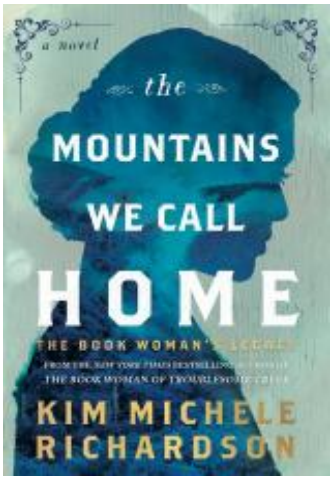
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The Mountains We Call Home: The Book Woman's Legacy

by Kim Michele Richardson



About the Book

In this stand-alone and companion novel to the *Book Woman of Troublesome Creek* series, our heroine for the ages, legendary book woman Cussy Lovett, returns home.

A powerful testament of strength, survival and the magic of the printed word, THE MOUNTAINS WE CALL HOME is wrapped into a vivid portrait of Kentucky life: examining incarceration and criminalization, exploring the effects on the poor and powerless, and tracing the societal consequences of fractured family bonds, along with nostalgic glimpses of a bustling, multifaceted Louisville, and heartwarming portraits of reading efforts in every facet of life.

Meticulously researched and richly detailed with a new cast of absorbing and complex characters, this beautifully rendered, authentic Kentucky tale is gritty and heartbreaking and infused with hope, spirit and courage known only to those with no way out.

Discussion Guide

1. Thinking of Rosemary Kennedy, and looking back throughout history, more women than men were lobotomized. Discuss what feminine ?traits? were deemed so undesirable or embarrassing as to justify lobotomy. Anxiety? Depression? Hysteria? How amorphous is the definition of that? Could it also have included the excise of free will in opposition to the male?

2. According to studies, U.S. Correctional Education is traced back to 1789 and was named ?Sabbath School? so that inmates would learn to read the Bible. It was designed to encourage inmates to ask for forgiveness for their sins and to change one?s moral compass to be virtuous. Today, educational degrees and various studies are offered in U.S. prisons. Can you think of other ways to help reduce recidivism?

3. What happens when others and/or the government decide what books you or your loved ones can or can?t read?

4. When the bustling West Walnut Street district fell to Urban Renewal, it devasted families, inflicted generational poverty on thousands, and destroyed a thriving, diverse culture. What do you think those in power hoped to achieve? Why was the land that was ?renewed? allowed to go to seed? What was the government?s intention? Discuss the impact the inherited businesses would have had on future children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. What changes, if any, have been made to revitalize these vacant areas?

5. Thinking of the Supreme Court case *Loving v. Virginia*, what legacy was left by laws in place before the landmark decision, and how were lives changed by it? What would banishment from towns, communities and churches mean to those who long for belonging?

6. Looking back to 1936 in THE BOOK WOMAN OF TROUBLESOME CREEK with Sheriff Davies Kimbo destroying the marriage license, and on to Daniel, who was incarcerated for being a homosexual in the 1950s, and then to the former Kentucky county clerk who denied same-sex couples a marriage license as recently as 2015, what has changed --- and what role, if any, should government or any powers-that-be play in private lives?

7. Mrs. Claxton and Cussy run out of gas and land in a hostile town. Published annually from 1936-1966, THE NEGRO MOTORIST GREEN BOOK enabled Blacks to safely navigate roads and avoid discrimination and danger. Discuss the value of the annual book and the possible risks of not having one.

8. Looking at inequities in the justice system, like mass incarceration, what are the pros and cons of prison for drug addiction and/or relatively minor offenses versus serious and violent crimes?

9. Cussy was born in 1917. Babies were generally delivered at home during this time, and births were often recorded in Bibles, baptismal and cradle roll certificates that were later used for identification. The first Social Security cards in the U.S. were issued in 1936. It wasn?t until the 1980s when parents of newborns could request Social Security cards for an infant. In 1934, Kentucky started issuing driver's licenses. How has personal identification evolved in the U.S.? Can you think of other ways the government could record births 100+ years ago and track citizens?

10. Prison wine or jailhouse hooch has always been part of the culture for the incarcerated. Today, jails and prisons limit fresh fruit/produce and rarely provide it to inmates for fear of it being fermented into alcohol. This results in the incarcerated having weakened immune systems.

In a few states, free telephone calls are allowed for the incarcerated. Yet in most, inmates and loved ones are charged excessive fees that are controlled and run by wealthy outside companies, making it extremely difficult for loved ones and friends to connect, leaving inmates lost and forgotten. Can you think of ways the U.S. could improve the mental and physical health of the incarcerated?

11. Women are rarely sentenced to death. Do gender stereotypes work against or in favor of women in the justice system? Does that influence differ depending on the crime? Has that changed as women have gained more autonomy?

12. Thinking about rural vs. urban living and how shocked Cussy is by seeing so much waste, spending and frivolity in the city, but also how much more opportunity the city offers, what are the advantages and disadvantages of living rural or in a city? Do you see bigger wastes and frivolity of lifestyles in either one?

13. The majority who received forced sterilization under eugenics laws were women. The eugenics movement and forced abortions existed at the same time when abortions were criminalized. Discuss how people might have accepted these contradictory ideas.

14. Superstitions are often passed down from generation to generation. For example, the phenomenon of angel crowns or death crowns introduced in this book are unique to Appalachia and often become heirlooms if found. Shotgun houses were known to hold superstitions, which is why some homeowners insisted the entry or back doors be built unaligned. In the book, the governor appears as both a god-fearing and superstitious man when confronted by reporters about a second execution for Sassyann. Discuss any superstitions that were passed down to you and if you adhere to them.

15. Mrs. Claxton risks her life to help Cussy escape. Would you have done the same? Was it right for Cussy to run away, or should she have served out her sentence?

16. The Free Library of Philadelphia uses unique ?Book Bikes? pedaled by library staff to provide mobile outreach services. Melanie Moore of Cincy Book Bus Depot refurbished an antique VW book bus she named Tilly to reach readers. Did you have a bookmobile growing up? What kind of bookmobile would you design today?

Author Bio

A native-born Kentuckian, Kim Michele Richardson is the *New York Times*, *L.A. Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author who has written six novels, a memoir and, most recently, two children?s picture books. The works have been published in more than 18 languages, and she is a two-time Southern Book Prize finalist.

Her novel THE BOOK WOMAN OF TROUBLESOME CREEK is taught widely in high schools and college classrooms and has been adopted as a Common Read selection by states, cities and colleges across the country and abroad, and was a Favorite Read by Dolly Parton in *People*.

Kim Michele was inducted into the Kentucky Women?s Remembers Exhibit in 2025 by Gov. Andy Beshear for her contributions to Kentucky, and was awarded a Doctorate in Humanities from Eastern Kentucky University. She lives with her family in Kentucky and is the founder of Shy Rabbit, a writers residency, and a literacy initiative, *Courthouses Reading Across Kentucky & Beyond.*

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