

# Narrative Sovereignty in Contemporary African American and Indigenous Writing

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J.J. Strossmayer University of Osijek  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Double Major MA Study Programme in English Language and Literature and  
Sociology – Teaching English as a Foreign Language and Sociology

Tihana Anić

**Narrative Sovereignty in Contemporary African American and  
Indigenous Writing**

Master's Thesis

Supervisor: Dr. Sanja Runtić, Full Professor

Osijek, 2023

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## Abstract

Native Americans, African Americans, and Australian Aboriginal people have all experienced injustice throughout the past centuries. This thesis explores three prominent works, each belonging to one respective ethnic group – Evelina Zuni Lucero’s *Night Sky, Morning Star* (2000), Angie Thomas’s *The Hate U Give* (2017), and Doris Pilkington Garimara’s *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* (1996). It argues that these literary works are representative of the human rights genre as they all aim to give voice to the oppressed and harness the power of storytelling to rewrite history, heal traumas, and make changes in contemporary local and global societies. All three texts address the issues of social inequality and institutionalized racism. Whereas *Night Sky, Morning Star* and *The Hate U Give* explore racial disparity, discrimination, and profiling in the contemporary U.S. context, *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* revisits history by recounting the devastating effects of colonisation on Indigenous Australians, focusing on the Australian government’s policy of forced removal of “half-caste” children from their Aboriginal families. Using a comparative and contextual approach, the paper maintains that all three ethnic groups discussed share a history of oppression and marginalization within the dominant settler society and that literature is a powerful tool for these minority groups to assert their sovereignty and attain racial justice, equality, and human rights.

*Keywords:* narrative sovereignty, discrimination, human rights literature, *Night Sky, Morning Star, The Hate U Give, Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*.





## Introduction

Although human rights have been violated throughout history and many of the issues raised by these violations have been addressed in literary works, scholars have only recently begun to explore the field of human rights within literature. As literature has the power to share experiences as well as provoke empathy in readers, storytelling is one of the ways in which human sufferings can be revealed. Most importantly, literature paves the way for the oppressed to raise their voices against discrimination and marginalization. In other words, through literature and narration, the victims of oppression can tell their stories and explain their point of view. The oppressed are usually people whose ethnic, racial or religious background is different from that of the dominant culture. They are stigmatized, socially excluded, and denied many rights available to the rest of society. This inequality stems from the oppressors' fear of losing power over the oppressed social groups, so they impose rules and regulations upon them to restrict their rights.

This thesis analyses three texts, Evelina Zuni Lucero's *Night Sky, Morning Star* (2000), Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give* (2017), and Doris Pilkington Garimara's *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* (1996) in order to draw attention to the mistreatment of the marginalized groups due to their ethnic and racial background. Focusing on American Indians, African Americans, and Aboriginal Australians, it aims to highlight the difficulties these groups have been facing ever since the beginning of their oppression until today and accentuate that the fight for their rights is still ongoing.

The first chapter briefly discusses the genre of human rights literature. The second chapter provides an outline of post-contact American Indian history followed by an analysis of the novel *Night Sky, Morning Star* by Isleta Pueblo/Ohkay Owingeh author Evelina Zuni Lucero. The third and the fourth chapter discuss the African American and Aboriginal history through the respective texts – *The Hate U Give* by the African American novelist Angie Thomas and *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* by the Aboriginal author Doris Pilkington Garimara. The analysis focuses on the topics of discrimination, oppression, inequality, cultural appropriation, and prejudice towards each ethnic group concerned. The conclusion summarizes the main points of the analysis and compares the three texts in order to show that the experiences of the oppressed minorities are similar and that the struggle for their rights is still relevant.

## 1. Human Rights Literature

From the 1789 French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen* to the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, human rights have been discussed profoundly throughout the centuries. However, at the time of the French Revolution, literature was intertwined with politics. As Julie Stone Peter argues, “In the late eighteenth century, of course, the literary had not yet been segregated from the ‘scientific’: the aesthetic was mingled with the political, the narrative with the discursive, fiction with non-fiction. Rights treatises could be indistinguishable from what we would think of as literary genres” (24). The interdisciplinary field of human rights and literary studies emerged shortly after the attacks of September 11, 2001 as “a number of humanities scholars in the United States turned to human rights as a productive way to interrogate a new age of empire, geopolitical conflict, and human suffering” (McClennen and Schultheis Moore 3). What is more, “[t]hese scholars were joined globally by a chorus of faculty working from afar who also noticed that the attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center had opened up a unique moment for both the advancement of and the assault on human rights” (McClennen and Schultheis Moore 3). Since then, both scholars and the media have addressed crimes against humanity committed by various regimes through “personal testimonials in public venues, televised confessionals, documentary films, [and] internet sites featuring human rights victims telling their stories” (Stone Peters 19). The narrative form of storytelling “has come to be used instead of (or alongside) punishment or victim compensation: not as evidence (even where it is also used as evidence) but as a form of remedy, in and of itself. That is, narrative in human rights has come to have an independent legal-political function” (Stone Peters 19).

Indeed, storytelling has proven to be a kind of redress for the victims since it “can bind the community, and thus serve as a force for healing, moving us past atrocity and into a healthy future” (Stone Peters 19). Through storytelling, the victims are given voice to retell their stories, which offers them not only relief but also legitimacy over the experience they have had. Once told, those experiences can relate with experiences of people with similar difficulties, which can prevent the recurrence of atrocities. As stated by Stone Peters, the testimonies serve as a narrative closure both for the victims and for society as a whole (20). Accordingly, the right to narrate is a vital human right for the progression of humankind:

The right to narrate is . . . a metaphor for the fundamental human interest in freedom itself, the right to be heard, to be recognized and represented. . . . When you fail to protect the right to narrate you are in danger of filling the silence with sirens, megaphones, hectoring voices carried by loudspeakers from podiums of great height over people who shrink into indistinguishable masses. Once we have allowed such “walls of silence” to be built in our midsts and our minds, . . . we are compelled to return to the silent killing fields of the past and the present – be it Colonisation, Apartheid, the Holocaust, or Vietnam, Palestine, Afghanistan, South Africa, Rwanda, Kosovo – to try and give voice to those who were silenced. (Bhabha qtd. in Stone Peters 20)

The role of human rights literature is to promote human rights by combining the power of literature to reveal stories and individual experiences with motivation for action. Human rights literature strives to make social change, since it is at its core to protect human rights and react against injustice. Even before the emergence of this literary genre, people have fought against mistreatment by using literature to share their sufferings. For instance, Frederick Douglass wrote an autobiographical slave narrative *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845), which portrays his sufferings and the traumas he endured as a slave. Social injustice is also depicted by people who have not experienced it directly but feel the need to fight against it through writing. As an example, the American novelist Harper Lee wrote the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), in which she describes racial inequality and prejudices through the eyes of a child. Such authors have shown that ordinary people who are not involved in discrimination can speak out and contribute to social equality. In a similar manner, the readers of works addressing social inequalities can help in sharing the stories of people whose rights have been violated. By reading such works, people can sympathize with the victims and become aware of injustice present in their own surroundings. In addition, by noticing these injustices, people might be triggered by the experiences they have read about and start making changes in society to prevent oppression from happening. Finally, it is up to each individual to decide what to do, but human rights literature aims at provoking people’s thoughts and inciting them to act.

From racial and ethnic inequality to gender, religious, and economic inequality, social injustice is omnipresent and needs to be tackled. Therefore, this thesis will explore the topic of racial and ethnic inequality to remind of the problems that people have faced throughout the centuries and that have massive repercussions today. In its own way, the thesis aims to fight against the oppression of the disenfranchised.

## **2. American Indian History**

“Literature tells truths about the past that history cannot articulate,” says Joy Porter, referring to the fact that historians have misrepresented the American Indian history by limiting it to conflicts with the whites, Indian policies, as well as tribal histories that include narratives (39). Naturally, it is necessary to understand the American history from the Native point of view to get the whole picture. Important American Indian authors, historians, and activists, such as Vine Deloria Jr., Paul Chaat Smith, N. Scott Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko, Louise Erdrich, and others, have contributed to the consideration of American Indian way of life and respect for their communities.

American indigenous people came to be called “Indians” because Christopher Columbus, who discovered the American continent in the fifteenth century, believed that he had reached the Asian continent, more precisely India. He called the natives Indians, and the term has prevailed until today. The term American Indian actually encompasses 574 tribes that have survived in the United States to this day (“Federally Recognized Indian Tribes and Resources for Native Americans”). Whereas James Mooney estimates that at the time of Columbus’s “discovery” there were about 1.15 million native inhabitants in the Americas (qtd. in Mann, ch. “An Arithmetical Progression”), according to Henry Dobyns, the Indigenous population size in 1492 was between 90 and 112 million (see Brinkley qtd. in Runtić and Knežević ii). It is estimated that in the first 130 years of Europeans’ colonization of the Americas, about 95 percent of the people in the Americas died (Dobyns qtd. in Mann, ch. “An Arithmetical Progression”). It should also be noted that at the time of Columbus’s arrival, 1,200 languages belonging to 180 linguistic families were spoken in both Americas (Mann, ch. “Continental Divide”). Porter estimates that there were about five hundred languages in today’s USA and Canada, whereas nowadays “less than two hundred [languages] are still spoken” (42). As Dobyns finds out, during the first contacts, one of the major threats to the Natives were European diseases such as typhus, influenza, diphtheria, measles, and smallpox to which they were susceptible and due to which they suffered great losses (qtd. in Mann, ch. “An Arithmetical Progression”). These data show the devastating consequences of the European colonisation of America and its native inhabitants (see also Runtić 13).

According to Porter, American Indians “inhabited a great variety of landscapes, engaged in a range of sometimes interlinked economies, cherished their own shared memories of the past, and spoke languages often unintelligible not just to Europeans, but to their own

Indian neighbors” (42). Although it is impossible to share experiences of all the tribes, their beliefs, and lifestyles, there are some common traits shared by most of the Native tribes, such as “a sense of the interconnectedness and relationship between all things, between animals, land, peoples and their language, and a requirement to seek individual, communal, and environmental balance” (Porter 43). Since the American Indians are linked to nature, the loss of territory for them is considered “a deprivation of psychic strength” (Porter 43). The Europeans used to seize native land, denying the Natives the right to their own land:

They all found ways to claim title to it by emphasizing some aspect of Indian deficiency relative to European standards. Land deemed “empty,” either because it was not inhabited by a Christian prince or because it was occupied seasonally as part of a Native economy, was therefore open for occupation by Europeans for their “higher” use. (Porter 46)

Furthermore, American Indians were subjected to prejudices and viewed as civilisationally inferior to Europeans, who considered themselves a progressed and civilised society:

European culture was considered superior to Indian culture of any sort, but from the beginning non-Indians differentiated Indians into “good” and “bad,” with “good” Indians having noble, innocent, and virtuous qualities and “bad” Indians having fiendish, warlike, and occult ones. Non-Indians understood Indians in antithesis to themselves: because they thought themselves civilized, dynamic, and *in* history they judged Indians to be culturally static and somehow *outside* of history. (Porter 45)

Under the pretext of civilizing the Natives, the Europeans “justified diverse abuses against Indian land and peoples, acts conducted against Indians ostensibly ‘for their own good’” (Porter 46).

From the very beginning of the European arrival on the American continent, the Europeans wanted to enslave its Indigenous peoples. Namely, in 1492, the Italian explorer Christopher Columbus, sponsored by the Spanish Crown, landed in today’s Bahamas, where he met the Arawak people, whom he considered good-natured but ignorant, and thus suitable for enslavement:

They . . . brought us parrots and balls of cotton and spears and many other things, which they exchanged for the glass beads and hawks’ bells. They willingly traded

everything they owned. . . . They were well-built, with good bodies and handsome features. . . . They do not bear arms, and do not know them, for I showed them a sword, they took it by the edge and cut themselves out of ignorance. They have no iron. Their spears are made of cane. . . . They would make fine servants. . . . With fifty men we could subjugate them all and make them do whatever we want. (Columbus qtd. in Zinn, ch. 1)

Columbus managed to persuade the Spanish king to finance his voyages so that he could bring gold that would make Spain the richest country in the world as well as slaves who would either be taken to Europe as free labour or have to collect gold on the island of Hispaniola for the Spaniards. The Arawaks tried to fight the Spaniards but failed as their opponent was better armed, which resulted in mass crimes against the Arawak people. When there was no more gold, the Arawaks toiled on huge estates called *encomiendas*, where many of them died, and 152 years later, none of the original Arawaks remained on the island (Zinn, ch. 1). Similarly, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English explorers and settlers, such as Richard Grenville, John Winthrop, and John Mason, committed mass genocide against native tribes and took over their land. The English settlers in New England believed that they could intimidate their Indigenous enemy by killing non-combatants since “[b]attle is only one of the ways to destroy an enemy’s will to fight. Massacre can accomplish the same end with less risk” (Jennings qtd. in Zinn, ch. 1). However, the settlers were not always in dispute with the Natives. For example, the French formed an alliance and traded goods with the Huron tribe, as they were in conflict with the Iroquois and their European rival, England (Kicza 41).

As already mentioned, the Europeans disregarded Native sovereignty as the French, Spaniards, and British divided the continent among themselves. In 1760, the British gained the French claim to Canada, but the Indigenous people were not satisfied with the British rule. As a result, in 1763, Pontiac’s War broke out between the Natives and the British, which ended in treaties, but “[t]he issue of sovereignty was left unsettled” (Evans Dowd 61-62). As the United States were formed in 1783, when the American negotiators and a British representative signed the Treaty of Paris, this also marked the beginning of the U.S. western expansion, which meant that the position of Native Americans was questionable (“Treaty of Paris (1783)”). In 1830, the Indian Removal Act was passed, which “made official a policy of removing Southeastern tribes from their lands. This was considered necessary because the United States wanted to expand into lands owned by members of the Five Civilized Tribes, and they were, as many of the time



put it, in the way” (Lippert and Spignesi, ch. “Removal (1830–1850)”). Lippert and Spignesi describe the inhumane conditions that the Cherokee tribe, one of the Five Civilized Tribes, endured during the removal:

The trip from the Cherokee lands to Indian Territory was approximately 1,000 miles. Between 15,000 and 17,000 Cherokees made the trip. Often, they had little more than the clothes on their backs. Much of the trip was made overland. A drought had lowered the levels of many of the rivers in the area. This delayed some of the trip into the winter months. As many as 4,000 Cherokees died during the trip due to sickness, fatigue, or exposure. Many of the dead were the young and the old. Many more would die in the next few years in Indian Territory since they had been ill-prepared to move to a new land. (ch. “Encountering Europeans”)

As Russell Thornton accounts, “[l]inked to removal and relocation was the development of elaborate state and federal reservation systems and the subsequent concentration of American Indians into small geographical areas” (50-51). Following the removals, the Americans destroyed American Indian way of life, especially “flora and fauna that American Indians used for food and other purposes” (Thornton 51). According to Thornton, the destruction of the buffalo led to starvation and collapse of many Plains tribes (51-52).

In 1871, the Indian Appropriation Act was passed, when “the federal government altered its statutes and executive orders on Native Americans by recognizing them as a single ethnic entity rather than as members of separate tribes” (Snodgrass 327). Mary Ellen Snodgrass explains that the law “reclassified Indians as federal wards under the U.S. Constitution and demoted hereditary chiefs from positions of influence and authority” (327). The legislation was made as a means of ending the “Indian Wars,” which lasted from 1850 to 1890 – “decades [that] recorded the greatest number of conflicts between Indians and the U.S. military” (Michno 1). In his book *Encyclopedia of Indian Wars: Western Battles and Skirmishes, 1850-1890*, Gregory Michno describes 675 fights that occurred in this period in nineteen western states. Lippert and Spignesi list three battles significant for Native Americans – The Sand Creek Massacre of 1864, the Black Hills War from 1876 and 1877, and the Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890. The Wounded Knee Massacre, which occurred because the U.S. military misinterpreted the Ghost Dance of Lakota tribe as a “prelude to the battle” dance, is “considered the end of the Indian Wars of the 19th century” (Lippert and Spignesi, ch. “The Indian Wars”). According to Lippert and Spignesi, the Wounded Knee Massacre left casualties on both sides:

“more than 200 Lakota were killed or wounded, and an equal number fled, [and is] believed to have died later of exposure. The U.S. military lost 25 soldiers, and 39 men were wounded. The Lakota dead were left in the snow to be buried three days later in a mass grave” (ch. “Indian Wars”).

As the reservation system proved to be an inadequate method of dealing with the Indigenous people, the U.S. government tried to assimilate them into mainstream society. Firstly, in what is known as the General Allotment Act or Dawes Act of 1887, the government chopped the reservations into parcels for farming, believing that the Natives could survive by doing agriculture (Lippert and Spignesi, ch. “Assimilation (1871–1928)”; Porter 53). What happened is that “most reservations were unsuitable for farming and the allotments too small to be economically viable. Many Indian farmers quickly found themselves in debt and when the land was finally theirs, were forced to lease or sell it to non-Indians” (Porter 53). Another assimilation policy was sending Native children to boarding schools in order to “civilize” them. According to Lippert and Spignesi, “[a]t these schools, anything ‘Indian’ was absolutely forbidden. Students speaking their native language would be severely punished. Parents were only allowed to visit once or twice a year, thereby completely eliminating their involvement in decisions regarding their children” (ch. “Assimilation (1871–1928)”).

Children were separated from their traditional religion and culture so that they could be more easily taught English and Christianity. Many Native American parents did not want to send their children to boarding school, but Government officials used coercion, such as withholding of rations, to force them to send their children. The education and care that children received at Indian schools were often substandard and did little to prepare them for joining Euro-American society. In addition, when children returned home they often had difficulty adjusting to life on the reservation. (“Indian Boarding Schools 1890”)

In other words, the dominant society wanted to integrate Native children into American society by instilling American values in them and eradicating their Indigenous identity and values. Yet, the assimilation policy was unsuccessful. The 1928 Meriam Report, “which looked at conditions on Indian reservations in 26 states” during the assimilation period showed the failure of the U.S. government to integrate Native Americans into society (Lippert and Spignesi, ch. “Assimilation (1871–1928)”). According to the Meriam Report,

An overwhelming majority of the Indians are poor, even extremely poor, and they are not adjusted to the economic and social system of the dominant white civilization. The health of the Indians as compared with that of the general population is bad. . . . In justice to the Indians, it should be said that many of them are living on lands from which a trained and experienced white man could scarcely wrest a reasonable living. . . . The work of the government directed toward the education and advancement of the Indian himself, as distinguished from the control and conservation of his property, is largely ineffective. The survey staff finds itself obliged to say frankly and unequivocally that the provisions for the care of the Indian children in boarding schools are grossly inadequate. (qtd. in Lippert and Spignesi, ch. "Assimilation (1871–1928)")

As the assimilation policy failed, and following the Native American veterans' participation in World War I, the U.S. Congress passed the Indian Citizenship Act in 1924, under which "Native Americans still retained their tribal affiliations and rights to tribal property" ("Native American Citizenship 1924"). Despite that, the right to citizenship did not change Native Americans' position that much since they did not have all the rights that other Americans had. However, the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 had a major impact on Native independence and sovereignty because it enabled the following: "to conserve and develop Indian lands and resources, to extend to Indians the right to form business and other organizations, to establish a credit system for Indians, to grant certain rights of home rule to Indians [and] to provide for vocational education for Indians" (Lippert and Spignesi, ch. "Reorganization (1928–1942)"). In contrast, the 1950s saw the termination policy that ended tribal sovereignty because the U.S. government wanted to save money spent on "Indian affairs" and grab Indigenous land, which is rich in natural resources (Lippert and Spignesi, ch. "Termination (1943–1968)"). As a result, American Indians protested against the policy and demanded the right to self-determination – "to govern themselves and make their own decisions about tribal matters" (ch. "Advancing Self-Determination 1968"). Although they did not achieve their demands immediately, they succeeded in raising "American awareness and sympathy for correcting the nation's ongoing injustices committed against indigenous peoples" (ch. "Native American Activism 1970"). Finally, the Indian Civil Rights Act of 1968 and the Indian Self-Determination Act of 1975 were significant milestones in equalizing the rights of Native Americans and other American citizens. After that, many other rights were granted to American Indians, such as healthcare

improvement, education, freedom of speech, religious freedom, the right to petition for grievances, due process, and equal protection (Lippert and Spignesi, ch. “Major Recent Acts of Congress Concerning Indians”).

Nonetheless, American Indians today still face inequality. As the statistics show, their poverty rate is around 25 percent; 30 percent of them have no health insurance; their educational levels are below the national average, and “they are incarcerated at a rate 38 percent higher than the national per capita rate” (Lippert and Spignesi, ch. “Native Americans: Today and Tomorrow”). A major problem for Natives is alcoholism as “[f]ive of the top ten causes of death among Native Americans are related to abuse of alcohol. This is about four times the rate in America as a whole” (Lippert and Spignesi, ch. “Native Americans: Today and Tomorrow”). Porter also mentions Natives’ susceptibility to death in comparison to non-native Americans since “Indians [are] much more likely than non-Indians to die from tuberculosis, liver disease, diabetes, pneumonia, and influenza and from accidents, homicide, and suicide” (40). Porter depicts other issues experienced by contemporary American Indians, as their struggle for survival is continuing:

Contemporary Indian communities face acute ongoing threats to the sovereignty of their remaining land base and to the ecological balance of Indian environments from, amongst other things, nuclear testing, nuclear waste disposal, coal strip mining and oil, logging, and uranium extraction. Indian communities also face threats to the integrity of their tribal, national, and ethnic representation and they suffer the internal conflicts created when a diverse set of peoples survive massive depletion in numbers, progressive engulfment by foreign cultures, repeated displacement, and fundamental attack upon their spiritual life. (Porter 40)

In addition to these problems, American Indians nowadays still have to deal with prejudices and mistreatment by the dominant American society. Some of these contemporary issues and challenges will be shown through the analysis of Evelina Zuni Lucero’s novel *Night Sky, Morning Star*.

## **2.1 Evelina Zuni Lucero’s *Night Sky, Morning Star***

*Night Sky, Morning Star* is a contemporary novel that describes everyday lives of several American Indian characters and the difficulties they have faced in the last fifty years. There are

five narrators in the novel, each retelling the events from his/her perspective, and there is one chapter told from the third-person point of view. The main plot revolves around Julian Morning Star, who is serving a life sentence in prison because he was falsely accused of murdering a rancher and possessing illegal substance and unregistered weapons. While in prison, he remembers his high school love, Cecelia Bluespruce, whose photo he found in the prison library magazine, not knowing that they have a grown son. Cecelia is a famous potter and sculptor who focused on her career and left her son, Jude, with her aunt Virgie, afraid of sharing her past with her family.

The novel deals with a number of issues and hardships faced by contemporary American Indian communities. Describing his prison experience, Julian says that “Indians and prisoners have a lot in common” (39), referring to the fact that, like prisoners, Native Americans are ostracized and marginalized. While in the hospital, Julian expresses his dissatisfaction with the fact that American Indians do not have the opportunity to share their opinion and that non-Indians do not consider their viewpoint. When the doctor tells Julian that he may no longer be able to speak due to the trauma to his trachea and voice box, he thinks to himself: “I never had a voice, Doc. No one ever gave a damn about anything I’ve had to say. Why’ja people have to go and save my raggedy ass for?” (Zuni Lucero 36). In a similar manner, Julian refers to the fact that the American Indians’ experience has been diminished and that their point of view has been left out of the U.S. history books:

In those very mountains the Donner party, emigrants heading to California, had gotten stranded in the snow in 1846 and had eaten one another to survive, then gotten the pass named for them. The Indians of the region had watched them and wondered what they were doing, but that portion was neglected in the history books we studied in school. Nobody ever asks Indians what they think of white people’s doings. (Zuni Lucero 39)

Porter’s observation that “until the watershed years of the late 1960s and early 1970s Indians were either ignored or grossly misrepresented by conventional histories” (39) confirms this, as well.

Another issue discussed in the book is that of misinterpretation of Indigenous people. Julian’s colleague Viola, an American Indian activist, is outraged because her anthropology professor co-wrote a book full of inaccuracies about her tribe. When she tries to warn the

professor that the book contains mistakes, he disregards her remarks, claiming that oral narration, which she refers to, is an unreliable source of information:

Viola hated the book, the way Indians were lumped into broad categories and discussed like curiosities. She said the information about her people was wrong and she had already pointed out the errors to our anthro professor, who co-authored the book. He told her he respected her “opinion,” but that oral history was not a reliable source, academic research was, then showed her the door. (Zuni Lucero 145)

Through the character of Viola, Zuni Lucero discusses the American Indian activism of the 1960s and the 1970s and the American Indian Movement (AIM) as a way of opposing the U.S. government’s mistreatment of Native Americans. The American Indian Movement, which appeared in the United States in 1968, rose out of frustration “by discrimination and decades of federal Indian policy” (“American Indian Movement (AIM): Overview”). Its leaders “spoke out against high unemployment, slum housing, and racist treatment, fought for treaty rights and the reclamation of tribal land, and advocated on behalf of urban Indians whose situation bred illness and poverty” (“American Indian Movement (AIM): Overview”). The FBI tried to suppress the movement during the 1970s, and one of the most prominent events in that period was the occupation of Wounded Knee by the AIM members, which lasted for 71 days and during which “two people were killed, twelve wounded, and twelve hundred arrested” (“American Indian Movement (AIM): Overview”). Zuni Lucero depicts the purpose, significance, and circumstances of the emergence of AIM in the novel:

AIM had made itself known as the defender of Indian land, treaty rights, sovereignty, and Indian pride. The movement grew out of the same pent-up, helpless rage and frustration that the Indian brothers come into prison with, the kind that blinds them into alcoholism and despair, then defeat. AIM wanted to break that cycle. It started in the streets of Minneapolis and in a matter of years, resistance spread throughout the country like wildfire. Indian people all over began reclaiming land and resources, resisting environmental exploitation, talking treaty rights and sovereignty. It even went beyond U.S. borders to the north and south. (154)

As the goal of AIM was to bring attention to American Indian problems, their members organized an anti-Columbus Day rally and proclaimed it “a national day of mourning for Indian

people” (Zuni Lucero 148), during which they “sponsored a one-day conference which featured speakers and panel presentations by tribal grassroots activists” (Zuni Lucero 148).

Although Julian was not directly involved in the American Indian Movement, he participated in some protests and activities like “getting involved with tribal struggles over water rights that pitted Indians against ranchers, sportsmen, and government agencies” (Zuni Lucero 149). In order to validate his Native identity, Julian changed his last name from an American – James – to an Indian one – Morning Star, which is an English approximation of his grandfather’s name (Zuni Lucero 131). Julian’s father did not approve of his activism because “[h]istorically, renegade Indians were killed outright or imprisoned then killed” (Zuni Lucero 152). On the other hand, Julian’s friend Viola “was politicized to the core, rock solid certain of what she believed – that without action, Indian people didn’t stand a chance” (Zuni Lucero 146). Julian explicates that Viola’s radical activism came from her upbringing because “she was struggling to hold her own in school, butting heads with a racist principal, school district, and town, all of whom believed Indian people were no better than dogs. Her most important education, she felt, came from her family and tribal elders in the form of spiritual training” (Zuni Lucero 146). Julian and Viola used to talk about Native American issues such as “[g]rave robbing. Sacrilegious excavation of ancient ruins and burial sites. Museum display of sacred artifacts and human remains. Sacred space and objects. Disrespect of non-Western cultures. Ethnocentrism. Institutional racism. Government conspiracies against brown people” (Zuni Lucero 145).

Because of AIM’s radical politics, the FBI infiltrated two people into the movement “to smear the reputation of AIM in California by pinning the murder of a taxi driver on two AIM members. They set up the whole crime, using Indian people against their own, taking great pains to make sure the crime occurred at a so-called AIM camp” (Zuni Lucero 154). One of the agents also “mistreated and turned off non-Indian AIM sympathizers and used and abused the media to make AIM look like rip-offs and criminals” (Zuni Lucero 154). In fact, the government was so keen on intimidating the public and the AIM members that they used various methods such as threats, bribery, and fabrications to make the AIM look bad:

During their all-out campaign, AIM leaders all over the country were arrested on various charges ranging from possession of marijuana to assault, which had been provoked or fabricated by cops, to false charges of murder. The charges were meant to intimidate, get AIM to lose heart and stop the work. Some AIM members were

offered deals if they would sell out and testify in cases against AIM brothers. Even AIM sympathizers, Indian and non-Indian, were targeted, bullied by FBI agents and asked how they and their families would like to be buried. (Zuni Lucero 154)

This turbulent period is also referred to through the depiction of Julian's arrest and his subsequent incarceration. As an AIM sympathizer, Julian is falsely accused of possession of illegal substances and unregistered weapons, including a rifle that was used to kill a rancher. Later on, when he refuses to cooperate with the federal agents by withholding information about the AIM, he is also accused of and sentenced for murdering the rancher. It is not until the end of the novel, which is set in the 1990s, that this and similar tactics used against the AIM in the 1960s and 1970s are exposed. Julian's son, Jude, comes across news articles about former FBI agents confessing to crimes and false testimonies dating back to the 1960s:

Former FBI agents were singing like canaries, confessing past sins, of how they had infiltrated select political groups as far back as the '60s, directed smear campaigns to discredit leaders, harassed and arrested them on trumped up charges, mishandled and manufactured evidence in FBI labs, and down and out lied in sworn testimony against group members during trials. (Zuni Lucero 181)

Through Julian's character, *Night Sky, Morning Star* also draws attention to the problem of high incarceration rates of Native people. According to the latest statistics, "American Indian and Alaska Native people have high rates of incarceration in both jails and prisons as compared with other racial and ethnic groups. In jails, Native people have more than double the incarceration rate of white people, and in prisons this disparity is even greater" ("Native Incarceration in the U.S."). In addition to that, American Indians are mistreated in the prison system. For example, Julian is framed for possession of drugs and beaten by the guards only because he fights for his religious rights, including the right to use a sweat lodge and to be allowed to use specific sacred items for his religious practice as well as to have access to a spiritual adviser who conducts the ceremony. Yet, as Julian reveals, Native inmates are denied "what is a constitutionally guaranteed right under the First Amendment and under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act" (Zuni Lucero 43). Julian relates the mistreatment he endures as a result of demanding his religious rights:

I'm alive and I'm not supposed to be, simply because as an Indian, I fought for my religious rights to grow my hair long, to have access to and use of a sweat lodge,



sacred items, like our pipe, sage, and medicine bundles, for spiritual advisers to be allowed to come in and conduct ceremonies and counseling. After my written testimony was presented at congressional and state hearings, I was framed by guards for possession of drugs, thrown in the Hole, beaten by the guards and left without medical treatment. I'm considered dangerous, unstable, a threat to society. That's what is written in my jacket, my file, though I am a model prisoner as much as I can be under the stress of being caged. I know about these lies because they were read aloud at my parole hearing held earlier the same day I was attacked. I was denied parole, told to come back in a few years. (Zuni Lucero 44)

In addition, Zuni Lucero's novel reveals that contemporary American Indians have to deal with many prejudices. To illustrate, one of the nurses who takes care of Julian after he has been beaten in prison acts as if he "might pull out a tommyhawk, tie her to a tree, do things to her that would taint her, make her unacceptable to her own kind" (Zuni Lucero 37), while the other nurse considers him "a savage" (Zuni Lucero 37).

The novel also tackles some legal issues, such as land grabbing. Cecelia's friend Drew describes his grandmother's plights resulting from the government's fraudulent taking, selling, and repurposing of her ancestral land:

His grandmother was enrolled and lost her land holdings when they were lensed out to white farmers. With her thumbprint as signature, she granted permission and they later used that same thumbprint to sell the land. The BIA did that to most of the tribe and now the reservation was checkerboard. With what little land base they had left, the tribal council wanted to open a casino, and they were going to do it over the protests of tribal members. (Zuni Lucero 204)

Native American boarding schools are another major issue addressed in Zuni Lucero's novel. Julian recounts stories he has heard from former campus workers about children from the boarding school times, describing: "the bed-wetting, sleepwalking, suicide attempts, pregnancies, runaways called AWOLs like they were army deserters, acts of defiance such as refusing to get up in the morning or make beds, talking back" (Zuni Lucero 40). He mentions that there were voices "in the land, in the blood soaked into the land that cried out for justice, in the trees and rock structures. Voices of long-ago boarding school students who once walked the campus, voices of the people who once hunted and gathered, voices of those who were

dispossessed and then despised” (Zuni Lucero 40). By referring to the assimilation policy era and the boarding schools, the novel also tackles the issue of identity loss since children who attended boarding schools were not only cut off from tribal roots but were also forbidden to speak their Native language.

The identity issue is further addressed through the question of tribal affiliation and the fact that the criteria that define someone as American Indian are inconsistent as “there is no single federal or tribal criterion or standard that establishes a person’s identity as American Indian or Alaska Native” (“Who is an American Indian or Alaska Native?”). In general, “an American Indian or Alaska Native person is someone who has blood degree from and is recognized as such by a federally recognized tribe or village (as an enrolled tribal member) and/or the United States” (“Who is an American Indian or Alaska Native?”). Of course, the degree of American Indian blood a person possesses, commonly referred to as blood quantum, is not the only criterion for defining a person as American Indian. Other important criteria are “a person’s knowledge of his or her tribe’s culture, history, language, religion, familial kinships, and how strongly a person identifies himself or herself as American Indian or Alaska Native” (“Who is an American Indian or Alaska Native?”). Although the U.S. government “does not force tribes to implement blood quantum criteria, . . . the Bureau of Indian Affairs provides a step-by-step process for guiding tribal enrollment, even providing charts on how tribes should determine blood quantum” (Schmidt 5). According to some scholars, tribes that participate in tribal enrolment by using blood quantum internalize a racist colonial practice (Schmidt 5) as they are “ubiquitously forced or duped into acceptance of Euro-American racial ideology” (Tallbear 90). They believe that the blood-quantum policies “will ultimately end with extinction of the original indigenous people of native North America” (Schmidt 6). Ryan W. Schmidt warns that the blood quantum policy can lead to tribal termination: “[i]n the 1950s and 1960s, certain tribes that were deemed too small were ‘terminated’ by the federal government, losing a recognized status and subsequent benefits. Essentially, termination means the death of a tribe as a political entity” (7). Schmidt concludes that identity is a fluid concept that is “in continual process” and is “not something inherently and innately fixed in the human genome, defined by blood or any other facet of biology” (8). Zuni Lucero’s character Cecelia advocates that tribes should decide on their own membership requirements: “. . . tribes have always defined themselves. Tribalism is all about being a member of a specific community,

clan, or extended family with a recognized territory and traits” (209). During an argument with her friend Drew over the question of American Indian identity, Cecelia elaborates:

There’s a world of difference between being Indian and claiming Indian ancestry, which many Americans can truthfully do. It’s dangerous to think that a drop of Indian blood gives anyone special claims and rights to being Indian. You can’t be Indian in the past tense. Being Indian is like being pregnant . . . You can’t be a little bit pregnant, part pregnant, pregnant because your grandma once was. You either are or you aren’t. (Zuni Lucero 210)

Cecelia also reveals that some non-Natives use the Native identity to advance in their life as it brings them some benefits:

There were names, careers, and money to be made by claiming an Indian identity, not only in the arts market but in other realms. Marli told me of some university professor in Washington who recently resigned in disgrace as director of a Native American studies program when it was discovered his claim of Indian blood was fraudulent. People who didn’t have a drop of Indian blood in them were setting themselves up as the Indian expert or role model, or pitching books about their identity angst or Native spiritual insights, taking the place and voice of Indian people. Without the Indian claim to fame, they had nothing to distinguish themselves in the cutthroat, competitive Anglo world. (Zuni Lucero 209)

The exploitation of Native identity is further addressed when, at a Native art show, Cecelia and her son Jude criticize appropriation of their culture in its various forms. Referring to the fact that some Anglo-American artists and customers at the show dress up as American Indians, Jude maintains:

Some of the artists here are more strange than their art. There’s a guy over there, white as flour. Some Navajo guys were teasing him, saying they had to wear their sunglasses when they looked at him to avoid the glare! He was wearing a fringed leather vest and a black hat with a beaded hat band. He had on a turquoise bracelet with these incredibly huge chunks of stones. If he hit you on the head with it, you’d be out for days. Another woman with hair dyed pure black looks like an old, moldy

hippie in a long skirt. She's got these weird braids." I laughed in remembrance. "I thought this was supposed to be an Indian art show." (Zuni Lucero 195)

In order to protect authentic Native art from appropriation, Cecelia's aunt Reena, who owns a curio shop, had to post signs that "announced her shop to be 'Indian owned and operated,' featuring 'authentic Indian-made art'" (Zuni Lucero 27). In contrast, when a boy who visits Cecelia's booth at the show wants to buy a storyteller that she made, his mother refuses to buy it, telling him that this "stuff is way too expensive . . . [and that they will] stop by one of those stores where [he] can buy something Indian for a dollar" (Zuni Lucero 21). This example shows not only the exploitation of but also non-native disrespect for authentic Native American art.

To summarise, Zuni Lucero's novel reveals that American Indians have been discriminated and their rights violated in various ways. From boarding school traumas, land grabbing, police brutality, intimidations, and fabrications to insults, prejudices, discarding Native viewpoint and oral history, as well as cultural appropriation, American Indians seem to be deeply affected by the unjust treatment of their fellow citizens. Even though from the late 1960s, when the AIM was founded, there has been a significant progress regarding Native Americans' legal rights, issues such as blood quantum policies, poor living conditions, whether on reservations or in urban areas, and exploitation of Native cultures are still pressing and should be emphasized in order to bring about change. Assimilation and inter-racial marriages are inevitable consequences of colonialism, but in order for the American Indians to retain their tribal identity and enjoy their rights, awareness should be raised by debating these topics at the global level through various media, including literature.

### **3. African American History**

African American history goes back to the Atlantic slave trade in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Although slavery was practiced in some parts of Africa at the time, it was nothing like the American chattel slavery. In Africa, “a slave might marry; own property; himself own a slave; swear an oath; be a competent witness and ultimately become heir to his master” (Zinn ch. 2). According to Zinn, there are two features that made American slavery the cruellest form of slavery in human history – “the frenzy for limitless profit that comes from capitalistic agriculture” and “the reduction of the slave to less than human status by the use of racial hatred, with that relentless clarity based on color, where white was master, black was slave” (ch. 2). Just as American Indians differ in beliefs, languages, and cultural practices, African slaves who were brought to America also came from different backgrounds, and their experiences were influenced by various factors:

It is more accurate to speak of diverse African American experiences and cultures, which were shaped by specific local conditions: the nationality of the colonizer; the geographical location of a colonial outpost; a colony’s demographics; the varying modes of economic production; and the Atlantic world market in slaves, which affected the overall quantity, sex-ratio, and geographical source of the blacks themselves. (Franklin and Brooks Higginbotham 65)

The first slave ship in North America arrived in Jamestown, Virginia in 1619, and it carried twenty African slaves. These first African slaves were brought as servants, but they were treated differently from white indentured servants from Europe. Zinn describes that the Virginians were desperate for work force, so that is why they took African slaves:

The Virginians needed labor, to grow corn for subsistence, to grow tobacco for export. They had just figured out how to grow tobacco, and in 1617 they sent off the first cargo to England. Finding that, like all pleasurable drugs tainted with moral disapproval, it brought a high price, the planters, despite their high religious talk, were not going to ask questions about something so profitable. They couldn’t force Indians to work for them, as Columbus had done. They were outnumbered, and while, with superior firearms, they could massacre Indians, they would face massacre in return. They could not capture them and keep them enslaved; the Indians

were tough, resourceful, defiant, and at home in these woods, as the transplanted Englishmen were not. (ch. 2)

Zinn also depicts the inhumane conditions African slaves experienced before reaching the American continent:

They were captured in the interior (frequently by blacks caught up in the slave trade themselves), sold on the coast, then shoved into pens with blacks of other tribes, often speaking different languages. The conditions of capture and sale were crushing affirmations to the black African of his helplessness in the face of superior force. The marches to the coast, sometimes for 1,000 miles, with people shackled around the neck, under whip and gun, were death marches, in which two of every five blacks died. On the coast, they were kept in cages until they were picked and sold. . . . Then they were packed aboard the slave ships, in spaces not much bigger than coffins, chained together in the dark, wet slime of the ship's bottom, choking in the stench of their own excrement. (ch. 2)

Under these circumstances, one of three Africans died during the trip, but the slave trade was profitable so Europeans kept transporting them like that. Some slaves jumped overboard to drown rather than suffocate. Zinn estimates that, by 1800, 10 to 15 million Africans had been transported to the Americas and about 50 million of them died “in those centuries we call the beginnings of modern Western civilization, at the hands of slave traders and plantation owners in Western Europe and America, the countries deemed the most advanced in the world” (ch. 2). The unequal treatment of Black people can be traced back even to the early years of enslavement since White servants received a lesser punishment than Black ones did for the same acts. White and Black servants treated each other as equals, but their masters did not approve of this. As early as in 1661, the Virginia Colony passed a law, under which English servants were punished with extra years of labour if they ran away with an African slave. In 1691, another law banned marriage between a White man or woman and people of other colours. Slaves often rebelled against their masters by running away from plantations, either alone or in groups. Therefore, a slave code was enacted in Virginia according to which a slave could be dismembered, killed, or in any other way punished for escaping. One of the main reasons for running away was to reunite with family members, which proved that, despite the slave owners' attempt to destroy family ties, slaves were willing to sacrifice their lives to be

with their family. Zinn explains how slaves were manipulated into slavery through both psychological and physical means:

The slaves were taught discipline, were impressed again and again with the idea of their own inferiority to “know their place,” to see blackness as a sign of subordination, to be awed by the power of the master, to merge their interest with the master’s, destroying their own individual needs. To accomplish this there was the discipline of hard labor, the breakup of the slave family, the lulling effects of religion (which sometimes led to “great mischief,” as one slaveholder reported), the creation of disunity among slaves by separating them into field slaves and more privileged house slaves, and finally the power of law and the immediate power of the overseer to invoke whipping, burning, mutilation, and death. (ch. 2)

There are numerous accounts of slave revolts during the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Since the Whites feared the rebels would destroy their towns and communities, almost all of these revolts ended in execution, hanging, burning the rebels alive, or some other brutal form of punishment. Sometimes, White and Black men were accused of conspiring together for a fire breakout or similar crimes. Because of that, there was a fear that “discontented [W]hites would join [B]lack slaves to overthrow the existing order” (Zinn, ch. 2). Consequently, the Virginia Assembly gave White servants some benefits to prevent uprising: “In 1705 a law was passed requiring masters to provide white servants whose indenture time was up with ten bushels of corn, thirty shillings, and a gun, while women servants were to get 15 bushels of corn and forty shillings. Also, the newly freed servants were to get 50 acres of land” (qtd. in Zinn, ch. 2). In contrast, slaves were restricted in travelling, barred from military service, and their children were sold into bondage (Franklin and Brooks Higginbotham 57). Slaves usually lived in poor conditions and hence experienced a higher death rate. An archaeological discovery in New York City in 1992 revealed that they suffered from “health problems [such] as rickets, stress from malnutrition, and serious dental problems resulting from chewing whole grains” (Franklin and Brooks Higginbotham 70) as well as from “measles, respiratory infections, and whooping cough” due to inadequate slave housing (Franklin and Brooks Higginbotham 70). Despite the law, slaves were enlisted for military service in the American Revolutionary War. While some of the states offered freedom to all slaves who would serve in the army, and their owners were given a land bounty, Georgia and South Carolina never allowed enlistment of slaves (Franklin and Brooks Higginbotham 93).

After the Revolutionary War, the antislavery movement gained importance. It called for the termination of the Atlantic slave trade and abolishment of slavery, which led to the emancipation of African Americans in the northern states. African Americans formed black communities in urban areas, especially in the North, where slave codes were slowly being abolished, “[b]ut even where free status prevailed, blacks endured economic discrimination and social ostracism” (Franklin and Brooks Higginbotham 106). These communities were built on the grounds of shared institutions, not only to oppose racism but also “because of blacks’ desire to participate in shared cultural traditions,” which is evident in the establishment of independent Black churches (Franklin and Brooks Higginbotham 108-9). In 1816, the first African American church denomination was created by bishop Richard Allen, and it was the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia (Franklin and Brooks Higginbotham 109-10). During this period, which is known as the antebellum period, African Americans dealt with racism on a large scale – ranging from ethnological explanations for Black people’s inferiority and enslavement, racial bigotry, and prejudices to mob violence, minstrel shows, which mocked African Americans, and segregated schools (Franklin and Brooks Higginbotham 163-75). On January 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, according to which the slaves from the Confederate States gained freedom. The issue of slavery was actually one of the main causes of the American Civil War in 1861 (Franklin and Brooks Higginbotham 209-13). Many ex-slaves served in the war on the Union’s side, and they were of great help to the Union since they knew the Southern terrain and were often used as spies and scouts (Franklin and Brooks Higginbotham 222). However, Black soldiers were paid less for their service than White soldiers and had to protest to get equal pay (Franklin and Brooks Higginbotham 227-28).

Following the Union’s victory in the Civil War, 1865 saw the abolition of slavery by the Thirteenth Amendment (Franklin and Brooks Higginbotham 236). In 1868, the Fourteenth Amendment granted civil rights to the former slaves, and the Fifteenth Amendment of 1870 gave Black men the right to vote (Franklin and Brooks Higginbotham 243). Dissatisfied with the war’s outcome and Black people’s rights, White supremacists from the South formed organizations, such as Knights of the White Camelia and Ku Klux Klan, that intimidated Black people in various ways and attempted to “to exercise absolute control over blacks, drive them and their fellows from the ballot box and elective office, and establish ‘white home rule’” (Franklin and Brooks Higginbotham 256). During the 1890s, a repressive legal system called



Jim Crow was imposed in the Southern states. It reinforced racial segregation in housing, transportation, education, and public places (Franklin and Brooks Higginbotham 270-75). Due to systematic oppression, both White and Black activists like Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois demanded advancement of African Americans (*Free at Last* 22-3). Finally, in 1954, the Supreme Court issued a ruling that ended school segregation, which “deprived African Americans of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment” (Franklin and Brooks Higginbotham 507-8). However, despite the order, in practice, segregation did not cease to exist as mainly southern states tried to subvert the law:

Legal segregation, meanwhile, still prevailed in much of the South, not just at many schools but at nearly every kind of public facility, from swimming pools to buses and from movie theaters to lunch counters. And segregationists succeeded all too often in depriving African Americans of their most basic constitutional right. Through a combination of unfair technicalities, outright fraud and chicanery, and ultimately by threat of violence, the plain language of the Fifteenth Amendment was subverted, and blacks throughout the South were unable to vote. (*Free at Last* 30)

As a consequence of segregation and overall inequality, African Americans fought for their rights widely from the 1940s to the 1960s through the civil rights movement (Franklin and Brooks Higginbotham 511). They organized sit-ins in restaurants and other public places and boycotted buses to oppose racial segregation (Franklin and Brooks Higginbotham 513-520). They also organized marches and campaigns such as Freedom Summer in 1964 and Selma-to-Montgomery march in 1965 (Franklin and Brooks Higginbotham 524-26). The demonstrations eventually led to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which “gave the attorney general additional power to protect citizens against discrimination and segregation in voting, education, and the use of public facilities” (Franklin and Brooks Higginbotham 545). Due to limitations of the law and following the 1965 Alabama marches and “Bloody Sunday” in Selma, Alabama, which included whippings and firing tear gas canisters at protesters, the Voting Rights Act was passed in 1965. It “authorized the federal government to assume control of the voter registration process in any state or voting district that had in 1964 employed a literacy or other qualifying test and in which fewer than half of voting age residents had either registered or voted” (*Free at Last* 57-58; 61). The effect of the civil rights movement and the accompanying laws was seen even in the South:

After the civil rights movement, African Americans could attend integrated schools, they ran for – and won – political office, and they lived with a dignity that the culture of Jim Crow had denied. These changes also seeped into white Southern life and reshaped its very contours. The civil rights movement pushed Southerners, black and white alike, further along the path toward racial equality. (Sokol 64)

African Americans today are not on equal footing with the rest of American society. According to health statistics, they have higher death rates of asthma, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, and cancer than their White counterparts (Franklin and Brooks Higginbotham 618). The reasons for their susceptibility to these diseases is that most of them live in densely populated and impoverished segregated communities that are “plagued by environmental pollution, substandard housing, overcrowding, high crime rates, and inadequate schooling” (Franklin and Brooks Higginbotham 618). One of the disparities between the Black and White population is the high incarceration rate. According to Franklin and Brooks Higginbotham, African Americans “make up 47 percent of the nation’s prison population. The overwhelming majority of incarcerated blacks are male, and 40 percent of them are between the ages of seventeen and twenty-seven” (620-21). Black people are more likely to be associated with crimes, and therefore, “[c]ompared to whites . . . black men of all economic classes are subjected to closer police surveillance, are more frequently profiled and arrested, and are more likely to be perceived as threats to society” (Franklin and Brooks Higginbotham 621).

The problem of institutional racism and racial profiling is an important one as there have been many cases of Black people’s rights violations and police violence throughout recent years. As a response to the acquittal of the murderer of the African American teenager Trayvon Martin, a social and political movement Black Lives Matter (BLM) was founded in 2013 in the U.S. Its “mission is to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes” (“Black Lives Matter”). Barbara Gföllner elaborates that “BLM emphasizes that black lives matter to foreground the many instances in which African Americans are treated as less than human, such as in police shootings, cases within the criminal justice system, and rhetorical dehumanization in the media” (8). Regardless of the fact that American society has undoubtedly progressed since the arrival of the first slaves in terms of the rights granted to African Americans, there is a long way to go to attain racial equality on all grounds in the U.S. This theme permeates Angie Thomas’s novel *The Hate U Give*.



### 3.1 Angie Thomas's *The Hate U Give*

*The Hate U Give* is a contemporary young adult novel that features a sixteen-year-old African American girl, Starr Carter, who is subjected to racial discrimination after a police officer kills her friend Khalil as a result of racial profiling. Starr lives in a black ghetto with her family but goes to school in a white neighbourhood because it is safer than her neighbourhood, Garden Heights. She witnesses the murder of her friend, and then gives a police statement, which is not enough to file a lawsuit against the police officer. After a TV interview with the police officer's father in which he defends his son and wins sympathy for him, the officer is released. Starr then decides to take matters into her own hands and tell the truth about the night of the murder in another interview. She also testifies in court, but the jury decides to acquit the police officer of all charges, making people in the streets riot. In "Author's Note," Thomas explains that the novel is written as a remembrance to Emmett Louis Till and Oscar Grant, young African Americans who were brutally killed by white men. Thomas also reveals that the novel rose out of frustration for all the other murders of African Americans by white people out of racial prejudice and that its purpose is to give voice to the oppressed and urge people to react against injustice:

I've always told stories. When I can't find a way to say the words out loud, I create characters who do it for me. *The Hate U Give* started as a short story my senior year. It was cathartic at the time, and I thought I was done telling Starr and Khalil's story because I foolishly hoped Oscar wouldn't happen again. But then there was Trayvon. Michael. Eric. Tamir. There were more conversations just like the one I heard at school but on a wider scale. Politicians and officials echoed my classmates, which led to more anger and disappointment for me, my peers, and the kids in my neighborhood who saw themselves in those gentlemen. In the midst of it, three words suddenly created a variety of reactions whenever uttered: Black Lives Matter. I did the only thing I knew how to do: I expressed my feelings through story, in hopes that I would give a voice to every kid who feels the same way I do. As we witness injustice, prejudice, and racism rear their ugly heads again in this political climate both in the US and abroad, I think it's even more important to let young people know that they aren't alone in their frustration, fear, anger, and sadness. We must also provide glimmers of light in the midst of the darkness. . . . But my ultimate

hope is that every single person who reads *The Hate U Give* walks away from it understanding those feelings and sharing them in some way. (“Author’s Note”)

The novel reveals different ways of discrimination against African Americans, the most prominent of which are police brutality and racial profiling. Namely, at the beginning of the novel, Starr recounts how she had two talks with her parents at the age of twelve: “One was the usual birds and bees. . . . The other talk was about what to do if a cop stopped me” (Thomas). According to her father, “the most important thing is to do everything the police ask and not to argue about anything” (Tornikoski 39). When Starr and Khalil are stopped for an apparent traffic violation, Khalil breaks those rules by confronting the police officer and making a sudden move when the police officer has his back on him. While Khalil was reaching for a hairbrush in the car and checking whether Starr was fine, the police officer thought he was reaching for a gun and therefore shot him three times. As Starr later elucidates, the reason Khalil was killed was because the police officer assumed that Khalil would attack him only because of the colour of his skin:

“But I’m tired of them assuming. Especially when it comes to black people.” “You wish that more cops wouldn’t make assumptions about black people?” she clarifies. “Right. This all happened because he” – I can’t say his name – “assumed that we were up to no good. Because we’re black and because of where we live. We were just two kids, minding our business, you know? His assumption killed Khalil. It could’ve killed me.” (Thomas)

This prejudicial behaviour is also seen in the media and news reports which label Khalil as a criminal and thus imply that he is the guilty party and that he deserved his fate:

The protests calling for justice coincide with one-sided media coverage – Khalil is called a “thug,” “gangbanger,” and drug dealer – which is an extension of racial profiling that casts people of color, often young Black men, from impoverished communities as unlawful. This criminalization is a tool to justify the intensified surveillance and profiling of such communities and their members in a policy effort to establish law and order. (Tausel 111)

Gföllner notices how “the representation of Khalil as a ‘thug’ shifts attention from the criminal act of the police officer to the victim’s alleged criminality” (12). She further explains this paradox by stating that “[t]he refusal to acknowledge the actual perpetrator as a threat shows

that his white privilege grants him humanity, sympathy, and even innocence. Khalil's youth and innocence, but most profoundly his humanity, are dismissed by police and public alike" (Gföllner 16). Indeed, the news reports omit the important detail that Khalil was unarmed, which confirms the bias of the media.

Likewise, while Starr is giving her statement to the detectives, they try to discredit her by asking questions about Khalil and her on the night of the horrific event:

"Did you consume any alcohol at the party?" she asks. I know that move from *Law & Order*. She's trying to discredit me. "No. I don't drink." "Did Khalil?" "Whoa, wait one second," Momma says. "Are y'all putting Khalil and Starr on trial or the cop who killed him?" . . . "You haven't asked my child about that cop yet," Momma says. "You keep asking her about Khalil, like he's the reason he's dead. Like she said, he didn't pull the trigger on himself." (Thomas)

According to Gföllner, "Starr's interrogation by the police offers an example of this indiscriminate characterization of the black body as dangerous and guilty" (13). Another instance of stigmatizing African Americans occurs when the police officer's father depicts Starr and Khalil as dangerous delinquents who "kept glancing at each other, like they were up to something . . . [and] could've taken [the police officer] down if they teamed up" (Thomas). Gföllner confirms that the police officer's father "views Starr and Khalil through a lens that conflates blackness and violence before even considering them as unarmed teenagers" (14). Starr's father, Maverick, experiences racial profiling too when two police officers order him to lie down with his hands behind his back, one of them keeping his knee on Maverick's back and searching him, all while his children are watching. They approached him because he was arguing with a neighbour and decided to search him after seeing his ID and realising that he was the father of a witness in Khalil's case. This incident also shows the police officers' prejudice against people from the ghetto, despite one of them being African American.

The reasoning behind all of the harm done to the characters is offered in the title of the book, which is borrowed from title of the rapper Tupac Shakur's album *Thug Life*, an acronym for "The Hate U Give Little Infants Fucks Everybody" (Thomas). As Gföllner explains, "thug life stands for the cycle of poverty and crime in which many black individuals find themselves as a result of an oppressive system" (20). In the same way, Starr explains the concept of "thug

life” as the conditions that African Americans live in due to the hatred and oppression that society gives them:

“Khalil said it’s about what society feeds us as youth and how it comes back and bites them later,” I say. “I think it’s about more than youth though. I think it’s about us, period.” “Us who?” he asks. “Black people, minorities, poor people. Everybody at the bottom in society.” “The oppressed,” says Daddy. “Yeah. We’re the ones who get the short end of the stick, but we’re the ones they fear the most.” (Thomas)

This concept is further clarified by Maverick, who says that African Americans do not have the same opportunities as white people to succeed in life, so they have to engage in illegal activities to survive:

“Right. Lack of opportunities,” Daddy says. “Corporate America don’t bring jobs to our communities, and they damn sure ain’t quick to hire us. Then, shit, even if you do have a high school diploma, so many of the schools in our neighborhoods don’t prepare us well enough. That’s why when your momma talked about sending you and your brothers to Williamson, I agreed. Our schools don’t get the resources to equip you like Williamson does. It’s easier to find some crack than it is to find a good school around here. “Now, think ‘bout this,” he says. “How did the drugs even get in our neighborhood? This is a multibillion-dollar industry we talking ‘bout, baby. That shit is flown into our communities, but I don’t know anybody with a private jet. Do you?” “No.” “Exactly. Drugs come from somewhere, and they’re destroying our community,” he says. “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. The Brendas can’t get jobs unless they’re clean, and they can’t pay for rehab unless they got jobs. When the Khalils get arrested for selling drugs, they either spend most of their life in prison, another billion-dollar industry, or they have a hard time getting a real job and probably start selling drugs again. That’s the hate they’re giving us, baby, a system designed against us. That’s Thug Life.” (Thomas)

In addition to institutional racism, African American characters in Thomas’s novel experience individual racism, as well. Starr’s high school friend Hailey once made a comment

about fried chicken<sup>1</sup> to her while playing basketball, unaware of its racist connotations. Sandra Tausel reasons that “Hailey’s aversive racism, defined by Gaertner et al. as ‘the conflict between the denial of personal prejudice and the underlying unconscious negative feelings and beliefs’ (378), is subtle, yet pervasive and no less destructive than more blatant forms of racism” (112). Hailey also refused to come to Starr’s house as “[h]er dad didn’t want her spending the night in ‘the ghetto’” (Thomas), which once again shows the underlying racism instilled in her.

Furthermore, Starr adjusts her behaviour and talk when she is at her school, Williamson Prep, so that she is not considered a girl from the ghetto:

Williamson Starr doesn’t use slang – if a rapper would say it, she doesn’t say it, even if her white friends do. Slang makes them cool. Slang makes her “hood.” Williamson Starr holds her tongue when people piss her off so nobody will think she’s the “angry black girl.” Williamson Starr is approachable. No stank-eyes, side-eyes, none of that. Williamson Starr is nonconfrontational. Basically, Williamson Starr doesn’t give anyone a reason to call her ghetto. (Thomas)

According to Tornikoski, Starr’s code switching is “a common tool used by minorities to survive in racist societies” (46). Starr admits that it is quite demanding to balance between her two identities: “Being two people is so exhausting. I’ve taught myself to speak with two different voices and only say certain things around certain people” (Thomas). However, by the end of the novel, she manages to merge her dual identity by bringing together people from both of her worlds and shutting Hailey, who disrespected her, out of her life. Tornikoski names this process hybridization and argues that it can be a successful tool to deal with conflicting identities (51).

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<sup>1</sup> The offensiveness of Hailey’s fried chicken comment stems from the fact that “[h]istorically, chickens held special importance for enslaved black Americans, being the only livestock they were allowed to keep. Black domestic workers would cook fried chicken for their masters and, later, their employers. And then, after emancipation, women known as ‘waiter carriers’ would hawk trays of fried chicken and biscuits to travellers through open windows as their trains stopped in stations. But while these black cooks and homemakers effectively invented what would become known as southern food, their contribution was erased. The white folk took the credit for its creation, while black people were mocked and parodied merely as greedy consumers. It’s one of the most outrageous examples of cultural theft. The racist 1915 film *The Birth of a Nation*, widely touted as the first blockbuster, attempted to paint black people as aggressive, disorganised and untrustworthy. In one scene, elected black officials are seen swigging from whisky bottles and putting their bare feet on tables. And then one man is seen animalistically gnawing on a chicken drumstick. In that one clip, the negative association was cemented” (Thompson).



To conclude, *The Hate U Give* thematises a contemporary African American community that experiences various ways of oppression, such as racism, discrimination, prejudices, and unjust law enforcement. Despite the existing laws, African Americans nowadays are still deprived of privileges available to White Americans since they have unequal opportunities to succeed and thus tend to engage in illegal activities such as drug dealing. Thomas depicts one of the vital problems of African Americans, which is racial profiling, due to which their lives are constantly in danger. As Gföllner infers, “[t]he novel challenges the normative discourse that decides who is considered human and instead foregrounds the lives of unjustly killed black people. At the end, the book leaves the fictional realm as it provides the names of real victims of police brutality” (22). Thomas’s novel calls to action as it evokes sympathy but also bitterness in its readers. The problem of police brutality continues, and certain measures must be taken to protect the African American community from racially prejudiced behaviour. To start with, by sharing such stories and conversing about them, individuals can make great changes and help minorities achieve equality.

#### 4. Aboriginal History

Colonization of Australia started in the eighteenth century with the arrival of English explorers James Cook and Arthur Phillip. Since the British had to find a location for a large number of their convicts, they found the Australian continent suitable and established a penal colony for “criminals, debtors, and political dissidents, most of whom were charged only with defaulting on debt and other small crimes” (Bourdon 4). Since 1788, the British had treated Australia as a colony of settlement, not of conquest, as they considered the land to be *terra nullius*, that is, belonging to no one (“Colonisation 1788 – 1890”). Alice Brittan explains that “[t]he judgement that Australia was *terra nullius* meant not only that the British could claim legal sovereignty over the entire continent, effectively declaring the Crown as the new and undisputed owner, but also that they did not need to negotiate any formal treaties with the Aborigines” (73). When Cook first encountered Aborigines, he concluded that they had “‘no idea of traffic’, no acquaintance with or interest in the principles of trade, and that they were by extension without culture or coherent social structure” (Brittan 72-73), which later led to their oppression by white settlers as they were deemed uncivilised. Bourdon recounts how the Aborigines suffered slaughtering in the early years of the British settlement:

In 1847, just over sixty years since the opening of the Australian frontier, a group of agrarian vigilantes began a reign of terror against Aborigines and whites who sympathized with them in the townships of Umbercollie and Carbuckly. Their actions included many native slaughtering and intense harassment/terrorism on the part of white victims. (4)

The British colonials disrupted Indigenous Australians’ lives in many ways, which included abduction and forced removal of their children for the purposes of education and conversion to Christianity, land grabbing, physical abuse, and legal policies that forbade interracial marriages, which consequently led to the reduction of the Aboriginal population (Bourdon 6-9). One of the pernicious policies was the rationing of food, supplies, and hunting/farming lands due to which Aboriginal people suffered from starvation and deprivation (Bourdon 11-13). Bourdon lists two major problems that arose from this policy: “Children were commonly born underweight or deformed, and often experienced abnormal growth patterns. Black mothers, unable to maintain a healthy diet and reasonable workload, had miscarriages at rates much higher than those of their white counterparts” (13). Although the exact number of

Aboriginals affected by the white invasion is unknown, it is known that “many Indigenous men, women and children died of introduced diseases to which they had no resistance such as smallpox, influenza and measles. Many also died in random killings, punitive expeditions and organised massacres” (“Colonisation 1788 – 1890”).

In the late nineteenth century, under State and Territory laws, Aboriginal people were segregated and controlled by being moved onto reserves or missions. In 1883, the Aborigines Protection Board was established, which allowed “to move Aboriginal people out of towns; to set up managers, local committees and local guardians (police) for the reserves; to control reserves; to prevent liquor being sold to Aboriginals; and to stop whites from associating with Aboriginals or entering the reserves” (“Protection and Segregation 1890s to the 1950s”). In 1909, the Aborigines Protection Act was passed, but over the years, it was amended by changing policies. Hence, “[a]mendments to the Act in 1915 and 1918 allowed the Board to remove children from their parents for training, and to force ‘half-castes’ to leave the reserves,” but in reality, children were exploited in these institutions (“Protection and Segregation 1890s to the 1950s”). What is more, during the 1920s, the Australian government tried to assimilate Aborigines by moving them from reserve to reserve so that they could lease their land to White farmers. In the upcoming years, they encouraged Aboriginal people to move to towns in order to close the reserves. The consequences of the assimilation policy were devastating for the Aboriginal people since the Australian government invaded their lives on a large scale:

Protection and assimilation policies which impacted harshly on Indigenous people included separate education for Aboriginal children, town curfews, alcohol bans, no social security, lower wages, State guardianship of all Aboriginal children and laws that segregated Indigenous people into separate living areas, mainly on special reserves outside towns or in remote areas. Another major feature of the assimilation policy was stepping up the forcible removal of Indigenous children from their families and their placement in white institutions or foster homes. (“Assimilation (1940s to the 1960s)”)

According to “Bringing Them Home Report,” “between one in three and one in ten Aboriginal children were forcibly removed from their families and communities in the period from approximately 1910 until 1970.” In the 1960s, the government administered welfare settlements for Aborigines where they gained control over their lives, but most of these settlements were established on dry land and the Aboriginal people had no regular supply

rations, which left them feeling hopeless (Bourdon 14-5). This general sense of helplessness among the Aboriginal community led to the continuing problems of alcoholism, violence, and domestic abuse (Bourdon 15). Despite that, the late 1960s saw an advancement of Aborigines' position as they were granted the right of citizenship. Similarly, in 1972, they were granted the right to self-determination, and in 1975, the right to self-management ("Integration, Self-determination and Self-management 1967 to mid 1990s").

In 1991, the reconciliation era began with the final recommendation of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody ("Reconciliation 1991 to the Present"). The Mabo case of 1992 "recognized for the first time the existence of Aboriginal 'native title' over large parts of rural Australia," after which many Aborigines have used the ruling to reclaim their ancestral land ("Aboriginal Peoples"). Furthermore, Northern Territory National Emergency Response of 2007 addressed "allegations of rampant child sexual abuse and neglect in Northern Territory Aboriginal communities" ("Reconciliation 1991 to the Present"). Finally, in 2008, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd apologised to Indigenous Australians on behalf of the Federal Parliament for the so-called "Stolen Generations" – generations of Aboriginal children who were forcibly taken from their families and assimilated in the period from 1909 to 1969 ("Reconciliation 1991 to the Present"). Yet, the struggle for Aboriginals' rights is still ongoing as they are excluded from the Australian Constitution and are, therefore, discriminated against although being Australia's first peoples ("Constitutional Reform: Fact Sheet – Recognising Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander People in the Constitution"). The above implies that contemporary Aboriginal people are still exposed to racism, abuse, and poor living conditions:

Today they still face racist attitudes, and there are periodic incidents of violence towards them, particularly affecting those in police custody. Their generally poor living conditions mean that Aboriginal people have a far higher infant mortality rate and suicide rate and a lower life expectancy than the rest of the population, and they make up a disproportionate section of the prison population. ("Aboriginal peoples")

As they are not constitutionally recognised, Aboriginal people today deal with racial discrimination, which is a violation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. While the legislative battle is currently underway, the Aborigines are not on equal footing with the Australians, and much needs to be done for the Indigenous people of Australia to achieve equality.



#### 4.1 Doris Pilkington Garimara's *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*

*Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* attempts to rewrite history of Australia, more specifically, the “Stolen Generations” period, as it is based on real-life characters and events as well as the traumas experienced by most Aboriginal people in the twentieth century. Pilkington Garimara retells the story of her mother, Molly Craig, who was forcefully taken to Moore River Native Settlement near Perth in 1931 at the age of fourteen, together with her half-sister Daisy and cousin Gracie. After facing mistreatment in the settlement, Molly decides to run away with Daisy and Gracie, embarking on a 1,600-kilometre-long trek home, following the rabbit-proof fence, which led to their home Jigalong, in Western Australia. Along the way, they encounter various challenges, but Molly and Daisy manage to return home thanks to Molly's excellent survival skills. Unfortunately, Gracie is caught by a Mardu police tracker when she separates from the girls to catch the train to Wiluna, where her mother is said to be, and she never makes it back to Jigalong. The story gained publicity in 2002, when Phillip Noyce released the adaptation of Pilkington Garimara's book, *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, which reminded people of the collective trauma experienced by Aboriginal families not so long ago.

The first part of Pilkington Garimara's novel describes the hardships that Aborigines endured during the first contact with White people. It depicts the brutality of the crew from an American whaling ship when encountering the indigenous peoples of Australia:

They were shot by the white raiders when they tried to stop them from kidnapping the women. The family were still mourning their dead. Kundilla and his family had heard how their brothers and uncles were killed by ruthless white pirates, desperados and escaped convicts. Those cruel and murderous men came ashore and stole Aboriginal women and kept them on board their ships as sexual slaves, then murdered them and tossed their bodies into the ocean when their services were no longer required. (Pilkington Garimara)

Pilkington Garimara also tells of the British grabbing of native land and turning it into farming land, which prevented Aborigines from going along their hunting trails: “The Nyungar people, and indeed the entire Aboriginal population, grew to realise what the arrival of the European settlers meant for them: it was the destruction of their traditional society and the dispossession of their lands.” As the English possessed superior weaponry, Aboriginal people had to obey and were usually punished under English laws: “When the brothers were caught spearing a

sheep they were the first of many Nyungar men to be brought in to be sentenced under the English law. They received several years imprisonment and were transported to Rottnest Island Penal Colony. . . . They were never seen again” (Pilkington Garimara). At the same time, they were forbidden to carry out their own traditional laws, “handed down to them by the Dreamtime spirit beings” (Pilkington Garimara). Pilkington Garimara portrays the suffering of Aboriginal people caused by the prohibition of their religious practice:

They had become dispossessed; these teachers and keepers of the traditional Law were prevented from practising it. They had to fight to find ways to return to their secret and sacred sites to perform their dances and other ceremonies that were crucial to their culture and whole way of life. Their pain and suffering remained hidden and repressed, silent and deep. They remembered the corroborrees and songs that they were forbidden to dance and sing, unless commanded by government officials. No longer would the corroborrees be shared and danced by scores of feet, kicking up the dust in the moonlight around the glowing fires. Warriors with painted bodies and plumes of feathers on their ochre-covered heads would become faded images, buried in the past. The important dates on their seasonal calendars would be forgotten. (Pilkington Garimara)

By the early twentieth century, the Australian government allowed large areas of Indigenous land to be claimed by European farmers, but they used Aborigines as a working force. Aborigines did not perceive their work as exploitation, although they very often experienced mistreatment: “There were incidents of violence and murder; some reported, others were not. But all Aboriginal people were affected by the growth of the rural industry, either by expulsion from traditional lands, sexual exploitation of the women or by the criminal acts of murder and violence committed against them” (Pilkington Garimara).

As already mentioned, the central theme of the novel relates to the forced relocation of half-caste, or part-Aboriginal, children since “[t]he common belief at the time was that part-Aboriginal children were more intelligent than their darker relations and should be isolated and trained to be domestic servants and labourers. Policies were introduced by the government in an effort to improve the welfare and educational needs of these children” (Pilkington Garimara). This practice was promoted by Chief Protector of Aborigines A. O. Neville, who devised “a program of racial and social engineering designed to erase all Aboriginal characteristics from a desired White Australia. Directed at Aborigines of mixed descent . . . , it

was predicated on the removal and institutionalisation of ‘mixed race’ children” (Haebich 273). The explanation for this policy is related to Social Darwinism, according to which there was “alleged similarity between non-white races and ‘mere animals’ in evolutionary terms” (Dafler 143). As White settlers thought that Aborigines were “destined for extinction due to their allegedly inferior genetic make-up” (Dafler 144), their goal was to breed out children of mixed race. Such was the destiny of the half-caste protagonists, Molly, Daisy, and Gracie, when they were removed from their homes and deported to an Aboriginal internment camp called Moore River Native Settlement. Pilkington Garimara, who herself was raised there, describes the conditions of life in these settlements. She depicts the dormitories as prison-like, with “the door [that] was locked with chains and padlocks” (Pilkington Garimara) and “bars on the windows” (Pilkington Garimara) as “[t]hey lock you up at night time and come and open the door in the morning” (Pilkington Garimara). Since Aboriginal children often tried to escape, there was a place at Moore River called “the boob,” where those who tried to escape were locked up as a punishment. Pilkington Garimara mentions other types of punishments for runaways: “They all got seven days punishment with just bread and water. Mr Johnson shaved their heads bald and made them parade around the compound so that everyone could see them. They got the strap too.” The children were also forbidden to speak in their native language and had to use English all the time. Pilkington Garimara summarizes the inhumane conditions of early native settlements by comparing them to a concentration camp:

Instead of a residential school, the Aboriginal children were placed in an overcrowded dormitory. The inmates, not students, slept on cyclone beds with government-issue blankets. There were no sheets or pillow slips except on special occasions when there was an inspection by prominent officials. Then they were removed as soon as the visitors left the settlement and stored away until the next visit. On the windows there were no colourful curtains, just wire screens and iron bars. It looked more like a concentration camp than a residential school for Aboriginal children. (Pilkington Garimara)

Longing for their home and family as well as frightened by the treatment of natives, the three girls run away and, with the help of rabbit-proof fence, Molly and Daisy reach their home. Ultimately, the fence, which symbolizes colonization, as the White settlers made it to prevent rabbits from destroying their crops and in that way facilitate the continued exploitation of Indigenous land (“The Rabbit-Proof Fence”), becomes “a symbol of love, home and security”



(Pilkington Garimara). Yu-wen Fu agrees that the fence is “a symbol of Aboriginal peoples’ faith and strength to transcend colonial violence and to reconnect to and perhaps reinvent their cultures and home” (183).

Labour exploitation, child labour, sexual abuse, and land dispossession are just some of the rights violations committed by White settlers since their arrival on the Australian continent in the eighteenth century. Pilkington Garimara took a huge step by sharing the story of her mother and cousins’ escape and drawing attention to the genocide committed by the Australian government throughout the twentieth century. As Australian Indigenous people still face the consequences of the government’s inhumane child removal policy, their plights and traumas must be heard so that such crimes never happen again. Indeed, “contemporary Aboriginal storytelling in English invites/enables collective listening and rereading of the nation’s complex colonial past” (Fu 183-84), and as such, serves as a driving force for changes in the treatment of Aboriginal people.

## Conclusion

*All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.*

– “Universal Declaration of Human Rights”

Under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, all human beings have the right to freedom and equality, but in reality, many violations are happening even at this point. As it seems that history has taught humankind nothing about the devastating consequences of oppression, abuse, and racism, the emergence of human rights literature serves as a remedy for people affected by these violations. Through literature, marginalized people are able to achieve narrative sovereignty by sharing their experiences and showing their side of the story. This thesis has discussed the difficulties of the Indigenous people of the U.S. and Australia as well as African Americans through a historical account and analysis of three texts, each dealing with one respective ethnic group. European imperialism has severely changed the lives of the Indigenous people and Africans who were brought to America as slaves, the aftermath of which is present up to this day. All three ethnic groups were either partially or fully removed from their homelands and exposed to systemic racism and malicious assimilation policies designed to destroy their identity and traditional beliefs. The oppression of these ethnic groups is still ongoing, proving that achieving equality is far from over.

As shown in this thesis, American Indians, African Americans, and Aborigines today live in much worse conditions than their white counterparts do. Besides, they do not have equal opportunities in comparison to White people because they are judged by the colour of their skin. As they mostly live in poverty, they sometimes have to resort to illegal means to survive, which leads them to problems with the law and imprisonment. The problem of racial profiling and police brutality is delineated in Thomas's *The Hate U Give*, whose young African American character is killed unjustly. The novel thematises the contemporary police practice of racial profiling and mistreatment of African Americans, which makes them vulnerable at any moment. On the other hand, Zuni Lucero's *Night Sky, Morning Star* problematizes blood quantum policies and how they led to the termination of American Indian tribes, a high incarceration rate of American Indians, disrespect of Native inmates in prison, and cultural appropriation. Lastly, Pilkington Garimara's *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* sheds light on Australia's infamous history of child removal policy, as its victims are still healing from it. The three works analysed in this thesis prove that the ethnic groups concerned still have to fight for

their rights despite living in modern “civilised” societies and that much has to change in human perception to discard the social constructs of race and ethnicity. In the end, all human beings should be able to live their life freely but without violating other people’s rights.

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