

## Visual Activism: Appropriating the Child's Corpse to Promote Resistance and Cultivate Empathy

In 1955, Mamie Carthan insisted on an open-casket funeral for her son, Emmett Till, drawing attention to his mutilated corpse. Photographs of Emmett Till's dead body circulated around the country. In 2015, one of the most harrowing images of the Syrian refugee crisis rose to international prominence. Alan Kurdi's three-year-old body was discovered face down in the surf on the Mediterranean Sea. His image made global headlines and was dispersed across all forms of media with the hope of inciting outrage and garnering empathy. Emmett and Alan are just two examples of the ways in which culture uses and distributes the image of the dead child to counter social injustice and war.

Looking to Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* and Angie Thomas's *The Hate U Give*, this paper will examine the ways in which the young protagonists of the novels effect political and social change through the spectacle of the dead child. When Katniss's ally, twelve-year-old Rue, is killed in the arena, Katniss re-visualizes the space she is in by using ephemeral elements such as flowers and song to engage in her own form of visual activism. As she notes, "I want to do something, right here, right now, to shame them, to make them accountable, to show the Capitol that whatever they do or force us to do there is a part of every tribute they can't own" (Collins 237). Although forced into a dehumanizing spectacle of entertainment and violence, Katniss reclaims the objectification of children's bodies by drawing attention to and humanizing Rue's corpse for all of Panem to see. This act, as we later learn, provokes uprisings throughout the districts.

In addition, in Thomas's novel, when Starr's childhood best friend, Khalil, is shot dead by a white police officer, his body is left "in the street like it's an exhibit" (Thomas 25). In this scene, Thomas highlights the disturbing reality of America's undignified treatment of black bodies. On display, Khalil is objectified and rendered insignificant. Later in the novel, Starr's white friend Hailey presents her with two photographs of Khalil before his death, implying that Khalil's "thug" appearance somehow justifies his murder. Nonetheless, in her own act of defiance, Starr appropriates the visual medium of Tumblr, drawing attention to dead black bodies and ultimately engaging in her own form of activism and resistance against racial violence.