



The Illegal by Lawrence Hill

About the author:

Hill is the author of ten books of fiction and non-fiction. In 2005, he won his first literary honour: a National Magazine Award for the article “Is Africa’s Pain Black America’s Burden?” published in *The Walrus*. His first two novels were *Some Great Thing* and *Any Known Blood*, and his first non-fiction work to attract national attention was the memoir *Black Berry, Sweet Juice: On Being Black and White in Canada*. But it was his third novel, *The Book of Negroes* (HarperCollins Canada, 2007) — published in some countries as *Someone Knows My Name* and in French as *Aminata* — that attracted widespread attention in Canada and other countries.

Lawrence Hill’s non-fiction book, *Blood: The Stuff of Life* was published in September 2013 by House of Anansi Press. *Blood* is a personal consideration of the physical, social, cultural and psychological aspects of blood, and how it defines, unites and divides us. Hill drew from the book to deliver the 2013 Massey Lectures across Canada.

In 2013, Hill published the essay *Dear Sir, I Intend to Burn Your Book: An Anatomy of a Book Burning* (University of Alberta Press).

His fourth novel, *The Illegal*, was published by HarperCollins Canada in 2015 and by WW Norton in the USA in 2016.

Hill is currently writing a new novel and a children’s book, and co-writing a television miniseries adaptation of *The Illegal* for Conquering Lion Pictures. Hill is a professor of creative writing at the University of Guelph, in Ontario.

Source: Author’s website (<http://www.lawrencehill.com/the-author/>)

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About the book:

Globe and Mail Best Book of the Year

National Post Book of the Year

CBC Best Book of the Year

CBC Canada Reads

Governor General's History Award for Popular Media: The Pierre Berton Award:
Winner

Selected for the National Post's 99 Best Books of 2015

Selected for the Globe and Mail's Best Books of 2015

Selected for CBC's Best Books of 2015

CBC's Canada Reads 2016 – Winner

Keita Ali is on the run.

Like every boy on the mountainous island of Zantoroland, running is all Keita's ever wanted to do. In one of the poorest nations in the world, running means respect. Running means riches—until Keita is targeted for his father's outspoken political views and discovers he must run for his family's survival.

He signs on with notorious marathon agent Anton Hamm, but when Keita fails to place among the top finishers in his first race, he escapes into Freedom State—a wealthy island nation that has elected a government bent on deporting the refugees living within its borders in the community of AfricTown. Keita can stay safe only if he keeps moving and eludes Hamm and the officials who would deport him to his own country, where he would face almost certain death.

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This is the new underground: a place where tens of thousands of people deemed to be "illegal" live below the radar of the police and government officials. As Keita surfaces from time to time to earn cash prizes by running local road races, he has to assess whether the people he meets are friends or enemies: John Falconer, a gifted student struggling to escape the limits of his AfricTown upbringing; Ivernia Beech, a spirited old woman at risk of being forced into an assisted living facility; Rocco Calder, a recreational marathoner and the immigration minister; Lula DiStefano, self-declared queen of AfricTown and madam of the community's infamous brothel; and Viola Hill, a reporter who is investigating the lengths to which her government will go to stop illegal immigration.

Keita's very existence in Freedom State is illegal. As he trains in secret, eluding capture, the stakes keep getting higher. Soon, he is running not only for his life, but for his sister's life, too.

Fast moving and compelling, *The Illegal* casts a satirical eye on people who have turned their backs on undocumented refugees struggling to survive in a nation that does not want them. Hill's depiction of life on the borderlands of society urges us to consider the plight of the unseen and the forgotten who live among us.

Source: HarperCollins Canada: <http://www.harpercollins.ca/>

Discussion Questions:

1. What does running represent to Keita? To the children of Zantoroland? To Freedom State? How does this compare with the understanding of running that the children of AfricTown possess?

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2. Illegality in the work refers to illegal entry, illegal residency. These seem to be collapsed into a category of Illegal personhood by people who possess legal citizenship. What other ways does the idea of The Illegal manifest in the work?
3. In the book, what role/responsibility do international human rights groups have in the lives of Keita and Charity? Are these roles fulfilled? What does this book tell the reader about advocacy and human rights?
4. What is / where is home to Keita? What does citizenship mean in this context?
5. Which character in The Illegal inspired you? Why?
6. Do you think Keita took unnecessary or foolish risks? Do you think the portrayal of Keita is realistic or believable?
7. Is Lulu a hero or a criminal?
8. What risks would you be prepared to take to save your life?
9. Do you agree that refugees have the right to seek asylum?
10. Do you think racism and xenophobia are a major concern in Canada?

Source: Amnesty Book Club: <http://www.amnestybookclub.ca>

Other formats available at Halifax Public Libraries:

- eBook
- Audiobook (digital)

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