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Racial Prejudice Towards Asian Americans in Trachi Chee's *We are Not Free*

Rini Wahyuni[1], Umi Hani[2]
[1] riniwahyuni2828@gmail.com
[2] hani8681@gmail.com
[1,2] Universitas Pamulang

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Abstract

This study examines the representation of racial prejudice in Traci Chee's historical novel. The narrative recounts the traumatic experiences of a group of Japanese American teenagers who were forcibly displaced from their homes and confined in internment camps, where they endured systemic discrimination and profound loss during World War II. The objectives of this research are twofold: first, to identify and analyze the various forms of racial prejudice depicted in the novel; and second, to explore the ways in which Japanese Americans respond to such prejudice. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, the study analyzes selected textual excerpts using Gordon Allport's theory of prejudice (1954) as its primary theoretical framework. The findings reveal that racial prejudice is manifested through multiple forms, including antilocution, discrimination, segregation, and physical violence. Furthermore, the analysis demonstrates that Japanese Americans respond to these injustices through diverse strategies such as enlisting in the military, fostering solidarity within their community, and engaging in acts of protest.

✉ Corresponding author:
B3 Building, Kampus Viktor, Pamulang, Tangerang Selatan Indonesia 50229 E-mail: *riniwahyuni2828@gmail.com*

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INTRODUCTION

Racism is a persistent global problem that remains unresolved. It is not confined to a single country or culture, as every society possesses its own history and dynamics related to race. Understanding the local context is therefore crucial when discussing racism. Fundamentally, racism is an ideology that posits the superiority or inferiority of certain races over others (Sihotang et al., 2024, p. 3). It is rooted in a long history of discrimination and oppression based on differences in race, color, ethnicity, or nationality. Racism operates not only at the individual level but also as a systemic problem, manifesting in politics, economics, law, education, and culture.

Historically, race has been defined as a population distinguished by recognizable physical traits. Within systems of prejudice, social hierarchies often elevate groups with shared physical features while marginalizing others. As Smedley and Smedley (2005) explain, people have traditionally been classified by visible attributes such as skin color, eye shape, hair texture, and facial features. From a sociological perspective, racism functions as a struggle between groups, wherein one asserts superiority while rendering others inferior. This framework not only evaluates race through physical traits but also through cultural practices, behaviors, and traditions. According to this theory, races are viewed as inherently unequal and thus arranged hierarchically, with inequality serving as the foundation of all racial systems (Smedley & Smedley, 2005, p. 20).

Racial prejudice constitutes one form of racism. Although terms such as prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination, and bigotry are often used interchangeably, they reflect different aspects of racial bias (Salter et al., 2018). Prejudice, as defined by Allport (1954), is characterized by judgments based on vague or unfounded assumptions, rather than logic, and is rooted in antipathy or irrational dislike. Racism, therefore, should be understood as both a moral and social problem with significant consequences for individuals and communities.

In the United States, racial prejudice against Asians dates back to the 19th century, when Asian Americans were frequently stigmatized and marginalized. Such prejudice continues in contemporary contexts, as illustrated by the experiences of @chigira_germany, a Japanese-descended woman living in Germany who shared her encounters with racism on social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. In one post (February 24, 2024), she recounted being mocked on the street by a group of men who imitated Japanese and Chinese speech in a derogatory manner. While she expressed that she was not personally offended, she nonetheless urged against engaging in racist actions toward Asians. This example demonstrates the enduring presence of racial prejudice across different contexts and time periods.

The prevalence of racial conflict has inspired many writers to address these issues in literature. As Carter (2006, p. 69) observes, literary works often reflect the societies in which they are created. Novels, in particular, serve as both representations of social reality and expressions of cultural values and beliefs. Literature thus functions as a mirror of human experience, capturing emotional realities, cultural developments, and social responses to historical events (Laurenson & Swingewood, 1972).

Traci Chee's *We Are Not Free* exemplifies this function of literature. The novel, set in Japantown, San Francisco, follows the perspectives of fourteen Japanese-American teenagers whose lives were disrupted by the forced relocation and mass incarceration of over 100,000 Japanese Americans during World War II. As a work of historical fiction, the novel powerfully illustrates various forms of racial prejudice directed against Asians. This study employs Gordon W. Allport's theory of prejudice (1954) as its primary framework to analyze both the social realities and literary representations of racism depicted in the text.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach to examine the representation of racial prejudice in literature. A qualitative design was chosen because literary texts, as forms of written expression, rely heavily on nuanced language—such as metaphors, imagery, and carefully constructed phrasing—that conveys meaning and evokes emotion. As Creswell (2013, p. 44) notes, qualitative research begins with assumptions and interpretive frameworks to explore the meanings individuals or groups assign to social or human problems. It involves the collection of data in natural settings, followed by inductive and deductive analysis to identify patterns or themes.

In the context of literary research, qualitative analysis focuses on textual data by identifying, interpreting, and comparing problems presented in narratives with real-world experiences. Researchers may also draw upon personal insights to explain how literary representations reflect broader human behavior and social issues.

The primary data source of this study is Traci Chee's *We Are Not Free* (2020), which depicts the experiences of Japanese American teenagers during World War II. The data consist of textual excerpts—narratives, dialogues, and actions—that illustrate racial prejudice.

1) Data collection was conducted in several stages:

2) Close reading of the novel to identify passages that contain conflicts or issues related to racial prejudice.

3) Selection and annotation of relevant quotations.

4) Underlining and noting key excerpts for further analysis.

5) Compiling a list of quotations that specifically address racial prejudice.

Data analysis followed Creswell's (2018) framework, which involves data organization, interpretation, and reporting. The analysis was guided by Gordon Allport's theory of prejudice (1954), focusing on identifying different forms of prejudice and the strategies employed by the characters to respond to it. The selected quotations were examined as evidence to support the study's thesis, with findings categorized into two main areas: (1) the manifestations of racial prejudice and (2) the responses of Japanese American characters to such prejudice.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section examines how racial prejudice, specifically against Asian Americans, is portrayed in Traci Chee's *We Are Not Free*. Narrated by Minnow, the novel follows the experiences of a group of Japanese-American teenagers living in San Francisco during a period of intense racial discrimination. Before the outbreak of war, their lives were filled with friendship, hope, and aspirations for the future. However, the attack on Pearl Harbor dramatically alters their circumstances. They are subjected to hostility from neighbors and schoolmates, and their lives are further disrupted by forced relocation to internment camps. Through these narratives, the novel vividly depicts racial prejudice, the loss of freedom, and the psychological toll of internment.

The Reflection of Racial Prejudice in *We Are Not Free*

According to Gordon Allport (1954), prejudice constitutes negative judgments or attitudes toward individuals or groups that are not based on factual evidence. He identifies several forms of prejudice, including antilocution, discrimination, segregation, and physical attack. Traci Chee's novel illustrates each of these categories.

Antilocution (Verbal Prejudice).

One of the earliest and most pervasive forms of prejudice in the novel is verbal abuse. As illustrated in the passage:

"Because American citizens are still getting jumped all the time, like when the ketos cornered Tommy Harano behind the YMCA. They shoved him around and called him dirty words like 'Jap' and 'Nip.' They said the only good Jap was a dead Jap. They said they were going to do their country a favor and get rid of him right then." (p. 12)

This excerpt reveals the brutal realities of wartime racism. Tommy Harano, a young Japanese American, is both physically assaulted and verbally dehumanized through racial slurs such as "Jap" and "Nip." The attackers rationalize their violence as an act of patriotism, framing hatred as loyalty to the nation. Such language not only demeans the victims but also legitimizes hostility by portraying Japanese Americans as existential threats.

Another example of antilocution occurs when a character is accused of espionage:

"You are spying on us, Jap?" the gap-toothed guy says, shoving the sketch in my face. "You gonna send these back to the emperor?" (p. 14)

Here, prejudice manifests through false accusations. A simple act of sketching is interpreted as espionage, reflecting how wartime suspicion transformed ordinary behavior into grounds for hostility. The repeated use of "Jap" functions as both insult and marker of otherness, reinforcing propaganda-driven stereotypes that conflated Japanese Americans with enemy forces.

A further instance highlights the inevitability of prejudice:

"We could do everything right, and they'd still think we were dangerous." (p. 16)

This statement underscores the permanence of suspicion. No matter how compliant or loyal Japanese Americans attempted to be, they were persistently perceived as threats. Such perceptions exemplify Allport's notion of prejudice as irrational and impervious to evidence.

Based on Allport's theory, these examples demonstrate the function of antilocution as a precursor to more severe forms of prejudice. By repeatedly labeling Japanese Americans with derogatory terms and false accusations, society stripped them of individuality and humanity, making subsequent discrimination and violence easier to justify.

Discrimination.

Beyond verbal prejudice, the novel depicts systemic discrimination, particularly through state-sanctioned propaganda and exclusionary practices. For example:

"The ads says GET IN TRIM FOR FIGHTING HIM! and in the center there's a drawing of a Japanese soldier with diagonal slits for eyes, nostrils like watermelon seeds, and two big square teeth jutting out over his lower lip." (p. 10)

This advertisement exemplifies how visual caricatures reinforced hostility toward Japanese people. The exaggerated physical features presented in the poster were designed to dehumanize and incite animosity, portraying Japanese individuals as grotesque and subhuman enemies.

Similarly, Chee references the role of popular culture in spreading racist imagery:

"In PM Magazine, Dr. Seuss, the kids' book author, has been drawing us with pig noses and wiry mustaches, queuing up for boxes of TNT. There are all sorts of cartoons like that. Sometimes we look like pigs, sometimes monkeys, sometimes rats." (p. 17)

This passage highlights how even trusted cultural figures contributed to racial prejudice. By likening Japanese Americans to animals or pests, such depictions framed them as dangerous intruders unworthy of dignity. The novel emphasizes how propaganda, deeply embedded in cultural production, normalized discrimination and fostered a climate in which prejudice was both socially acceptable and politically reinforced.

Other forms of discrimination are also evident in the novel. For example:

"The army guys are here to recruit volunteers for Roosevelt's new combat team. See, we don't got liberty, we don't got property, but you better believe we've got the Great American Right to die for a country that doesn't want us." (p. 77)

This passage reflects the bitter irony of Japanese Americans being invited to fight for a country that had already stripped them of their basic rights and freedoms. The sarcastic tone—"the Great American Right to die"—underscores the contradiction between American ideals of liberty and the discriminatory treatment of Japanese Americans. Although deprived of property and freedom, they were still expected to prove their loyalty through military service. This demonstrates how prejudice simultaneously marginalized and exploited Japanese Americans.

Another example illustrates racial violence and its traumatic consequences:

"I don't know where these pets keep coming from, because we weren't allowed to bring any from home, but—Crack! I jump. For some reason, I think of a white hand—Japs go home. By the fence, Mr. Uyeda collapses. A gunshot, I think. It was a gunshot. Someone shot him. There he is, groaning, wriggling in the dust. He might be dying." (p. 100)

The sudden gunshot, accompanied by the slur "Japs go home," encapsulates the atmosphere of hostility faced by Japanese Americans. The violence inflicted on Mr. Uyeda serves as a stark reminder of how prejudice escalated from verbal abuse to physical harm, instilling fear, uncertainty, and trauma within the community.

Discrimination is also conveyed in everyday encounters, as shown in the following excerpt:

"WE DON'T SERVE JAPS HERE!" he bellows, like he can't hold it in anymore. His voice is so loud, it echoes in my head." (p. 126)

This scene illustrates blatant exclusion from public life. Yuki's attempt to purchase ice cream is met with an outburst that denies not only service but also dignity and belonging. The emphatic phrasing, presented in capital letters, reflects the widespread societal sentiment that demonized and ostracized Japanese Americans during the war.

Chee also depicts institutionalized racism through systemic segregation:

"Today I strolled around town for a while. Did you know they have separate drinking fountains here for 'white' and 'colored'? Separate entrances, separate seating sections, nothing equal? Back in Japan, did you know, when you dreamed of America, that it was never equal? Did you understand? Did I?" (p. 173)

This excerpt draws attention to the structural racism embedded in American society. The narrator's observation of segregated facilities underscores the persistence of inequality and challenges the idealized vision of America as a land of freedom and opportunity. The character's disillusionment highlights the contrast between the American dream and the discriminatory realities imposed by law and custom.

Finally, systemic prejudice is further revealed through government policies:

"He's nineteen, and after Pearl Harbor, he wanted to sign up to fight the Japanese and the Germans and the Italians, but the government reclassified us from A-1 to C-4, making us all 'enemy aliens' (even though people like Frankie and me and the guys are Nisei, second-generation Japanese-American citizens), so he couldn't fight anybody." (p. 18)

Here, the reclassification of Japanese Americans as "enemy aliens" demonstrates the devastating consequences of institutionalized racism. Despite their citizenship and loyalty, they were stripped of fundamental rights and denied the opportunity to serve. This passage illustrates how fear and prejudice, rather than evidence, guided government policy, deepening the injustice faced by Japanese Americans.

Taken together, these excerpts illustrate how racial prejudice manifests in multiple forms of discrimination, ranging from propaganda and stereotyping to systemic exclusion and violence. This aligns with Allport's theory of prejudice, which emphasizes the link between negative stereotyping and discriminatory behavior. *We Are Not Free* thus illustrates how prejudice, once normalized, escalates into structural injustice and personal suffering.

The third form of racial prejudice identified in the novel is segregation, or the enforced separation of groups within society, particularly in housing, education, employment, and public services. Chee depicts this clearly in the following passage:

"Ten days ago, President Roosevelt established the War Relocation Authority, a federal agency that's supposed to be in charge of figuring out how to get us out of military zones where the government doesn't want us. We just don't know which of us they'll move. Or how it's going to happen. Or when." (p. 15)

This excerpt highlights the official sanctioning of segregation through the establishment of the War Relocation Authority. Japanese Americans were forcibly removed from their homes and relocated to internment camps following the attack on Pearl Harbor. The unilateral nature of this decision—made without consultation or transparency—underscores the injustice and disempowerment faced by the community, reducing them to passive subjects of state control.

Other examples of segregation are also depicted in the novel. For instance:

"The next, we're being ordered off the buses between guard towers and armed soldiers, a barbed-wire fence separating us from the rest of the city—its streets, its schools, its citizens, wandering free." (p. 41)

This passage illustrates the enforced racial separation between Japanese Americans and the wider community. The phrase "ordered off the buses" highlights the coercive nature of this segregation, emphasizing the lack of agency and the dominance of state authority. The barbed-wire fence serves as a powerful symbol, representing not only physical confinement but also the perception of Japanese Americans as threats who must be controlled. The imagery underscores restrictions on movement, access to public spaces, and participation in society, reflecting a system that treated them as outsiders unworthy of equal rights.

Another example emphasizes the psychological weight of confinement:

"Outside is the camp, the barbed wire, the guard towers, the city, the country that hates us. But in here, we are together. We are not free." (p. 58)

Here, segregation is depicted as both a physical and psychological reality. The "barbed wire" and "guard towers" symbolize the literal prison-like conditions of internment, while the phrase "we are not free" explicitly acknowledges the loss of autonomy. Beyond physical confinement, the narrative reveals how prejudice created a sense of alienation and collective psychological imprisonment. This dual loss—of mobility and dignity—demonstrates how systemic racism extends beyond material deprivation to shape the very consciousness of those affected.

The novel also portrays the escalation of segregation through government policies:

"The next day, we get the news. We know for sure. Segregation's going to start in September, and all the No-Nos are going to be shipped off to Tule Lake in California." (p. 144)

This passage reflects the institutionalization of segregation, as Japanese Americans classified as "No-Nos" were forcibly relocated to Tule Lake, a high-security internment camp. Such policies intensified the trauma of displacement, compelling individuals to abandon homes, businesses, and communities. Families were torn apart, and those who resisted loyalty oaths were subjected to even harsher conditions, including curfews, constant surveillance, and limited mobility. The relocation amplified feelings of isolation, despair, and loss of dignity, while symbolizing the systematic stripping away of civil liberties.

Taken together, these excerpts exemplify Allport's (1954) theory of prejudice, which recognizes segregation as a mechanism of social exclusion and dehumanization. *We Are Not*

Free vividly portrays how government policies institutionalized prejudice, separating Japanese Americans from the broader public and reducing them to prisoners of race-based suspicion.

Physical Attacks

The fourth form of racial prejudice identified in the novel is physical violence, where prejudice escalates into direct bodily harm. Such attacks were common during World War II as expressions of hostility toward Japanese Americans. One such instance occurs when the protagonist is assaulted on his way home from school:

"Then the first guy punches me again, and my head lolls to the side. In the gutter, my sketchpad lies face-down, pages wrinkled beneath it." (p. 14)

This description captures the brutal reality of racially motivated violence. Minnow's assault represents more than physical pain; it is an act of dehumanization intended to silence and subordinate him because of his racial identity. The image of his sketchpad lying crumpled in the gutter symbolizes the destruction not only of personal property but also of creative expression and individuality. Through this scene, Chee underscores how physical violence functioned as both punishment and control, reinforcing systemic oppression.

Other examples of physical attacks are also depicted in the novel. For instance:

"Before Christmas, *Life* magazine published an article called 'How to Tell Japs from the Chinese.' I guess it was supposed to tell ketos which of us to attack, but if you ask me, it wasn't very helpful, because American citizens are still getting jumped all the time, like when the ketos cornered Tommy Harano behind the YMCA. They shoved him around and called him dirty words like 'Jap' and 'Nip.'" (p. 12)

This excerpt highlights both institutionalized racism and its violent consequences. The *Life* magazine article "How to Tell Japs from the Chinese" represents a striking example of how mainstream media normalized prejudice, spreading negative stereotypes and even directing aggression toward Japanese Americans. By framing them as enemies, the article effectively sanctioned public hostility and dehumanization. The racial slurs "Jap" and "Nip" further reduced Japanese Americans to a monolithic group, stripping away individuality and reinforcing their status as perpetual outsiders. The assault on Tommy Harano behind the YMCA demonstrates how propaganda translated into direct physical violence, reflecting not only individual prejudice but also the broader social climate of hostility and fear. The use of the term *keto* (slang for white Americans) underscores the racial polarization of the time, suggesting that these attacks were part of a wider atmosphere of racialized animosity rather than isolated incidents.

Another powerful example occurs later in the novel:

"Crack! I jump. For some reason, I think of a white hand—Japs go home. By the fence, Mr. Uyeda collapses. A gunshot, I think. It was a gunshot. Someone shot him. There he is, groaning, wriggling in the dust. He might be dying." (p. 100)

This passage captures the brutal reality of racially motivated violence during the internment period. The sudden gunshot, accompanied by the slur "Japs go home,"

symbolizes both the physical and psychological dangers Japanese Americans faced. The attack on Mr. Uyeda illustrates how prejudice could escalate into life-threatening violence, leaving the community in constant fear. The abruptness of the event mirrors the unpredictability of racial violence, while the description of Uyeda "groaning" and "wriggling in the dust" conveys the dehumanizing impact of such attacks. For the characters, this violence was not only a physical threat but also a traumatic reminder of their vulnerable position in a society that regarded them as enemies within.

Taken together, these examples demonstrate how *We Are Not Free* reflects Gordon Allport's (1954) theory of prejudice in its most destructive form: physical violence. When verbal abuse and systemic discrimination go unchecked, they can escalate into outright aggression and brutality. Through these depictions, Traci Chee illustrates the devastating consequences of prejudice on Japanese Americans during World War II, revealing how societal hatred—fueled by propaganda and institutional policy—manifested in systemic oppression and direct violence. The novel thus serves as a narrative embodiment of Allport's framework, showing how prejudice operates on multiple levels, from words and images to laws and physical harm.

The Protagonists' Efforts to Confront Racial Prejudice in *We Are Not Free*

In Traci Chee's *We Are Not Free*, the Japanese American characters employ several strategies to confront and cope with racial prejudice. Their responses—joining the military, forming solidarity and community, and participating in demonstrations—reflect both resistance to discrimination and attempts to reclaim dignity within a society that marginalized them.

1. Joining the Military

One significant response was enlistment in the U.S. military. Despite being interned and stripped of fundamental rights, many Nisei (second-generation Japanese Americans) chose to join combat units such as the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, seeking to prove their loyalty to a country that had betrayed them.

"The army guys are here to recruit volunteers for Roosevelt's new combat team. See, we don't got liberty, we don't got property, but you better believe we've got the Great American Right to die for a country that doesn't want us." (p. 77)

This passage underscores the paradox faced by Japanese Americans: denied liberty and property, yet expected to demonstrate loyalty through military service. The phrase "Great American Right to die" carries biting irony, revealing the tragic contradiction of fighting for a nation that simultaneously rejected them. Through this act of service, many sought to assert their identity as Americans and challenge the prejudice that cast them as enemies.

Another passage illustrates the systemic injustice underlying this decision:

"Everyone seventeen and up has gotta do this questionnaire to see who's loyal and who's not. If you're loyal, you can volunteer for Roosevelt's combat unit. It's Nisei-only, which is a shit idea, if you ask me. If Uncle Sam sends 'em to the Pacific, the other battalions are gonna mistake them for the enemy." (p. 79)

Here, Chee emphasizes the racialized suspicion embodied in the so-called "loyalty questionnaire." The requirement to prove loyalty highlights systemic discrimination, while the narrator's critique of the all-Nisei unit reflects the persistent risk of being misidentified as the enemy—even by fellow American soldiers. This moment reveals both the desire to resist prejudice through service and the irony that prejudice could still undermine such efforts.

2. Forming Solidarity and Community

Another form of resistance was the creation of solidarity within the internment camps. Despite internal divisions generated by discriminatory policies, Japanese American youth in the novel forged unity as a means of resilience.

"More and more, the camp separates. We're being wedged apart by the Caucasians and their questionnaires, by guys like 'Old Issei,' who wrote that editorial saying all the No-Nos should be shunned, and guys like my dad, who say the Yes-Yeses are sniveling cowards. But us Japantown kids stick together. We walk to school as a group, No-Nos and Yes-Yeses both." (p. 109)

This passage demonstrates how the U.S. government's divisive policies, such as the loyalty questionnaire, fragmented the community into "Yes-Yes" and "No-No" factions. Yet, the younger generation resisted this imposed division by maintaining solidarity. Their collective action—walking to school together regardless of faction—constitutes a quiet but powerful rejection of prejudice, emphasizing unity over division. Solidarity thus becomes both a survival mechanism and a subtle form of protest.

3. Demonstrating and Demanding Justice

Finally, the novel highlights collective resistance through public demonstrations.

"But it's hard to concentrate with the crowds roaming the streets outside. Every so often, we hear someone cry for justice for Mr. Uyeda." (p. 105)

This excerpt, narrated by Aiko, reflects the unrest and protests demanding justice for victims of racial violence such as Mr. Uyeda. While Aiko herself is not an active participant, her awareness of the demonstrations underscores the broader atmosphere of resistance within the community. The cries for "justice" affirm the community's refusal to remain silent in the face of oppression. These demonstrations signify a collective demand for recognition, rights, and accountability, even under the constraints of wartime prejudice and incarceration.

Through these varied responses—military service, solidarity, and protest—Chee's novel illustrates the resilience of Japanese Americans confronting systemic racism. While each strategy carried risks and contradictions, together they reveal the determination of an oppressed community to resist dehumanization and assert their dignity in the face of racial prejudice.

Other forms of demonstration are also evident in the following excerpt:

"I lose track of the guys in the big crowd by City Hall. It's noisy and people are crammed together like tsukemono in a jar, turning sour in their own anger." (p. 106)

This passage vividly portrays the collective anger and resistance of Japanese Americans through the metaphor of *tsukemono* (pickled vegetables). The imagery of a noisy, overcrowded crowd suggests both the physical density of the protest and the suffocating conditions imposed on the community by prejudice and internment. The metaphor "crammed together like tsukemono in a jar" highlights the sense of confinement, reflecting the community's lack of freedom and space, while "turning sour in their own anger" emphasizes the collective transformation of frustration into resistance. The anger expressed here is not arbitrary but rather a direct and justified reaction to racial injustice.

In *We Are Not Free*, Japanese-American characters respond to systemic discrimination in multiple ways, reflecting the resilience and complexity of their experience during World War II. First, some male characters enlist in the U.S. military, most notably in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, as a paradoxical means of proving loyalty to a nation that had stripped them of rights and freedom. Despite the irony, this decision reflects a profound desire to assert their identity as American citizens. Second, the novel depicts solidarity and unity within the internment camps. While loyalty questionnaires and external pressures create divisions, the Nisei youth in particular choose to maintain strong communal bonds, resisting the divisions imposed upon them. Solidarity thus becomes both emotional refuge and a subtle form of resistance. Finally, the novel illustrates public demonstrations as a more overt response to injustice. Whether in cries for justice for victims such as Mr. Uyeda or in large, restless crowds described as "turning sour in their own anger," demonstrations channel grief and frustration into visible demands for justice.

Taken together, these varied responses—military service, community solidarity, and public protest—underscore the determination of Japanese Americans to resist dehumanization. Chee's narrative demonstrates that even under conditions of systemic oppression, marginalized communities find ways to assert dignity, demand recognition, and confront prejudice.

CONCLUSION

This study examines the racial prejudice experienced by Asian-American characters in Traci Chee's novel *We Are Not Free*. Set against the backdrop of World War II, the novel vividly portrays the widespread anti-Japanese sentiment that fueled systemic prejudice against the broader Asian-American community, particularly those of Japanese descent. Applying Gordon Allport's theory of prejudice, the analysis demonstrates how such prejudice manifests in multiple forms, including antilocution, discrimination, segregation, and physical violence.

Throughout the novel, Asian-American characters endure negative stereotypes and unjust generalizations, frequently being equated with "the enemy" solely because of their ethnicity. These prejudices translate into discriminatory practices that strip them of their freedom and fundamental rights. In response, Japanese Americans are depicted as confronting racial prejudice in several ways: by enlisting in the U.S. military to assert loyalty, fostering solidarity and resilience within their communities, and engaging in demonstrations to demand recognition and justice.

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