

Title: *We Are Not Free*
Author: Traci Chee
Genre: Historical Fiction

Reviewer Name and Grade: Nolan J., 8th Grade

Date Reviewed: March 28, 2021

We Are Not Free is a book about a group of Japanese teenagers that aren't socially accepted because of their race. It is told from 14 different perspectives, and it shows how after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the conditions for them were worse than some animals. Many detention camps had them live in horse stalls, because the government didn't have enough time or money to set up proper homes for the thousands of people they were trying to detain. This period of time was a time full of paranoia and hate toward Asian people, mainly Japanese. The book centers around 14 different teenagers of varying age, Mas, Frankie, Twitchy, Bette, Yuki, Yum-yum, Keiko, Shig, Minnow, Stan, Tommy, Aiko, Kiyoshi, and Mary. Inside these detention camps, they are served leftover scraps of meat, such as cow liver. This book shows the horrible treatment of the Japanese people during WW2, to the point where they aren't considered human, and when an old man gets shot because he was "too close to the fence," the government people refuse to acknowledge that he was killed by someone. Also, inside the camps, there were divided among the residents, because of "Questionnaires" put out by the government to trick people into showing if they were loyal to the Emperor of Japan or not. This was first shown in the chapter around Frankie, a 19 year old boy living in the camp. This created "Yes Yes" and "No No" families. The "No No" families didn't agree with giving all their faith to the American Government especially because of the conditions they were in, while the "Yes Yes" families agreed to cut off "all the ties they had with the Emperor of Japan," and to agree to do whatever the Americans wanted. Eventually, the "No No" families were sent away, and the remaining families still lived in the detention camps, but were allowed to do stuff like play softball games, shown in one of the chapters centering around a girl named Yuki.

Did the plot (for fiction) or presentation of information (for nonfiction) keep you interested?

The plot changed up the story every chapter, taking it from a different perspective each time. From being a Japanese American soldier in Italy to being imprisoned for staying out five minutes after curfew, there were many different perspectives showing you the racial discrimination and conditions there were.

Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?

The pace of the book was just right, because it showed you the thoughts and feelings of the teenagers while not being stretched out and boring. One of these was from the scene where Twitchy joins the army in Italy, and how nothing seems as bad as what people say war is, until he got to experience what "actual war" was like.

What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?

This book is appropriate for teenagers, because there is a lot of swearing, and there are also topics like racial discrimination, war, and death.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to?

I would recommend this book to anyone who likes history, and people who like getting a full picture of a situation from all perspectives.

What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?

Even if *We Are Not Free* is historical fiction, it's still based on how people treated others unfairly because of their race and how they looked, and its because of that and extreme paranoia that events like that unfolded.

I would rate this book *5 stars* because it gave an insight into fourteen different perspectives, and showed how the people in the book went through hardships, and kept surviving despite society hating them. Some of the best parts in the book were the descriptions of the pain they went through, from not having enough food to eat to surviving in a warzone with little help.

Reviewer Name and Grade: Julianna V., 10th Grade

Date Reviewed: July 9, 2021

The novel *We Are Not Free* by New York Times bestselling author Traci Chee, is about the journey of fourteen interconnected teens who are living through World War II. The story takes place between the time period of March 1942 through March 1945. After the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt issued Civilian Exclusion Order No. 20. This order forced people who were Japanese Americans out of their homes and were relocated to concentration camps throughout the United States. Fourteen teenagers who were trying to live their normal lives in San Francisco, California, were forced to relocate together to a concentration camp far away from their homes, just because of the way they looked. Eventually, while spending their time in camp, the teenagers began to drift apart. Some of them became old enough to live on their own and they moved out of camp, some of them volunteered to serve in the army to fight in the war, and some needed to make the important decision whether or not to renounce their citizenship as an American. Some of the Japanese American teenagers who are important characters in this book include fourteen year old artist Minnow, seventeen year old war hero David "Twitchy", and fourteen year old softball player Yuki. The author, Traci Chee, wrote this novel in a way in which the reader can feel a deep connection to the characters. Throughout the novel, the reader can see the racial injustice and hate toward Japanese Americans. These acts of hatred include calling people racial slurs and acts of violence. The reader can not help but feel sympathetic toward the people who were Japanese Americans living through this difficult time period; they were discriminated against because of the way they looked. The racial discrimination that took place in this novel are relevant to current events. In today's society, there are many hate crimes against those who are of Asian descent. These crimes are committed because of the way the people look even though they have done nothing wrong, and this is exactly what takes place in the novel *We Are Not Free*.

Did the plot (for fiction) or presentation of information (for nonfiction) keep you interested?

I would say most definitely yes. Every chapter was a different perspective of a different character in the story, and many events occurred in every chapter which kept the story interesting and it made me want to continue reading.

Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?

I believe that the pace of this book was just right. Although the book takes place between a three year period, the author did not rush the events that were going on and she carefully explained everything so the reader could understand what was happening.

What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?

I think that the grade levels 9th through 12th are appropriate for this book; this book is geared more toward high schoolers. Also, this book contains mature language, so a person will need to be mature enough if they were to read this book.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to?

This book is great for someone who is a fan of historical fiction, but honestly I would recommend this book to any reader. This book has important historical fiction components, but it also includes romance and some action.

What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?

This book is really interesting and informative, and I would recommend this book to any reader; this book does not disappoint.

I would rate this book 5 stars: I'm really glad I read this book; it was awesome!

Usually, I do not rate books 5 out of 5 stars, but this was one of the rare instances in which a book was very well written. This book was the best young adult fiction book that I have read within the last year. It was also very informative because it provided historically accurate events that could have taken place during WWII, and it certainly opened my eyes to the racial injustice that took place during this time period. I enjoyed how the author wrote the book in first person, and each chapter was a different perspective of a different character. It was also really interesting how the characters were all interconnected with each other, and the reader can feel a deep connection to these characters. This book is a great contemporary read, and I would certainly recommend it to any reader grades 9th through 12th.