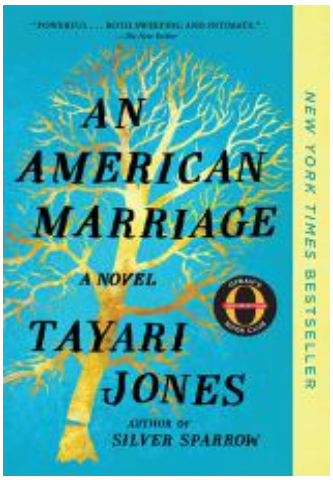
An American Marriage

by Tayari Jones



About the Book

Newlyweds Celestial and Roy are the embodiment of both the American Dream and the New South. He is a young executive, and she is an artist on the brink of an exciting career. But as they settle into the routine of their life together, they are ripped apart by circumstances neither could have imagined. Roy is arrested and sentenced to 12 years for a crime Celestial knows he didn?t commit.

Though fiercely independent, Celestial finds herself bereft and unmoored, taking comfort in Andre, her childhood friend and best man at their wedding. As Roy?s time in prison passes, she is unable to hold on to the love that has been her center. After five years, Roy?s conviction is suddenly overturned, and he returns to Atlanta ready to resume their life together.

This stirring love story is a profoundly insightful look into the hearts and minds of three people who are at once bound and separated by forces beyond their control. AN AMERICAN MARRIAGE is a masterpiece of storytelling, an intimate look deep into the souls of people who must reckon with the past while moving forward --- with hope and pain --- into the future.

Discussion Guide

1. The title of this novel is AN AMERICAN MARRIAGE. Do you feel this title accurately represents the novel? Why or why not? And if you do find the title appropriate, what about the story makes it particularly ?American??

2. When Celestial asks Roy if he would have waited for her for more than five years, he doesn?t answer her question but reminds her that, as a woman, she would not have been imprisoned in the first place. Do you feel that his response is valid, and do you think it justifies his infidelity? Do you believe that he would have remained faithful if Celestial had been the one incarcerated? Does this really matter, and if so, why?

3. In her ?Dear John? letter to Roy, Celestial says, ?I will continue to support you, but not as your wife.? What do you think she means by this statement? Do you feel that Roy is wrong to reject her offer?

4. You may not have noticed that Tayari Jones does not specify the race of the woman who accuses Roy of rape. How did you picture this woman? What difference does the race of this woman make in the way you understand the novel?s storyline?

5. Andre insists that he doesn?t owe Roy an apology for the way his relationship with Celestial changed. Do you agree? Why or why not?

6. There are two father figures in Roy?s life: Big Roy is the one who shepherded him into adulthood and helped him grow into a responsible, capable person, but Walter is the one who taught Roy how to survive. Do you feel these men deserve equal credit? If not, which was the more important figure in Roy?s life and why?

7. Big Roy explains that he and Olive never had children of their own because Olive feared that he would not love Roy as much if he had his ?own? children. Do you feel she had the authority to make that decision? And do you feel she was right in making that decision?

8. When Roy is released from prison, he first goes to his childhood home and almost immediately makes a connection with Davina. Do you feel that given the tenuous relationship he has with Celestial --- who is still legally his wife --- he is cheating? Why or why not? And when Roy announces to Davina his intention to return to his wife, do you feel that her anger is justified?

9. Roy is hurt when Celestial, in discussing her career as an artist, doesn?t mention him or the role he played in giving her the encouragement and freedom to follow her dreams, but Walter argues that she is justified in her silence. Do you agree? Do you think her silence is due to shame, or is she just being practical in how she presents herself to advance her career?

10. It is obvious that Andre is different from Roy in many ways. Do you feel that ultimately he is a better match for Celestial? If so, why? Also, why do you think Celestial and Andre decide against formally marrying? Do you think that as a couple they will be good and nurturing parents? Do you feel that as a couple, they will be better at parenting than Celestial and Roy would have been? If so, why?

11. Do you think that Andre strategized to get Celestial to fall in love with him, or did it happen naturally? Do you feel that it was a surprise to them that it happened after all those years? Do you predict that Celestial?s parents will come to accept Andre as her life partner?

12. Toward the end of the novel, Celestial does a complete about-face and returns to Roy. What do you think her emotions were in coming to that decision? Do you feel that it was the right decision?

Author Bio

Tayari Jones is the author of five novels, most recently KIN and AN AMERICAN MARRIAGE, which was an Oprah?s Book Club selection and also appeared on Barack Obama?s summer reading list and his year-end roundup. It won the Women?s Prize for Fiction, the Aspen Words Literary Prize, and an NAACP Image Award, and has been published in two dozen countries. Jones is the C.H. Candler Professor of English and Creative Writing at Emory University and lives in Atlanta.

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