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With the second book of his trilogy complete, Thompson nears the finish line

by Nigel Roberts

Starting a trilogy may be easy, but completing one is a challenge. For **Julius Thompson**, it's been an arduous but rewarding 12-year journey. Thompson published the second book of his trilogy in July, and he's now editing the final book of Andy Michael Pilgrim's 30-year saga.

Thompson, 60, is a former sportswriter for the *Philadelphia Bulletin* who currently teaches advance literature courses and journalism at Redan High School and creative writing at Emory University.

At a busy café, just off Emory's campus, we met to talk about his trilogy. With a distinguished gray beard, Thompson speaks knowledgeably about literature and writing. He shifts effortlessly from teacher to seasoned novelist when discussing literature. It didn't take long to discover that Thompson has a deep passion for quality writing.

"I wanted to write this trilogy because there's really not much literature out there with developed characters," Thompson said leaning forward in his chair. "In bookstores, you have **Walter Mosley** and then something titled *Bootylicious* next to it, and that's really not good."

He laments that the range of choices in African-American literature includes a growing list of works that contain little more than the sexual escapades of Black people. Thompson says his novels are serious fiction. "If you want to read a book that's just all about sex then go somewhere else," he added.

In Thompson's first novel, *A Brownstone in Brooklyn*, readers meet Andy, a senior at the City College of New York during the tumultuous late 1960s. Andy's goal is to graduate from and pursue a sports writing career. But to achieve that goal, he must navigate his way around pitfalls that trapped many other young Black men in the late '60s: drug addiction, crime and radical social movements that went nowhere.

Fortunately for Andy, he has lots of support—not

only from his parents but also from other families who live in his brownstone building. Along the way, readers learn about how riots destroyed Andy's close-knit, middle-class Bedford Stuyvesant neighborhood—as they did many other Black communities in the late '60s and early '70s.

In Thompson's second book, *Philly Style and Philly Profile*, we follow Andy from Brooklyn to Philadelphia, where he works as a sportswriter in the '70s. Through Andy's eyes, we see how illegal drugs and gangs led to the further breakdown of Black communities and the destruction of lives.

Ghosts of Atlanta, Thompson's final book in the trilogy, is almost complete. In it Andy relocates to Atlanta in the 1980s. In his forthcoming novel, Thompson reveals that Andy "faces the demons of his youth" and observes the effects of Black reverse migration to the new south.

In part, Thompson wrote his trilogy for the many young people who know nothing about the strength and unity of Black communities before the destruction caused by rioting, drugs and crime. "It's interesting that the publisher thought that *A Brownstone in Brooklyn* would appeal only to readers over 50 years old, but it's been almost the opposite. Teenagers, as young as 15 or 16 years old, are reading the book," he said. Several older readers have also e-mailed Thompson to say *Brownstone* rings true—many of them from Detroit, Chicago and other urban cities.

Born in Statham, Ga., Thompson grew up in Brooklyn and now lives in Stone Mountain. His newspaper career started as a copy boy and freelance writer for the *New York Times* and later with the *Bulletin*, where he won an Associated Press Sports Editors Award in 1977.

As Thompson edits the final installment of his trilogy, he has ideas for several more books. But he's quick to say no more trilogies. "It's a long hard process. But then, when you get your book back from the publisher, with your name on the front page, you forget all the pain."

