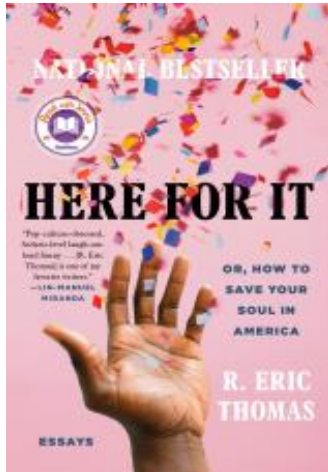


# Here for It: Or, How to Save Your Soul in America: Essays

by R. Eric Thomas



## About the Book

From the creator of *Elle*'s "Eric Reads the News" comes a heartfelt and hilarious memoir-in-essays about growing up seeing the world differently, finding unexpected hope, and experiencing every awkward, extraordinary stumble along the way.

R. Eric Thomas didn't know he was different until the world told him so. Everywhere he went --- whether it was his rich, mostly white, suburban high school, his conservative black church, or his Ivy League college in a big city --- he found himself on the outside looking in.

In essays by turns hysterical and heartfelt, Thomas reexamines what it means to be an "other" through the lens of his own life experience. He explores the two worlds of his childhood: the barren urban landscape where his parents' house was an anomalous bright spot, and the Eden-like school they sent him to in white suburbia. He writes about struggling to reconcile his Christian identity with his sexuality, the exhaustion of code-switching in college, accidentally getting famous on the internet (for the wrong reason), and the surreal experience of covering the 2016 election for *Elle* online, and the seismic changes that came thereafter.

Ultimately, Thomas seeks the answers to these ever more relevant questions: Is the future worth it? Why do we bother when everything seems to be getting worse? As the world continues to shift in unpredictable ways, Thomas finds the answers to these questions by reenvisioning what "normal" means and in the powerful alchemy that occurs when you at last place yourself at the center of your own story.

HERE FOR IT will resonate deeply and joyfully with everyone who has ever felt pushed to the margins, struggled with self-acceptance, or wished to shine more brightly in a dark world. Stay here for it --- the future may surprise you.

## Discussion Guide

1. Which essay in the collection did you like the most, and why?
2. In *HERE FOR IT*, R. Eric Thomas writes, "Every story, whether truth or fiction, is an invitation to imagination, but even more so, it's an invitation to empathy." Do you agree? How does reading help people learn to be more empathetic?
3. One of the major themes of *HERE FOR IT* is belonging. Thomas writes about living at the intersections of blackness, queerness and Christianity in America. Discuss how those parts of a person's identity can be in harmony or in conflict with each other.
4. In the essay "There's Never Any Trouble Here in Bubbleland," Thomas writes about his childhood and the utopia that was his progressive private school. For him, being able to grow up in a bubble of possibilities and opportunities afforded by that school was invigorating. How did this essay challenge you to think about the various bubbles people live in- --- and how those are advantageous and how they are not?
5. If you are Black, queer and/or Christian, how did this book make you feel seen or represented? If you are not, how did this book help you understand some of those experiences?
6. In the essay "Unsubscribe from All That," Thomas writes about how exhausting and toxic the internet and social media can be, especially when he relies on both to do his job. Can you relate? How does your own experience with social media affect how you engage with the rest of the world?
7. In "Historically Black," Thomas writes, "There were moments when I was reminded that no matter how passively I engaged with my blackness, it was never not a force at work in my life. And, I found, the knowledge of my blackness could be used as a weapon against me at any moment. All my life I'd operated under the assumption that there were many kinds of blackness. But in that passing moment, during the conversation about the SATs, it occurred to me that no matter where I was, perhaps there was only one kind of black." Discuss what he means and how America tends to homogenize Black people. How have you seen someone's Blackness used as a weapon against them?
8. "Someone is Wrong on the Internet" is Thomas' story about the first time he went viral for writing a satirical piece on Black History Month. How did you react to this essay? How did it make you think about accountability for what we put in a social media space?
9. "When the fact of your being is used as a weapon against you, the process of relearning who you are and what your value is, is a long one. I don't know that I'll ever be finished. I don't know that I'll ever be fully there," Thomas writes at one point in the book. What does he mean? How are people supposed to value themselves when marginalized by the larger society?
10. In an essay about his coming-out experience, Thomas writes, "It was something else altogether. It wasn't a collision, but an expansion. I hadn't expected that. I felt like I was drifting toward an understanding of myself that I couldn't comprehend." If you are queer, how did your own coming-out experience compare? If you aren't, how did Thomas' story help you understand what that might feel like?

11. "And I am doing the thing that I do with things that I love, or am frustrated by, or don't understand, or am infuriated by: I am making jokes," Thomas writes in *HERE FOR IT*. How do you use humor as a tool for understanding the world or as a defense mechanism in your own life?

## Author Bio

R. Eric Thomas (he/him/his) is a senior staff writer at *Elle* online where he has written the daily pop culture and politics humor column "Eric Reads the News" since 2016. His writing for the theater has been seen on stages around the country; he won the Barrymore Award and the Dramatists Guild Lanford Wilson Award and was a finalist for the Steinberg/American Theater Critics Association New Play Award. Off the page, he is the long-running host of "The Moth StorySlams" in Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia. He lives in Baltimore with his extraordinary husband, the Reverend David Norse Thomas, and an out-of-control collection of succulents, candles and tote bags. *HERE FOR IT* is his first book.

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