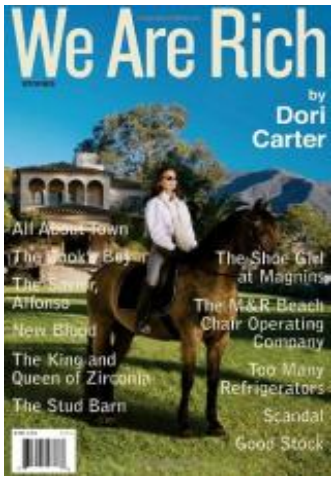
We Are Rich

by Dori Carter



About the Book

The little, leafy town of Rancho Esperanza has been a perfect place to live for well over a century --- a bastion of good, solid, Anglo-Saxon, Republican money. These founding fathers built their gracious estates and country club and fondly called their town ?Ohio by the Sea.? There was only one traffic light and time seemed to stop at the freeway off-ramp. Then came the Clinton years and the invasion of the New American Ruling Class: New York hedge fund managers, Hollywood producers, and Silicon Valley billionaires. Almost overnight, real estate prices quadrupled, horse pastures vanished, tuna tartare and arugula appeared on every menu, and a Democratic congresswoman was elected by a landslide. The Old Guard aristocrats of yesterday are now irrelevant and the only power they have is keeping the Kornblatts out of their country club. Twelve characters with distinctly different voices tell their tales of lust and longing spanning the years from World War II to the present --- each story a portion of a jigsaw puzzle. When the last piece is put in place, the secrets and lies, guarded for generations, are revealed, changing everything we thought was true about Rancho Esperanza and the people who live there.

Written as a novel in stories, Dori Carter?s social satire gets into the hearts and souls of her characters, and presents a fresh look at our attitudes toward money and the ever-shifting nature of status in America.

Discussion Guide

1. When Peter goes back to Rancho Esperanza as an adult for the Fourth of July party at the Crowell?s much smaller home on the golf course, he discovers that Claire has married Nacho. Chicky declares that she doesn?t give a damn if the neighbors at Seven Oaks think she has ?turned their precious place into little Tijuana.? Peter describes Chicky as ?lofting her margarita glass?high above her head, like the Statue of Liberty.? Discuss the symbolism inferred by this observation. Who has been liberated? Discuss the irony of where Chicky and Lincoln wind up having to live after the fire.

2. Jerry says ?I never hide the fact that I?m a Jew, but neither do I advertise it to people who aren?t Jewish.? Discuss the

significance of this statement. In what ways has Jerry attempted to hide the fact that he was Jewish? In what ways does he overcompensate to buck Jewish stereotypes? In what ways does his faith and family history define Jerry? What is the significance of the title of Jerry?s story: ?The Savior, Alfonso?? What does Alfonso save Jerry from?

3. What did you think of Sally?s decision to have a tryst with Nacho? Did you sympathize with her? Did it make you think less of her? Of him?

4. Leigh believes that Nancy lets her guard down in front of her because ?I wasn?t someone whose judgment she had to fear.? Is this true? Did Nancy have something to fear in her relationship with Leigh?

5. Several characters in We Are Rich speak of wanting ?justice.? Peter says of Chicky: ?The class distinction she so effortlessly conveyed offended my instinctive sense of justice, never more so than when she referred to me as ?the cook?s boy?.? Speaking of Leigh?s desire to see Howard and Nancy Berry exposed as phonies and frauds, Mac tells Leigh ?You want some kind of justice but you?re not going to get it.? In their refusal to settle with Delilah, Jerry and Renee want to see justice served. In the end does anyone get the justice they are seeking?

6. When Lincoln discovers Walter and Lailani having sex in the stud barn at the school fundraiser, he has such a visceral reaction to this that he has a stroke. Discuss the reasons why he may have responded in this way. Does Lincoln?s righteous indignation seem hypocritical considering what we discover about his past?

7. In ?The M&R Beach Chair Operating Company,? when Zane took all the credit for the student film that he and Ian made, how did it make you feel about Ian? About Zane? What lessons did Ian learn from the situation? In ?The Savior, Alfonso? Jerry cherishes the lessons he learned from his own father but worries he has nothing to teach his son, Ian. What life lessons does Ian end up learning from Jerry?

8. In ?The Scandal? Bobby Bingham says, ?No matter what you may think of George and Barbara Bush?s desiccate personalities, at least they knew how to carry on a tradition. They tried to pass the torch to their sons and what did Dubya and Jeb Boy do? They let the torch go out. And you think the Bush girls --- those teenybopper twins of his --- are going to relight it? Once the torch is out, it?s out forever.? Can you name some characters in We Are Rich who, despite having every advantage, fail to carry on the tradition of their lofty lineage? Discuss examples of characters in the book who are representative of the American Dream in that they have the fire and ambition to make more of themselves than previous generations in their families.

9. Translated from the Spanish, the name Fidelia means loyalty. In Edmund Spenser?s epic poem ?The Faerie Queene,? the character Fidelia is full of quiet grace and dignity as she teaches the Red Cross Knight about discipline, causing him to be repentant. Discuss loyalty as it pertains to the character Fidelia in We Are Rich. Who has been loyal to her? Who has she been loyal to? Has she been disloyal to anyone? In what ways does her inner resolve serve as a mirror that exposes the sins of others in We Are Rich?

10. After two failed marriages but remarkable professional success, Peter says of himself, ?I was driven to prove myself to people who probably never gave me a moment?s thought.? Was this true of Peter all along, even as a child? What other characters in the book have this same inclination?

11. Does it surprise you when Peter and Leigh end up together? Do you find them compatible? What type of relationship

do you imagine them having?

12. There is a lot of discussion of art in the book. In ?The Stud Barn? Lincoln follows his tirade about modern art with the statement ?I wouldn?t try to define art for anybody.? Does he actually have opinions about what is and what is not art? How do various characters in the book define art? Bobby Bingham?s fake illustrations are believed by the Berrys to be objects of great worth, although they turn out to be worthless fakes. In Steve Farkey?s closing ?All About Town? piece, Nancy is quoted as referring to these fakes as ?a priceless piece of Rancho Esperanza?s history.? In what ways is this an accurate assessment? Discuss the significance of the Kornblatt?s $7,000 mirror being the cause of the fire?

13. We?re told that Elliott Kornblatt earned his fortune as ?a big mucky muck at Lehman Brothers.? Do you think the author is making a statement about the current global economic crisis? Discuss the parallels between some of the characters in the book and some of the real-life figures who?ve made headlines in recent months.

Author Bio

Dori Carter divides her time between Santa Barbara, California, and Jackson, Wyoming. Her first novel, **Beautiful Wasps Having Sex,** was a *Los Angeles Times* bestseller.

Critical Praise

"Dori Carter writes with deceptive ease and a sly wit that cuts to the bone. Her insider?s view of the collision of comfortable and complacent Cadillac old money with Ferrari carelessness and ambition in the sheltered retreat of Rancho Esperanza reminds me of the pleasures of first reading John O?Hara and Fitzgerald on the same culture clash in another time not unlike our own."

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