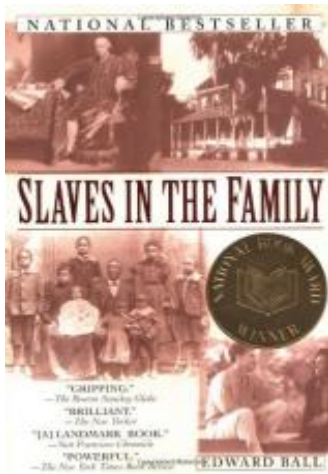


Slaves In The Family

by Edward Ball



About the Book

Edward Ball, descendant of a seventeenth-century plantation owner in Charleston, South Carolina, chronicles the lives of the people who lived in his ancestors' lands: the African slaves, mulatto children, and his own white landowning relatives. This is the story of black and white families living side by side through three hundred years. As Ball searches out descendants of the slaves his family owned, he confronts his own fears and prejudices about slavery and his family.

Discussion Guide

1. In the interview accompanying this guide, Edward Ball and Sonya Fordham discuss what they learned about slavery in school. What did you learn about slavery in school? How much of what you learned and what was taught was influenced by where you grew up, your own race, or the race of your teachers?
2. What did you learn about slavery and the history of African-Americans in America from this book that you did not already know? What surprised you about what you learned?
3. Do you feel the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s succeeded? Why or why not? What impact has the movement had on your life?
4. The subject of reparations for the descendants of slaves is one that Ball and Fordham touch upon in their interview. What are your feelings about reparations? What are the arguments for and against paying reparations in your view?
5. Do you know of a history of slavery in your own family, and if so, would you do as Edward Ball has and try to contact descendants of the slaves or the descendants of slave owners? Why would you want to contact them? What reaction would you expect?

6. Were you surprised by any of the reactions Ball received from descendants he contacted and met? Why or why not?
7. In one of his conversations with Leon Smalls, Ball asks Smalls if it is better to talk about the past and get it out in the open, or keep things in the past and let them rest (p. 126). Do you agree with Smalls's response that it's better to talk about and confront the past?
8. Much of Ball's story took place in or around Charleston, South Carolina, and his conversation with Fordham further discusses the community in Charleston today. How do whites, African-Americans, Asians, and people of other races interact in your community? Are there still traces of slavery's influence in your community? Have race relations in your community changed in your lifetime? What factors contributed to any changes? How is your community different from or similar to the portrait Fordham and Ball paint of Charleston?
9. Many people say, "Don't talk to me about slavery, because my family came to America after the Civil War." What do you reply to Ball's statement that white families who came to the United States after the end of slavery struggled, especially immigrants who arrived via Ellis Island; but that these families also benefited from the inheritance of slavery, because they entered a caste society, created by racism, that gave white immigrants better housing, education, and jobs than native-born black Americans and lifted whites into the middle class?
10. What is your opinion of Ball's view that white Americans are not responsible for the slave past, but they are accountable for it; that they are obliged to come to terms with it, because slavery not only did damage to many Americans, but it also shaped what it means to be white?

Author Bio

Critical Praise

"Fascinating reading; there is simply nothing quite like it in print. "

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