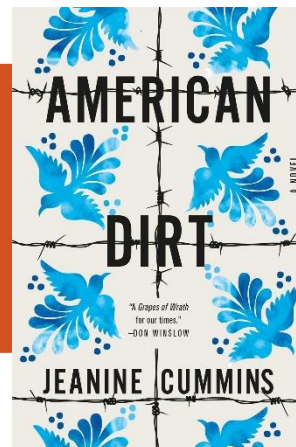




American Dirt

Jeanine Cummins



Author Background

Jeanine Cummins is the author of the bestselling memoir *A Rip in Heaven*, and the novels *The Outside Boy* and *The Crooked Branch*. Her fourth book, *American Dirt*, was an Oprah's Book Club and a Barnes & Noble Book Club selection. It has been translated into 37 languages and has sold more than three million copies worldwide. She lives in New York with her husband and two children.

Book Summary

Lydia Quixano Pérez lives in the Mexican city of Acapulco. She runs a bookstore. She has a son, Luca, the love of her life, and a wonderful husband who is a journalist. And while there are cracks beginning to show in Acapulco because of the drug cartels, her life is, by and large, fairly comfortable.

Even though she knows they'll never sell, Lydia stocks some of her all-time favourite books in her store. And then one day a man enters the shop to browse and comes up to the register with a few books he would like to buy—two of them her favourites. Javier is erudite. He is charming. And, unbeknownst to Lydia, he is the *jefe* of the newest drug cartel that has gruesomely taken over the city. When Lydia's husband's tell-all profile of Javier is published, none of their lives will ever be the same.

Discussion Questions

- ❖ When the book was released, it faced significant criticism. The author, who identifies as white, was accused of relying on stereotypes and failing to authentically portray migrant experiences. Were you aware of this controversy prior to reading the book? If yes, did it impact the story for you in any way?
- ❖ The story starts off with violence as cartel members murder Lydia's entire family (16 in total). What did you think about this beginning?
- ❖ What did you think about the storyline of Javier and Lydia's relationship?
- ❖ What would you have done if you were Lydia?
- ❖ This horrifying journey is non-stop, and the violence is told in extreme detail with some even calling the story "torture porn." What are your thoughts on this? Do you think the descriptions were too much or did it fit with the story?
- ❖ Did you like the ending? Why or why not?
- ❖ In the author's note, Cummins writes: "I was worried that, as a non-immigrant and non-Mexican, I had no business writing a book set almost entirely in Mexico, set entirely among immigrants. I wished someone slightly browner than me would write it." She now says she used "clumsy" wording. What do you feel that the author should have done differently?
- ❖ Would you read another book by this author? Why or why not?

References

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