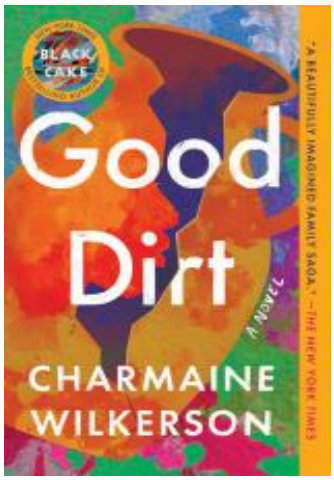
Good Dirt

by Charmaine Wilkerson



About the Book

The daughter of an affluent Black family pieces together the connection between a childhood tragedy and a beloved heirloom in this moving novel from the *New York Times* bestselling author of BLACK CAKE, a "Read with Jenna" Book Club pick.

When 10-year-old Ebby Freeman heard the gunshot, time stopped. And when she saw her brother, Baz, lying on the floor surrounded by the shattered pieces of a centuries-old jar, life as Ebby knew it shattered as well.

The crime was never solved, and because the Freemans were one of the only Black families in a particularly well-to-do enclave of New England, the case has had an enduring, voyeuristic pull for the public. The last thing the Freemans want is another media frenzy splashing their family across the papers, but when Ebby's high-profile romance falls apart without any explanation, that's exactly what they get.

So Ebby flees to France, only for her past to follow her there. And as she tries to process what's happened, she begins to think about the other loss her family suffered on that day 18 years ago --- the stoneware jar that had been in their family for generations, brought North by an enslaved ancestor. But little does she know that the handcrafted piece of pottery held more than just her family's history --- it also might hold the key to unlocking her own future.

In this sweeping, evocative novel, Charmaine Wilkerson brings to life a multi-generational epic that examines how the past informs our present.

Discussion Guide

1. There was the moment before and there would be everything after.? Prior to the shooting, the flashbacks to Baz and Ebby?s childhood depict them as carefree siblings with a strong bond. How does this before-and-after mentality shape

the way Ebby sees her life? How does Baz?s death haunt Ebby throughout her adult life?

2. What was your favorite part of the story? Favorite location and time period? The character who interested you the most?

3. Ebby?s decision to take refuge in a small French village after her wedding is called off is a pivotal moment. What do you think she was hoping to find in France, and how does this setting contrast with her life in the United States?

4. When Henry?s new partner, Avery, meets Ebby, she immediately knows who Ebby is: ?Here, in the middle-of-nowhere France, is yet another person who has formed an image of Ebby before they?ve even met her.? How does the novel portray the way trauma, particularly public trauma, becomes a part of a person?s identity? How does Ebby react to being known more for her tragedy than for her personal achievements?

5. Throughout the novel, Ebby?s physical appearance changes repeatedly as she experiments with hair color. How do you interpret these changes in the context of her emotional journey?

6. During a flashback to her childhood, Ebby feels uncomfortable with the attention the Freemans receive as a prominent Black family in Massachusetts. How does this discomfort evolve as Ebby grows older and gains more visibility in society? How does her family?s wealth and status complicate her feelings about race and belonging?

7. ?Sometimes, not recognizing someone?s worth can be an advantage.? Do you find this statement to be true for the characters in the novel? Discuss.

8. The novel shifts between different time periods and perspectives. How do these shifts in time help to deepen your understanding of the characters and their motivations? How does learning about Ebby?s ancestry shed light on the Freeman family?s lives today?

9. The Freeman family?s jar is described as a ?reminder of how you children came to be Freemans.? How does the jar?s presence in different moments of the story influence the characters? sense of identity and family legacy? What do you think the heirloom symbolizes for Ebby, specifically?

10. The theme of heritage and legacy is important in the novel, from the family?s historical ties to Refuge County to the jar that has been passed down for generations. How does the novel explore the concept of inheritance --- both material and emotional?

11. Old Mo, the cherished family jar, ultimately becomes a beloved museum exhibit. How do you think this shift from a personal family heirloom to a public artifact affects the emotional connection the Freemans have to it? How does Old Mo?s fate at the end of the novel mirror Ebby?s own story?

12. What do you think will happen to Ebby after the novel?s conclusion? Do you believe she will finally find peace and closure, or do you think her past will continue to influence her future decisions and relationships? What path do you imagine for her moving forward?

13. True crime is a very popular trend across television, film, books, podcasts and more. Did Ebby?s story make you

examine or reconsider how pop culture consumes other people?s stories and trauma?

14. What did you think of the five words on the bottom of the jar? How did you feel when the words were revealed?

15. If GOOD DIRT became a movie or TV show, who would you cast as each character?

Author Bio

Charmaine Wilkerson is the *New York Times* bestselling author of BLACK CAKE, which was named a "Read with Jenna" Book Club pick and adapted as a Hulu streaming series by Oprah Winfrey and Kapital Entertainment. She is an American writer who has lived in Jamaica and Italy. A graduate of Barnard College and Stanford University, she is a former journalist whose award-winning short fiction has appeared in various magazines and anthologies.

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Publication Date: January 27, 2026
Genres: Fiction, Women's Fiction
Paperback: 384 pages
Publisher: Ballantine Books
ISBN-10: 0593358384
ISBN-13: 9780593358382