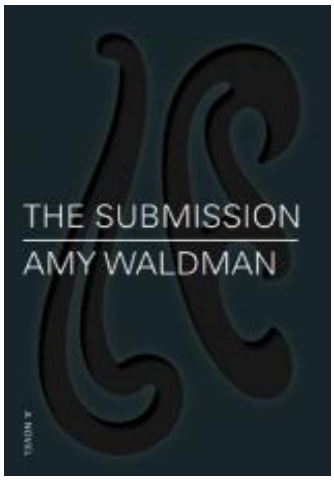
The Submission

by Amy Waldman



About the Book

Reimagining 9/11 and its aftermath, Amy Waldman?s provocative novel begins with a resonant scene: a jury gathers in Manhattan to choose a memorial for the victims of a devastating Islamic terrorist attack. After tense deliberations, they select the Garden, which features trees both living and made from salvaged steel. Then the jury discovers that the anonymous architect who created the winning design is an American Muslim.

The revelation triggers both fury and ambivalence throughout New York, making the designer --- the staunchly independent Mohammed ?Mo? Khan --- a symbol of beliefs that seem foreign to him. His most visible defender is Claire Harwell, the only member of the selection committee who lost a loved one in the attack. Cool and eloquent, Claire grows increasingly frustrated by Mo as he stubbornly refuses to answer concerns about the origins or meaning of his design.

At the helm of the memorial project is Paul Rubin, a grandson of Jewish peasants who has risen to a position of influence and wealth. Paul?s idea of America is rooted in tolerance, but he must also take into account the emotions of outraged, grieving family members who want him to quash Mo?s design. Within the crowds, two powerful voices come to dominate the debate: the widow of an undocumented worker who cleaned offices champions Mo?s design, while the brother of a fallen firefighter calls it the worst kind of disrespect. As the emotional rhetoric escalates, The Submission becomes a mesmerizing meditation on the human experience.

Raising profound questions about the impact of 9/11 on the American psyche, **The Submission** explores the essence of grief and healing. We hope the following questions will enrich your reading group?s experience of this stirring debut novel.

Discussion Guide

1. What do you think the purpose and message of a national memorial should be? Would you have voted for the Void or

the Garden?

2. Reread the epigraph. What do its words suggest about the relationship between nature and human nature?

3. As Claire tries to explain the tragedy to William (and, in a way, to Penelope), what does she discover about her own beliefs and feelings?

4. Mo is under considerable pressure to give the ?right? reasons when asked why he entered the competition, but he defies simplistic answers. What does his design communicate on its own? For any creative work --- including novels --- should the author?s biography matter to us? Do you think he was obligated to explain himself and his design? Why or why not?

5. Chapter 16 begins with a depiction of Mo?s hunger and thirst during Ramadan. We?re told, ?The truth was he didn?t know why he was doing it.? How does it affect him, a secular skeptic, to join Muslims worldwide in observing the fast?

6. How did your reactions shift as Sean?s story unfolded, especially as he struggled with conflicting feelings after pulling Zahira?s scarf? Is bigotry excusable if it?s coming from someone whose loved one was the victim of a horrific crime? What are the limits of a survivor?s rights?

7. Asma?s memories of Inam are her private inheritance, and she must rely on translators to convey her messages in English. Did anyone in the novel have a truly accurate understanding of her suffering? How was her mourning experience different from Claire?s and Sean?s? What common emotions do all of the novel?s survivors share?

8. Many of the characters desperately want someone to blame for their loss. The final line of chapter 22, referring to Alyssa, reads, ?She is responsible.? Ultimately, who is responsible for the tragedies depicted in the novel?

9. What would you have done in Paul Rubin?s situation? Was it courageous or insensitive of him to permit Mo?s submission to move forward?

10. A journalist, Amy Waldman had special insight into Alyssa?s world. What does the novel tell us about the role of the media (exploited by all parties involved) and the impact of a free press in the information age?

11. How does Claire?s sense of self change when Jack reappears in her life? Did Cal, despite his wealth, cost her an important part of her identity?

12. Discuss the novel?s title. To what (and to whom) must the characters submit? Who are the novel?s most and least submissive characters?

13. An uproar erupted in 2010 when Park51, a community center housing a mosque, was proposed for construction two blocks from Ground Zero. What does this conflict --- and the one described in The Submission --- suggest about how 9/11 might have transformed American society? (Note: Amy Waldman began writing The Submission several years before Park51 was announced.)

14. What makes fiction a powerful way to explore events that shaped our lives? What can a novel achieve that

journalism and testimonials can?t?

15. In the final ?dialogue? between Claire and Mo, orchestrated by Molly and William, is anything resolved? What does the closing image of a cairn show us about the heart of the novel, and the role of future generations in resolving history?

Author Bio

Amy Waldman's first novel, THE SUBMISSION, won the Janet Heidinger Kafka Prize and an American Book Award and was named a Finalist for the PEN Hemingway Award. It was *Entertainment Weekly*'s #1 Novel for the Year, *Esquire* 's Book of the Year, a *New York Times* Best Book for 2011, one of NPR's Ten Best Novels of the Year, and a *Washington Post* Notable Fiction Book. In the UK, it was a Finalist for *The Guardian* First Book Award and was longlisted for the Orange Prize. Amy was South Asia Bureau Chief for the *New York Times* and a national correspondent for the Atlantic. She graduated from Yale University and has been a Fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study and at the American Academy in Berlin. She lives with her family in Brooklyn.

Critical Praise

"Amy Waldman writes like a possessed angel. She also has the emotional smarts to write a story about Islam in America that fearlessly lasers through all our hallucinatory politics with elegant concision. It?s a literary breakthrough that reads fast and breaks your heart."

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