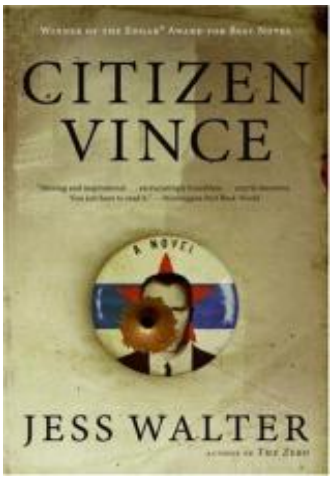
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Citizen Vince

by Jess Walter



About the Book

One day you know more dead people that live ones...

Jess Walter is a writer with a rare talent for finding humanity and emotional truths in lives lived on both sides of the law. With his third novel, **Citizen Vince**, Walter has crafted a story as inventive as it is suspenseful -- an irresistible tale about the price of freedom and the mystery of salvation.

It's the fall of 1980, eight days before a presidential election that pits the downtrodden Jimmy Carter against the suspiciously sunny Ronald Reagan ("Are you better off than you were four years ago?"). In a quiet house in Spokane, Washington, Vince Camden wakes up at 1:59 a.m., pockets his weekly stash of stolen credit cards, and drops in on an all-night poker game with his low-life friends on his way to his witness-protection job dusting crullers at Donut Make You Hungry. This is the sum of Vince's new life: donuts, forged credit cards, marijuana smuggled in jars of volcanic ash, and a neurotic hooker girlfriend who dreams of being a real estate agent.

But when a familiar face shows up in town, Vince realizes that no matter how far you think you've run from your past . . . it's always close behind you. Over the course of the next unforgettable week, on the run from Spokane to New York's Lower East Side, Vince Camden will negotiate a maze of obsessive cops, eager politicians, and emerging mobsters, only to find that redemption might just exist in -- of all places -- a voting booth.

Darkly funny and surprisingly hopeful, **Citizen Vince** is the story of a charming crook chasing the biggest score of his life: a second chance.

Discussion Guide

1. The epigraph of **Citizen Vince** comes from the Tao Te Ching: "A great nation is like a great man ... he thinks of his

enemy as the shadow that he himself casts." How does Ray Sticks serve Vince's shadow? Who is the shadow that Dupree must confront? And Beth? Jimmy Carter?

2. Vince Camden's interior monologue is often in the second person ("One day you know more dead people than live ones.") What does this say about him? When do we generally think of ourselves as you, in the second person? How is Vince's interior monologue sparked by the presidential debate?

3. As he's listening to the debate between Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan, Vince thinks that we sometimes miss the larger tides of history because we're so focused on waves of news and gossip. How are the issues that the candidates debate similar to the issues our country faces now? How are the issues and the rhetoric different?

4. Does Vince's infatuation with Kelly represent more than just an attraction to a beautiful girl? How does it differ from his relationship with Beth? What is it the two women want? Does the woman that Vince winds up with in the end of the book tell us anything about the true nature of the changes he has made?

5. A handful of fictionalized versions of historical figures appear in **Citizen Vince**, from John Gotti to Jimmy Carter. How do these "real people" affect your enjoyment of the novel? Do they lend it some credence or do they distract from the story? Why do you think the author chose to include these characters?

6. The sense of place is as important to Citizen Vince as any of the characters. How do Spokane and New York differ in Vince's eyes? How do they differ in Ray's eyes? By the end of the book, why does Vince think of Spokane as his home?

7. The novel doesn't make it clear which candidate Vince voted for. Who do you think he voted for? Does it matter in the framework of the novel?

8. Vince only reads the beginning of novels, because he is so often let down by the endings. Novels, he thinks, can only end one of two ways, artfully (forced and manipulated) or truthfully (ambiguously or more often, badly). How do you think he would like the ending of **Citizen Vince**?

Author Bio

Jess Walter is the author of eight novels, including the bestsellers SO FAR GONE, THE COLD MILLIONS and BEAUTIFUL RUINS, the National Book Award Finalist THE ZERO, and CITIZEN VINCE, winner of the Edgar Award for best novel. His short fiction, collected in THE ANGEL OF ROME and WE LIVE IN WATER, has won the O. Henry Prize, the Pushcart Prize and appeared three times in *Best American Short Stories*. As a reporter, he was a finalist for the 1993 Pulitzer Prize for his coverage of Ruby Ridge. He lives in his hometown of Spokane, Washington.

Critical Praise

Here are characters who seem to live of their own volition, who talk out of a terrible inner need to make themselves known and understood, who reveal not just themselves but the yearning heart of our great flawed democracy.

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