

Dear Angie Thomas,

“What’s the point of having a voice if you’re gonna be silent in those moments you shouldn’t be?” (Thomas 252). This quote and others like it from your book: *The Hate U Give* enlightened and expanded my view of the world by opening my eyes to injustices experienced by minorities throughout the world and the importance of speaking out against them. As a white woman in America, I am naturally awarded certain advantages that before reading this book I did not acknowledge, understand, or fully appreciate. *The Hate U Give* exposed me to the horrors that people in America are forced to face just because of the color of their skin. Before reading this book, I knew that there were injustices and racism in America, but this book revealed that this horror and injustice can come from within our own government and the people who are supposed to be protecting us. The events of the novel also helped to prepare me for the monstrosities that came to light in the summer of 2020 surrounding the BLM movement and police brutality. Without the previous knowledge that I gained from reading this book, I would not have been able to fully grasp the weight, truth, and dismay of acts such as the murder of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and so many others.

In addition to learning of the horrifying events previously mentioned, I also encountered racism and injustice close to home. One of my best friends from middle school is of mixed race. She and I were extremely close, yet I didn’t understand the personal plight she fought against every day. Unfortunately, she endured racism from complete strangers. For instance, one day we went to the mall and we were walking around a store. We had separated for a few minutes, just browsing, when I noticed an employee following her around. After a few moments, I realized that he suspected her of stealing because she is black. I was instantly shocked, as I had never before experienced being judged for the color of my skin. This encounter opened my eyes to the tragic reality of life in America, for my friends and others, living as a minority.

The contents of *The Hate U Give* never became more important to me than when I began to live through the Antisemitism that has been on the rise during the last few years. While I do feel that I have white privilege, I have learned that the Jewish people also have individuals and groups that show hate towards our community. I cannot be silent when injustice and hate speech is directed at the Jewish people, or any people. Most of my friends are not Jewish, and I don’t stay quiet when we discuss Antisemitism. When I can, I take the opportunity to teach my friends and others about the practices of the Jewish people. Some examples of this were when I took my friends to the Museum

of Tolerance with Jewish teens from my temple so they could learn more about the Holocaust and when I invited my friends to my house for Hanukkah to teach them about the holiday. And, we even lit candles together on my family's menorah. I try to take opportunities like these to expand their knowledge of Judaism and the Jewish people's journey.

More recently, I have struggled with the circumstances in Israel. As you probably know, in October of this past year, Israel was attacked by Hamas. This resulted in large-scale attacks, destruction, tragedy, and death. When this attack occurred, I was stunned. My people, homeland, and faith had all been attacked in a single instant. This event led me down a spiral of fear, anxiety, and hopelessness. It was even more heartbreaking as I had no one to voice my concerns to. Many of my friends don't understand how I am personally affected by this tragedy, refusing to let my voice be heard. As of late, I have made it my mission to educate my friends on the events occurring in Israel. Although some of them do not understand, I feel I am doing my part to let my voice and story be told.

I gained the bravery to do so, inspired by your characters' voices, which bring attention to pressing issues in our society. Through my reading of *The Hate U Give* and your other books, I have developed more confidence in the knowledge that I also have a voice and I can use it. I use it when injustice is shown towards minority groups. I use it when I see people not doing the right thing. I use it to pray for a better world for all of us. I use my voice to ask questions so I can better educate myself in order to be a productive member of society. I use my voice to be a leader, whether it's as a camp counselor at a summer program, as an assistant director leading young children in performances, or on the field as the goalie for my many soccer teams.

I want you to know how much your words inspire me each and every day. I learned so much from reading your books, leading me to pursue new avenues of learning, to educate others, and to work to be the best I can be. I have made it my mission to take after you in this way, to use my experiences and struggles to inspire and educate others on the injustices in our world. So, I just want to say thank you!

Thanks for everything,

Sydney Applebaum