

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



New York Times best-selling author Tayari Jones is the author of four novels, most recently *An American Marriage*. 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 year-end 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. It has been published in two dozen countries.

Jones, a 2021 Guggenheim Fellow, has also been a recipient of the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award, United States Artist Fellowship, NEA Fellowship, and Radcliffe Institute Bunting Fellowship. Her third novel, *Silver Sparrow*, was added to the NEA Big Read Library of classics in 2016.

Jones is a graduate of Spelman College, University of Iowa, and Arizona State University. She is an Andrew D. White Professor-at-Large at Cornell University and the Charles Howard Candler Professor of Creative Writing at Emory University.

- Author’s website

DISCUSSION 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?

<http://www.oprah.com/oprahsbookclub/an-american-marriage-by-tayari-jones-reading-guide>

BOOK REVIEWS

Booklist

Married for just over a year, Roy and Celestial are still navigating their new dynamic as husband and wife. Then their lives are forever altered when they travel to Roy's small Louisiana hometown for a visit, and Roy is falsely accused of a harrowing crime and sentenced to 12 years in prison. The strain on their relationship is intense during Roy's incarceration, especially once Celestial's career takes off while he struggles with loss and feelings of abandonment. Nearly halfway through Roy's sentence, his conviction is vacated. In the aftermath of his unexpected release, the couple must confront difficult questions about the choices they've made as well as the expectations of others. For

Celestial, it means reconciling the relationship with her husband with that of a longtime friend turned lover. Roy, on the other hand, faces the complexities of a life he no longer recognizes. Jones (Silver Sparrow, 2011) 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.--Strauss, Leah Copyright 2017 Booklist

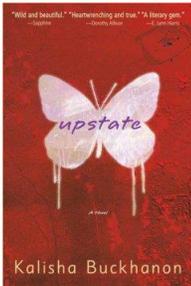
Publisher's Weekly

Jones (Silver Sparrow) lays bare the devastating effects of wrongful imprisonment in this piercing tale of an unspooling marriage. Roy, an ambitious corporate executive, and Celestial, a talented artist and the daughter of a self-made millionaire, struggle to maintain their fledgling union when Roy is sentenced to 12 years in prison on a rape charge he is adamant is false. Before Roy's arrest, the narrative toggles between his and Celestial's perspectives; it takes an epistolary form during his imprisonment that affectingly depicts their heartbreaking descent into anger, confusion, and loneliness. When Roy is proven innocent and released seven years early, another narrator is introduced: Andre, Celestial's lifelong best friend who has become very close to her while Roy has been away. Jones maintains a brisk pace that injects real suspense into the principal characters' choices around fidelity, which are all fraught with guilt and suspicion, admirably refraining from tipping her hand toward one character's perspective. The dialogue--especially the letters between Roy and Celestial--are sometimes too heavily weighted by exposition, and the language slides toward melodrama. But the central conflict is masterfully executed: Jones uses her love triangle to explore simmering class tensions and reverberating racial injustice in the contemporary South, while also delivering a satisfying romantic drama. Agent: Jane Dystel, Dystel, Goderich & Bourret. (Feb.) © Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved.

Library Journal

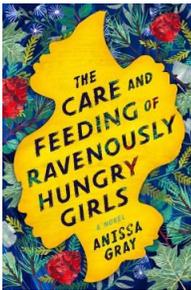
Novelist Jones (Silver Sparrow), recipient of the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award and United States Artist Fellowship, begins her story with Celestial and Roy, a young, newlywed couple excited about their future together, taking a trip to visit Celestial's family. Roy then makes a simple decision that changes his life. A woman in a nearby hotel room is raped and, having encountered Roy at the ice machine, later mistakenly identifies him as the culprit. Despite the lack of evidence, Roy is sentenced to prison for 12 years. Celestial knows that he is innocent and tries to support him despite her pain. She turns to best friend Andre, who was also a friend of Roy's, eventually beginning a relationship with him. When Roy's conviction is later overturned, his return is equally a joyous and a challenging occasion that brings up issues of love, family, and race. 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. VERDICT Layered like Pearl Cleage's *What Looks Like Crazy on an Ordinary Day*, this title will appeal to all readers of contemporary fiction. [See Prepub Alert, 8/14/17.]-Ashanti White, -Fayetteville, NC © Copyright 2017. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted.

READALIKES



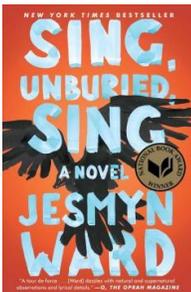
***Upstate* by Kalisha Buckhanon**

In jail after being charged with his father's murder, seventeen-year-old Antonio finds his love with sixteen-year-old Natasha tested and engages in a ten-year correspondence with her from behind bars.



***The Care and Feeding of Ravenously Hungry Girls* by Anissa Gray**

When their formidably strong-willed eldest sister is arrested, abruptly transitioning their family from respectability to disgrace, two younger sisters confront complicated dynamics in their family and identities to uncover what really happened.



***Sing Unburied Sing* by Jesmyn Ward**

A story of how the past affects the present, and of deeply entrenched racism, *Sing Unburied Sing* describes the life of a biracial boy, his addicted, grieving black mother, and his incarcerated white father. A road trip to Dad's prison kick-starts the novel, which offers deeply affecting characters, a strong sense of place (rural Mississippi), and a touch of magical realism in appearances by the dead.