [...] faced employment discrimination based on the confluence [...] of oppressions like racism, classism, and sexism that acted in concert” (Suarez et al. 93). Crenshaw has noted that her “focus on intersections of gender and race is only meant to highlight the need to take account of the multiple identities when considering how to restructure the world (Brown & Jackson 18). CRT thereby emphasizes the importance of understanding that various forms of oppression can work together, functioning as a domino effect.

Fourthly, the idea of “interest convergence” suggests that racism perpetuates because both the white elite and working class benefit from racism and consequently have little interest in change. Consequently, they do things based on self-interest rather than a wish to overcome racism. For example, some argue that the infamous *Brown v. Board of Education* was progress made solely because it would make the US look better outwardly – and thus align with the interest of the white majority in a politically tense era (Delgado & Stefancic 23).

The final element of CRT is the idea that *voices of color are unique* (Delgado & Stefancic 11). This tenet acknowledges the story of Blacks, Asians, Latinos, as well as other oppressed groups, and argues that they “may be able to communicate to their white counterparts matters that the whites are unlikely to know” (Delgado & Stefancic 11). Portraying situations from the perspective of marginalized groups gives value to their experiences, acknowledging that their first-hand experiences make them better suited to talk about issues such as race and racism. Their narratives become “Counterstories”, whose aim is “to cast doubt on prevailing myths, especially ones held by those in power” (Johnson & Neville 125). When important truths are left out, it can be hard to form the whole picture, and as Delgado and Stefancic emphasize, CRT has adopted from the Civil Rights Movement “a concern for redressing

historical wrongs” (5). This latter tenet is therefore closely related to the practice of *Revisionist History*. This will later be discussed in terms of how important it is for teachers to present the whole story and not leave out things.

An increasing number of scholars are applying CRT as a lens through which to study literature. This includes not only classical works, but also newer works like *The Hate U Give*. Johnson and Neville (2018) applied the same five tenets I’ve chosen to focus on to both Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and *THUG*, finding that using CRT as a tool for analyzing books “provides a language for grappling with these issues in our classrooms even when they can be difficult to discuss” (Johnson and Neville 124). Tulino et. al (2019) and Bedford and Shaffer (2023) have both researched applying ideas from CRT to analyze *THUG*, this time with a more direct focus on how to do this along with your students. The work by Tulino et. al (2019) provided research on one specific tenet, namely the importance of counter-storytelling. Their findings suggest that the use of texts functioning as counternarratives in education can “act as resistance that leads to social justice and can help students and teachers rethink and redefine curricula and the literary canon” (Tulino et al. 37). Similarly, by applying different tenets to several literary works, including the classic *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* from 1976, Bedford and Shaffer found that “literature acted as a safe space to discuss challenging topics students may have been previously blind to” (18). Additionally, they state that applying CRT “illustrated ways characters in stories have challenged racist norms and sought societal change” (ibid.). Generally, the findings suggest mainly positive outcomes and potentials of using CRT to study literature with students.

Although these scholars have emphasized and discussed a wide range of elements from *THUG*, there is less focus on the ordinariness of racism and the idea of interest convergence. By including more on these ideas as well as comparing the effects of CRT as a lens for reading realistic and speculative YA fiction, I aim to expand the conversation and contribute to a hopefully expanding amount of pre-service and practicing teachers who acknowledge both of these novels’ potential in the classroom. Although there is no research on applying CRT to *Noughts & Crosses*, the contributions of scholars like Lyngstad (2021) demonstrate the potential of this novel and other speculative or dystopian works of fiction for classroom use. The tendency of CRT being applied mainly to works of realism inspired me to include a speculative work in my comparison with *THUG*, to examine if there are any differences in how realistic and speculative fiction relate to the ideas of CRT. My thesis will also expand the

conversation by focusing on how this critical approach to reading and teaching about race can foster critical thinking and ethical awareness in students and meet the education's core values.

2.4 Realism – Realistic Fiction

Realism is defined by Abrams & Harpham as “a recurrent mode, in various areas and literary forms, of representing human life and experience in literature” (334). They further state that literary works of realism are “written to give the effect that it represents life and the social world as it seems to the common reader, evoking the sense that its characters might in fact exist, and that such things might well happen” (Abrams & Harpham 334). This is referred to as mimetic presentation. Because of its reflection of life as we experience it, realism is often opposed to works of romantic fiction, where the life presented is more “picturesque, fantastic, adventurous, or heroic than actuality” (ibid.).

Ian Watt draws attention to realism being more than seeing “life from the seamy side” (11). He argues that the novel “attempts to portray all the varieties of human experience, and not merely those suited to one particular literary perspective”, meaning that “the novel’s realism does not reside in the kind of life it presents, but in the way it presents it” (Watt 11). In Watt’s opinion, what separates realism from romantic works of literature is that it is a “product of a more dispassionate and scientific scrutiny of life than had ever been attempted before” (11). This brings us to another important discussion surrounding the realistic effect of novels – that they can appear realistic even if they do not portray mimetic content.

The novel brings connotations to real life through “the amount of attention it habitually accords both the individualization of its characters and to the detailed presentation of their environment” (Watt 17-18). As I will get back to, characters in both the novels are given full names, often thoughtfully picked out. The detailed presentation of the environment in novels involves “employment of a much more minutely discriminated time-scale than had previously been employed in narrative” (Watt 22). Arguably, this is applied and leads to important effects in both novels, making processes and happenings believable and authentic to how time feels in real life.

Lastly, Watt puts forward the thought that “the French Realists should have drawn attention to an issue which the novel raises more sharply than any other literary form – the problem of the

correspondence between the literary work and the reality which it imitates” (11). As we will see later, this crossing between a novel being fiction and supposed to represent reality becomes crucial when dealing with racial questions and problems. A debate on this will be presented in the next chapter on *THUG*.

2.5 Speculative Fiction

Speculative Fiction is known for portraying a society that differs from the one we are familiar with. It is commonly thought of as a subgenre of Science Fiction, but where the focus is on a “human rather than technical problem” (Oziewicz 4). It is defined as “all non-mimetic genres - genres that in one way or another depart from imitating consensus reality” (Oziewicz 2) and thereby includes both the utopia and the *dystopia*, a genre many have defined *Noughts & Crosses* as belonging to.

Dystopian Fiction is easiest explained if compared to the utopia. The latter presents a futuristic, desirable, and better society, rooted in a critique of contemporary society (Fitting 2010). As opposed to this possibly unreachable perfect society, the Dystopian one presents its critique of an element of society today in a slightly different way. This genre aims to hypothesize how things could become if these problematic elements are not addressed and changed for the better before it proves too late. Although, as Tomas Moylan points out, “all dystopian texts offer a detailed and pessimistic presentation of the very worst of social alternatives” (147), some stick to the hope of a utopia. This is especially common in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction, where the narrators often are youths who “attempt to recreate the worlds in which they live, making their societies more egalitarian, more progressive, and, ultimately, more free” (Day et al. 3).

It is worth mentioning that because of *Noughts & Crosses*’ angle of an altered *past* rather than a change from today and into the future, I find it a bit hard to agree that this novel fits into the dystopian genre. Blackman criticizes by presenting how close to a dystopian society the one in *Noughts & Crosses* is, yet also seems to stress its resemblance to how we’ve been acting in real life. The future often presented in dystopias appears to be the present or past instead in the novel. Based on this, I am tempted to call *Noughts & Crosses* “speculative”. It speculates what life could have looked like, had the past been different.

Oziewicz makes a point about Speculative fiction emerging as a genre because such types of fiction were not acknowledged in Literature. This was because they “failed to imitate reality” or “embraced a different version of the real” (Oziewicz 2-3). Arguably, “failing” to imitate reality can be turned into a strength. As I will elaborate on later, Blackman’s use of reversed power structures forces us to reflect on the current situation in society. This is a powerful opportunity for the speculative genre despite not being apparently mimetic in the same way as works of realism. This will be discussed when I go into this genre’s value for bringing up alternative perspectives on current issues and alternating historical happenings. Although it can remind us of a Dystopia in terms of a quite extreme reality, I will demonstrate how *Noughts & Crosses* is not that far from the society POC were met with not many years ago, and even still is to this day concerning some of the practices portrayed in the story.

2.6 Critical Thinking and Ethical Awareness

The Norwegian school’s Core Curriculum is an overarching document that all teaching in Norwegian classrooms should build upon. *Critical thinking* and *Ethical awareness* are stated as two of the Core values within this document. These values are important in schools because we are educating youths for the future, and these youths need to be able to be critical and make moral decisions by themselves. Focusing on the goal of progress, it is stated that “if new insight is to emerge, established ideas must be scrutinized and criticized by using theories, methods, arguments, experiences, and evidence” (Kunnskapsdepartementet). The Core value thereby calls for curiosity and inquisitive students who know how to approach current knowledge and develop their own.

It is specified that one goal is for students to “be able to understand that their own experiences, points of view and convictions may be incomplete or erroneous” and that they “must be able to assess different sources of knowledge and think critically about how knowledge is developed” (Kunnskapsdepartementet). In other words, students must be put in situations where they are allowed to question their own convictions to be able to change them. This aligns with Jeffrey Murray’s claim that you need to disrupt your students’ moral assumptions before they are able to reconstruct their views (Murray 2015). Only after their convictions have been challenged can they reflect on other possible ways to view otherness and diversity (ibid.). As I will argue later, applying the ideas of CRT when reading literary works on racism is one way of doing this. This will help students understand “that the

methodologies for examining the real world must be adapted to what we want to study, and that the choice of methodology influences what we see” (Kunnskapsdepartementet).

Along similar lines, developing ethical awareness involves learning the skill of “balancing different considerations”, which is crucial to becoming a “reflecting and responsible human being” (Kunnskapsdepartementet). Your ethics are your values and the choices you make based on them, and these can be developed or changed as you receive input. The skills of being a good critical thinker and being ethically aware are thereby connected. After having critically analyzed a situation, the next step is to take a stand, and such informed choices require ethically aware students. But what do these skills have to do with literature?

In her book on why fiction matters from 2015, Janet Alsup reminds us that “[t]he critical thinking argument is also often used when defending the humanities as an academic discipline in general” (53). By this, she refers to the importance of remembering the bigger potentials of literature. Humans often read books “not for the experience of reading itself, [...] but for the discrete ‘skills’ that reading can teach us” (ibid.). Expanding further, she claims that these often are skills that “can subsequently be applied to other more vocational, quantifiable endeavors—skills such as critical thinking” (Alsup 53). She is pointing to the value literature has in educating youths and helping them develop valuable skills that can be applied outside of the literary world as well.

To make ethically considered and morally evaluated decisions in life, students must develop an understanding that the experiences of others may differ from their own. This is referred to as theory of mind and is a skill that has been proved to develop through reading literary fiction (Kidd & Castano). In their 2013 study, David Kidd and Emanuele Castano found that “by prompting readers to take an active writerly role to form representations of characters’ subjective states, literary fiction recruits ToM” (380). Although they acknowledge that more research is needed, their findings suggest that literature has the power to teach valuable skills that can help students think critically and make ethically aware decisions that are better for society and those around them.

3 Analyzing *The Hate U Give*

The Hate U Give is a young adult novel heavily inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement. It is often described as realistic, as it “features striking similarities to real-world incidents” (Gföllner 6), such as the heavy focus on police brutality in the USA and the racialization of young Black boys. The protagonist, 16-year-old Starr Carter, is struggling to stay true to herself whilst navigating her split worlds and ends up on a quest for justice after her friend Khalil is shot and killed by the police.

This determining scene where one of Starr’s best friends, Khalil Harris, is shot by Officer 115 takes place quite early in the novel, although it could easily have been the climax of the story. This allows Thomas to draw attention to the aftermath of such a dramatic situation – a process that is often kept out of sight for the public. The focus of the novel becomes the struggle of Khalil’s family and friends in the aftermath, through which readers learn about how the ordinariness of racism led to the officer’s prejudiced view of Khalil, and how the young boy is now formed into a criminal by the media.

Throughout the novel, Starr finds herself doubting her ability to speak up. What motivates her is holding the Officer who killed Khalil accountable and gaining justice. We follow the development of the trial of Officer 115, which involves Starr trying to navigate her split world and understand people’s actions. Along the way, Starr encounters some conflicting situations where she has to take a stand. She breaks up with her white childhood friend Hailey as a result of her unwillingness to challenge her narrow views and prejudices. She is also met with the challenge of telling her father, who has some prejudice towards white boys, that she is dating a white boy called Chris. As her two worlds meet, she slowly realizes that they may not be as different as she thought. Chris is open to learning about Starr’s culture, and they realize that race is only a social construct. Towards the end of the book, Starr seems to have found herself and is confident enough in herself that she speaks up without any anonymity. She holds the bullhorn and protests with other activists. In the end, the leader of the drug dealers in Starr’s neighborhood, King, is detained after trying to punish Starr for snitching on his gang. This is an achievement which, in a way, restores peace in the neighborhood.

In this chapter, I investigate how various scenes and elements from the books reflect some of the ideas proposed by Critical Race Theory. Some of these will be brought up later in the

educational value chapter. Firstly, I draw attention to the use of “the talk” and Starr’s code-switching as evidence that racism is ordinary. Gabrielle Owen’s (2019) paper discusses the “politics of respectability”, arguing that Starr changes her behavior to fit in and appear acceptable. She focuses on the use of “textual negotiations within and against normativity” (Owen 238), which I will link closely to Starr’s use of code-switching. Additionally, Sandra Tausel (2021) argues for the opportunity *THUG* has to expose systemic racism. She praises the use of commonplaces like a high school and black neighborhood, claiming that it “emphasizes the structural inequalities without neglecting the diversity of Black experiences”, as these are spaces that suggest that *THUG* could be situated anywhere in the US (Tausel 105). She also brings up the persisting and important issue that even if young black children are taught how to act to be safe, systemic racism influences them in that they are not immune to violent experiences in the first place. Lastly, I discuss how the inevitable drug dealing cycle and the difficulty of getting out of it demonstrates that the systemic oppression they are receiving only leads to the persistence of racism. This section is the longest in both chapters, as I found it important to settle how systematic and institutionalized racism is before carrying out the rest of the discussion.

After this, I move the discussion to the social construction of race. I argue that the example of Khalil is representative of the typical racialization of Black boys, that society around him has created a norm that is automatically applied and activates prejudice when people see young men like him. This is also the case for authorities like the police, who act on their prejudice with deadly outcomes. The media helps create this image, and almost uncritically reproduces an image of Khalil as a criminal without knowing the true reason behind his actions. This also explains the dangers of reproducing such images of people and putting them into categories; you make everyone believe what they are seeing and hearing, in turn acting on and reproducing these biased thoughts themselves. Matek & Rehlicki (2022) draw attention to these dangers of reproducing stereotypes, arguing that the set image of a Black person leads to a continuous “othering” of People of Color in America, and gets us no closer to a post-racial society. When discussing the dangers of stereotypes I also bring up the viewpoint of Vincent Haddad, disagreeing with his claim that Thomas uncritically reproduces stereotypes of black people as angry. Thomas seems aware of how stereotypes appear in her novel, and as I expand on when discussing counterstories, she portrays a nuanced picture that captures the humanity of these characters.

In the third section, I consider the intersection of race with other elements, arguing that Thomas uses wealth, gender, and language to demonstrate how these traits act together with race to either strengthen or weaken a person's position. I draw attention to the current hierarchy of traits, arguing that it illustrates how the intersection of race, wealth, and language affects people's total impression of Khalil. In Starr's case, the crossing of her two worlds proves difficult. Commenting on this, Shelat (2019) points to cultural symbols such as the sneakers Starr wears to discuss how she keeps her culture whilst also trying to fit in amongst her wealthy peers. Elaborating further on this, I use the difference between the situation of Starr and her peers to discuss the strong power of the privileged to decide what is cool and not about someone's culture. Although differential racialization typically describes a change in attitudes over time, I angle this point a bit differently and argue that people of color continuously have to adhere to the changing "rules" of white people on a daily basis. I also bring up the intersection of race and gender in Starr's case. Using Adam Levin's (2019) argument of *THUG* being a "herstorical" narrative to support my reading, I argue that by including a powerful black and female protagonist, Thomas challenges the typical attitudes many hold toward both black people and female characters. Lastly, I bring up language as an intersecting factor. Referring back to Starr's code-switching and Khalil's use of slang, I argue that Thomas' use of language illustrates that this is typically a trait that influences our perception of someone.

When considering CRT's conviction that whites only allow racial progress when it also benefits them, called interest convergence, I argue that by demonstrating that both law enforcement and students at Starr's school act on the wrong motivations, Thomas emphasizes the importance of critically analyzing what racial progress is rooted in. Acknowledging that progress is often restricted to situations where it also benefits the privileged can help us move forward, as making progress based on the right motivations is crucial for lasting change.

Lastly, I argue that by portraying this story through Starr's perspective, Thomas demonstrates the importance of counterstories. She succeeds in challenging the traditional "secondly" portrayal of Black people's stories in literature (Neville and Johnson) by narrating the context of the shooting and the countless challenges after the happening. This also involves Starr's effort to counterwork the media's presentation of Khalil by instead presenting a more nuanced picture of him. The importance of such stories has been brought up by Barbara Gföllner (2020), who emphasizes how Black lives are denied the humanity they deserve. She draws

this back to the importance of collective and individual counterstories about victims of police violence. Lastly, I argue that the way drug dealers are presented all over functions as a counter-story to the set image, as they are portrayed as kind humans who help Starr's family.

3.1 Racism is ordinary - Structure of Society

The idea that racism is ordinary is one of the main arguments of CRT. They argue that the ordinariness of it leads to racism becoming invisible to those not subjected to it, which in turn restrains it from being acknowledged, met, and potentially solved. Although some may argue that most people are not outwardly racist these days, this tenet clarifies that racism being part of everyday life means that it has become ingrained into institutions like schools, the police force, and the law system. It is these instances that I will focus on in the following, mapping out the various ways in which Starr is discriminated and struggles, as well as how a racist cycle keeps youth in her neighborhood down.

Power-relations and structures

Starr's world is partly split in two. She lives in the black neighborhood Garden Heights, yet attends Williamson Prep, a school with mostly white students forty-five minutes away from her home. Being a black girl at this school affects to what extent Starr feels like she can be herself. In her everyday life, she feels the need to code-switch, changing her way of speaking and behaving to accommodate those around her. This is in itself an indication of society favoring a specific way of speaking and acting. As she arrives at her school, she reflects;

I just have to be normal Starr at normal Williamson and have a normal day. That means flipping the switch in my brain so that 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” [...] Basically, Williamson Starr doesn't give anyone a reason to call her ghetto.
(Thomas 74)

From these reflections, we can tell that Starr is aware of how people could perceive her if she used her natural language and that she instead chooses to follow the unofficial rules she may have learned from experience. She is aware that she is code-switching, and is constantly

correcting herself, trying to create the right image for those listening. Another example of this is when she speaks to the officers at the police station, straight after the incident with Khalil. From the very first “hello” she reflects on her voice changing; “It always happens around ‘other’ people, whether I’m at Williamson or not. I don’t talk like me or sound like me. I choose every word carefully and make sure I pronounce them well. I can never, ever let anyone think I’m ghetto” (Thomas 97). From both of Starr’s reflections on her language, it becomes clear that she connects language directly with being considered *ghetto*, a word typically used to describe someone low-class or unrefined.

Whenever she slips at being Starr 2.0 and says something “inappropriate”, Starr corrects herself; “‘Nah’ *Dammit. Proper English.* I sit up straight. ‘I mean, no, ma’am’” (Thomas 99). The so-called “invisible” racism unfolds itself quite clearly here, with Starr having to downplay some of her traits since they are not accepted by the majority. Gabrielle Owen calls this modification “politics of respectability”. She suggests that through emphasizing that Starr feels untrue to herself when acting this way; “I can’t stand myself for doing it, but I do it anyway” (Thomas 74), “Thomas’s representation of Starr encourages readers to question her conformity to these social norms and to wish along with her that she could just ‘be herself’” (Owen 251). We recognize that she finds it exhausting to constantly have to alternate how she speaks and may thereby become even more aware of what some people of color have to go through daily. That she feels the need to change herself to fit in demonstrates the ordinariness of racism, as it is Starr who has to change, not the society around her.

Growing up in Garden Heights means growing up in worse conditions than those in white neighborhoods. Although Starr and her siblings have the opportunity to attend a private school, the other kids growing up in Garden Heights have to attend parties where people are shot and play in parks where drug dealers show up mid-play. Her neighborhood is described as “a war zone” when riots happen (Thomas 138) and Starr’s brother, Sekani, keeps his bike at his uncle’s house since he is not allowed to play outside in Garden Heights. The park Starr and her older brother Seven play basketball at is surrounded by a “tall chain-link fence” that Starr wonders if is supposed to protect “the graffiti on the basketball court, the rusting playground equipment, the benches way too many babies have been made on, or the liquor bottles, cigarette butts, and trash that litter the grass” (Thomas 143). You can tell that this is not an ideal playground. Growing up in such conditions robs children in Garden Heights of a safe place to play and be kids. As the example of Starr’s friend Natasha demonstrates, not

even a playground is somewhere Black children are safe from being killed by gunshots. Her friend was killed in a drive-by shooting at only ten years old whilst she and Starr were out playing. By including this, Thomas demonstrates that it all starts when children are very young and that what is around them influences what they grow up believing is normal.

These patterns of oppression are so implemented into everyday life that young people grow up thinking this is how things are supposed to be. This is reflected in the acronym “THUG LIFE”, which the title of the novel builds upon. Made popular by the rapper Tupac, this abbreviation of the saying *The Hate U Give Little Infants Fucks Everybody* brings attention to how systemic racism leads those growing up in Black neighborhoods to see no other option than resorting to crime to make money. Starr and her father have a conversation about this cycle and the systematicity behind it, where Maverick asks what she thinks the saying means. Starr replies, “Khalil said it’s about what society feeds us as youth and how it comes back and bites them later” (Thomas 167). She elaborates that she thinks it’s about “Black people, minorities, poor people. Everybody at the bottom in society”, not only little infants (ibid.). As the conversation moves on, they get to talking about Khalil’s situation, and how hard it was for him to stay away from selling drugs; “‘They needed money’, I say. ‘And they don’t have a lot of other ways to get it.’ ‘Right. Lack of opportunities’, Daddy says.” (Thomas 168).

The cycle of drug dealing proves difficult to get out of, demonstrating how systemic oppression keeps them in this environment. As Maverick draws attention to, drugs are destroying neighborhoods like Garden Heights by creating a cycle presented as inevitable to get out of and therefore necessary to stay in; “‘You got folks like Brenda, who think they need them to survive, and then you got the Khalils, who think they need to sell them to survive’” (Thomas 168). Straight after, he brings attention to the realities that lead to this impression; “The Brendas can’t get jobs unless they’re clean, and they can’t pay for rehab unless they got jobs” (Thomas 169). Similarly, the “Khalils” either end up in jail for the rest of their lives when they are caught selling drugs or they “have a hard time getting a real job and probably start selling again” (ibid.). This cycle also explains why meritocracy remains impossible for black youths to even try to partake in. The image outward is that black youth are simply not working hard enough, yet the reality is that lack of opportunities is what keeps them down and part of the cycle. Maverick concludes their conversation by saying “That’s the hate they’re giving us, baby, a system designed against us” (Thomas 169). By referring directly back to the systematicity of their experiences, he is calling attention to it being a

systemic cycle, not individual acts of racism. This could make readers aware that there is more to racism than what is apparent to the eye in society around us.

The wish to break the cycle is represented through DeVante, a young man who seeks help from Maverick after feeling stuck with the King Lords (Thomas 172). Having seen his little brother killed, he is ordered by King to take revenge on the person who did it, something he does not want to do. Instead, he is interested in breaking the cycle and getting out of the gangs. Maverick himself knows how hard this can be, as his only way out was taking the blame for a crime on behalf of King and serving time in jail. Knowing how much this changed his life, Maverick decides to help DeVante by giving him a job at his shop. Starr reflects on the hope in this; “We couldn’t help Khalil with his situation before he died. Maybe we can help DeVante” (Thomas 177). She realizes that it is all about learning from the past to try breaking the cycle. Maverick gives DeVante a job at the store, just like the manager of the store did for him when he came out from jail. He is given an opportunity to make money without partaking in the cycle of drugs, so we see that there is a way out, but that this is dependent on a number of structural factors and requires individuals with connections. You can’t just choose yourself to get out. Luckily for DeVante, Maverick has a store, and when it gets dangerous in Garden Heights, he is allowed to stay at Starr’s Uncle Carlos’ house in a safer neighborhood.

The “anti-snitch” culture in Garden Heights makes it scary for Starr to speak her mind and for anyone in general to call out people – which in turn helps keep the cycle alive. It is evident that inside the neighborhood, the King Lords rule. They have people wrapped around their fingers and if someone calls them out, they are in trouble. As Starr slowly understands through conversations with her father about “THUG LIFE”, this is because snitching would ruin what they do for a living, what helps them feed their families. If the police find out about all the networks of drug dealing, the whole system will fall apart, and King and his men will be sent to jail. After having heard about some King Lords jumping the police, a storeowner called Mr. Lewis decides to snitch on King, wanting the truth to come out (Thomas 186). Later, he is attacked for this snitching (Thomas 218), and Starr witnesses his swollen eyes and blood dripping from his cheeks. She is also warned not to try snitching on King when she is about to talk with the DA (Thomas 269). Despite these two warnings, the encouragement from Ms. O’frah to use the power of her voice seems to be a stronger factor, and as I will elaborate on later, Starr decides to snitch anyway (Thomas 283).

Law enforcement enacting violence

The way gun violence and police brutality are portrayed in the novel serves as a social critique. The ordinariness of police racism is demonstrated when Maverick, like most parents of African American children in the US, feels the need to prepare his children for future encounters with the police. Through having “the talk” with his children, he is preparing them for what he considers inevitable for a black person growing up.

When I was twelve, my parents had two talks with me. One was the usual birds and the bees. [...] The other talk was about what to do if a cop stopped me. Momma fussed and told Daddy I was too young for that. He argued that I wasn't too young to get arrested or shot. “Starr-Starr, you do whatever they tell you to do,” he said. “Keep your hands visible. Don't make any sudden moves. Only speak when they speak to you.” [...] “I hope somebody had the talk with Khalil”.

(Thomas 24)

During the episode with the police, Khalil doesn't do as he is told, asking “What you pull us over for?” twice before following orders from the officer to provide license, registration, and proof of insurance (Thomas 25). Starr appears worried that Khalil is not acting according to the rules her parents have taught her. In the lead-up to the shooting, she reflects on this: “My parents haven't raised me to fear the police, just to be smart around them. They told me it's not smart to move while a cop has his back to you. Khalil does. [...] It's not smart to make a sudden move. Khalil does.” (Thomas 27). That Khalil ends up getting shot by Officer 115 for doing these things strengthens Starr's belief that if you don't act according to these rules, it is your fault if you get hurt. This is an example of how systems of oppression keep themselves alive. Later, it also becomes evident that all black people have “the talk” with their children. Maverick and Mr. Lewis both automatically get their hands out of their pockets when they encounter police and Starr thinks to herself “His parents must've had the talk with him when he was twelve” (Thomas 189). They all act according to the “rules” to protect themselves.

Sadly, however, not even having this talk with African American children will protect them from ending up in these situations in the first place. As Sandra Tausel emphasizes, “the knowledge of conduct ultimately does not safeguard Starr from the traumatizing, violent, and racialized experiences in her young life” (109). After what happened to Khalil, as well as

being held at gunpoint herself, Starr is scarred for life and gets nervous every time she encounters the police. When a police car pulls up on the side of Starr and her brother, we see that it affects people around her as well. Seven “straightens up and stares ahead, barely blinking and gripping the steering wheel. [...] ‘C’mon, light,’ he prays. ‘C’mon.’ I stare ahead and pray for the light to change too” (Thomas 89). It happens again later, when Starr is with her mother, grabbing the door handle and getting tensed up when she sees the police: “They can easily grab their guns and leave us like Khalil” (Thomas 163). We see that situations like these make black kids permanently scared of the police and what they’re going to do to them.

In a discussion between her parents about whether moving to a white neighborhood would help make the children safer, Starr’s mother argues that “Maverick, she’s seen two of her friends killed. [...] Two! And she’s only sixteen” to which Maverick answers “And one was at the hands of a person who was supposed to protect her! What, you think if you live next door to them, they’ll treat you different?” (Thomas 55). This conversation highlights racism’s ordinariness. Since it is ingrained in instances like the police force, it will likely follow them around. Despite Maverick’s negative outlook on it, the family ends up moving at the end of the novel. Their move is paralleled with the image of Maverick’s roses; “The roses are dry, and some of their petals have fallen off” [...] “A li’l damaged, but alive. [...] Putting them in new soil can be like hitting a reset button” (Thomas 428). He watches over his roses and takes them very seriously, partly symbolizing the way he and his children are trying to bloom from harsh conditions. This is partly what they do when they end up moving to a different area that could be a bit safer for all, putting themselves in new soil to hopefully blossom again. Although they know that police violence is everywhere, they are hopeful that a new beginning in a new neighborhood can be the reset they need. Thomas adds hope, but we don’t get to know if this will change things.

The way the law system functions and performs in *THUG* also reflects the systemic nature and ordinariness of racism today. Firstly, we get the impression that from the beginning, Starr has to fight very hard for her story to be heard. The officers questioning her are more interested in asking questions about Khalil’s relation to gangs than in hearing how she experienced the episode of the shooting and how Officer 115 acted. They ask why Khalil attended the party, whether he had been drinking, and even if he was involved in selling drugs, not even asking a single question about the Officer. Starr’s mother reacts to the nature

of the questions; ““Woah, wait one second. Are y’all putting Khalil and Starr on trial or the cop who killed him?” [...] ‘You keep asking her about Khalil, like he’s the reason he’s dead’” (Thomas 104-105).

Starr has to go above and beyond to get the outcome she wants and feels guilty when she doesn’t do “enough”. When she is a witness in the trial, this fear is evident: “I didn’t say something right, and now that cop’s not getting arrested” (Thomas 140). Since authorities do nothing, it becomes a 16-year-old girl’s responsibility to hold the cop accountable for his actions. Much like in the situation where Khalil is killed for not following the protocol, this example adds to the image that African Americans in the US feel like it is always their responsibility to “do things right”. Her thoughts reflect her conviction that these people have already set their minds on what is “correct” to say and not, and how much they are going to value Starr’s words vs. protect the Officer. However, Starr’s mother encourages her by saying, ““Sometimes you can do everything right and things will still go wrong. The key is to never stop doing right’” (Thomas 154). Starr doesn’t lose courage and just needs to trust that eventually, someone will give her words the weight they deserve.

On a similar note, both the law system and some of the white characters in the book take Officer 115 in defense despite what he has done. After the shooting, he does not lose his job. In a heated discussion between Uncle Carlos and Maverick, it is revealed that Carlos knew Officer 115 (or Brian, as he calls him), since they had worked together as cops. He goes on defending him, saying that he was a good guy and that he is sure this is hard on him, before ending it with the classical ““Who knows what he was thinking at the time’” (Thomas 55). The discussion ends with Carlos getting mad about Maverick pulling the race card, to which Maverick answers “Ne-gro, please. If I kill Tyrone, I’m going to prison. If a cop kills me, he’s getting put on leave. Maybe.” (Thomas 55). This reflection from Maverick implies that he is aware of the discriminating consequences that such similar actions can have and that the law system is flawed and partly biased. Through Starr’s friend Hailey’s perspective, we see how easy it is to be blind to these considerations when you are protected from experiencing these situations yourself. She feels bad for Officer 115 and his “poor family”, stating that “His son lost everything because he was trying to do his job and protect himself. His life matters too, you know?” (Thomas 244). She has no perception of the situation - that a young man’s life was taken away from him, and the officer who did it is not even being held accountable.

Based on the way authorities act toward him, it seems like Officer 115 would have been left alone and gotten to carry on with his life if Starr hadn't kept up the battle. In the end, the officer ends up not being indicted (Thomas 382). This keeps happening in the US every day, as we've seen, for example, in the case of Michael Brown. Despite Michael's friend witnessing the incident, his word proved useless since there was evidence of Brown having fought back. The shooting was then, of course, interpreted as the officer protecting himself, and he was not held accountable for his actions. In some cases, however, the policeman ends up being punished, such as in the cases of George Floyd and Oscar Grant. What is curious about these cases is that there was video evidence of the happenings. This certainly helps people see what is going on in these situations and understand the injustice happening. It doesn't necessarily lead to the officer serving the amount of time in jail that he should, but it helps people become aware of what goes on in the hidden. In the case of Khalil, Starr has to fight twice as hard, since there was no evidence of the scene, only word against word. As I will elaborate on in the section on interest convergence, this need for evidence makes it easier for the police to create a narrative that excuses the officer and keeps the rumor of the police clean. We'll have a closer look at how these narratives are created in the following section.

3.2 Race as a social construct – “creating” race

One thing CRT scholars are trying to make people realize is that race is a social construct - a category that is created, formed, and upheld by society. Put in a historical perspective, this tenet challenges the traditional idea that black people were subverted because they were indeed less worthy or less intelligent. Instead, CRT scholars emphasize the *convenience* question and argue that the imagined category “race” was created because of a need for a workforce. The imagined picture of these people as less worthy was used to justify their discriminatory and racist practices, and similar attitudes are still present to this day. Many still make assumptions based on the color of someone's skin, and as I intend to focus on in this section, that image is solely constructed and kept alive because we do not challenge it enough. These stereotypes lead to fatal outcomes, and as I bring up in this section and elaborate on later under “counterstories”, we need to recognize the whole picture of a situation or person to break down the generalization that stereotypes bring with them.

One clear example of race being socially constructed in *THUG* is how Khalil was perceived when the police officer stopped him. The officer racially profiles Khalil, associating his

appearance with the stereotype of a drug dealer and perceiving him as a threat solely based on his race. This assumption is used as justification for Officer 115 “seeing a gun”, which in turn justifies his choice of shooting. Even though he couldn’t have seen a gun, as there wasn’t any, the prejudice the officer held toward Khalil’s skin color made him assume there was a gun involved. After the shooting, Khalil is further presented as a criminal outwardly. An important factor in this process is the media, which upholds this image. At one point, they put Officer 115’s father on air, who states that, ““My son was scared for his life”” and claims that he ““only wanted to get home to his wife and kids”” (Thomas 241). To those watching, this could suggest that the officer was in danger, and that Khalil was a threat to him and rightly to be feared. The media uncritically reproduces an image of Khalil as a criminal without presenting what actually went down during the encounter, and hence protects the police’s rumor. Society constructs criminals and makes ordinary victims into what they want others to see them as (Johnson and Neville 128), an ongoing struggle in today’s society.

It later becomes clear that the media covers only what they want people to see. When Maverick is told to get on the ground with his hands behind his back after simply talking with Mr. Lewis, Starr thinks to herself “Where’s that camera operator now? Why can’t this be on the news?” (Thomas, 191). This act of keeping reality away from people’s eyes is another subtle and, to some, unnoticeable way in which racist ideas are being fed to people. Similarly, Garden Heights is presented as a neighborhood “notorious for gangs and drug dealers” by the voice-over talking about Officer 115 (Thomas 242). Starr questions why they’ve chosen the worst parts of her home to show on the news. As we’ve discussed in the section above, this is another measure that partly excuses racism by normalizing it and creating a set image of the neighborhood as a whole. As I will elaborate on in the last section, this is an example where counterstories are necessary to portray the whole truth.

As we can tell from Hailey’s understanding of Khalil, the media portraying yet another black person as a criminal certainly affects how people perceive them. Without knowing who Khalil was other than seeing him on the news, she utters; ““I mean, it’s kinda messed up that we’re protesting a *drug dealer’s* death, but - ”” (Thomas 181). Some youths base their perception of reality on what is said in the media, and it has a lot of power and responsibility to portray accurate representations of happenings. Generally, Hailey makes many assumptions about her friends’ cultures, such as when she asks her Asian friend Maya if her family ate cats for Thanksgiving (Thomas 247). She does not notice this herself, or at least she doesn’t see any

problem with it. She may have grown up with these kinds of assumptions being okay to make jokes about, as many people in today's society do. As a result of Hailey's ignorance, prejudice, and lack of willingness to challenge her perceptions, Starr decides she is "done following Hailey" (Thomas 182). This scene encourages students to value making their own choices and sticking to their morals, instead of blindly following attitudes they do not agree with. When someone is not on the same page as you and is not open to different interpretations, you may be better off without them.

The social construction of race also extends to the creation and upholding of stereotypes. In relation to this, the scene where Starr is protesting with Just Us for Justice and throws a tear gas can at the police has received some attention from scholars regarding the way it is portrayed. In this part of the protest, we see Starr throwing the can out of frustration and anger; "I scream at the top of my lungs, hoping Khalil hears me, and chuck it back at the cops. It explodes and consumes them in a cloud of tear gas. All hell breaks loose" (Thomas 407). Critiquing the way Thomas chose to portray this action, Vincent Haddad (2018) argues that she is reinforcing stereotypes of black people being angry, and that she's not as nuanced as black people deserve her to be. He points to the possible pitfalls when creating realistic, yet fictional works of literature and agrees with James Baldwin's famous statement that most protest novels deal with reality in the wrong way, stripping current social issues of their complexity and instead reinforcing stereotypes (Haddad 41).

Haddad sees strong parallels to the famous picture of a guy throwing tear gas at a protest in Ferguson. Edward Crawford himself stated in an interview with CNN that he only wanted to get the gas away from himself and some children and that he did not throw it at the police in anger (CNN 00:44-01:26). Since it has become symbolic for the BLM protests, Haddad discusses how important it is to remember that a picture is a format where we have to assume what is going on outside the frame (45). He finds it problematic that Thomas chose to have Starr throw the can at the police because it could lead to an assumption that Crawford was doing the same. What Haddad forgets to consider is that Thomas never mentioned the reference and that fictional novels allow for inspirational scenes to be altered to fit the story. Tear gas cans are often thrown back at the police, but as in Starr's case, this is more often than not *after* they are first thrown at black people simply protesting for fair treatment. In general, Thomas does a good job at explaining where that rage comes from, and as I will expand on in the section on counterstories, including the lead-up to these kinds of situations

evidences a more thoroughly considered portrayal of these scenes than Haddad seems to recognize. Mostly, we see Starr protesting with her voice, using a bullhorn that is ironically “as heavy as a gun” (Thomas 406) as her weapon. She is simply using her anger to fuel her courage to speak up with her voice.

Stereotypes also extend to the use of cultural symbols. In *THUG*, cultural symbols are used throughout the novel, sometimes to prove a point about prejudice, other times to keep the culture and pride of black people alive. In one scene, we see the police act based on stereotypical clothing and tattoos. When the police arrive, Starr reflects that a possible reason for them going straight to her father and not even looking at Mr. Lewis is that the latter “isn’t wearing an NWA T-shirt. Or because there aren’t tattoos on his arms. Or because he’s not wearing somewhat baggy jeans and a backwards cap” (Thomas 189). She is aware of what some of these things symbolize, and thereby what they seem to signal for the police, although they have no such “meaning” in them. Thomas draws attention to the diversity of these symbols by presenting that some black people wear NWA T-shirts and have tattoos on their arms, whilst others don’t. She points out how we tend to link specific symbols to traits that are not representative of a whole group of people, and by no means indicate things about their personality. Stereotypes are often oversimplified and contribute to prejudice based on no actual connection between looks and behavior. Through this scene, Thomas emphasizes that the police often are influenced by these stereotypes as well.

Expanding the discussion on stereotypes, Thomas has also included situations where presumptions of cultural symbols go both ways. DeVante utters his opinion of Starr’s boyfriend Chris being a “wigger” because he is wearing Jordan’s; “White boys wear Converse and Vans, not no J’s unless they trying to be black” (Thomas 232). To this, Starr answers with a thought-provoking point; “My bad. I didn’t know shoes determined somebody’s race” (ibid.). Similar reflections are brought up later when the boys have a conversation about what is “normal” for them. The boys discuss food and names, disagreeing on things like how macaroni and cheese should be cooked. Seven and DeVante are used to cheese on top, and when Chris utters that he is used to breadcrumbs, DeVante responds with an amused “The fool said breadcrumbs” (Thomas 394). Chris also asks “Why do some black people give their kids odd names?”, prompting Seven to enquire “What makes [DeVante’s] name or our names any less normal than yours? Who or what defines ‘normal’ to you?”, before finishing up with stating that “It’s about perspective” (Thomas 396). Through this scene, readers are

guided to understand that “normal” is a subjective concept, and that learning about other cultures should include openness and a wish for understanding that there is no “normal vs. not normal”, there is only my normal vs. someone else’s.

Thomas also points out that our generalized assumptions can lead to prejudice both ways. This is quite clearly illustrated through the way Maverick reacts when he finds out about Starr having a white boyfriend. He is hesitant when he finds out about Chris, and reacts with: “‘The hell, Starr?’ [...] ‘You dating a white boy?’” (Thomas 227). His reaction suggests that black people sometimes have prejudiced attitudes toward whites as well. Although it could be argued that bringing up this scene could take away the focus on prejudice toward black people and lead to reactions similar to “All Lives Matter”, I think it is important to show students that we all make assumptions about each other. After noticing how Starr’s father reacts to her having a white boyfriend, Chris asks if this is some “black thing”, to which Starr answers “It’s not like this kinda stuff is exclusive to black people, you know? [...] Your parents don’t have a problem with us dating?” (Thomas 228). Chris admits that he and his parents did, in fact, discuss him dating a black girl. Commenting on prejudices going both ways, Matek and Rehlicki argue that “concepts and stereotypes that white people have of themselves and black Americans in the novel, and vice versa, perpetuate the tension between them” (237). They further suggest that this ultimately “rescinds the idea of one, unified American nation” (ibid.), as there continues to be an *us* against *them*. Correspondingly, we see Starr recognizing the challenge of dating someone who represents the same race as a person who killed her friend. She thinks of Officer 115 as “A cop as white as Chris” (Thomas 86) and later questions that relation even more; “Chris didn’t pull us over, he didn’t shoot Khalil, but am I betraying who I am by dating him?” (Thomas 107). However, the idea of an *us* against *them* is challenged in the end, when Maverick accepts Chris. He realizes that there is no need to question your child dating someone of the opposite race since our so-called major differences are only socially constructed. We tend to ignore all our similarities and equal human traits, and instead try to construct differences, a pattern we need to challenge.

3.3 Differential racialization and intersectionality

Another tenet of CRT that is closely connected to the social construction of race is that of differential racialization. This idea proposes that a group can be perceived differently depending on where in the world you are and at what time in history, again changing based on

what is convenient for those in power. For example, it emphasizes how the view of black people has changed from simple-minded creatures who only function as a labor force, to sly criminals who deal drugs and create trouble. On a somewhat similar note, the way people are viewed on a daily basis is dependent on the intersection of your race with other traits like your gender, how wealthy you are, and how you speak or dress. These factors can either add to your already oppressed situation or benefit you by minimizing the effects of being black.

Marc Johnston-Guerrero argues that “differential racialization and intersections with other identities contribute to a vast diversity of experiences and perspectives across and within racial groups” (46). This diversity within racial groups is interesting, because, as Vincent Basile and Ray Black draw attention to, “What began as large, often binary race categories are now in some spaces divided into many sub-categories” (380). Each of these “ascribe differentiated, hierarchical attributes, often pitting these sub-groups in opposition to each other” (ibid.). In other words, different categories are now mixed together and across one another, making up combinations like poor, white, female, and rich, black, male. It is the total of these categories that places you somewhere in the hierarchy. Arguably, the clear racialization of Khalil in *THUG* reflects the fact that less wealthy, young, Black boys are often the “most racialized” group. They are assumed to be part of drug-dealing environments and up to no good. This is also pointed out in the *THUG-LIFE* conversation between Starr and her father, where they discussed that wealth (or rather the lack of it), is what keeps people like Khalil part of the drug-dealing cycle. They are kept unwealthy since the impression people have of people of their race leads to them not obtaining jobs.

In contrast, Starr’s wealth protects her from some of the experiences of Khalil. She is not as heavily targeted and prejudiced as black boys are. Nonetheless, she is still not as rich as Chris, whom she reflects has “an entire floor as big as my house and hired help that looks like me” (Thomas 83). Starr’s dual identity makes it difficult for her to fit in anywhere. She is seen as “too black” at Williamson, and her friend Kenya says she’s “too white” to understand all the struggles of her friends in Garden Heights. As a kind of “common ground” for her two identities, Thomas has emphasized Starr’s use of the famous Jordan sneakers. Jay Shelat argues that “Starr finds a sense of identity by collecting, maintaining, and wearing Jordans” (71). Expanding on that, he claims that when she notices her peers wearing them as well, she “notes the monetary worth or cultural capital the shoes carry” (ibid.). She gets to keep her culture part of her, yet also appears somewhat wealthy like the other kids at Williamson.

Starr also notices that her friends at Williamson borrow things from her culture that are cool (like Jordans), yet everything else is not; “Funny how it works with white kids though. It’s dope to be black until it’s hard to be black” (Thomas 15). Her friends want to wear the same cool sneakers, talk slang, listen to rap, and tan, yet they don’t want and are protected from shady neighborhoods, being afraid when they encounter the police, or being “too dark” and everything that comes with that. Although not exactly differential racialization, this demonstrates how her white friends have the privilege to decide themselves what to borrow and what to resent about her culture. Starr, on the other hand, has to continuously be aware of how her way of speaking and dressing is perceived by those around her. This illustrates the power of white people to keep black people on their toes, constantly thinking about how they are viewed outwardly.

The use of a female protagonist was a powerful move by Thomas. According to an interview by Dayna Evans (2017), Thomas intentionally chose Starr as her main character because black female voices are often left out. Throughout the novel, it is never suggested that Starr being a girl could keep her further down. Instead, it reinforces the power girls have in them to make a change, countering the traditional view that strength is exclusively associated with boys. Adam Levin (2020) emphasizes the intersectionality of Starr being both black and female as the two elements that lead to her feeling oppressed by society. Building upon Owen’s observation that Starr is allowed to be “a fully complex human being with [...] motivations that do not appeal to standards of white normativity or serve to comfort white readers” when she protests (Owen 253), he claims that this scene “elicits a subversion of the power relations with which Black and white readers are familiar” (Levin 162). Giving a black female the power to change things is an important choice by Thomas that encourages her young readers to view themselves as powerful and capable of achieving big things.

Lastly, I want to discuss the use of language in the novel. Thomas allows the youths to speak how they naturally would and use slang such as “man”, “a’ight”, and even portrays Khalil saying “nunya” to the police, an authentic writing style that draws people to the story and makes it even more realistic. As she has stated in several interviews, Thomas was inspired by Rachel Jeantel, the girl who witnessed at Trayvon Martin’s trial, to keep the authentic language of her characters (Levin 149). Jeantel was judged on her language and seen as untrustworthy by those listening to her accounts in court. As discussed in the section on

ordinariness and code-switching, Starr didn't want to use slang because she thought it would affect how people viewed her (Thomas 73-74). According to an interview by Dayna Evans, Thomas' aim with using this kind of writing appears to have been conveying the significance of language as a social marker to her readers, emphasizing that your way of speaking should not lead people to assume things about your personality.

So many black kids are put in that position, so I wanted to show that there is no one way to talk black. There is a stereotype that if you sound ghetto, and you use a lot of slang, that makes you black. [...] The way you speak should not determine your intelligence. I should be able to say "lit" and you still know I'm intelligent. I should be able to say "turn up" and that doesn't take away from my intelligence. I wanted to break down that stereotype a little bit. I know it's just a book, but if I can get kids to understand that it's okay how they talk, then I'll have done my job. (Evans 2017)

Angie also brings attention to the media depicting "more discussion about the way she presented herself than about what she was saying. I was so angry about that." (Evans 2017). In the end, Trayvon Martin's killer, George Zimmerman, was released, a decision that could have been different had only Rachel's testimony been given the weight and value it deserved. Instead, her testimony was "met with scorn both within the courtroom and by the public" (Levin 149). As Levin (2019) emphasizes, the results of these judgments are highly critique-worthy and prove the need for a change in the way the law system seems to allow decisions made upon prejudice. Starr's battle for her voice to be heard and for justice to be served for Khalil has similarities to the case of Jeantel, and by telling Starr's story, Thomas stresses that black girls deserve to be heard and that their voices are not worthless.

3.4 Interest convergence – progress when in the interests of the dominant

The tenet of interest convergence suggests that progress is likelier to occur when the interests of the dominant and racialized groups align. It is rooted in the belief that whites have little interest in changing things because racism benefits them, and questions that they will act solely out of a sense of justice. As Johnson and Neville put it, all progress is "made because it benefits those already in power" (125). This tenet is a bit controversial because it is hard to prove why decisions are made. However, it encourages individuals to confront their own and others' motivations and make sure decisions are based upon genuine wish for racial progress.

When Officer 115 shot Khalil, he received no other punishment than getting put on leave. Although you would expect stricter consequences, the rights of the police seem to outweigh the desire for justice for the victims - leading to the killer often not being held accountable. One reason for this lack of consequences could be the need to protect the police's image. It appears to be a general defense mechanism to avoid damaging their reputation, authority, and respect. Admitting that an Officer acted on their bias would not benefit them and is consequently avoided at any cost. As we saw when Starr was giving her account of what happened at the police office, they do everything to create an image that indicates that their officers did nothing wrong. This is a tricky subject, as the police must be protected to some extent, and we cannot assume that their actions are wrong in every situation. However, we know that many cases are unjust, and people are becoming aware that prejudice is often involved. As Alessandro Tinonga stated in a report shortly after the killer of Oscar Grant was released from jail, less than a year after the murder, this case "illustrates how far the criminal justice system is willing to go to protect itself. At every step of the process, the police and the judicial system went to extreme lengths to maintain their legitimacy" (Tinonga 2011). The interest of the police to keep a good rumor makes it harder to achieve justice for the victims.

The genuine wish for progress is also doubtful when we understand the real motivation behind a protest initiated at Starr's school. Although Starr and her siblings appear to like it at Williamson, we understand that those from Garden Heights have quite different worries than those living close to Williamson. This is exemplified when Hailey's brother initiates a protest for Khalil only because he wants the day off school. He sends out a message to hundreds of students that reads; "Protesting today @ 1st period", and when one guy answers "Hell yeah. Free day. I'm game", he confirms his intentions with "That's the point, dumbass." (Thomas 180). Hailey is also happy that she can get away with not attending the test she didn't study for, "Perfect timing too. I so did not study for that English exam." (Thomas 180). Their wish to protest is certainly not rooted in wanting to help Khalil, and this scene could be viewed as a criticism of how some young people handle racial issues today. When the thing they are protesting is not affecting them negatively, their motive is often personal benefits.

Reflecting on Hailey's action, Starr considers that maybe they are joining in because sitting out a protest could "make them look racist" (Thomas 183). Bringing this perspective up with students could be interesting, as it is helpful to know their reflections on participating in protests. When Hailey later asks, "Isn't a protest a good thing?" Starr answers, "Not if you're

only doing it to cut class” (Thomas 239). Hailey doesn’t seem to grasp the problem and instead turns herself into a victim, finding it unfair that she is held accountable when it was a joint decision; “So you want us to apologize for it even though everybody else did it too?” (ibid.). In response, Starr educates Hailey, stating, “Just because everyone else did it doesn’t mean it’s okay” (Thomas 240). By implementing such a strong statement, Thomas may awaken reflections in her young readers. This scene can make them question their choices and whether they are protesting for the right reasons or simply doing things for their own good. Additionally, it could help them reflect on the importance of knowing your values and sticking to them, not just doing what everyone else is doing. I will elaborate on this in the educational value chapter.

Lastly, the detaining of King towards the end of the novel demonstrates what happens when the interest of the neighborhood actually converges with the interest of the police. Vincent Haddad claims that this scene is an example where the police get to do what they want to, which is to detain black people – a view I share with him. However, Haddad elaborates that the reader is “meant to see this iteration of an arrest, [...] as an achievable, pragmatic, and appropriate justice for the death of Khalil” (47). King becomes a symbol of why Garden Heights is the way it is, which “signals to the reader that the racial, economic, and social injustices that beleaguer the residents of Garden Heights [...] ought to be attributed to individual agents” (Haddad 47). These individuals can then “only be dealt with through incarceration, rather than a broader and more diffuse struggle against systemic and institutional racism” (ibid.). The way he sees it, this is simply another way of keeping the stereotype of black people belonging in jail alive.

From my perspective, this scene is not presented as justice for Khalil. Instead, Starr and Maverick appear to be celebrating because this is the only time the police detain the *right* people; “The cops load King and his boys into patrol cars, and the crowd claps and cheers. Finally, something to celebrate tonight” (Thomas 422). King has led to continuing unrest and uneasiness in Garden Heights, and the detaining symbolizes a break from his grip of power. King is a powerful leader who pulls all the strings and creates a lot of trouble around the neighborhood that should indeed be punished. In the lead-up to this detaining, he lit Maverick’s store on fire, well aware that Starr and Seven were in there. He wanted to get revenge for Starr snitching on him. If we connect this scene to what we’ve discussed about the anti-snitch culture keeping the cycle alive, the detaining of King can help with openness

around the struggles in the neighborhood. The police detained King for arson, not drug dealing, and it is not until after they've driven away that DeVante suggests snitching on his stash to give King the time he deserves in jail (Thomas 423). This is a point where the novel's closeness to activism is again reinforced, with DeVante using his voice to get out of the cycle. Detaining King may not break the cycle, but speaking up about their conditions is one step toward ending the prevailing inequality in the neighborhood.

3.5 Counterstories - Point of view matters:

This tenet is based on the claim that *voices of color* are unique - that people of color have a unique ability to tell stories from their perspective and convey truths that may be kept from the rest. By allowing them to tell their versions, you get a counter-story that may differ from that presented outwardly and reveal things that the public has not recognized. In this section, I emphasize the value of Starr's decision to speak up, as her counter-story helps give a rightful impression of Khalil and inspires a focus on challenging stereotypes. I also highlight the value of this novel itself as a counter-story through Blackman's nuanced portrayal of Black people.

Already from the beginning, the focus of Critical Law Studies was to enhance the fact that the victim's perspective often differs from that of the perpetrator. This idea stems from an article by Alan Freeman from 1978 and appeared as a critique of the general consensus that it was the intention of the perpetrator that should determine if an action was racist or not (Brown & Jackson 14). Freeman points out the importance of being conscious of the "distinction between defining discrimination in terms of the effects of actions as opposed to the intent that motivated the actions" (Brown & Jackson 14). In other words, if you only define discrimination based on the perpetrator's intent, you are not acknowledging the victim's experience of the situation. On a somewhat similar note, Neville and Johnson point out that "the frame an author chooses for a story determines the narrative" (130). Referring back to a TED talk by Chimamanda Adichie, where she cites the Palestinian poet Mourid Barghouti, they emphasize the tendency for stories about black experiences to start with "secondly" and focus solely on their resistance (Neville & Johnson 130). To put themselves in a better light, storytellers would not include the origin of the anger and frustration behind black people's actions, only the violence used when they were fighting back. As Adichie points out in her lesson, this reflects the "danger of a single story" (2009). If we leave out the important

counterstories, we create stereotypes and reproduce incomplete stories. Through their focus on counter-storytelling, CRT emphasizes the value of the victim's perspective as well.

By telling the story from Starr's perspective, Blackman emphasizes how the inclusion of an alternative view of the police brutality affects our interpretation. Instead of only hearing Officer 115's idea of what happened, which would likely be that he thought he saw a gun and therefore shot the "criminal" Khalil, Blackman gives us the full story. We get an insight into Starr and Khalil's evening beforehand, see them discussing music in the car in the lead-up to the shooting, and learn what Starr was thinking throughout the encounter. This gives us a more complete picture of the situation. Thomas's focus on narrating the happening itself, as well as mapping out Khalil's past, challenges the traditional discourse where those in power led the narrative. As you change the narrative and include accounts of how POC experience these situations, you change the whole impression of a story.

Since *THUG* is written from Starr's point of view, we get a first-hand account of her struggles when trying to get justice for Khalil. Her journey is long, as Thomas signals through the use of markers like "When it Happens", "Five weeks after it", and "Thirteen weeks after it" to split up the sections of the book. It takes her months to build up courage and get to a place where she dares to speak up. Her desire to take action is sparked at Khalil's funeral when Starr learns that Officer 115 will not be arrested (Thomas 129). After the funeral, people hold signs calling for justice for Khalil that read "Am I next" and "Enough is Enough!" (Thomas 134). The lawyer Ms. Ofrah contacts Starr and wants her to join *Just Us for Justice*, a movement that resembles the BLM movement in its collective spirit; "Khalil was silenced, but let's join together and make our voices heard for him" (Thomas 130). Later, Ms. Ofrah states that "'Starr offers a unique perspective on this, one you don't get a lot with these cases'" (Thomas 135). Thomas seems to suggest that despite the power of movements like BLM and Just Us for Justice, having a witness give a personal account of the victim can be beneficial. When Starr gets sick of the police not doing anything, Kenya advises her to "Go on TV or something [...] Tell everybody what really happened that night. They're not even giving [Khalil's] side of the story" (Thomas 195). This sparks something in Starr, and with the encouragement of Ms. Ofrah, she decides to talk to the DA and do a TV interview. In these interviews, Starr fights to get the real version of Khalil represented and counterwork what the media has said about him. She talks about their childhood together, that he "was a jokester" and "had a big heart" (Thomas 282). Outside the interviews, she also creates a blog

called “The Khalil I knew”, where she writes about everyday things he liked. As Gföllner states, “Counternarratives to dominant discourses oppose the derealization of marginalized people by, [...] challenging prevalent images of black people as criminals or thugs” (9). By humanizing Khalil, Starr makes people see him as a real person instead of a thug.

The unique ability of voices of color to give insight and counter stereotypes is demonstrated quite well in *THUG*. Although Garden Heights is called “the ghetto” and they have broken playgrounds and bad schools, Starr’s accounts illustrate that it is so much more than that. She emphasizes how nice people are towards each other, conveying the humanity and kindness present in neighborhoods like Garden Heights. During the riots, we see all the neighbors call to check in on each other and offer to help with whatever necessary (Thomas 139). Towards the end of the novel, Starr states that their “street is quiet for the most part this morning. It usually is”, before she goes on to describe two of her neighbors gossiping in their garden and another working in her flower bed with the help of a friend (Thomas 323). This humanity and kindness is also represented when the Cedar Grove King Lords offer to help protect Starr on the day of the trial (Thomas 317). As Gabrielle Owen observes, the men are shown “laughing, eating, and talking politics with Starr’s father, strategizing how to prevent rioting and how to foster unity among the gangs to protect the neighborhood” (256). This presentation highlights their soft side and gives a more nuanced picture of a somewhat stigmatized group. Together with the way both Khalil and DeVante’s situations are presented, this leads to gang members being “depicted as human beings with a range of circumstances and motivations” (Owen 256). Thomas helps keep a nuanced picture of gang members instead of criminalizing them.

On this point, however, Haddad (2018) disagrees. As discussed above, he sees the ending scene where King is detained as representative of how gang members are presented in *THUG*, arguing King and his men are criminalized and that the empathy readers are meant to develop does not extend to them (Haddad 47). Haddad assumes that all readers share his interpretation of this scene but is looking past the fact that many other scenes present a different image of gang members than the stereotypical one. Agreeing with Owen, I believe that Thomas depicts gang members as diverse and thereby humanizes them instead of putting them into categories and only allowing them to act according to stereotypes of that group. Drawing this back to what we discussed under social constructions, this choice demonstrates the importance of giving readers insight into other possible sides to these people than the prejudiced image people have based on their looks or connotations to the business they are part of.

3.6 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analyzed *THUG* in light of several tenets of CRT, revealing the novel's potential to raise awareness of complex issues and encourage important conversations. Reading this novel can help us understand things like systemic racism, the dangers of prejudice, and what motivates racial progress. Its nature as a counter-story brings attention to the unseen and can make readers aware of the existence of things they didn't know of, which CRT presents as necessary for change to be able to happen.

More specifically, the first section was used to argue that *THUG* presents patterns similar to the systemic racism CRT argues is part of society today. The code-switching Starr feels the need to do indicates how power relations and the "politics of respectability" come into play in every aspect of life for a person of color. Additionally, the normality of racist practices in both the police and law force demonstrates how POC have to change their behaviors and watch their words, only to avoid being killed or achieve the justice they deserve. In the second section, we had a closer look at the social construction of race and how easy it is to manipulate the image of a person. Through the example of Khalil, I emphasized the critical role of the media in creating and upholding false and unnuanced portrayals of young black boys.

Thirdly, the intersection of traits and the continuing struggle of differential racialization was discussed. I argued that Thomas' use of authentic language brought attention to the assumptions activated when we hear a black person speak, and how it is often used as a marker of their intelligence. Moreover, the fourth section presented examples of interest convergence and found that Thomas focused on the lesson of questioning people's intentions. By portraying a law system that protects police officers who have carried out racist actions, as well as youths who simply view Khalil's death as an excuse to skip class, Thomas manages to convey the restricting effect of today's power relations. Lastly, I emphasized the importance of telling counterstories, revealing that giving both perspectives of a situation is the only way to establish a fair foundation when siding with someone or making up our minds about them. Thomas challenges the typical "secondly" portrayal of POC by including backstories and portraying nuanced characters, thereby challenging stereotypes. In the following section, a similar analysis will be done on *Noughts & Crosses* before comparing the two novels and discussing how they can be used to educate critical thinkers in school settings.

4 Analyzing *Noughts & Crosses*

Noughts & Crosses is a speculative young adult novel where we meet Persephone (Sephy) Hadley and Callum McGregor. The two are part of a love story much like that of Romeo & Juliet, yet what hinders them from staying together is that one is a nought and the other is a Cross. The society they live in is one where racism permeates every element of society, including schools, hospitals, the police, and the law force. Over time, this leads both Callum and his family towards making a determining decision – joining the Liberation Militia (LM).

Throughout the novel, we follow the two youths as they try to navigate their segregated society and revolt in the hopes of inspiring change. Sephy's increasing understanding of how things must be for Callum and other oppressed people mirrors a common development as people start recognizing their privileges. Callum, on the other hand, becomes a symbol of how anger can build up in oppressed groups, especially when he decides he's had enough and joins the Liberation Militia, a resistance group. Overall, this novel portrays the highly relevant themes of prejudice, racism, and fear of the unknown, and uses a lot of scenes that resemble moments in history to extend its critique to racial issues in today's society.

The novel's speculative nature allows the author to alternate historical happenings and timelines. One example is the reversal of racial roles, which changes the power structure entirely from the one we are familiar with. This makes the issue of prejudice and stereotypes more noticeable and helps readers become more aware of how much power the dominant group has in society. By altering the timeframe of several happenings, readers are made aware that some things in this story differ from reality. One example is how it is stated that slavery ended only about 30 years ago, yet noughts are already starting to be allowed to attend school together with Crosses. In reality, there was a significantly longer period between these two achievements, especially in the desegregation of schools in the US, which was made famous through the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Blackman has gotten inspiration from several key points in racial history worldwide, and through these choices and alterations, she can spark readers' curiosity about what happened throughout the real history of the oppressed.

It is worth mentioning that although the novel itself hasn't been discussed that much by scholars, *Noughts & Crosses* has had enormous success both as a theatre production that has toured around the UK and as a TV series on BBC. It is also frequently seen on *recommended*

reading lists in the UK, although it has not gained popularity in Norwegian classrooms yet. I hope that this thesis will inspire teachers to see the value of using this book in their classrooms. As a result of the narrow body of critical work, this chapter is mostly my own analysis and reading of the scenes as they relate to the tenets of CRT.

In this chapter, I investigate how different elements of the novel relate to the ideas of CRT. The first section maps out how ordinary racism is in *Noughts & Crosses*. I emphasize that in addition to the partly invisible structures portrayed in *THUG* and found in society today, Blackman presents openly racist actions that are no longer carried out. By including these in addition to patterns still seen today, Blackman makes readers reflect on how society has moved from obvious segregation and inequity to more hidden racist practices. The law system institutionalizes racism by enforcing, rather than protecting, noughts from violence. This systemic racism only leads to the persistence of discriminatory practices, an issue that will be further discussed in this section. Drawing on Christine Wilkie-Stibbs' (2006) article about the effects of the power politics portrayed in the novel and what she calls "colonized childhoods", I argue that the portrayal of Callum joining the LM and noughts resorting to violence demonstrates the effects of this continuous oppression.

The next section examines how Blackman reverting the power structures we are familiar with helps make the point about race being a social construct. Additionally, the deeply unfair and prejudiced ideas of Callum leading to his death is used to emphasize the dangers of acting on your assumptions. Importantly, this section also brings up the significance of challenging said prejudices and assumptions to realize that people are more equal than we are made to believe.

Thirdly, I will discuss how Callum being differentially racialized depending on the interests of authorities demonstrates the strong power of those in charge and how easily they can manipulate the presentation of oppressed groups. I also include Wilkie-Stibbs' point about IDs initially functioning as identification, but now being used to curtail individual liberties and target the already oppressed noughts. I draw parallels to the similar case of the Windrush Scandal, demonstrating how some happenings in this speculative novel are heavily inspired by real happenings. The extent of power held by Crosses is further portrayed through cases of interest convergence. Progress like allowing Callum to attend school only happens when it benefits both the oppressed *and* those in charge. Through these examples, Blackman draws attention to the importance of thinking critically about people's intentions and motivations,

since, as we will see later, they can use their power to withdraw those progresses if they were not rooted in the right motivations.

Lastly, I discuss the importance of counterstories, and argue that by implementing a dual first-person point of view in her storytelling, Blackman has achieved a focus on both the voice of the oppressed as well as the thoughts of the privileged. This affects plot development and influences how readers experience the characters and the world of Sephy and Callum. They are both trying to counterwork the current status quo, leading the way toward a more accepting and tolerant society. Claire Bradford (2010) agrees with this and elaborates that portraying Callum and Sephy as the only ones challenging these constructs underscores how strong the power structures found in this society are. I also bring attention to CRT's mentioned focus on revisionist history, exemplified by a history-class scene from Callum's school. As Marit Lyngstad (2021) suggests in her paper, scenes like this one can be valuable starting points for critical discussions with your students. Although she focuses on the development of democracy and citizenship skills, we share many thoughts on the potential of Blackman's novel in a school context.

4.1 Racism is ordinary - Structure of Society

That racism is ordinary means that it is everywhere and that the reason for it being invisible to those not subject to it is that it is implemented into the structures of society. Starr's peers did not understand her situation simply because for them, practices of racism and discrimination were not visible. The idea of racism being ordinary takes a somewhat different approach in *Noughts & Crosses*. In this case, racism is ordinary and systemic like today, yet it also portrays racism as something visible in society. Most noughts are prohibited from attending the same schools as Crosses and they are lynched in the open for people to see. These clearly visible discriminations are not present in today's society, indicating that racism has adopted more hidden approaches and now persists mostly through institutionalized structures.

Power-relations and structures

Critical Race Theory examines how racism is ingrained in and reinforced by power structures. According to Edward Taylor, "CRT comes from a long tradition of resistance to the unequal and unjust distribution of power and resources" because these, along with "the support and legitimacy of the legal system", allow for "the perpetuation of the established power

relationships of society” (1). The continuation of racism is rooted in the silent persistence of the status quo, as those unaffected by racism often have no interest in calling for change when their position is comfortable. Consequently, the oppressed have to work twice as hard to get the freedom and justice they are fighting for.

Much like in today’s society, things are suited for the dominant race. One way this is presented is through the symbol of plasters (band-aids). They only come in “skin color” - that of Crosses. When Sephy meets Shania, a nought girl attending Heathcroft, for the first time, she has “a dark brown plaster on her forehead” which Sephy reflects sticks out on her “pale white skin like a throbbing thumb” (Blackman 67). In everyday life, people of color are reminded in supermarkets that “skin color” defaults to white tones. This common experience highlights how something white people don’t see any challenge with at all can be utterly racist, demonstrating that racism is ordinary and all around us.

According to Christine Wilkie-Stibbs (2006), Blackman’s novel demonstrates “how power politics filter into the divisive practices of everyday lives with terrible consequences” (238). As I will elaborate on throughout the chapter, they affect every aspect of a nought’s life. Generally, mechanisms of power appear to function as “the agent of structural violence” and foster discriminatory practices (Wilkie-Stibbs 238). This is exemplified through the constant ID checks Callum and his family go through, which only intensifies their experience of being targeted and assumed to be up to no good. One example of this is when Sephy and Callum are headed for the park, and the police get on the train for a routine inspection (Blackman 102). The two are traveling on first-class tickets bought by Sephy, and Callum reflects that the officers only take “cursory glances” at the ID passes of all the Crosses in their coach (Blackman 102). He wonders whether they are going to stop and question him, knowing the answer already; “I was the only nought. Would they stop and ask me lots of questions? Huh! Is pig poo smelly?” (ibid.). As expected, they decide to have a closer look at Callum, insinuating that he has stolen his ticket or snuck on board. They ask, ““Where did you get the money to buy this kind of ticket?”” and ““Did you buy this ticket?””, to which Callum answers with the honest ‘no’ (Blackman 103). When they order him to come with them, Sephy intervenes, admitting to buying his ticket. She says they can call her father and offer them her ID, both of which they turn down, because why would they bother using time on that when it was Callum they were after? Although they let him go, since they believe in Sephy, this incident shows how noughts face unfair assumptions based on their skin color and are treated

as criminals when doing ordinary things like riding the train. As she explains in her autobiography *Just Sayin'* (2023), Blackman has experienced interrogations like this herself. She included this incident to raise awareness about the discriminatory practices happening around us. This experience of prejudice adds to Callum's feelings of frustration and anger, leading to consequences I will elaborate on later in the chapter. I will also get back to the use of ID requirements later, as they are used to differentially racialize and target noughts in other ways as well.

Law enforcement enacting violence

Another way in which it becomes evident that racism is ordinary and systemic in the society of *Noughts & Crosses* is how the law system enforces discrimination. As discussed in the introduction, CRT was born out of Critical Law Studies (CLS), a group wanting to critique and change the discriminatory practices of the law system. The detention of Callum's father exemplifies how the law system acts and is based on systemic racism, as I will elaborate on in the following.

A bit into the novel we get to know that Callum's brother, Jude, and their father, Ryan, have joined a group called the Liberation Militia. They are resorting to violence, hoping that this will finally give them the justice noughts have been fighting for throughout the last decades or even centuries. At one point, Ryan declares his "ineffectual days are over" (Blackman 171), and Callum can sense that something potentially dangerous is going on. Shortly after, a blueprint is spread out on their kitchen table, which Jude and Ryan are trying to hide from Callum. They are planning a bombing at the mall, which turns out to have fatal consequences.

Officers trick Ryan into confessing to the bombing by pretending they are going to hang Jude. This brings out the father instinct in Ryan and makes him admit to all the charges and take the blame for his son. After confessing, he is made aware of the lies; "Those bastards! They said they had him. They said Jude was as good as hanged" (Blackman 235). Similar to the behavior we saw by the officers in *THUG*, these ones are also working systematically to create the outcome they want; "Meggie, they threatened that you and Callum would also go to prison for conspiracy. It was my life or the lives of my entire family." (Blackman 236). In the lead-up to this, they also did similar things to Callum when questioning him about his brother's involvement with the LM. They ask leading questions, trying to get him to admit something: "When did Jude join the Liberation Militia?" (Blackman 225). Equally, they

claim they “know all about your [Callum’s] family’s involvement with the L.M.” to which he answers with the somewhat snappy ““What d’you need me for then?”” (226), illustrating that he understands that they are trying to manipulate him.

There is a severe lack of noughts amongst authorities in *Noughts & Crosses*, with the sight of nought police officer being “as rare as blue snow” (Blackman 156). Generally, Callum reflects that “The number of noughts in position of authority in the country could be counted on the fingers of one hand – without including the thumb!” (Blackman 132). We are reminded of this unfair split in highly respected professions when Meggie and Callum go to look up lawyers and find mostly Cross solicitors (Blackman 230). Lawyers are another authoritative group that can exercise power in society, and although some may try to challenge the consensus, they are part of a flawed legal system that resembles the police in reinforcing discriminatory practices. Equally, the jury in the Ryan’s trial consists of twelve “good Cross men and women”, because, as Callum reflects ironically, “How else could justice be served?” (Blackman 256). Altogether, a society ruled predominantly by Crosses will value the interests of noughts less, as I will expand on in the section on interest convergence.

In the following, we see what Callum calls “a farce of a trial” (Blackman 256). The prosecution lawyer is trying to manipulate the outcome of the trial, asking leading questions so that the jury is given no chance to doubt Callum’s intentions at the mall; ““When you found her, why didn’t you sit down in the café with her [...]? What was the hurry?”” (Blackman 266). He receives support from the judge who mostly allows these kinds of questions. Although they are right about him knowing something about the bombing, they are using him to prove his father’s involvement with the LM. Callum experiences a similar fear of saying something that could wrongly convict his father as Starr did when she fought for the conviction of Officer 115. He questions if he had “waited too long to answer?” and wonders “Which version of the truth would this Cross court find acceptable?” (Blackman 259-260). These thoughts stem from the power dynamics he is accustomed to, where noughts are made to believe that everything they do is wrong, and thereby blame themselves if something goes wrong. This illustrates how oppression over time has led to the power structures keeping themselves alive. The injustice continues because those performing it are not held accountable when the oppressed are blamed instead.

They prosecution lawyer suddenly presents video clips that Ryan's lawyer Kelani was not informed about. Although they argue that they just found out about the video to get away with showing it, this is something the lawyer is required to get information about. Allowing such important evidence to be shown without Kelani having time to prepare her defense likely wouldn't have been tolerated if the defendant was a Cross. Sephy is also brought into court, and although the judge appears way kinder to her, calming her and advising her to take her time (Blackman 268), not even her account is given significant value. Although Callum still seems to blame himself; "Between the two of us, Sephy and I had pretty much put the noose around Dad's neck" (Blackman 271), it is clear that the jury had set their mind on Ryan being guilty prior to the trial. However, Kelani is one of the few Crosses actually working to improve the situation of noughts, and she quickly devises a plan that strengthens Callum's position. As I will elaborate on under interest convergence, it seems like the corroboration of Callum's story by a Cross police officer was the only thing that could "better" the outcome.

When Ryan is sentenced to death for the bombing at the mall, this is to be carried out by lynching - a historical and open way of getting rid of one race where people are able to see the punishment. Having the law system enact racist violence instead of protect against it demonstrates the institutionalization of racism, something CRT scholars have been concerned with ever since the movement grew out of legal studies. By depicting this extreme form of racism, the novel prompts readers to reflect on how racism has moved away from the more public ways of enacting discrimination. While public execution is now forbidden in most countries, there is an interesting connection between the current role of video evidence of police killings and the publicity of lynching. As discussed when analyzing *THUG*, a lot of police violence happens in the hidden, which leads us to believe racism is not practiced today. However, there is evidence in the numbers that race still impacts how likely you are to be criminalized, and just by taking a quick glance at the disproportionate number of black men in prison, we are reminded that the law is still not colorblind. The Sentencing Project, led by Kara Gotsch, works with highlighting and counterworking the high incarceration rates currently found in the US and the racial disparities reflected in these numbers. When mapping out current trends, they found that black men born in 2001 are almost six times as likely to be incarcerated during their lifetime than white men (1 in 3 as opposed to 1 in 17) (The Sentencing Project 5). As this tenet is trying to make us aware of, racism is invisible to many, even if it is happening all the time. The role of evidence becomes to help people realize what is going on around them and it certainly speaks as proof of racism still existing.

Importantly, this lynching scene is presented through both Sephy's and Callum's perspective, as Sephy is secretly brought with her family to attend Ryan's lynching. When she realizes what she is about to see, she tries to act up and make a scene. Her parents then force her to sit down and later tell her that it was their "duty" to be there. Although they don't seem to enjoy it either, looking straight ahead like robots, with somber and grim expressions (Blackman 284), I will elaborate on their involvement in this process in the section on interest convergence.

The dual point of view adds depth and gives the readers an insight into how it feels for Callum to have a posh group sit there and watch his father get a noose around his neck. We are reminded of the sharp contrasts between how noughts and Crosses are positioned to violence as Crosses are protected from it and instead get to see violent actions carried out on noughts. It becomes evident through Sephy's thoughts and actions that she had no intention of joining this event, which she wished Callum knew: "I didn't know, I mouthed. [...] How to make my desperate thoughts reach him?" (Blackman 285). Callum, on the other hand, is frustrated and angry. For him, it seemed like Crosses were watching the hanging of his father like it was "free entertainment" as if they were "having a night out at the ballet or going to the cinema or something" (Blackman 289). Portraying this scene from both perspectives allows insight into the inner thoughts of both Callum and Sephy, through which we understand the clear consequences and restrictions of the set *us* against *them*. Sephy is trying to distance herself from the actions of "her people", yet she is stuck in her position, not even being allowed to support Callum. Callum, on the other hand, reflects on his people once again being treated disrespectfully. He despises the actions of Crosses, including Sephy, as he thinks that she must also be enjoying it.

Blackman effectively portrays the Liberation Militia and their extremist actions by providing insight into and giving context to their actions. Although she doesn't justify extremism and terror, she explains where all this anger is coming from – that is the result of decades of oppression that has built up. This helps us understand why Callum is drawn to the LM, and that oppression can lead people to resort to violence. Blackman also guides us to understand Callum's choice through structural choices like allowing enough time to pass for his motivations to develop. As opposed to *THUG*, this novel builds up quite slowly. We follow Callum through his teenage years and the challenges he meets. The racist power politics present are, as Wilkie-Stibbs points out, "the conditions that breed terrorism and suicide

bombers” (238). By building up the storyline and giving us the context of these power politics before presenting the actions of the LM, Blackman makes it easier for readers to understand where they are coming from and draw connections to how injustice may lead to anger in real life. The use of time in this way also promotes a sense of literary realism. It builds probability, and we are more likely to understand why he chose to join the LM when we’ve read about the countless unfair discriminatory actions toward Callum, building empathy and anger along with him. Blackman presents a direct link between the way society is ruled and people joining terrorist groups like the LM, making readers aware of the dangerous results of racism’s ordinariness in the long run.

4.2 Race as a social construct – “creating” race

As we saw in the last section on *THUG*, the idea of race being a social construct describes the opportunity of groups in power to put others into categories and construct the image they want of them. This also involves racializing a group when it is convenient, as CRT scholars believe the idea that one race is subordinate was invented because Europeans needed a workforce and had to justify slavery. It was all built upon convenience. Since racism persists even after we’ve settled through science that races are equal, CRT claims that the social creation and upholding of racial images must be recognized and challenged for a change to happen. Blackman includes several examples that illustrate that we only construct differences, and she also emphasizes the importance of recognizing prejudice and dangerous assumptions, as they can lead to fatal outcomes.

Interestingly, Blackman waits until about 50 pages in before revealing that Sephy is black and Callum is white. Although she drops some hints by Callum’s mother noting that a “slight problem” stops the two from having a future together, it isn’t until the plaster scene that we are made aware that Crosses are dark-skinned and that the “problem” Sephy and Callum are facing is being of different races. As she stated in an interview with Krishnan Guru-Murthy, Blackman wanted this book to help people become aware of their assumptions (Channel 4 News 02:07-05:54). Through alternating racial power relations, she confronts readers with their prejudice and makes them question what the norm is and how it has been created.

Blackman’s use of vocabulary affects how we perceive the two groups. For example, naming the majority group “Crosses” invites reflections on what it means to come off as cross, or

even think of crossing a boundary. As a result, the author may enhance the impression that the group in charge is bossy and even a bit intimidating. When seeing how they act towards noughts, this impression is enhanced. In contrast to the capitalized “Crosses”, the minority group is consistently referred to as “noughts” with a lowercase “n”, highlighting the power difference between the groups. Additionally, words like “blanker” are used, along with “nothing, nil, zero” (Blackman 73). Although Cross is quite negative in a harsh way, these descriptions are even more degrading and enhance the impression that noughts are less worthy than Crosses. On a similar note, the choice of names also affects our perception of the two groups. Whereas the nought family bears names typical for Britons today; Callum, Jude, Margaret, and Ryan McGregor, the Hadleys have a bit more “exotic” names. Kamal is Arabic, Persephone is Greek, and Minerva is Latin. Through such choices, stereotypical elements are reinforced with various effects. Arguably, many people would assume that those with “exotic” names are the oppressed. The choice of switching up the roles thereby leads us to question our prejudice even more, as the Judes and Margarets being oppressed by the Kamals and Persephones is somewhat unusual. This demonstrates that even names are part of the construction of race, as you expect certain things when you hear or see a name, even without knowing what the person looks like.

A result of stereotypes being connected to the color of someone’s skin is that noughts are never given the benefit of the doubt. The set image of noughts is that they are dishonest and always try to trick Crosses, and when they see someone with light skin, they automatically assume that they represent these things. As Callum reflects after being accused of stealing or falsifying the train ticket, “After all, it was one of those well-known Cross-initiated facts that we noughts didn’t pay for anything when there was the chance of stealing it instead” (Blackman 105). He thinks back to all the times he has been stopped or followed around in department stores, knowing perfectly well that only the color of his skin made them suspicious of him. Arguably, this example demonstrates exactly *why* we need to recognize that these assumptions are social constructions for racism to be challenged. It is impossible to get out of a set pattern if you never question whether it is actually accurate or not. As I will elaborate on in the following, these assumptions can lead to fatal outcomes.

Being subject to prejudices like these daily leads people to wish that they had been born with a different skin color. Callum sees a man who has “the kind of tan that must’ve been paid for” (Blackman 167). He calls him a “lucky beggar” for looking almost mixed race and reflects on

how he wishes he could “afford the treatment to make [his] skin permanently darker” (ibid.). As demonstrated through the case of Callum’s sister, Lynette, feeling unworthy based on the coincidence of which skin color you are born with can have fatal consequences. Lynette was in denial of her own identity as a result of the oppression she and her people experienced. She wanted to change herself completely because she didn’t fit into the standards created by society. As a result, she ended up with mental issues, and tried to cope by convincing herself that she was a Cross: “I’m not like you. I’m... I’m different. I’m brown. Look at my dark skin. Look...” (Blackman 114). It is evident how horrible being light-skinned is for Lynette, and that she tricks herself into thinking that she is not a part of that group anymore to protect herself from everything being white has led to. Arguably, the character of Lynette can represent all young people who feel like they can’t be themselves and that they aren’t good enough simply because they don’t fit into beauty standards made up by society.

What made Lynette get to her state of denial about her race was that she and her Cross boyfriend were attacked by noughts for being together (Blackman 116). In a letter she had written to Callum before taking her own life, she wrote “I hope you and Sephy have more luck than Jed and me – if that’s what you want” (Blackman 162). Unfortunately, history seems to repeat itself. Similar to Lynette’s situation, Sephy is also beaten up for being a “Blanker-lover” at school (Blackman 80). It is evident that this act is carried out because the news makes Cross girls at Sephy’s school believe every nought is a criminal; ““And besides we don’t need to speak with them. We see them on the news practically every other day. Everyone knows they all belong to the Liberation Militia and all they do is cause trouble and commit crimes and stud like that”” (Blackman 78). As Sephy watches the news herself, she reflects on the same thing: “Why was it that when noughts committed criminal acts, the fact that they were noughts was always pointed out? The banker was a Cross. The newsreader didn’t even mention it” (Blackman 87). This presentation of the media constructing a set image is similar to what we saw in *THUG*, again trying to manipulate what impression society gets of a people or an individual.

Interracial relationships are presented as a territory where it is easy to connect love with fear and confusion on whether their love for each other is enough. Similar to the story of Romeo and Juliet, these challenges appear to come from the outside. Despite knowing how badly it can end, Callum is determined to keep his relationship with Sephy. He is also determined that he won’t take his life as a result of the tension their relationship brings with it; “I swore that

nothing would ever make me do the same as [Lynette]. Nothing.” (Blackman 163). This proves inevitable, as I discuss in the following section on Callum and Sephy’s destiny.

The last scene of the novel demonstrates that assumptions combined with power may have fatal consequences. Callum is sentenced to death and lynched for presumably having raped Sephy. Her parents firmly believe that noughts and Crosses cannot love each other, and even when Sephy tries to explain otherwise, stating that ““Callum didn’t rape me. He didn’t.””, her father is set on his assumption about noughts; ““But you’re pregnant so he must’ve done”” (Blackman 413). The image of noughts is so set that Kamal leaves no room for questioning whether his assumption is correct. When he understands that Sephy is speaking the truth, he goes to extreme measures to make sure nobody finds out that his daughter is a ‘nought-lover’. He tells her ““You are no longer my daughter. You are a blanker’s slut.”” (Blackman 413) and starts manipulating both Callum and Sephy to get the outcome he wants – that Sephy has an abortion. Sephy’s parents keep Callum away from her, and the couple is robbed of the opportunity to discuss the situation together and agree on a solution. The way Blackman chose to end the novel is symbolic and holds a valuable lesson. The last page presents a birth announcement telling us that a new child is born. Callie Rose McGregor. Traditionally, a birth signals hope for the future, and Blackman wanted to add hope to her ending. Although it is still a bit unclear how the future of this new citizen will play out, her birth certainly holds a powerful message. Callum chooses to sacrifice himself just so that the grandparents of this child can get to know her and hopefully realize that there is nothing wrong with those of mixed race, and that race is only a social construct.

4.3 Differential racialization and intersectionality

Differential racialization involves constructing and changing the image of a group whenever that is convenient for those in power. Consequently, that image can change over time and take different forms in various parts of the world. A clear example of this is how after the 9/11 attack in New York City, Muslims were racialized. People who gave any visible sign that they were Muslim or were known to hold such religious beliefs were now depicted as connected to terrorists, and labelled as a group you should be careful around. Examples like this one show how easy it is to change the collective image of a group, and how generalizing it is. The examples in this section illustrate how unreasonable it is to draw such overarching

conclusions. I have chosen to address intersectionality alongside differential racialization because both concepts describe the image of people being changed depending on their traits.

The significance of generalizing and rapidly changing images is evident in Meggie's reaction when Callum asks her to put on the TV after the LM's bombing at the mall. Her first thought is "Please don't let it be something bad about us noughts" (Blackman 194). In her subconsciousness she already knows that it is, yet like so many others in real life, she is afraid that certain events will hurt the reputation of their group further and paint an image of them all as dangerous. When authorities decide who belongs to a group and how they are perceived, individuals have little control over their own situation. Since people have assumptions about the group as a whole, changing peoples' perception of them as individuals is out of their control.

Comparing Callum's situation with that of Khalil here is helpful, as they are both subject to their identity being constructed outwardly. However, as opposed to Khalil being portrayed as a criminal and racialized in the moment of the shooting, Callum is differentially racialized depending on what is convenient for the powerful, like Kamal Hadley, Sephy's father. When he starts Sephy's school, Callum is seen as a boy with an aptitude for academics and part of what Kamal calls the "crème-de-la-crème of Nought youth" (Blackman 59). Still, this does not protect him from being suspended when his father and brother become associated with the Liberation Militia. As Mr. Costa explains, "The governors and I have decided that it would serve everyone's best interest if you were suspended for a while" (Blackman 247). It appears to be a pattern in several schools, however, that noughts are kicked out for diverse reasons; "In the few schools into which us noughts had been allowed, we were dropping like flies. Expelled, or what the authorities euphemistically called 'excluded', for those things which would get Crosses detention or a severe telling off" (Blackman 248). We understand that those in power construct reasons that help them justify their wish to kick him out of the school. Since these reasons would not lead to the same actions towards Crosses, we are guided to understand the unfairness as well. It doesn't seem like they ever wanted noughts there, as I will expand on in the following section. The rapidly changing image of Callum demonstrates how easily those in power can manipulate the presentation of the oppressed, depending on convenience.

The ID requirements and checks mentioned previously are also applied to hospital practices, where a new government ruling decides that “[a]ll patient IDs have to be checked and registered” (Blackman 206). Nurse Carter explains that she thinks it’s “their way of trying to stop swindles” (ibid.). When Callum’s mum questions this, saying she’s not trying to defraud anyone and don’t want to give them her ID, the nurse ends up registering Jude’s ID card instead. This sudden ID requirement resembles a similar situation that took place in the UK during the *Hostile Environment* policy under Theresa May. In this case, citizens who had arrived in Britain as children, part of the Windrush generation, were suddenly denied crucial hospital treatment because they were “undocumented”. In reality, they had been allowed to enter on their parents’ passports many years ago, and now the authorities changed their practices to target specific groups. As Wilkie-Stibbs puts it, ID cards “were prospectively introduced to protect individual identity and national interests”, yet now, as reflected in Callum’s case, they “function in practice to curtail individual liberties” (242). This withdrawal of privacy is demonstrated when we see how authorities work together to further target noughts. Despite the nurse assuring Jude that she is going to delete the record of his card, Jude’s ID is used against him later, when they find his fingerprints on a bottle at the mall and validate this by cross-referencing it with information they find in their systems (Blackman 227). This reveals that it did, in fact, become part of a record, indicating that the system itself works against noughts – just like it did in the Windrush case. It also suggests how easy it is to racialize and build the persona you want whenever that is convenient.

The idea behind intersectionality is the additive effect of different factors in a person’s life, such as gender, race, class, and disability. Despite race often being the most determining factor, the reality for many is that other elements could enhance the low position this puts you in. For instance, in addition to race itself being a factor, the use of class to distinguish between different groups of people is apparent in *Noughts & Crosses*. This reflects the reality in the UK, a country where class is a prominent category in determining people’s position in society. Interestingly, Blackman has chosen to present a society with no examples of wealthy noughts at all. Unlike in *THUG*, where we saw Starr and her family having “worked their way up” to wealth and her parents having jobs, this seems unachievable for the oppressed in *Noughts & Crosses*. Noughts are in a position where their race equalizes poor, which only adds to their already oppressed position.

This split between rich and poor, and privileged and oppressed becomes apparent through the contrast between the Hadleys and the McGregors. Sephy's father, Kamal, is a highly respected politician, and the Hadleys live in a house with seven bedrooms and five reception rooms, which Sephy herself realizes is excessive: "What a waste. Four people in such a vast house" (Blackman 22). They even have a private beach, one where Sephy and Callum meet up all the time to discuss their lives. The McGregors, on the other hand, live a much simpler, restricted life. Margaret (Meggie) worked as a maid for the Hadleys, and when she was fired by Jasmine, the family's conditions became worse – proving once again that Crosses are in charge of noughts' wealth. Callum is hit with reality and a feeling of shame when he gets home: "Every time I came back from Sephy's, I flinched at the sight of the shack that was meant to be my home" (Blackman 25). The lack of wealth amongst noughts affects every aspect of their lives, and as touched upon, noughts are lacking from positions of power. Instead, they are drivers, maids, and servers in the food halls, stuck at the bottom of society.

4.4 Interest convergence – progress when in the interests of the dominant

The idea of interest convergence alludes to the powerful position of the dominant race to decide when racial progress should occur. CRT scholars argue that there will be no action taken if it only benefits the oppressed, as the privileged have no interest in changing things if they do not gain anything themselves. In *Noughts & Crosses*, the integration of noughts into Cross schools aligns with the interests of the powerful. Building on the previous discussion on Callum being differentially racialized at school, I argue that this example illustrates how wrong motives can result in the withdrawal of such progress shortly after they have been implemented. Blackman also highlights that racial progress rooted in the desires of the privileged may not always be perceived as progress to the oppressed. I will refer back to how Sephy's parents influenced Ryan's lynching and his subsequent reaction to illustrate this point.

The most evident example of interest convergence in the novel is Callum being allowed to attend a Cross school on a scholarship. Prior to him starting school, noughts were kept uneducated: "Until a few years ago we were only allowed to be educated up to the age of fourteen – and in noughts-only schools at that" (Blackman 17). Callum is also aware that these schools "don't have a quarter of the money or resources that [Cross] schools have" (ibid.). The sudden turn and permission of some to attend Cross schools is quite interesting

and appears to have occurred only because it gives those in power goodwill. By allowing noughts to attend the “good” schools, politicians are seen as heroes and will appear more inclusive than they are. During a discussion with Mrs. Paxton, Mr. Costa admits that ““No one wanted them here in the first place”” and that ““The government did as the Pangaeon Economic Community ordered. They were afraid of sanctions and that was the only reason they did it.”” (Blackman 134). As we’ve seen further up, this only leads to the opportunity of withdrawing these advancements. When the motivation isn’t the right one, it becomes more plausible that progress is not there to stay. While some may see this as searching for faults, Blackman’s emphasis on Kamal and other authorities easily withdrawing progress serves as a cautionary tale. It encourages people to question intentions and make sure that progress is based on the right motivations. Only then can real progress happen - something we can help students reflect over through this scene.

Interestingly, the opportunity to attend school is restricted to noughts who are born with the capacity for learning. This demonstrates further how progress happens on the premises of the powerful. As Kamal states: ““In a civilized society, equality of education for those noughts with sufficient aptitude”” (Blackman 59). The use of the word aptitude is curious, as some believe that black people are less intelligent and skilled at learning. However, as David Gilborn (2018) points out through his analysis of racism in the school system, this image has been repeatedly proved to be constructed by structural changes instead of actual underachievement by black students. While some believe that it is this “lack of aptitude”, or even lack of effort, that keeps black youths down in education, the truth is that they are deprived of opportunities to reach their full potential in the first place. Whether it is through no schools, schools with fewer resources, or while attending “mixed” schools, they are still assumed to be less intelligent. Often, teachers expect less from people of color and consequently give them lower grades, which explains how systemic racism works against black people. They are being kept undereducated by any means and are not able to obtain the higher positions that meritocracy claims they would through enough hard work because their efforts prove useless.

To present a somewhat different example of interest convergence, I will bring the attention back to the planned lynching of Ryan, Callum’s father. This hanging was called off right before Ryan was about to jump, with the Prison Governor being informed that Ryan had received a reprieve (Blackman 288). A conversation between Sephy and her mother reveals

that Jasmine was the one who paid for Ryan's lawyer Kelani and managed to get him the reprieve. Sephy states that she believes her mom only did it out of "guilty conscience" (Blackman 292). She continues: "You've never done anything for anyone other than yourself in your life" (ibid.). The so-called "progress" arguably only happens because Jasmine wants to feel like a hero, "I prayed and paid and did everything I could to make sure that Ryan wouldn't hang. What else could I have done? You tell me. (Blackman 292). However, as we can tell from Ryan's reaction, he is already sick of them messing around with his feelings and expectations "I was ready to die [...] They should've hanged me. It would've been kinder" (Blackman 294). Although Jasmine's interest in feeling better is met when Ryan is "saved" from hanging, his situation is arguably only worsened. He sees no other way out than killing himself, since he doesn't want to spend the rest of his life in jail for something he didn't do. His interest was simply to take the blame for his son, and we understand that staying in jail for the rest of his life was not what he imagined.

As her sister Minerva makes Sephy aware of, her father would be put in a bad light if Ryan got off the hook, as it would mean Kamal favored someone he knew (Blackman 239). Based on this, it can be argued that calling of the lynching is agreed upon only because Ryan is still sentenced to jail. As Callum tells Sephy when the hanging is stayed; "Your father must be so proud of himself [...] An innocent man is going to rot in prison and just like that his political reputation is restored" (Blackman 299). When Sephy tries saying 'It wasn't like that...'. Blackman has chosen to include Callum's reflection "But it was – and we both knew it" to make readers aware that this was actually the case (Blackman 299). Kamal is still seen as having done what was right, and Ryan later ends up choosing to "escape", ending his life.

4.5 Counterstories - Point of view matters:

Choosing to tell a story from the perspective of a minority group is a significant opportunity to give what is called a "counter story". As we recall from the previous chapter, this is rooted in CRT's idea that *voices of color are unique*. Despite the roles being reversed in this case, and voices of "color" therefore being a bit misleading, the point of giving an oppressed group a voice is an important part of the narration of *Noughts & Crosses*. Instead of only portraying the perspective of the oppressed, Blackman has chosen to include a dual narration. Narrating through both Callum's and Sephy's viewpoint has many interesting effects, the most

prominent that we are guided to understand the importance of considering multiple perspectives, not just our own.

A significant scene that proves the importance of counterstories quite explicitly is when Callum attends Mr. Jason's history class. The teacher is giving a lecture about explorers and inventors, preaching that they are "just like you and me, that we too can aspire to greatness" (Blackman 128). Listing up a couple of names, he wants the students to guess what they all have in common. The other students suggest they were all "men", "dead", or "earned a lot of money", but to Callum, it is obvious that they were all Crosses (Blackman 128). Blackman likely included this part because it resembles how privileged students seldom think about race since they are not subject to discriminatory practices themselves. Callum, on the other hand, thinks of it as the only obvious answer, as he experiences it every day.

When Callum challenges Mr. Jason's incorrect presentation of only Crosses achieving noteworthy things by listing nought explorers and inventors, the teacher questions "How come I've never heard of them?" (Blackman 131). In response, Callum offers a thought-provoking perspective that encourages reflections in students; "Because all the history books are written by Crosses and you never write about anyone else except your own." (ibid.). Although both the names and achievements brought up by Mr. Jason are real, most Norwegian students have probably never heard of these African American explorers. This scene can therefore be a good starting point for discussing how history often follows the voice and perspective of the majority. It becomes clear that the truth is not fully covered when one group gets to restrict what is being taught in schools, a point I will elaborate on in the educational value chapter. Since the other students in Callum's class are not familiar with the names he brings up, this scene illustrates that it only takes one person to speak up if they know there are other sides to a story.

The importance and potential of this scene is also recognized by Marit Lyngstad (2021) who notes its value for classroom use, especially because it highlights the effects of restricted teaching and the importance of keeping a diverse focus when giving lessons. She questions "whether it is possible, if you never hear about or see great achievements by someone who is like you, to believe that you can achieve something great as well" (Lyngstad 21). This reflection highlights the importance of bringing up these kinds of questions and reflecting on similar situations when we are assessing what we are teaching our youths. If minority kids

don't see themselves, both represented in books and reflected in teaching about history and great achievements, how can they believe themselves to be important? Keeping this representation away from teaching is a systematic way of keeping oppression and discrimination alive, and only by including counterstories can this be counterworked.

Narrating the novel from a dual first-person point of view gives readers insight to their inner thoughts of Callum and Sephy. We understand their reasoning better, and it becomes easier to notice that every reflection they have is based on where they are coming from. Deciding to give the privileged a voice as a contrast to the oppressed perspective of Callum was an interesting choice by Blackman. By adding the perspective of Sephy, the story gains a character through which white students can recognize themselves. In *THUG*, we only know what characters like Chris and Hailey are thinking through their conversations with Starr. Portraying Sephy's sometimes naïve and oblivious persona can make it easier to bring up themes like white privilege, and make students realize things that they haven't been aware of previously. One example of this is demonstrated when Sephy shows up at Lynette's funeral and gets confused when she is told that she is not welcome. This scene emphasizes how Sephy's privilege makes her oblivious to how seriously the power structures can affect thoughts. She is unaware of the reason Lynette committed suicide and compares it to her mother's suicide attempts. She simply "wanted to show them that I really did care, that I understood" (Blackman 172), and doesn't seem to grasp that their reaction was rooted in them associating her with Crosses, whom they hate for creating the standards that led Lynette to commit suicide. The hostility goes both ways because of the *us* against *them* mentality, just like we saw in *THUG*.

One controversial belief about CRT is that it labels all people who benefit from racist power structures as racist. This creates debate among parents who refuse CRT to be taught in schools because they believe it labels their children "racists". This issue is brought up in both *THUG* and *Noughts & Crosses*, as we see the youths thinking of their friends as racists because of their skin color. We've seen Starr associating Chris with the police officer, questioning if he would do the same to Khalil. Similarly, we see Callum trying hard not to take his frustration out on Sephy because she is one of *them*; "I didn't want to look at Sephy. [...] I didn't want to blame her for the way the police treated me and every nought I knew." (Blackman 105). However, as they demonstrate through their development and actions, Chris and Sephy are not racist, a fact that Starr and Callum recognize as well. The authors focus on

the fact that although the systems are racist and some agree with those ideas, this is not automatically the case for all. What CRT instead wants to create awareness of is that by being open to getting to know someone no matter the color of their skin, we may all realize that our assumptions are too generalizing.

Throughout the story, Sephy becomes an important character who represents youths challenging the way the adults rule society. She challenges it in her own ways, and we can tell that she is trying actively to do something. As we've discussed above, she started off by standing up and protesting during the lynching of Ryan. Later, we see her joining a dissident group, trying to make a difference in a peaceful way (Blackman 328). She grows a lot through her conversations with Callum, a bit like we saw Chris wanting to learn about Starr's experiences and culture to understand her feelings. The ending scene discussed above indicates how far Sephy is willing to go in challenging the set expectations of society. As Claire Bradford points out, "The effect of the representation of Sephy and Callum as exceptional figures is to accentuate the normalcy of racist practices and attitudes and the fixity of cultural formations" (42). They are both trying to make a change but are working against a quite set and powerful system.

Wilkie Stibbs argues that the strategy of narrating through multiple voices gives "an intimate insight into the duplicity and motivation of characters" (242). She further expands that this is done "by narrating the slippage between inner resolve and outward behavior and the gulf between intentions and consequences and between rhetoric and action" (ibid.). To illustrate this, I have chosen to turn the attention to when Callum joins the LM, as well as when he, along with Jude and two others, decides to kidnap Sephy. As Callum joins the Liberation Militia, we can sense that he is losing himself slowly; "I served it icy-cold. And I lost more of myself as I did so" (Blackman 331). We understand that he has to let go of his values to adhere to the rules of the LM. Initially, we learn that he joins because he feels left out (Blackman 199), which shows how easy it is to end up in these organizations. Callum is lost between wanting to stand up for his own rights together with other noughts, yet he knows that some Crosses are good based on his experiences with Sephy and doesn't want to hurt her.

The process continues and along with rank growth comes the alienation of Callum's humanity: "By the time I was nineteen, I'd gained my stripes – and lost my soul" (Blackman 335). This suggests that he must distance himself from the situation and his actions in order to

gain what he wants – justice. He even says to himself, “*Be what you have to be Callum, not what you are*” (Blackman 350). For Sephy, seeing Callum in the doorway of her cell after being kidnapped leads to confusion, disbelief, and a feeling of betrayal: “Callum... The sight of him standing in the doorway was like an arrow whizzing straight through my body. He wasn’t the Callum I’d grown up with and I’d been an idiot to think he would be. It had all been a trick. A trap. And like the biggest fool in the universe, I’d fallen for it” (Blackman 351). She is not aware of how hard Callum strives to distance himself from the fact that this Cross girl is, in fact, Sephy. When the other boys leave to go on a mission, Callum can no longer uphold a fake hate towards her, and ends up declaring his love for her and help her run away.

Another benefit of a shifting perspective is that it illustrates how a situation can appear from different perspectives, and that we often don’t know the full story if we only hear one person recall it. This also allows for interesting plot development, as Blackman can cut off the story in the middle of a scene and switch to the other POV, partly guiding our reading of different situations. One example of this is when Sephy is leaving for boarding school. She appears gutted that Callum didn’t show up before she left, despite having written him a letter begging him to come. In addition to getting the readers engaged in trying to find out what happens next, cutting the scene between her and Callum’s perspective allows readers to follow along as the situation unfolds, and be aware of things that one character is not. Sephy assumes that Callum has made a conscious choice not to show up, “*He wasn’t coming. [...] Oh Callum... Why didn’t you come?*” (Blackman 321), yet readers are well aware that he hasn’t read the letter yet, and that as soon as he does, he runs as fast as he can to Sephy’s house – only for her driver to spoil it all by driving on even though he sees Callum. This can help us reflect on how fast we assume things, and that if we apply a more critical view to the situation, we may realize that there are other perspectives and realities than our own. I will expand on this in the next chapter.

4.6 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen that *Noughts & Crosses* offers many valuable elements for discussing racism in an alternative way. For example, we’ve seen how Blackman makes use of strong power structures to demonstrate that being surrounded by injustice may lead to oppressed groups becoming violent. Racism is institutionalized, as demonstrated through the

law system tricking Ryan confessing and later performing violence in the form of lynching on Callum instead of protecting him from it. Blackman mixes both visible, slightly hidden, and purely systemic discriminatory practices to encourage reflections on which of these are still present today and what may be the reason for this. Further, we see how generalizing and incorrect assumptions can lead to fatal outcomes. Through an inversion of the racial structures we are familiar with, Blackman confronts readers with their own prejudice and emphasizes how arbitrary it was that those with darker skin became oppressed. Thirdly, Callum's experience with the school system was used to illustrate the idea of differential racialization, as school leaders were allowed to rapidly change their image of noughts depending on what was convenient for them. We also saw that they were allowed to pick and choose who were "good enough" to attend schools, restricting the opportunity to those with "sufficient aptitude". When discussing the intersection of race and wealth, we saw that being a nought also meant being poor, which made it impossible to get out of poverty and move up in society.

The element of interest convergence was strongly connected to the differential racialization of Callum, as his admission to school was rooted in other motivations than a genuine wish for racial progress. Transferable to real-life challenges, this could be read as a warning that wrong motivations can lead to progress being withdrawn later. We get nowhere if this is not acknowledged and changed, as the interests of the oppressed are not met no matter how hard they fight. Lastly, I argued that the dual point of view illustrates the value of counterstories. As opposed to Thomas choosing to tell the story from only the minority's perspective, adding Sephy's voice made the contrast between her and Callum even more evident, as well as gave privileged students a character through which they could see themselves. The following section will link the two novels further to their value and potential in the classroom. Based on the findings from the two text focused chapters I will carry out a comparison between the two and suggest how discussing scenes from the novels together with students could help them develop critical thinking and ethical awareness.

5 Discussion - Educational Value

So far in this thesis, I have examined the two novels separately through the lens of Critical Race Theory. The analysis has shown that both novels include elements that reflect CRT's way of viewing racial issues and that there are many similarities in how the authors have chosen to do this. In this section, these findings will be further discussed and connected to their potential educational value. I will first present a comparative analysis where I discuss general similarities and differences and comment on implications for classroom use. I propose that despite both novels portraying a society where racism is ordinary and systemic, the speculative nature of *Noughts & Crosses* can make it harder for younger students to grasp and discuss. Additionally, I suggest that since *Noughts & Crosses* includes racist practices that are no longer used, it could be helpful to include connections to how racism is enacted today in the teaching, to help students see the change that has happened over time.

After the general comparison, I move on to more specific examples of how the novels can foster critical thinking and ethical awareness. This section is split into four subsections, each discussing one "skill" the Core Curriculum calls for and that the novels can teach students when they approach them through Critical Race Theory. I argue that the nature of counterstories can foster an understanding in students that their perception of things is not the only one, or necessarily the right one. Seeing the dangers of being prejudiced or oblivious could help them become more aware of how important it is to consider different perspectives. In turn, this could also improve their ethical awareness by acknowledging that you need to balance different considerations to make ethically right choices. Through examining the social construction of race together in class, they could also reflect on how knowledge is developed, and hopefully apply similar critical approaches to their own life and convictions. Lastly, I argue that studying the examples of interest convergence can spark an understanding in students that when they apply a lens like CRT and think critically, they may reveal questionable patterns in both historical decisions and cases transferable to their own lives like what motivates them to protest a case. Generally, my findings suggest that reading any of the two books would help students develop their critical thinking skills and become more ethically aware.

5.1 Comparative analysis of *The Hate U Give* and *Noughts & Crosses*

Throughout the last two chapters, I have examined the two novels through a close reading, revealing many similarities, but also some differences between Thomas' and Blackman's novels. In the following, I will draw attention to some of the most significant similarities and contrasts, suggesting implications for using the novels along with students.

At first, both novels appear similar and equally relatable in that they portray protagonists who are around the same age as the students, and who are victims of oppression. Starr and Callum both experience systemic racism and encounter a law system that is trying to protect itself instead of enacting justice toward the oppressed. Additionally, both authors make use of literary conventions like giving their characters real and full names, as well as describing the environment in detail to make the story trustworthy and allow readers to connect with the characters and believe their stories.

What makes them differ, however, is how mimetic the novels are of the real world. It is evident that *THUG* is representative of the situation many young black people find themselves in, especially in the US. This makes it easy to link to actual happenings in real life, like connecting Khalil's case to other young boys killed by police prejudice. When studying novels that mimic reality it is important to make your students aware that novels are still fictional works that are allowed to change things up. Although you can expect works of realism to be rooted in realistic challenges found in society today, you still need to think critically about what the author may be doing with their artistic freedom. These stories should not be taken as representative of the experiences of all those who are subject to racist discrimination but can inspire discussions on the themes like prejudice and assumptions.

In *Noughts & Crosses* we see a somewhat different approach to realism. Although individual parts like Lynette's struggles to fit into society's standards can mirror situations students may find themselves in, the novel as a whole does not mimic the racial environment present today. As discussed in the text-focused chapter on *Noughts & Crosses*, the reversal of a racial hierarchy forces readers to face their own assumptions about characters. If we subconsciously expect a character excluded from a nice school to be black but are met with a story where that character is instead white, we may be able to reflect on these kinds of unconscious assumptions operating in our perception of real people. This illustrates how the speculative

novel alternating the real can make us reflect on our actions in real life. However, that kind of thinking is quite complex and requires metacognitive abilities. Since these abilities develop a lot during adolescence, as settled in studies by Schneider (2008) and Weil et al. (2013), it can be argued that middle schoolers may have a harder time understanding the real messages of *Noughts & Crosses* because of its complexity. Instead, the quite straightforward and realistic *THUG* may be easier for them to follow along with and understand the basic ideas of.

The complexity of the portrayal of violence suggests similar considerations. Since both novels involve sections of violence toward oppressed groups and individuals, some may be concerned about young students being exposed to violence through these books. However, these students already live in a world where violence happens all around them, and reading a novel in class about these themes can be a safe space to learn about this. What becomes more relevant to discuss is to what extent the students are able to understand the point behind the ways the novels portray violence, and thereby gain something from reading them.

In *THUG*, the theme of police brutality is brought up from the very beginning with the shooting of Khalil. It shapes the plot throughout the novel, as Starr's journey revolves around holding the officer accountable and standing up for the injustice of police violence. In *Noughts & Crosses*, the story also portrays different forms of violence, but understanding how Callum ends up radicalized requires a deeper understanding of the plot by students. Although both radicalization and police shootings are pretty unrelatable for most Norwegian youths, understanding radicalism requires quite complex thinking. You need a lot of empathetic imagination to understand the feelings of a person in a situation this far from your own, and it requires a theory of mind, a skill that develops quite a lot during adolescence. As a study by Białecką-Pikul et al. (2020) shows, this is because you learn a lot about your psychological self during your teenage years, and along with enhanced self-understanding comes the understanding that others may have emotional experiences you are unaware of. The complexity of your understanding continues to grow until adulthood (Valle et al. 2015), which could imply that *Noughts & Crosses*, because of its complexity, should be reserved for older students. Accordingly, this book requiring a more complex thinking process overall could suggest an opportunity for those who are mature enough to expand their critical thinking even more.

Lastly, I want to draw attention to an important difference in the way people from the two novels think about racism. In both novels, the social construction of race demonstrates that assumptions are often unrealistic and undeserved portrayals based on an imagined *us against them*. This is, however, done a bit differently in the two novels. In *THUG*, single characters are racialized, whereas in *Noughts & Crosses*, it is the race as a whole. This difference is illustrated through the way characters appear to think they are judging others based on skin color. In *Noughts & Crosses*, racism is so ingrained and accepted in society that people know that they are acting racist. They provide justifications for why they are doing it and seem convinced that noughts are inherently inferior and thereby deserving of their position. In *THUG*, on the other hand, characters appear to think they are not judging based on skin color. As we learn throughout the examples of Officer 115's actions and Hailey's attitudes, the strong social construction of race is making them do it anyways.

This split resembles the evolution we have seen in real life. There has been a change from a collective thought of a whole race as bad to the criminalization of individuals. When it is "only" individuals, it becomes easier to hide behind your prejudice and use other reasons as a cover-up – an opportunity given by the complexity of intersectionality. Even Starr's Uncle Carlos is about to fall into that trap, saying that he "heard he was a drug dealer" (Thomas 54). When Starr's dad answers with "And that makes it okay?", Carlos answers "I didn't say it did, but it could explain Brian's decision if he felt threatened" (ibid.). The Officer could not see that Khalil was a drug dealer, but he could see the color of his skin. This example thereby illustrates how easy it is to blame other elements than race, a trap we should be aware of today. Since I only came to realize the value of considering this change in attitudes when considering the novels together, I would suggest teachers keep this change in mind, especially when teaching *Noughts & Crosses*. Connecting the collective thought of the past to why racism can still manifest itself to this day can be challenging if we do not bring up the significance of intersectionality today, which arguably could be lost when teaching *Noughts & Crosses*. Similarly, drawing parallels to the past when teaching *THUG* could help students acknowledge how the past has affected the current state of things.

5.2 Promoting *critical thinking* and *ethical awareness* through reading the novels

In the following section, I will dive deeper into how reading the novels can promote critical thinking and ethical awareness. Drawing on my findings from the last chapters, I will point to

goals settled in the Norwegian Core Curriculum and discuss to what extent these goals can be met through reading different scenes from the novels.

Your truth vs. *the* truth

One of the goals of Norwegian education is to make students “able to understand that their own experiences, points of view and convictions may be incomplete or erroneous” (Kunnskapsdepartementet). Developing critical thinking skills involves being able to recognize your own position and how your privileges can keep some realities away from your consciousness. Generally, both novels seem able to help achieve this goal through their powerful use of counterstories and the presentation of racism as ordinary yet hidden in society. By becoming aware of counterstories existing and that your experience may differ from that of another person, students may develop the ability to look at society around them critically and not blindly accept information and attitudes around them as the whole truth.

In *THUG*, Starr’s contrasting account of who Khalil was and what led to him ending up in the cycle of drug dealing presents one such opportunity. Most students are unaware of what causes young men to end up in these situations and may have inherited prejudices towards these groups. Through this example, they may realize that their impressions were erroneous and based upon a lack of knowledge. Additionally, the presence of Hailey, an oblivious and privileged youth, adds an opportunity for readers who may have similar perceptions as her to see themselves and realize how their flawed and biased perspectives perpetuate racism instead of challenging it. Lastly, the way Thomas humanizes Khalil by elaborating on his reasons for selling drugs and explaining how the cycle persists can help students understand what is meant by their convictions being “incomplete”. By expanding their horizons and questioning what brought people to the situation they are in, they can learn about other people’s experiences instead of reproducing a narrowed and prejudiced view of them.

In a somewhat similar way, we see Blackman mapping out the oppressed situation of Callum. By making readers aware that Callum’s actions are a result of oppression and that he didn’t rape Sephy, she establishes a background for understanding how unfair it feels when someone acts upon prejudices without even considering the whole truth, and when not even the justice system is fair. Additionally, the alternating point of view allows a situation to be seen from both perspectives, revealing the general understanding that we don’t know the whole truth if we have not heard the opposite point of view. As discussed in the text-focus chapter, the letter

scene shows Callum reading the letter too late, and Sephy assuming that he had read it and just didn't care. Scenes like these could improve students' theory of mind since, as the study by Kidd and Castano suggested, they are prompted to imagine the subjective states of the characters (380). By becoming aware that Sephy did not even consider Callum's side of the story to be different from what she imagined, they may additionally realize how important it is to take a step back and understand that your perspective is not the only one.

Enacting justice through balancing different considerations

In addition to focusing on critical thinking, the Core Curriculum also calls for ethically aware pupils who can balance different considerations; "The teaching and training must develop the pupils' ability to make ethical assessments and help them be cognizant of ethical issues" (Kunnskapsdepartementet). This skill is important to "be a reflecting and responsible human being" and involves "balancing different considerations" (ibid.). Balancing different considerations requires acknowledging that counterstories exist, as well as bearing in mind the complete image of a person's situation, as I will elaborate on in the following.

Becoming ethically aware involves developing a sense of justice, and recognizing what is right to do and what is wrong. Both novels include countless examples of situations where injustice is carried out towards individuals and groups. In these situations, the importance of balancing different considerations to reach fair decisions is demonstrated quite well. Although some of the ethically challenging issues in the novel are too big for the youths to see themselves taking any part of, like the provoking legal decisions, the way the authors chose to present these decisions clearly indicates what is right and what is wrong. By telling Starr's story and giving readers insight into her battle for justice, Thomas guides readers to understand the unfairness of this case; that Officer 115 is protected after having shot and killed Khalil, and Starr's voice is not even given the value it deserves. Arguably, taking things down to the youths' own level of understanding and connecting this to situations they can relate to would help them understand things more clearly. For example, we see Starr making a tough choice by breaking up with Hailey because she finds it more important to stick to her values than to keep a friend she's had for years. Hailey's prejudiced view of Khalil and things that matter to Starr results in her defying peer pressure and instead standing up for what she considers right. Discussing this choice with students could help them develop a good basis where they understand that their values and morals are important, a lesson they will hopefully carry with them as they grow older and encounter similar pressure.

In *Noughts & Crosses* we see both Callum and Sephy face ethical issues. Callum's choice of joining the LM involves him realizing that he is not complacent with their actions. He is torn between what he believes is rightful on behalf of the community of noughts who are fed up with being oppressed, and his own resentment to what he is made to do towards Sephy. After balancing the two considerations, we see him choosing loyalty towards Sephy, as this is what he finds right in the situation. Similarly, Sephy is presented as a morally developing youth, who is slowly realizing what is right for her to do. As discussed, she challenges the consensus and makes an unconventional choice when she decides the only right thing to do is to keep her mixed baby. Although these examples are a bit more distant from the students' lives, they demonstrate how hard it can be to make the right choices, and that balancing different considerations involves thinking of others as well.

Making ethically considered choices also involves recognizing the interconnections that are present in situations and our perception of people. When reading about these factors affecting someone's situation, students may become aware that if they were to balance their situation and another person's, these factors would be present and need to be considered. For example, they may understand how they themselves are positioned in terms of wealth when they read about Chris vs. Starr's house, Sephy vs. Callum's house. Readers are guided to acknowledge that to make fair decisions, they must consider the overall situations of others.

Where does knowledge come from – and what is it based on?

Views youths pick up from schools and through society around them tend to shape their perceptions quite a lot. However, it is important to teach them not to blindly believe and accept the ideas they are fed. The Norwegian Core Curriculum advocates for teaching that promotes students' ability to "assess different sources of knowledge and think critically about how knowledge is developed" (Kunnskapsdepartementet). Arguably, both novels can make students reflect on and understand what this goal involves through examples where the creation of "knowledge" is critiqued. These examples could motivate students to implement this critique into their own practices through questioning where their knowledge comes from, and what it is based on. Are they simply being fed information that may be constructed by others with a particular interest in mind? Along similar lines, it is also settled that for new insight to emerge, "established ideas must be scrutinized and criticized by using theories, methods, arguments, experiences and evidence" (Kunnskapsdepartementet). This is part of thinking critically about the development of knowledge, as it calls for a deep dive and

inspection of standardized convictions we may have. If we are to understand something in a new way, we must challenge our own convictions and question structures and opinions that are present and common in today's society.

In *THUG*, Starr emphasizes the erroneous and biased portrayal of Khalil in the media. Having a reliable protagonist speak about her beloved friend and explain who he really was may help students realize that the media and everything they see around them may not always be presenting the whole story. They are often generalizing, and students are made aware of the dangers of this. Thinking critically about "how knowledge is developed" would involve being able to understand what the social construction of race involves, and how those in power decide what people will consume and thereby believe. Seeing Starr question why the media is covering only what they want and her determination in giving Khalil's counter-story inspires students to apply similar practices to their own lives. This can help them think more critically about the things they consume and give people a chance before acting on their prejudices.

The importance of scrutinizing established ideas is even further expanded on in the history-class scene in *Noughts & Crosses*. In this example, we are presented with the aftermath of Crosses composing their preferred history for centuries. Callum finds himself in a class that is supposed to teach him and the other students about famous achievers in the past, yet the lecturer leaves out all the nought inventors and explorers. This focus on selective teaching in schools encourages reflections on how we develop knowledge in our own society, which may not be that different from this situation. This example can make students aware that they should not necessarily trust that what they are taught is the whole truth. Additionally, this scene could spark an interest in doing some research themselves. It suggests that they could and should be critical to their own education, because, as discussed above, their education could be "incomplete or erroneous" (Kunnskapsdepartementet). If students follow the example of Callum and start questioning what they are taught at school, they may become more aware of what sides of history are taught, making sure crucial parts are not left out of the narrative. This discussion could be supplemented by making students aware that there is currently a movement going on where students question why their curriculum is so "white" (Lumpkin 2020). It is easier to keep reproducing faulty or incomplete versions of history when people are complacent and don't question things, but when students think critically, we may all help each other challenge misconceptions.

Similarly, this scene can be a wake-up call to all teachers. It can motivate reflections on how much (or shall we say little) inclusion there is in teaching, and how good teachers are at presenting a nuanced picture of the past that covers historical figures of different ethnicities. As discussed above, the presentation of counterstories and acknowledging oppressed voices is important. When literature is representative of different youths' lives, it will be easier to initiate conversations on real accounts of oppression. Importantly, we see that the inclusion of ideas from CRT has led to a renewed wish by some to ban books that teach these same ideas, especially in the US (Will 2021). Seen from a historical perspective, this is exactly the kind of whitewashing of history that is being protested again and again in an attempt to make students' curriculum less white. They are trying to keep the truths out of people's minds and keep them from questioning things, an attempt that deserves to be counterworked.

Discovering reasons and intentions

The Core Curriculum states that developing critical thinking involves “applying reason in an inquisitive and systematic way” (Kunnskapsdepartementet). Elaborating on this, it is specified that “the teaching and training must create understanding that the methodologies for examining the real world must be adapted to what we want to study”, and consequently that “the choice of methodology influences what we see” (Kunnskapsdepartementet). Arguably, this is exactly what is done when we apply CRT as a lens through which we read the world and understand how it is built. As I've settled in the last two chapters, this methodology can expose important elements of current-day racial issues, and using the fictional works as a starting point for discussions works very well.

Both authors present cases of interest convergence, suggesting to readers that they can benefit from questioning people's intentions. This does not mean that we should always assume the worst, but it does invite a critical view of the situation as a whole, as demonstrated in the following examples. In *THUG*, we saw that the protest at Williamson was born out of different motivations than it should have. Only when it gave them an opportunity to skip a test did the white kids at Starr's school decide to protest for Khalil. This example can help students reflect on their own contributions and motivations for taking an active part in protests. Are they engaged only when the outcome benefits them as well, or would they skip a class and get an absence or a demerit for the cause they are interested in supporting? Elaborating on that, this is also an example where students can develop their ethical awareness. The way the scene is presented and followed up invites reflections around cases

like these being seen as fun or harmless actions, but that they are in reality reinforcing their own privilege and further undermining the position of those already oppressed. Reading this scene which may even be transferable to their own life could help them think critically about their own intentions as well and invite reflections around what they base their choices on.

In *Noughts & Crosses*, this theme goes a bit deeper. As discussed in the text-focused chapter, the idea of interest convergence is presented through Callum all of a sudden being admitted to a Cross school. Similar to the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*, this example draws attention to the fact that major changes and progress in society may seem impossible until they suddenly converge with the interest of those in power. Although a bit less transferable to their own encounters with converging interests, this example can make youths think about historical progress critically and understand what motivated them. If taken even further, applying reason in an inquisitive way can extend to analyzing the changes we see happening with Callum when he is differentially racialized. To understand what is going on in these situations, students must look for potential reasons for the sudden change, which is helping them become critical thinkers. Having a specific example to use in class can make the process a bit easier than using a hypothetical situation since they are familiar with the rules of society and may have gotten some hints throughout the story.

5.3 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the educational value of the two novels. They were compared and contrasted, revealing that *Noughts & Crosses* is a bit more complex and would fit an older group of students than *THUG*. The speculative approach may be a bit harder for younger students to wrap their minds around, as opposed to the more straightforward *THUG*. Both novels include several elements that can encourage critical thinking and improve their ethical awareness, like their focus on counterstories allowing students to understand that there are other perspectives than their own, which can in turn help them see the value of balancing different considerations to make ethical decisions. Furthermore, both novels include cases where people are trying to construct the image they want outwardly, and having both protagonists challenge this can inspire students to do the same by questioning what their knowledge is based upon. I also discussed how reading examples of interest convergence in the novels could make them realize that applying critical thinking (CRT) can help us notice things we normally wouldn't and be even more critical instead of oblivious to intentions.

6 Conclusion

The goal of this thesis has been to illustrate how analyzing books through Critical Race Theory can foster critical thinking and ethical awareness, in accordance with the goal of Norwegian teaching. The future needs citizens who are able to think critically and make ethically considered decisions, a mission that starts in the classroom. Choosing to use CRT as my lens was deliberate, as I think this theory is often misunderstood and includes many valuable starting points for helping students better their critical thinking and ethical awareness. The following research questions were proposed in the introduction; *How are racial issues portrayed and approached in the two novels?* More specifically, I wanted to examine if race was presented as a social construct in the novels and whether the authors reproduced or challenged stereotypes. Secondly, *what elements from real life are brought up and how do they correlate to current issues in the US and the UK?* And lastly, *how do the genres of realistic and speculative fiction lend themselves to approaching the theme of racial issues in classrooms?* This was examined to determine if reading these novels could help meet the educational purpose of students developing *critical thinking* and *ethical awareness*.

If we are to succeed in the mission of educating students for the future, we must give them tools that help them challenge the current status quo in persisting issues like racism. This thesis has demonstrated that reading literature and applying CRT is one way to do this. Literature has the ability to reflect tendencies in society, help us understand complex issues, teach us lessons, and thereby help us work towards a better future. As the analysis revealed, both novels include themes and challenges that connect to the real world, which can function as a bridge to questions youth may have about current issues. Most importantly, the analysis demonstrated how both novels get to the core lesson of racism still being present in society. All tenets and sections boiled down to the ordinariness and systematicity racism is rooted in. Race as a concept was presented as socially constructed by those in power, upheld by them with help from the media, altered depending on what was necessary, and lastly, not changed unless those changes would also benefit the privileged. Both novels also portrayed the importance of giving oppressed voices the opportunity to tell their stories. Only through these stories will people realize how ordinary racism is around them, as it is hidden in the structures of society. Additionally, both authors challenged stereotypes, which could help students recognize that these are generalized assumptions and avoid uncritically reproducing what they are made to believe by society.

The last section suggested ways in which these readings connect to the skills the Norwegian Core Curriculum calls for. When comparing the novels, *Noughts & Crosses* proved to be more complex and challenging, making it harder for younger students to comprehend and, therefore, more suitable in upper secondary. It requires both better metacognitive abilities and theory of mind than *THUG*, whose mimetic content is easier to grasp. When connecting these readings to their value in the classroom I found that introducing students to CRT's way of scrutinizing and questioning things around them makes them better suited to apply similar approaches to different aspects of their own lives. For example, the focus on counterstories in both novels can help them recognize that their perceptions may be incomplete or faulty, as well as help them balance different considerations when making decisions in their lives.

As presented in the introduction and theoretical background, my thesis builds upon a still quite limited field of work, especially considering the application of CRT as a lens. Although some scholars have acknowledged the opportunity of studying *THUG* through CRT in schools, the conversation on *Noughts & Crosses* was notably lacking. This presented an opportunity for deeper exploration and allowed me to do a fairly unique comparison of how realistic and speculative novels reflect the ideas of CRT. Despite my findings suggesting valuable potential, I am aware that my interpretations of how the novels connect to CRT and, consequently, how this could help my students develop critical thinking and ethical awareness are only suggestions. Although many have already studied *THUG* through CRT with their students, it would have been interesting to do some further research to see if my suggested implications are accurate.

Overall, I hope that my thesis can expand people's views of Critical Race Theory. By presenting the different tenets and connecting them to specific examples from the novels and real life, I have shown that CRT is not only about "labeling white people as racist", as many seem to believe. Instead, its many tenets are all rooted in the same goal; to get to the core of racism and expose the discriminatory structures that are still present in the hidden. If we are not aware of and don't challenge the social construction of race, remain oblivious that progress seems to coincide with the interests of the powerful, and continue ignoring counterstories, we will never experience a world without racial discrimination. Let this thesis be an encouragement to provide our future citizens with the tools needed to challenge the status quo, and to guide them toward recognizing the potential of powerful stories.

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