

A Free, Unsullied Land



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Nineteen-year-old Henriette Greenberg takes her first steps away from an abusive home on the dance floor of a Chicago jazz dive in prohibition-era Chicago and is enraptured by this new music. Struggling to escape a mother who doesn't like girls and a father who likes young women all too well, she submerges herself in bad sex and political action. She meets and falls in love with Dilly Brannigan, a graduate student in anthropology. Ignoring his warnings, she travels to Scottsboro, Alabama to protest the unfair conviction of nine young black men accused of rape. She adopts Dilly's work as her own. A powerful funeral ritual gives her hope of re-writing her family story but tempts her to violate an Apache taboo, endangering her life, her love, and her longed-for escape from home.

A Free, Unsullied Land Details

Date : Published November 1st 2015 by Fomite Press

ISBN :

Author : Maggie Kast

Format : Paperback 371 pages

Genre : Academic, College, Fiction, Historical, Historical Fiction

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From Reader Review A Free, Unsullied Land for online ebook

Suzanne says

I kept thinking that President Obama would enjoy this novel about a young woman's political awakening in 1930s Chicago. I also kept thinking that although this is a historical novel, it is eerily relevant. Harriet gets caught up in the Scottsboro trials, in which several young black men were accused of rape after being in the same train car as two white women. Also, the characters discuss the rise of a demagogue in Europe, and guns. And then there is the issue of hate crimes against gay men.

It's also a love story. Although Henriette is haunted by her father's transgression, she gamely attempts to exert her sexual freedom. Later, she falls for a man of modest means, a guy who carries a gun, who is a graduate student in anthropology researching the Apache Ghost Dance. Can a young Jewish woman from a well-off liberal family find happiness with a poor anti-Commie student in the desert? Read and find out.

Kast's debut is a rich and satisfying novel, with complicated and very interesting characters.

Teresa Kander says

This book was difficult to read in parts, as it dealt with a time in history when there was so much blatant discrimination. The main character had a difficult childhood thanks to her dysfunctional parents, and that has made it difficult for her to make her own way in the world.

The author does an amazing job of making this story come to life with her words. She takes us across the United States, exploring Depression-era politics, academia, cultural bias, and prejudice along the way. The characters are well-written, even though they are not all easily likable.

I received a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review. All thoughts and opinions are entirely my own.

University of Chicago Magazine says

Maggie Kast, AB'56, AB'58
Author

From the author: "Nineteen-year-old Henriette Greenberg takes her first steps away from an abusive home on the dance floor of a jazz dive in prohibition-era Chicago and is enraptured by this new music. Struggling to escape abuse at home, she submerges herself in bad sex and political action. She meets and falls in love with Dilly Brannigan, a graduate student in anthropology and adopts her work as her own. Ignoring his warnings, she travels to Scottsboro, Alabama to protest the unfair conviction of nine young black men accused of rape. Devoted to her gay brothers, she struggles against the self-deceptions of family and society in an era when pansy clubs co-exist with persecution of "inverts." A powerful funeral ritual gives her hope of re-writing her family story but tempts her to violate an Apache taboo, endangering her life, her love, and her longed-for escape from home."

Superstition Review says

Maggie Kast's *A Free, Unsullied Land* is grand in its scope and touches on a variety of subjects. The novel's main character, Henriette Greenberg, is relatable. Kast manages to balance addressing both the personal problems of Henriette with the broader political and social problems she presents. Though the setting of the novel is the Great Depression era, the issues addressed by Kast (such as racial and sexual discrimination) feel relevant to today.

Review by Sophie Graham

Michele says

I am really not too sure how I felt about this book--it takes place in mostly the Great Depression era when Jim Crow laws were the order of the day in the South and Communism was feared and it's proponents lost their jobs etc etc etc. Henriette Greenberg was one messed up girl who couldn't quite find her way in the world--her parents--well lets just say her Mom knew how to throw a guilt trip and her Dad had a very bad temper when someone didn't agree with him--other wise her Mom ruled the roost. Henriette is trying desperately to find her way. She makes a lot of mistakes along the way and keeps going to her psychiatrist until she finally does the unthinkable and finds where she belongs and who she is. You will have to read this to find that out!

This was definitely reading outside of my comfort zone--which is the title of the guest post Maggie Kast wrote for my blog and will be live on 11/8. This author knows how to write and make the story come alive. It really is good to read outside the genres you normally do. Yes, I enjoyed this novel and look forward to her next one.

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Kristen Chandler says

This was definitely an interesting book. It was not only set in my home state, Alabama, in parts, but it was also set in one of my favorite time periods, the Great Depression. It was deep and hard to read in parts. For the most part however, it was educating and thought provoking. I will definitely read more by Maggie Kast.

I give this book 4 stars.

Annie says

I have received this book for free from goodreads giveaways.

I wasn't sure what to expect from this book, but I ended up liking it. It's wonderfully descriptive and I really

felt immersed in the story. All the characters are fully fleshed out and I was taken in by Henriette's journey.

Amy Shannon says

Intelligent and real

This book seemed hard to get into at the beginning, but I'm glad I read it all the way through. Written in third person, it tells the story of Henriette, and her struggle. Her struggle with sexuality, and Time began to feel enchanted, without beginning or end, like a single note that sings itself forever. in her own story. Henriette has amazing strength and courage, and her own psychosis. I really enjoyed this book and admit that I had to re-read a few parts over to gain some focus and clarity, but it was there. There were parts that were a bit confusing, but I got to the end and can say that I liked it. It starts in the 1920s and extends over the years from there. She was a w err tier. A true to heart writer, and I liked that about her. She may have strayed away for a while, but she remained true to herself. "Time began to feel enchanted, without beginning or end, like a single note that sings itself forever." Good book.
