

An American Marriage

(Questions)

1. The title of this novel is "An American Marriage." Do you feel this title accurately represents the novel? Why or why not? And if you do find the title appropriate, what about the story makes it particularly "American"?
2. When Celestial asks Roy if he would have waited for her for more than five years, he doesn't answer her question but reminds her that, as a woman, she would not have been imprisoned in the first place. Do you feel that his response is valid, and do you think it justifies his infidelity? Do you believe that he would have remained faithful if Celestial had been the one incarcerated? Does this really matter, and if so, why?
3. In her "Dear John" letter to Roy, Celestial says, "I will continue to support you, but not as your wife." What do you think she means by this statement? Do you feel that Roy is wrong to reject her offer?
4. You may not have noticed that Tayari Jones does not specify the race of the woman who accuses Roy of rape. How did you picture this woman? What difference does the race of this woman make in the way you understand the novel's storyline?
5. Andre insists that he doesn't owe Roy an apology for the way his relationship with Celestial changed. Do you agree? Why or why not?
- 6). There are two father figures in Roy's life: Big Roy is the one who shepherded him into adulthood and helped him grow into a responsible, capable person, but Walter is the one who taught Roy how to survive. Do you feel these men deserve equal credit? If not, which was the more important figure in Roy's life and why?
7. Big Roy explains that he and Olive never had children of their own because Olive feared that he would not love Roy as much if he had his "own" children. Do

you feel she had the authority to make that decision? And do you feel she was right in making that decision?

8. When Roy is released from prison, he first goes to his childhood home and almost immediately makes a connection with Davina. Do you feel that given the tenuous relationship he has with Celestial—who is still legally his wife—he is cheating? Why or why not? And when Roy announces to Davina his intention to return to his wife, do you feel that her anger is justified?

9. Roy is hurt when Celestial, in discussing her career as an artist, doesn't mention him or the role he played in giving her the encouragement and freedom to follow her dreams, but Walter argues that she is justified in her silence. Do you agree? Do you think her silence is due to shame, or is she just being practical in how she presents herself to advance her career?

10. It is obvious that Andre is different from Roy in many ways. Do you feel that ultimately he is a better match for Celestial? If so, why? Also, why do you think Celestial and Andre decide against formally marrying? Do you think that as a couple they will be good and nurturing parents? Do you feel that as a couple, they will be better at parenting than Celestial and Roy would have been? If so, why?

11. Do you think that Andre strategized to get Celestial to fall in love with him, or did it happen naturally? Do you feel that it was a surprise to them that it happened after all those years? Do you predict that Celestial's parents will come to accept Andre as her life partner?

12. Toward the end of the novel, Celestial does a complete about-face and returns to Roy. What do you think her emotions were in coming to that decision? Do you feel that it was the right decision?

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(About the Author)

- Birth— November 30, 1970
- Where—Atlanta, Georgia, USA
- Education—Spelman College; Arizona State University; University of Iowa
- Awards—Hurston/Wright Legacy Award (twice); Lillian C. Smith Award
- Currently—lives in Brooklyn, New York City

New York Times best-selling author, Tayari Jones, is the author of four novels, including *An American Marriage* (2018, an Oprah Book Club pick), *Silver Sparrow* (2011), *The Untelling* (2005), and *Leaving Atlanta* (2002). Published in 2018, *An American Marriage* is an Oprah's Book Club Selection and also appeared on Barack Obama's summer reading list as well as his end of the year roundup. The novel was awarded the Women's Prize for Fiction (formerly known as the Orange Prize), Aspen Words Prize and an NAACP Image Award. With over 500,000 copies in print domestically, it has been published in two dozen countries.

Jones holds degrees from Spelman College, Arizona State University, and the University of Iowa. She lives in Brooklyn. Currently, she serves on the MFA faculty at Rutgers-Newark. She has also been the recipient of the Shearing Fellow for Distinguished Writers at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. (*Adapted from the publisher and Wikipedia. Retrieved 2/6/2018.*)

<https://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/fiction/11224-american-marriage-jones?start=1>

<http://www.tayarijones.com/about/>

An American Marriage

(Reviews)

Jones maintains a brisk pace.... The dialogue ...[is] sometimes too heavily weighted by exposition, and the language slides toward melodrama. But the central conflict is masterfully executed: Jones ... explore[s] simmering class tensions and ...racial injustice.

Publishers Weekly

Jones's writing is engagingly layered with letters between the main characters integrated through the narrative. Her personal letter to readers demonstrates how writing this novel changed her. —*Ashanti White, Fayetteville, NC*

Library Journal

Jones crafts an affecting tale that explores marriage, family, regret, and other feelings made all the more resonant by her well-drawn characters and their intricate conflicts of heart and mind.

Booklist

Subtle, well-crafted, and powerful.... This is, at its heart, a love story, but a love story warped by racial injustice. And, in it, Jones suggests that racial injustice haunts the African-American story.

Kirkus Reviews



[A]n enchanting novel.... [It] explores philosophical and political quandaries, including generational expectations of men and women, the place of marriage in society, systemic racism, toxic masculinity ... [while] avoiding didacticism... [G]ripping, and the characters are unforgettable.

Forward Reviews

An American Marriage (Enhancement)

This novel deals with the racial inequities against African Americans in the American South and how it affects the family life of the main characters, Celestial and Roy, a married couple. Roy is imprisoned for a crime he did not commit.

There is substantial research on the topic of rates of imprisonment by racial group.

“The color of Justice: Racial and ethnic disparity in state prisons” by Ashley Nellis”

Truly meaningful reforms to the criminal justice system cannot be accomplished without acknowledgement of racial and ethnic disparities in the prison system, and focused attention on reduction of disparities. Since the majority of people in prison are sentenced at the state level rather than the federal level, it is critical to understand the variation in racial and ethnic composition across states, and the policies and the day-to-day practices that contribute to this variance.

Incarceration creates a host of collateral consequences that include restricted employment prospects, housing instability, family disruption, stigma, and disenfranchisement. These consequences set individuals back by imposing new punishments after prison. Collateral consequences are felt disproportionately by people of color, and because of concentrations of poverty and imprisonment in certain jurisdictions, it is now the case that entire communities experience these negative effects.

KEY FINDINGS

- African Americans are incarcerated in state prisons at a rate that is 5.1 times the imprisonment of whites. In five states (Iowa, Minnesota, New Jersey, Vermont, and Wisconsin), the disparity is more than 10 to 1.

- In twelve states, more than half of the prison population is black: Alabama, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Mississippi, New Jersey, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia. Maryland, whose prison population is 72% African American, tops the nation.
- In eleven states, at least 1 in 20 adult black males is in prison.

When the character/husband Roy was incarcerated, Celestine had her career as an artist and her friends to help her adjust to the situation. But the following article may have helped her, too:

“How to cope with a spouse’s incarceration”

It's confusing to go from the normal day-to-day living with your spouse to suddenly feeling the absence as he or she spends a sentence in prison. You may experience loss, mourning, anger, sadness, frustration, guilt or shame. You may suddenly have lots of responsibilities to fill while your spouse is absent. While the transition can be confusing and painful, know that there are ways to keep your chin up and help you cope more effectively.

- 1) Adjust initially to changes: realize it’s OK to mourn, deal with your own trauma & accept reality that life is different. Decide what to tell people about your spouse’s incarceration.
- 2) Taking care of your family: make necessary changes & adjust your life, habits and behavior. Take care of yourself and join a support group. Expect changes in behavior from your spouse.
- 3) Communicating with your spouse: discuss expectations & communicate within your means. Keep a notebook near the phone for your calls. Arrange visits to your spouse.

<https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/color-of-justice-racial-and-ethnic-disparity-in-state-prisons/>

<https://www.wikihow.com/Cope-with-a-Spouse%27s-Incarceration>