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Homegoing



Synopsis

“Homegoing” is an inspiration. Ta-Nehisi Coates’ The unforgettable New York Times best seller begins with the story of two half-sisters, separated by forces beyond their control: one sold into slavery, the other married to a British slaver. Written with tremendous sweep and power, Homegoing traces the generations of family who follow, as their destinies lead them through two continents and three hundred years of history, each life indelibly drawn, as the legacy of slavery is fully revealed in light of the present day. Effia and Esi are born into different villages in eighteenth-century Ghana. Effia is married off to an Englishman and lives in comfort in the palatial rooms of Cape Coast Castle. Unbeknownst to Effia, her sister, Esi, is imprisoned beneath her in the castle’s dungeons, sold with thousands of others into the Gold Coast’s booming slave trade, and shipped off to America, where her children and grandchildren will be raised in slavery. One thread of Homegoing follows Effia’s descendants through centuries of warfare in Ghana, as the Fante and Asante nations wrestle with the slave trade and British colonization. The other thread follows Esi and her children into America. From the plantations of the South to the Civil War and the Great Migration, from the coal mines of Pratt City, Alabama, to the jazz clubs and dope houses of twentieth-century Harlem, right up through the present day, Homegoing makes history visceral, and captures, with singular and stunning immediacy, how the memory of captivity came to be inscribed in the soul of a nation. From the Hardcover edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Homegoing begins in fire, as a house slave sets herself free by burning her master's African village to the ground, and ends in the ocean, as two of her two descendants - from two completely different lineages - find, finally, perhaps, a sort of reconciliation. In between, Ms. Gyasi traces the entire history of Africa and African-Americans. For the slave, Maame, had two daughters: the daughter of her captor, who she left behind in the burning village; and the daughter of her real husband. Effia and Esi grow up in warring villages, each only a distant rumor to the other, and they take wildly different paths. Effia is sold to a white British lord, living in Africa to negotiate the slave trade, and she spurs a line of descendants who grapple with the impact of the slave trade within Africa. The story of how slavery began in Africa is not one I knew well, and it was heartbreaking and jarring, to learn how the different tribes stalked and captured each other, selling rival sons and daughters and wives to the British, fueling the trade. Esi is herself captured, and kept in the dungeon of the Castle where her sister lives as the "wench" wife of a British trader, until she is sent through the Middle Passage to America, into slavery. The story of Esi's life in the dungeon, waiting to be shipped she knows not where, like every bit of the book, is so detailed and rich and true that it is astonishing to realize the author is only 26 years old. This book could easily be a lifetime achievement, and instead it is just the beginning of what I imagine will be an amazing body of work. Homegoing has many, many, many strengths, and perhaps just one weakness. The strengths are found in the story, and in the writing. It is a glory of riches.

Yaa Gyasi's Homecoming is a profound and beautiful reminder all great fiction is a tantalizing paradox. A great novel is a story that never happened but its "truth" is undeniable. Imagined characters, places, and events may feel more authentic than autobiography and memoir. With all due respect to Solomon Northup and Frederick Douglass, both powerful storytellers, Gyasi matches and in some ways surpasses their achievements. Stories of slavery and racism (separate but equally toxic) are intertwined with brutal misogyny by African and American men. Like the very best writers this young Alabaman (by way of Ghana) does not judge the characters that inhabit her story. She tries to imagine the demons and inner lives of the victim, the slave owner and slave trader. She details the excuses we make for our sins without ever wagging her finger. The structure of the novel bridges two continents and cultures. Alternating chapters tell the stories of two African half-sisters and their descendants. One is sold into slavery to America, the others remain in what becomes present day Ghana. The structure seamlessly makes the point mankind is culturally diffuse but the willingness to inflict suffering and the ability to transcend it is at the core of our nature. The stories of nine generations in both locales show the African diaspora as both tragedy and triumph. A fair

portion of the tragedy self-inflicted. The writing is assured and often a mixture of powerful and poetic: "...for the rest of her life Esi would see a smile on a white face and remember the one the soldier gave her before taking her to his quarters [to rape her], how white men smiling just meant more evil was coming...

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