

Title: *This Is My America*
Author: Kim Johnson
Genre: Mystery / Realistic Fiction

Reviewer Name and Grade: Oliver W., 9th Grade

Date Reviewed: June 28, 2021

Tracy Beaumont is a black 17-year-old girl living in Crowning Heights, Texas, a poor rural town in Galveston County. She is determined, considerate, and intelligent. The book takes place around the modern-day because the movie *Black Panther* is mentioned, which was released in 2018. Tracy's dad James was wrongly convicted for the murders of Mark and Cathy Davidson six years ago, and is now on death row, with less than a year left. Her brother Jamal is the top track athlete in Texas and is getting ready to graduate and attend Baylor University. Every week, Tracy writes a letter to Innocence X, a group that represents wrongfully convicted people, in the hopes of proving her dad's innocence. Jamal gets an interview with *The Susan Touric Show* to highlight his track achievements, but Tracy uses this opportunity to lie and say that suspects for the murder have been identified, in the hopes of catching the attention of Innocence X. Soon after, high school senior Angela Herron is murdered by the docks in an area known as the Pike, who had asked for Tracy's help in an exposé for the school newspaper earlier that day. Jamal is the main suspect for the murder, and he is forced to run, fearing a repeat of what happened to his dad if he turns himself in. Tracy then begins to investigate Angela's murder, trying to find out what she was doing by the Pike, and why Jamal was there too.

Tracy had been best friends with Quincy Ridges as a child, the son of her dad's business partner Jackson Ridges who was killed by the police when he refused to leave his house after being named a suspect for the Davidson murders. However, after Quincy's dad was killed and he was shot by the police, the two grew distant, and Dean Evans, a white boy, filled his spot. Now, Dean wants to be more than friends with Tracy, but Quincy and Tracy are starting to get closer again, and Tracy's best friend Tasha also has feelings for Quincy. Tracy gives know-your-rights workshops at the community center, and at the end of one of them, Steve Jones from Innocence X shows up. After Innocence X gets involved, Tracy has renewed hope that she'll be able to save both Jamal and her dad, and with further investigating, she realizes that the two murders her family is being accused of could be connected.

Did the plot keep you interested?

The plot mostly kept me interested. There were always new developments to the mystery being revealed and it kept the reader wanting to find out what happens.

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

The pace of the book was pretty good. For most of the book, there were many things happening as we followed Tracy on her investigations. However, near the end, the book became a little less interesting to read as it took a long time for the author to show how the two murders were related.

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

I think that this book is appropriate for readers in grade levels 6-12. There are many important topics that are discussed that I think all people should read about. There is sparse profanity throughout the book.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to?

I would recommend this book to readers who are interested in books about issues surrounding race and policing, as well as readers that enjoy crime mysteries with a lot of suspense.

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

I think it would be important for teens to know before reading this book that there is a lynching described in the past tense and that racism is discussed heavily.

My rating: 3 stars: *It was okay; I had hoped for better.* Though this book covered a lot of very important issues and I really loved the main character Tracy, many things just didn't work for me personally. There were a lot of run-on sentences that sometimes made the book hard to read, and though the two murders were connected in the end, it took a long time for them to be drawn together and I started to lose interest. I think the author was trying to include too much into the story, and there really wasn't much character development. This book did a good job of capturing the feeling of what it's like to have to live in fear just doing everyday things. However, the attempt at a love triangle in the book ruined it for me. Tracy seems to choose between Dean and Quincy based on how helpful they are at the moment, and both boys act like they have to "protect" her and are always telling her to tell them before she does anything. When Tracy chooses one boy over the other, she doesn't talk to the other for the rest of the book, and there are so many things that aren't closed up. And then there's Tasha, who, despite being Tracy's best friend, disappears for most of the book, and her love for Quincy is forgotten. Even though I didn't enjoy the romance in this book, I still think the author did a good job at showing the difficulties that people in interracial relationships experience. Overall, I think there were a lot of good messages in this book and can serve as a wake-up call to some, but the romance greatly lowered my opinion of the book and too many things were just forgotten without closure.

Reviewer Name and Grade: Yujay A, 10th Grade

Date Reviewed: 1/30/2022

Tracy is an African American teenage girl living in a small town in Texas. Seven years before the beginning of the novel, Tracy's father was wrongfully accused of murder and was sentenced to death. Despite the lack of evidence and his family saying that he was home, Tracy's father was put on death row based on the fact that he was business partners with Mr. Davidson, the victim. Mr. Ridges was Tracy's father's friend and business partner, and was shot and killed by police when he barricaded himself in his house when the police showed up to arrest him. In the present day, Tracy's older brother Jamal is going for an interview with a local news station. Jamal is a track star and is going to Baylor with a scholarship. Tracy's family is invited to be interviewed along with Jamal. However, Tracy takes the opportunity to spotlight her father's case in the hopes of catching the attention of Innocence X, an organization which helps wrongfully convicted people to prove their innocence. Tracy's family is furious but Tracy thinks it was the best course of action to take. Tracy has been writing letters to Innocence X for seven years, pleading for them to take her father's case. Tracy is a writer for the school newspaper and has a column which focuses on injustice. Tracy wants to be the editor for the paper next school year, but learns that another member of the team named Natalie is going for the position. Tracy talks to Angela, the current editor, and asks her how she can beat Natalie. Angela says she will help Tracy if Tracy aids her with a secret exposé, which Tracy agrees to. Tracy later finds Jamal kissing Angela at the radio station the two work at. Later that night, Tracy wakes up in the middle of the night to use the bathroom. However, she sees Jamal in the bathroom washing blood

off himself. When Tracy asks Jamal what happened, Jamal does not answer and acts suspiciously. After a while, Tracy is woken up again and sees the police at her door. The police have a warrant for the arrest of Jamal but Tracy stalls in order to let Jamal escape. The police say that Jamal is a suspect in the murder of Angela, who was found dead with Jamal's letterman jacket over her. Tracy believes in Jamal's innocence, and as she investigates Angela's murder, she begins to discover the racism embedded in her town's history and how Angela's murder connects to her father's case.

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

Yes, the plot definitely kept me interested as there was a lot of suspense and mystery. There were many intense scenes which kept me very interested.

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

The pace of the novel was just right, as it was not too slow to be boring but was slow enough to allow the reader to understand everything happening.

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

This novel is appropriate for grade levels 8 and up, as it contains some language, violence, and drug use.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to?

I would recommend this novel to everybody as it is important to raise awareness about injustice.

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

The novel is told from the point of view of Tracy and has her letters in between chapters periodically.

I would rate *This is My America* 5 stars because it was a very good book which portrayed current day issues such as injustice. The novel had a lot of suspense, mystery, and action, which made it interesting to read. Overall, *This is My America* was a great novel which was informative and entertaining.