



Dream Country

Shannon Gibney

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The heartbreaking story of five generations of young people from a single African-and-American family pursuing an elusive dream of freedom.

The novel begins in suburban Minneapolis at the moment when seventeen-year-old Kollie Flomo begins to crack under the strain of his life as a Liberian refugee. He's exhausted by being at once too black and not black enough for his African American peers and worn down by the expectations of his own Liberian family and community. When his frustration finally spills into violence and his parents send him back to Monrovia to reform school, the story shifts. Like Kollie, readers travel back to Liberia, but also back in time, to the early twentieth-century and the point of view of Togar Somah, an eighteen-year-old indigenous Liberian on the run from government militias that would force him to work the plantations of the Congo people, descendants of the African-American slaves who colonized Liberia almost a century earlier. When Togar's section draws to a shocking close, the novel jumps again, back to America in 1827, to the children of Yasmine Wright, who leave a Virginia plantation with their mother for Liberia, where they're promised freedom and a chance at self-determination by the American Colonization Society. The Wrights begin their section by fleeing the whip and by its close, they are then ones who wield it. With each new section, the novel uncovers fresh hope and resonating heartbreak, all based on historical fact.

In *Dream Country*, Shannon Gibney spins a riveting tale of the nightmarish spiral of death and exile connecting America and Africa, and of how one determined young dreamer tries to break free and gain control of her destiny.

Dream Country Details

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Author : Shannon Gibney

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From Reader Review Dream Country for online ebook

Shreya says

So excited to be part of the Dream Country blog tour!!! Check out my post on <http://thebaronessofbooks.weebly.com> including my review and some Read Alikes for the characters!

Camryn says

This was so hard to read, but also so important. I think my critiques are just that I wanted more time with the characters, but that also would've been really painful. There was also some historical context I didn't understand. Some characters were called white but really weren't, and some were called half-caste (I thought this was white/black) when it was American Black/Liberian. But yeah.

This was so heavy and so... like, lots of in depth ideas I had not considered, combined with history I didn't even know. I think I'm mostly shaken that those in bondage could go on to commit the same atrocities to others. It haunts me.

Emily Housworth says

3.5 stars. During the first few chapters of this book, I did not think I would like it at all. I totally believe that racism still exists in our schools, but the stories of the modern day Minneapolis school seemed a bit unrealistic to me. The thing that really tripped me up was the use of Brooklyn Center High School. Why not use a fictional school, since the events and characters in this book are fictional?

BUT, once Kollie's story was done, I really started to enjoy the book. I learned so much about Liberia, considering I knew next to nothing before. The stories about the African slaves who went to Liberia to colonize were so fascinating, especially to see how former slaves became the slavers. Super sad.

I did find myself getting confused in parts (for example, the American Africans are referred to as white by the native Africans, but this wasn't explained till much later in the book, so the whole time I was so confused as to why all the people from Congo were white haha.) I also had a hard time following the civil war/revolution.

However, the writing was good, and I really appreciate any story that brings to light what refugees are facing today, as well as their past sufferings. I admire the author's commitment in researching this story and uncovering history that had previously remain hidden or cloudy. We need more diverse stories like this!

I wanted to recommend this to my husband for his ESL students, but the repeated use of the C word and F word probably disqualify it. :(

Stephanie says

"Then he came back out on the porch and sat there for hours, watching the sun rise. Wondering if his own

history was just a dream-loop folding back on itself over and over again, in endless variation and repetition, always in search of a place to rest.” - Dream Country (page 321).

Dream Country tells the story, in alternating voices, of five generations of a black family stretching from pre-Civil War era America to 20th century Liberia, and back to present day America. It begins with Kollie Flomo, a Liberian born immigrant now living in Minnesota with his family. He is at once too black for the white people in his neighborhood and not black enough for his African-American peers. Finding no place of belonging, he fosters a lot of anger until one day he can't hold that anger in any more, and his parents make the decision to send him back to Liberia to live with relatives. The story then jumps to Togar Somah, on the run in the Liberian bush from a government who wants to enslave him to back-breaking work on state-run plantations, then to early 1800s Virginia and Yasmine Wright and her children, who will be one of the descendants of African American slaves to colonize Liberia with the help of the American Colonization Society. The story then moves to Kollie's father, trying to escape the Liberian Civil War in the 1980s.

This amazing and epic journey unpacks several heavy themes such as racism, white supremacy, power dynamics between the oppressed and the oppressors, and the trauma of enslavement and colonialism on indigenous people and their descendants. I'm going to at TW for: police violence on black people, incidents of gross racism (everything from use of the n-word to lynching), and sexual assault and rape.

This is a book that's going to stay with me for a while. It was extremely engrossing, and as heartbreaking as parts of it were, I couldn't put it down; in fact, I stayed up till nearly 1am to finish it. If you're looking for a book that'll give you all the warm fuzzies, look elsewhere my friend. This is a hard read, and it's going to leave you with some uncomfortable feels. You should read it anyway.

Mary Turck says

Beginning with a Liberian immigrant family in Brooklyn Center, Minnesota in 2008, Dream Country zig zags through time and space, telling stories from Liberian colonization and civil war to African American and Liberian American present day. Each segment focuses on an individual within a family, showing not only the individual struggle but also the inextricably linked family dynamic. The individual story segments bring to life the historical settings and events, from Liberian colonization to civil war to diaspora.

Dream Country, the publisher says, is a young adult novel. Don't let that fool you: Shannon Gibney respects her audience too much to write down to them or to soften the emotional and historical facts in any way. Her audience may include young adults, but this is a novel for all adults, as intense and troubling as any novel on the various book award and best seller lists.

For me, Angel's words sum up how the five separated but interrelated family stories come together and why this book tastes like life:

"The truth is fluid and fungible and untrustworthy and won't abide by any one telling. And sometimes, in inventing truth, we can discover something deeper. We can find our place in the story, because that, at least, is one thing that we can make for ourselves. A story."

Mary says

Shannon Gibney's second novel is flat out amazing. It is raw and revealing and captivated me on every level.

Scottsdale Public Library says

One family, five generations, and multiple journeys as they all search for their definition of freedom. This powerful read is eye-opening, relatable, full of depth, and quite sad. It's not a cheerful read, but it is an excellent one. *Dream Country*, a YA (young adult) historical fiction, is worth a checkout for teens and adults alike. –Megan G.

Rana says

While the story structure isn't my favorite, telling the story of a family working backwards and forwards in time actually worked in this instance. This is a part of history that I didn't really have any idea about other than a vague (really, really, really vague) idea that slaves moved/were sent/somewhere in between to what became Liberia maybe sometime in the 1800's or something. I did start the book and then immediately took my ignorant ass over to Wikipedia to brush up on Liberia history.

Amy says

WOW. I knew this book would be phenomenal, and it was. There are special books out there that open up a whole new experience, a whole new way of looking at the world. *Dream Country* is one of those books. My privilege means I had no idea about the history and current conflicts in Liberia. I am in awe of these stories and sacrifices. It is an important, moving book. I love "family sagas", though that's a cliché description of a book like this. But the connections between people and their stories was one of my favorite parts. I feel like my thoughts are so incohesive because I've never read anything like this and don't know how to put my thoughts into words. All I know is Shannon Gibney is an amazing author and this story needs to be read.

Unfortunately, I didn't care for the audiobook as much as the story itself. Bahni Turpin narrates, and as acclaimed as she is, she has never been my favorite. This was a story that deserved multiple narrators. It would've really helped keep the stories straight. Turpin didn't distinguish the characters enough, and it was confusing at times. But other audiobook listeners might be okay with it.

Tori (InToriLex) says

Content Warning: Rape, Substance Abuse, Graphic Violence, Sexually Explicit Language

This is a unflinching look at the many ways Liberia is tied to African American history. I only knew little

about Liberian history and the African American colony there started by slaves, before reading this book. This book follows a family throughout time and across continents who have survived American slavery, Liberian Civil War and immigrating to America to start over. The changing point of views stood out as distinct and interesting voices. The whole story is non linear and lacks clear paths or conclusions. It uses intimate details and relationships to give you an abstract way of looking at history through fictionalized events.

"This is what the demons teach us to survive to become two people at once. To hide ourselves in plain sight . What kind of sick learning is this?"

Kollie is a recent Liberian immigrant struggling to fit in with African Americans in high school, unable to connect with peers who bully and make fun of his culture. Togar is a indigenous Liberian who is forced to leave his home and family after his village is raided by Congo people who steal indigenous men and force them into labor. Yasmine is a young mother who sets out with her four children to Liberia to escape the horrors of slavery and build a new country with a better future for her children. Ujay is a Liberian University student trying to support revolution in a divided country. The horrors and heartbreak throughout their stories was shocking but something I felt was the only way to convey the true tragedy of Liberian history.

"If words were the only tools at your disposal to make sense of a lineage in two countries that never seemed to align or intersect in ways that made you feel like anything but a perpetual foreigner in either place , you too would have spent the last three years in a small room behind a computer screen, desperately punching out a invented history."

The story and characters are great but segments of the book were a bit too drawn out and slow paced. There is a segment at the back of the book listing major events in Liberian history. I suggest reading that first to make sense of some of the glossed over details about Liberia throughout the book. I emotionally connected with and learned a lot from these characters. This story will make you reflect on family race and identity in memorable and important ways.

Recommended for Readers who

- enjoy family sagas spanning continents and generations
- want to learn more about Liberian History and the African American colony built by ex-slaves
- can digest serious topics and tragedy told in a straight forward way

I received this book from the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

Susan says

This novel was heart wrenching. It follows five different generations of one family as they navigate countries and face hardships and heartbreak. The writing was truly excellent and the author did an amazing job with among each point of view sound like a different voice.

I was provided a copy of this book by the publisher via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

Jena says

“You all think you hate one another precisely because we don’t about this stuff.” She sighed. “You done realize it yet, but that is the real tragedy. Not a name somebody got called.”

Dream Country is a beautiful journey of one family, woven throughout a tapestry of generations, struggling with what freedom means to each of them. Told through five perspectives spanning from the early 1800’s to the present, we see the common threads of dreams, identity, and hope in each of their stories. This is a journey of a family, but it is also a journey through history, both real and imagined. It is a story of culture and how it evolves through generations. It is a story of countries, and how these larger struggles impact individuals living within them.

Each section is important to the rest, showing that we are never fully immune to the conflicts of the past. They scar us in ways that are sometimes both visible and invisible. Each generation building on the lessons and nightmares of the one before it. Dream Country is an examination of how our past can haunt our present, and how one dreamer is determined to understand these threads in order to seize control of her present and her future.

“Time passes, oceans are crossed; circumstances change, or they do not. One continent is exchanged for another, but still the spiral does not become a circle. No, spirals rise and they fall. Sometimes it’s hard to know which.”

Dream Country is not just a story of a family’s history. Or of a culture, or a country. It is a vivid portrayal of what racism looks like, feels like, but more profoundly, how it stems. How it can grow from one group to another, hate breeding hate, in new ways, with new generations wreaking pain and heartache on the next. This is a heartbreaking but real story. One which helps understand not only the pain of our past, but the difficulties in our present.

This incredible journey forces the reader to examine some of the lesser known truths of history. Dream Country is a “fictional canvas of fact”, where historical fact is woven into the story. Knowing that there is legitimate history written into these characters and their struggles makes the atrocities we encounter impossible to ignore. This isn’t a fictionalized story where once you close the cover, the story leaves the reader. Instead, this will awaken the need to know more, to think more, to understand more.

“The truth is fluid and fungible and untrustworthy and won’t abide by any one telling. And sometimes, in inventing the truth, we can discover something deeper. We can find our place in the story.”

Dream Country is a beautifully written story, that is compelling and stunning. It is deep and profound, and will open a dialogue for young readers everywhere. This book is perfect to help teens who perhaps have faced their own struggles with identity, and fitting in. With wanting to understand their own generational histories and where these lives of the past fit in with their future.

This book is perfect for book clubs, classrooms, and everything in between. There is some language, along with difficult subject matter such as colonization, slavery, violence, and references to rape, though outside of language, there aren’t any graphic descriptions. I would recommend to mature young adult readers, or at least with a parent or teacher available to help guide the reader through deeper discovery of these difficult themes and subjects.

In short, this book is stunning. It is a shining example of why we need diverse books with diverse characters, along with more own voices authors. This is a complex story bringing to light pieces of our own history that are lesser known. It is valuable, informative, and incredibly, incredibly important. Highly, highly,

recommend!

Thank you to Penguin Young Readers for including me on this incredible tour, and for sending me a copy for review!

Rich in Color says

Review copy: ARC via publisher

(Content warnings for graphic violence, rape, police violence, racial slurs, and homophobic slurs.)

Shannon Gibney's *Dream Country* is a heartbreaking look into the history of a family across two continents and almost two centuries. The sections of the novel are out of chronological order, but this back and forth between time and place effectively builds a sense of connectivity between the generations. This is most notable in how Gibney portrays violence rippling across the years, pitting people and their communities against one another. This us-versus-them mentality was a constant presence throughout the book and was especially prevalent in Kollie's section, where he not only had to deal with racism from white members of the community but also anti-immigrant/refugee sentiment.

I was particularly drawn to Yasmine Wright's section of *Dream Country*. Yasmine's yearning for freedom took her and her children across the ocean, where they carved out new lives at their own and others' expense. It was tragic seeing how the "heathen" rhetoric that was used to justify racism/continuation of slavery in the U.S. became a tool for Yasmine and the other colonists against the indigenous groups in Liberia. I appreciated that Gibney took the time to look at how violence and colonization changed (or didn't change) the members of Yasmine's family.

One thing I admire most about Gibney's writing is how distinct the voices were for all her narrators, especially given how little space some of them got compared to others. The narrators were key in bringing each setting to life, and I cared deeply about several of them. I wished we had more of Angel's section, though her ending narration and explanation for the stories of her family history (and her present) was well done and provided a surprisingly hopeful end to the book.

As a small side note, readers may find it useful to review the brief timeline of Liberian history provided at the back of the book before starting. While Gibney provides plenty of context to be able to figure out what's going on, I think I would have had a better appreciation for the novel had I gone in with a framework for my own reference.

Recommendation: Get it soon. *Dream Country* is a thoughtful, compassionate, and heartbreaking look at the history of an African-and-American family across five different generations. Shannon Gibney's exploration of freedom and violence and family is a worthwhile, if occasionally difficult, read.

Beverly says

This was a 3.5 read for me

Thoughts coming shortly

Faith Simon says

DNF @ 23%

I really wanted to like this book, because it's an important book, it revolves around fictionalized stories that existed and deserve to be told. I feel terrible for not being able to finish it, for not sticking through the stories to experience the book as a whole, as a Book as important as this deserves. But I just couldn't sit through reading this.

Part of the reason was the language in which the characters speak, I couldn't really follow it very well, most of the time I had to take a moment to figure out what was being said. This stems from my very white-centric knowledge of language, and it's unfortunate I found it hard to enjoy this book because of it. Another reason was that, nothing was happening. I was just bored, and I actually skipped ahead to a different POV because I was so bored, only to find that I couldn't quite sit through that one either.

In conclusion, I just couldn't finish this book at this point in my life, I hope to find a better appreciation for it later in my life, because I feel awful about not giving it the full read and appreciation it obviously deserves.
