

All American Boys

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Rashad is absent again today.

That's the sidewalk graffiti that started it all...

Well, no, actually, a lady tripping over Rashad at the store, making him drop a bag of chips, was what started it all. Because it didn't matter what Rashad said next—that it was an accident, that he wasn't stealing—the cop just kept pounding him. Over and over, pummeling him into the pavement. So then Rashad, an ROTC kid with mad art skills, was absent again...and again...stuck in a hospital room. Why? Because it *looked* like he was stealing. And he was a black kid in baggy clothes. So he must have been stealing.

And that's how it started.

And that's what Quinn, a white kid, saw. He saw his best friend's older brother beating the daylight out of a classmate. At first Quinn doesn't tell a soul...He's not even sure he understands it. And does it matter? The whole thing was caught on camera, anyway. But when the school—and nation—start to divide on what happens, blame spreads like wildfire fed by ugly words like “racism” and “police brutality.” Quinn realizes he's *got* to understand it, because, bystander or not, he's a part of history. He just has to figure out what side of history that will be.

Rashad and Quinn—one black, one white, both American—face the unspeakable truth that racism and prejudice didn't die after the civil rights movement. There's a future at stake, a future where no one else will have to be absent because of police brutality. They just have to risk everything to change the world.

Cuz that's how it can end.

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ALL AMERICAN BOYS

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Two boys, one black and one white, act out an all-too-familiar drama when the former is brutally beaten during an arrest and the latter witnesses it.

Rashad wasn't trying to steal that bag of chips, but Officer Paul Galuzzo beats him to a pulp rather than hear him out. Quinn doesn't know that, but he does know that no one should be treated the way he sees family friend and surrogate father Paul whaling on that black kid. Day by day over the next week, each boy tells his story, Rashad in the hospital, where he watches endless replays of the incident, and Quinn at school, where he tries to avoid it. Soon Rashad's a trending hashtag, as his brother and friends organize a protest he's not sure he wants. Meanwhile, Quinn negotiates basketball practice with his best friend—Galuzzo's little brother, who expects loyalty—and Rashad's, who tells him bluntly, "White boy like you can just walk away whenever you want." In a series of set pieces, Rashad contemplates his unwanted role as the latest statistic, and Quinn decides whether he'll walk away or stand. Reynolds and Kiely supply their protagonists with a supporting cast that prods them in all the right ways; Rashad's strict, ex-cop dad provides unexpected complexity.

If the hands and agenda of the authors are evident, their passion elevates the novel beyond a needed call to action to a deeply moving experience. *(Fiction. 12-18)*

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