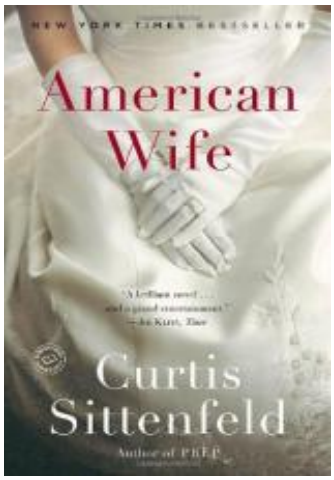
American Wife

by Curtis Sittenfeld



About the Book

On what might become one of the most significant days in her husband?s presidency, Alice Blackwell considers the strange and unlikely path that has led her to the White House --- and the repercussions of a life lived, as she puts it, ?almost in opposition to itself.?

A kind, bookish only child born in the 1940s, Alice learned the virtues of politeness early on from her stolid parents and small Wisconsin hometown. But a tragic accident when she was seventeen shattered her identity and made her understand the fragility of life and the tenuousness of luck. So more than a decade later, when she met boisterous, charismatic Charlie Blackwell, she hardly gave him a second look: She was serious and thoughtful, and he would rather crack a joke than offer a real insight; he was the wealthy son of a bastion family of the Republican party, and she was a school librarian and registered Democrat. Comfortable in her quiet and unassuming life, she felt inured to his charms. And then, much to her surprise, Alice fell for Charlie.

As Alice learns to make her way amid the clannish energy and smug confidence of the Blackwell family, navigating the strange rituals of their country club and summer estate, she remains uneasy with her newfound good fortune. And when Charlie eventually becomes President, Alice is thrust into a position she did not seek --- one of power and influence, privilege and responsibility. As Charlie?s tumultuous and controversial second term in the White House wears on, Alice must face contradictions years in the making: How can she both love and fundamentally disagree with her husband? How complicit has she been in the trajectory of her own life? What should she do when her private beliefs run against her public persona?

In Alice Blackwell, *New York Times* bestselling author Curtis Sittenfeld has created her most dynamic and complex heroine yet. **American Wife** is a gorgeously written novel that weaves class, wealth, race, and the exigencies of fate into a brilliant tapestry --- a novel in which the unexpected becomes inevitable, and the pleasures and pain of intimacy and love are laid bare.

Discussion Guide

1. The novel opens and ends with Alice Blackwell wondering if she?s made terrible mistakes. Do you think she has? If so, what are they?

2. Alice?s grandmother passes down her love of reading to Alice. What else do they have in common? What does reading provide for Alice throughout her life?

3. Why does Andrew Imhof remain such an important figure to Alice, even decades later? Do you think they would have ended up together under different circumstances?

4. To what do you attribute Dena?s anger at what she calls Alice?s betrayal? Do you think her anger is justified? Are there other issues influencing Dena?s decision regarding their relationship?

5. After her confrontation with Pete Imhof in her early thirties, Alice states, ?Long ago, I had become my own confidante.? What does she mean by this?

6. Is Charlie Blackwell a likable character? How did you feel about Alice?s decision to stay with him despite the problems they encountered in their marriage? Why do you think she continues to love him even though they are so different in so many ways?

7. Alice states that she lives a life in opposition to itself. What does she mean by this statement, and do you agree with it?

8. Does Alice compromise herself and her ideals by marrying Charlie? She tells him before they wed that she never wants to become a public figure. Do you think this has changed by the time he becomes president?

9. Were you surprised by the scene between Alice and Joe at the Princeton reunion? Why do you think it happened?

10. What would you have done in Alice?s situation at the end of the novel if you shared her beliefs? Do you think it was wrong of her to take the stance she did?

11. How do you think Laura Bush would react to this novel if she read it?

12. How is this book different from Sittenfeld?s previous two novels, other than in its subject matter?

Author Bio

Curtis Sittenfeld is the *New York Times* bestselling author of the novels PREP, THE MAN OF MY DREAMS,

AMERICAN WIFE, SISTERLAND, ELIGIBLE, RODHAM and ROMANTIC COMEDY, as well as the collections YOU THINK IT, I'LL SAY IT and SHOW DON'T TELL, which have been translated into 30 languages. Her short stories have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The Washington Post Magazine*, *Esquire* and *The Best American Short Stories*, of which she was the 2020 guest editor. Her nonfiction has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Atlantic*, *Time* and *Vanity Fair*, and on public radio?s "This American Life."

Critical Praise

"Curtis Sittenfeld is an amazing writer, and **American Wife** is a brave and moving novel about the intersection of private and public life in America. Ambitious and humble at the same time, Sittenfeld refuses to trivialize or simplify people, whether real or imagined."

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Publication Date: February 10, 2009
Paperback: 568 pages
Publisher: Random House Trade Paperbacks
ISBN-10: 0812975405
ISBN-13: 9780812975406