

Women's Prize for Fiction 2019

Reading Group Guide

An American Marriage by Tayari Jones Oneworld

Also by Tayari Jones:
The Untelling (2007)
Leaving Atlanta (2009)
Silver Sparrow (2012)

About the book

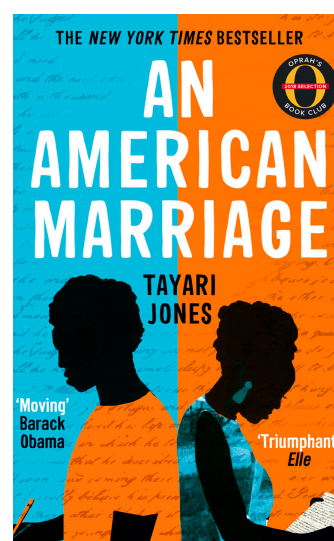
Newlyweds Celestial and Roy are the embodiment of the American Dream. He is a young executive, and she is an artist on the brink of an exciting career. Until one day they are ripped apart by circumstances neither could have imagined. Roy is arrested and sentenced to twelve years for a crime Celestial knows he didn't commit.

Devastated and unmoored, Celestial finds herself struggling to hold on to the love that has been her centre, taking comfort in Andre, their closest friend. When Roy's conviction is suddenly overturned, he returns home ready to resume their life together.

A masterpiece of storytelling, *An American Marriage* offers a profoundly insightful look into the hearts and minds of three unforgettable characters who are at once bound together and separated by forces beyond their control.

About the author

Tayari Jones is the author of four novels, including *Silver Sparrow*, *The Untelling*, and *Leaving Atlanta*. Jones holds degrees from Spelman College, Arizona State University, and the University of Iowa. She serves on the MFA faculty at Rutgers and blogs on writing at www.tayarijones.com/blog. She lives in Brooklyn.



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Questions and discussion points

1. The book is told from various perspectives, including letters between Roy and Celestial. What purpose does this have?
2. Tayari Jones concentrates more on the intimate relationships between the characters, than Roy's trial and incarceration. How do you think this focus helps us to understand the characters?
3. What does the novel reveal about injustice in the American criminal justice system?
4. Some readers have been surprised that Celestial does not act in the way they anticipated. Do you think it's important for a novel to break expectations in this way? Do you find it surprising how Celestial's feelings change over time?
5. What role does class play in the novel, in particular when examined in relation to race?

Suggested reading

Sing, Unburied, Sing by Jesmyn Ward

Surviving Justice compiled and edited by Lola Vollen and Dave Eggers

A Lucky Man by Jamel Brinkley

Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates

The Sun Does Shine by Anthony Ray Hinton

Useful links

[A Marriage Upended, a Life Destroyed](#)

[The Epistolary Heart of An American Marriage](#)

[Oprah's newest book club pick: An American Marriage by Tayari Jones](#)

[If I Can't Cry, Nobody Cries: An Interview with Tayari Jones](#)

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