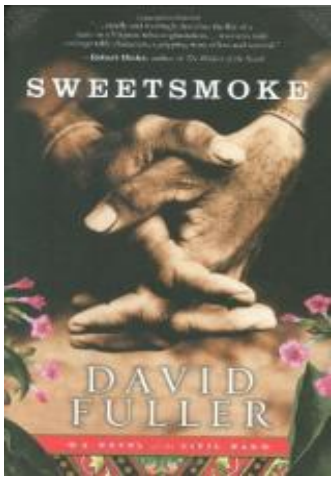
Sweetsmoke

by David Fuller



About the Book

The year is 1862, and the Civil War rages through the South. On a Virginia tobacco plantation, another kind of battle soon begins. There, Cassius Howard, a skilled carpenter and slave, risks everything?punishment, sale to a cotton plantation, even his life?to learn the truth concerning the murder of Emoline, a freed black woman, a woman who secretly taught him to read and once saved his life. It is clear that no one cares about her death in the midst of a brutal and hellish war. No one but Cassius, who braves horrific dangers to escape the plantation and avenge her loss.

As Cassius seeks answers about Emoline?s murder, he finds an unexpected friend and ally in Quashee, a new woman brought over from another plantation; and a formidable adversary in Hoke Howard, the master he has always obeyed.

With subtlety and beauty, **Sweetsmoke** captures the daily indignities and harrowing losses suffered by slaves, the turmoil of a country waging countless wars within its own borders, and the lives of those people fighting for identity, for salvation, and for freedom.

Discussion Guide

1. Do you think Cassius is a moral man? What makes someone moral or amoral?

2. Cassius accepts the blame when Tempie Easter is sold to a cotton and rice plantation. Do you think he was right or wrong in what he did? Could there have been another way?

3. The slaves? dialogue on the page does not include quotation marks. Why do you think the author did this? How did that affect your reading of the novel?

4. Hoke Howard has a number of sons in the narrative, and he has very different relationships with each of them. Taking

his attitude toward his children as a whole, what portrait does this paint of the man? After all they have been through, why does Cassius still carry a small modicum of affection for his master?

5. Politics is rampant throughout the lane in the slave quarters, as both men and women jockey for power and privileges. Discuss the politics of the slaves? lives. How are the same politics mirrored in the white community?

6. Cassius spends part of his time considering his name, wondering if he should change it. What is the importance of Cassius? name? How does it mold him, and change him? Do you think he should have changed his name? Why or why not?

7. Ellen Howard?s is the only point of view -- other than Cassius?s -- through which we see the story unfold. Why do you think the author included her perspective?

8. Discuss Cassius? relationship with God and religion. How is his perspective of religion changed by the fact that he can read? How are his views different than the other slaves? What role does traditional African religion play in the lives of the slaves?

9. Emoline Justice is revealed to be a spy for the Union. She has kept secrets her entire life. Cassius is devoted to her, but feels at one point as if her secrets are a betrayal. Why do you think she felt it necessary to keep things from Cassius?

10. Ultimately, Cassius has to make a decision as to whether to let a murderer live. Do you agree with his decision? He understands the great consequences of his decision before he makes it, as many others will be affected. Why do you think he made the decision that he did?

Author Bio

Critical Praise

"**Sweetsmoke** is a fascinating and gripping novel about the Civil War. The slave, Cassius Howard, is a great fictional character, and his story is part mystery, part love story, and a harrowing portrait of slavery that reads with the immense power of the slave narratives. A tour de force for David Fuller."

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Publication Date: September 1, 2008
Hardcover: 320 pages
Publisher: Hyperion
ISBN-10: 1401323316
ISBN-13: 9781401323318