



## Americanah

*Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*

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Ifemelu and Obinze are young and in love when they depart military-ruled Nigeria for the West. Beautiful, self-assured Ifemelu heads for America, where despite her academic success, she is forced to grapple with what it means to be black for the first time. Quiet, thoughtful Obinze had hoped to join her, but with post-9/11 America closed to him, he instead plunges into a dangerous, undocumented life in London. Fifteen years later, they reunite in a newly democratic Nigeria, and reignite their passion—for each other and for their homeland.

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## Americanah Details

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## From Reader Review Americanah for online ebook

### Kaykay Obi says

Americanah is a love story, not the kind of love stories I grew up reading, those with really beautiful women and handsome tall guys. In fact, the lovers in this one aren't too attractive, but their love is. Their love is beautiful, but then it is tried, beaten, stretched, yet it endures and gets stronger.

Okay, love aside. Americanah deals on the subject of race and hair. You may wonder how hair could be an issue, but it is in this book. The book begins in a hairdresser shop, where Ifemelu goes to make her hair for her return journey to Nigeria. There, she muses on her decision to go back home, and then, in Adichie's well-known style, the narrative jumps back in time, and we are transported to Ifemelu's teenage years. We see her as a girl with strong opinions and who isn't afraid of saying what's on her mind, a trait which she always gets rebuked for, especially by her elders. She meets Obinze in her secondary school, and they fall in love. The narrative follows them through their secondary school to their university days, where things begin to fall apart. University lecturers are frequently striking because the military government delays their salaries. This forces students to remain at home with nothing to do. And then people begin to travel out of the country, in search for greener pastures and for better education. Ifemelu grabs the opportunity when it is presented to her and she goes to America to study, while Obinze hopes to join her later.

While in America, Ifemelu notices something she has never thought about before – race, and she would later say, "We all wish race was not an issue. But it's a lie. I came from a country where race was not an issue, I did not think of myself as black and I only became black when I came to America." The issue of and racism makes her start a blog: Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black.

I loved the blog posts that appeared from time to time, a good innovation, which left me marveled. I've never read any novel where this was done, and I found it impressive, not just because of the concept, but because it doesn't distract you from the main story, although it makes you think and wonder, and you can't help but mark some of the posts so you could visit them later.

I enjoyed this book. There were funny scenes where I couldn't stop myself from laughing. And the dialogue is good; it felt so real and I could identify with it, especially in the Nigerian settings. I loved Adichie's descriptions of Lagos, London, and all the American cities where Ifemelu sojourned. Even the character descriptions, sometimes funny, create solid images in the head. And the writing is superb.

Americanah has a large cast of memorable characters. There's the younger and older version of Ifemelu and Obinze; Obinze's mother, one of the coolest fictional mother I've ever read; Ifemelu's Dad, who uses big vocabulary and doesn't hesitate in blaming the government for his misfortunes; Ifemelu's mother, devoted to religion and isn't rational in her thinking sometimes. Then there's Aunty Uju and her son, Dike; Blaine, Ifemelu's African-American boyfriend, who she refers to as "Professor Hunk" on her blog. And then Curt, the White American Boyfriend, rich, always cheerful and easy to please. I loved each of these characters. They have enough depth and substance – they felt too real. Not the kind of characters you will easily forget. I think my favorite among them is Obinze's mother. She's a thoughtful woman with a calm demeanor, the kind of woman I'd listen to talk and talk and I won't get bored, because she spits wisdom from her mouth.

Overall, I'd say Americanah is a remarkable book, a thoughtful book, a book filled with truth; it touches other issues such as social inequality, immigration, self-acceptance, loss of cultural identity, and change. The

book remains with you after you finish reading, begging you to “read again.” Without doubt, I’ll read this book again at a later time.

The Purple Hibiscus has always been my favorite Adichie novel. Now, Americanah, I think, is my favorite.

It’s a Five Star read, and although I didn’t like the book cover, I still look forward to Adichie’s next book.

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### **María says**

Una vez leí que Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie era una de las voces más potentes que teníamos en literatura en este siglo. Pensé: menuda exageración. Prejuzgué, sin ni siquiera haberla leído. Tiempo después me hice con Americanah. Me siento feliz de decir que me equivocaba. No estaban exagerando.

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### **Melanie says**

“But beyond race, the book is about the immigrant’s quest: self-invention, which is the American subject. “Americanah” is unique among the booming canon of immigrant literature of the last generation (including writers Junot Diaz, Jhumpa Lahiri, Gary Shteyngart, Chang-rae Lee, Dinaw Mengestu and Susan Choi). Its ultimate concern isn’t the challenge of becoming American or the hyphenation that requires, but the challenge of going back home.”

Emily Raboteau in the Washington Post

I could not say it better than that.

The unflinching and refreshing honesty of an outsider’s take on American politics, racial tensions, relations between men and women, between women themselves, education, immigration. The all-encompassing empathy of an artist for all human plights, for our idiosyncrasies and failures of the imagination, for our grit and stubbornness in the face of injustice. The sublime sense of humor of a writer in the face of incomprehensible behavior, deep-seated prejudice and warped logic.

There was so much to feel and learn and think about in this dazzling novel that I’m having a hard time gathering my thoughts into one cohesive whole. And maybe that’s exactly the point. There is nothing cohesive about life depicted here. The characters are all fleeting constructions of their own imaginations, their own desire for survival, their own need for validation. They are constantly evolving, changing, reassessing, adapting, morphing into the people that they become, always a little short of the people they aspire to be. The world, in all its cruelty and randomness, is constantly forcing them to bend and bend and bend until some break in two and others rebound even more forcefully.

Zadie Smith said that she wanted to write the first Black existential novel with “NW” but I think Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie may have written a much more devastating and illuminating one with “Americanah”. If “NW” was existential in its stylistic experimentations, “Americanah” is existential in its very essence.

In the end, it could very well be that love, true passionate love between two people, is the only constant force flowing through the chaos.

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## Dincy says

I'm only about halfway through this book but I am enthralled. I was afraid that I was over-eager and could only be disappointed, that I had set the bar too high, that I should remember that Adichie is only human, after all. But my fears were misplaced. "Chimmy" is back as strong as ever. I am mildly amused at how she's promoted the book in her interviews as being "about hair". This book is about race, and culture. (Admittedly, that's what it says in the blurb.) Anyway, so far, it is brilliantly on point.

(I'm saving the last star for in case it nosedives).

Update!

It didn't nosedive. It picked up, and sprinted at the finish. Having not too recently moved overseas from Africa, I can relate to this story very closely, which made it all the better a read. It is validation. She voices things that are not often voiced, the undertones (and less subtle experiences) of racism that we experience, the realisation of one's colour when one has never been conscious of colour before; the difference between people of colour born amongst colour, and those born elsewhere; the mild shocks and intense pleasures of returning home; the way at the end of it all, all we want is to be home.

Adichie is a master story-teller. I felt so connected to her characters that sometimes, distracted by someone speaking to me while I read, I would be surprised to find that Obinze was not sitting opposite me. But what I love most about Adichie's work is her ability to expose - to talk about those things that "we don't talk about". She is ballsy and opinionated and political, without being self-righteous and while still just... telling a story.

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## Nat says

*"Why did people ask "What is it about?" as if a novel had to be about only one thing."*

It's this opening quote that raised my intrigue by a tenfold on Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's **Americanah**. I've read (and reviewed in praise) her previous Nonfiction works (Dear Ijeawele & We Should All Be Feminists) so I knew Adichie to be an author with a compelling way of words, but all that paled in comparison to the character building she excels at exploring in this fictional work of art.

As teenagers in Lagos, Ifemelu and Obinze fall in love. Their Nigeria is under military dictatorship, and people are fleeing the country if they can. The self-assured Ifemelu departs for America. There she suffers defeats and triumphs, finds and loses relationships, all the while feeling the weight of something she never thought of back home: race. Obinze had hoped to join her, but post-9/11 America will not let him in, and he plunges into a dangerous, undocumented life in London.

Thirteen years later, Obinze is a wealthy man in a newly democratic Nigeria, while Ifemelu has

achieved success as a blogger. But after so long apart and so many changes, will they find the courage to meet again, face to face?

So, now comes the difficult part of trying to sum up my reading experience of this grandiose book. Which is also, coincidentally, the first lengthy book I've read in awhile, so I took my sweet time savoring its pages over the course of a week. And I'm glad I did because it gave me the chance to mull over my thoughts and feelings regarding **Americanah**.

“This was love, to be eager for tomorrow.”

First and foremost, how does the author succeed so seamlessly at fleshing out a side character even if they come to show only one time??? Time and again, I was dumbfounded at Adichie's success in cultivating characters so full of life with a single page or two, sometimes needing only one paragraph. This is raw talent right here.

By introducing a new character that says something particular, she then gives background on why they would act that way. Like, Ifem meeting someone she catches keen on other's affection:

*“He was an impresario, well oiled and well practiced, the sort of man who did a good American accent and a good British accent, who knew what to say to foreigners, how to make foreigners comfortable, and who could easily get foreign grants for dubious projects. She wondered what he was like beneath that practiced layer.”*

Or, Obinze's catching Amara's quick fix on reminding everyone she was wronged:

*“Maybe he should go and find a Jamaican woman,” Amara said. Her husband had left her for a Jamaican woman, with whom it turned out he had a secret four-year-old child, and she somehow managed to veer every conversation towards the subject of Jamaicans.”*

I'm a sucker for books full of eccentric and subtle quips on life, so **Americanah** fell prey to my immediate affection. However, this is also where my later issues with the book stem from since I came to depend on those familiar, detailed intimacies on everyday life to propel the book forward more than the actual storyline. My mind was on a never-ending wait for more noteworthy remarks to drop, instead of caring for any actual development in the plot.

It was also a bit of a bummer to learn that the most important person in Ifemelu's life could not have made me feel number. Sitting through whole chapters from Obinze's viewpoint left those parts of the book marred for me, as a result. His later persona, lacking that quiet strength that made up the arc of his youth, didn't work in his favor, as well.

It's the stark contrast between the joy and quickness Ifem's chapters provided with them, in comparison to the snail-paced reading I experienced with Obinze that staggered me.

There's also a comment in here that rubbed me the wrong way, regarding antisemitism:

*“Don’t say it’s just like antisemitism. It’s not. In the hatred of Jews, there is also the possibility of envy—they are so clever, these Jews, they control everything, these Jews—and one must concede that a certain respect, however grudging, accompanies envy.”*

Why is she essentially telling me to be grateful for antisemitism?? Opting for the wrong approach where they teach hundreds of little girls to take it like a compliment when boys use abuse to get attention??? I listened to a lecture recently on antisemitism and seeing a comment like the above to excuse this systematic form of oppression made me livid.

But I’ll hit a bit of a pause on the negatives to highlight my more cherished moments from the carefully-crafted story that is **Americanah**. I noted down so many quotes from this book that I had to open up a separate document in my notes for lines I highly wanted to include in my review so they wouldn’t be lost amid scouring my never-ending pages. I looked something like this writing everything down from excitement:

My favorite of those include:

- When this book expertly offers us an intimate look into Ifemelu’s young love with Obinze by including us in their private inside jokes that only those two get. Like, referring to him as “Ceiling” in public and making everyone wonder about the story behind it.

*“Why do you call him Ceiling anyway?” his friend Okwudiba once asked her, on one of those languorous days after first semester exams. She had joined a group of his friends sitting around a filthy plastic table in a beer parlor off campus. She drank from her bottle of Maltina, swallowed, glanced at Obinze, and said, “Because he is so tall his head touches the ceiling, can’t you see?” Her deliberate slowness, the small smile that stretched her lips, made it clear that she wanted them to know that this was not why she called him Ceiling. And he was not tall. ”*

- The amount of specificity the author offers to her characters astonished me time and again. To quote Ifem’s blog, she offers “Lagos from an Insider,” and there’s an unequivocal honesty to it.

*“You lied.” It was said with a kind of horror that baffled her, as though he had never considered it possible that she could lie. She wanted to say, “Blaine, people lie.” But she said, “I’m sorry.”*  
*“Why?” He was looking at her as though she had reached in and torn away his innocence, and for a moment she hated him, this man who ate her apple cores and turned even that into something of a moral act.”*

I can’t get over that last line. Blaine was one of the more interesting boyfriends of Ifem’s past. I liked, in particular, their initial encounter on the train the very same day Ifemelu drops her efforts at assimilating with faking an American accent.

*“It was not in her nature to talk to strangers on public transportation—she would do it more often when she started her blog a few years later—but she talked and talked, perhaps because of the newness of her own voice. The more they talked, the more she told herself that this was no coincidence; there was a significance to her meeting this man on the day that she returned her voice to herself.”*

Theirs was a fascinating dynamic that I loved seeing chronicled.

*“So when are you going to have the next salon, Shan? I was telling Ifemelu about them.”*

*When Blaine had told Ifemelu about Shan calling her gatherings “salons,” he had underlined the word with mockery, but now he said it with an earnestly French pronunciation: sa-lon.”*

The peak of intimacy arrives through these details that expand on domestic life; sharing a life together means you know their true, intimate thoughts, so that in outside situations you’re like, ummm, that’s not what you told me in private...

- On feeling stuck and unresolved in her relationship:

*“But she had not had a bold epiphany and there was no cause; it was simply that layer after layer of discontent had settled in her, and formed a mass that now propelled her. She did not tell him this, because it would hurt him to know she had felt that way for a while, that her relationship with him was like being content in a house but always sitting by the window and looking out.”*

I read that last part twice to let its magnificent power sink in

*“How was it possible to miss something you no longer wanted? Blaine needed what she was unable to give and she needed what he was unable to give, and she grieved this, the loss of what could have been.”*

- Sifting through Ifemelu’s past and playing this game of catch-up, there hits a certain moment when things start to feel exhausting and previous plot lines are forgotten (like, Ifem getting her hair braided in present day, which we keep returning to) in the process of reading this richly told story spanning three continents and numerous lives. And circling back to the present after being so caught up in the past is when my enthralment for the story usually goes down by a notch... That is until another noteworthy line gets dropped on us.
- Such as, the clapback delivered to Obinze at the hands of his wife, Kosi, after he confesses to his immature desires, left me feeling more empowered than the “cool girl” speech from **Gone Girl**:

*“It’s not about another woman, Obinze,” Kosi said, rising to her feet, her voice steeling, her eyes hardening. “It’s about keeping this family together! You took a vow before God. I took a vow before God. I am a good wife. We have a marriage. Do you think you can just destroy this family because your old girlfriend came into town? Do you know what it means to be a responsible father? You have a responsibility to that child downstairs! What you do today can ruin her life and make her damaged until the day she dies! And all because your old girlfriend came back from America? Because you have had acrobatic sex that reminded you of your time in university?”*

I couldn’t have been more grateful to Kosi for saying what I always yell at men who want to leave their wives and families to satisfy some impulse.

Also: “acrobatic sex.” I C O N I C

I’ll leave this list of favorites on one last priceless moment because I’m this close to sharing the whole novel with you... I smiled at the below:

*“It’s a cowardly, dishonest book. Have you read it?” Shan asked.*

*“I read a review,” Mirabelle said.*

*“That’s the problem. You read more about books than you read actual books.”*

That is to say, I'm more than eager to discover the power of Adichie's words in exploring her other books.

*Note: I'm an Amazon Affiliate. If you're interested in buying **Americanah**, just click on the image below to go through my link. I'll make a small commission!*

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This review and more can be found on my blog.

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## **Maxwell says**

Everyone should read this book.

Adichie has really hit her stride in this one. After having read and adored her previous works, I knew I would love this one, and it didn't disappoint. It is by far her best work, and you can see the progression of her writing skill in *Americanah*.

Characters are what Adichie does best. Her books become progressively less plot-driven, but her ability to engage the reader with flawed, true characters is where she excels. Ifemelu is brazen and perhaps, to some, unlikeable at times. She speaks her mind, and her blog posts, which Adichie utilizes to speak openly about race issues in America (never getting too preachy) are hard-hitting. Obinze is a bit more of a flat character in comparison to Ifemelu, but he is steady.

The narrative structure is loosely, based mainly around the framework of present-day Ifemelu returning home to Nigeria after over a decade in America. At times we also get flashbacks to her university life with Obinze, and his own storyline, though in less detail than Ifemelu.

Adichie's prose is infused with emotion; it is effusive and genuine. She is best when she is being philosophical. Often we get inside the characters mind, not only to hear what they are thinking but to understand how they are processing their thoughts and relating them to their general opinion of the world. We get more than just a flurry of consciousness with Adichie; we get parsed out wisdoms and failures, all from the minds of great characters.

Without a doubt I can say Adichie is one of my favorite authors of all time. I will automatically buy and read *anything* she releases, because she is just. that. good.

If you've yet to read anything by her, I recommend starting with *The Thing Around Your Neck* which is a short story collection, or her first novel, *Purple Hibiscus*.

**First read:** February 17-22, 2015

**Second read:** December 18-23, 2016

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## **Roxane says**

There's a lot going on here. This book is a beautiful mess. Adichie takes on race, immigration and emigration, the politics of natural hair, interracial relationships, what it means to leave home, and what it means to return, all wrapped up in a love story. The book is, at points, indulgent, just on and on the writing goes, the writer showing off her admittedly impressive way with words. Stronger editing would have done wonders for this book. But when this book is good, it is absolutely brilliant.

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## **Mena says**

Sigh. I really wanted to be here for this novel, but damn: the two main characters - especially Ifemelu - were barely likeable after her move to America, all the other characters (especially the Americans and "nouveau riche" Nigerians) were very one-dimensional, the adjective use was next level and I felt like I was being lectured half the damn time. Adichie's prose is beautiful and she knows how to evoke emotion, but her politics - at least on the topic of race and class - feel very staid: I didn't feel like I was hearing anything new or particularly thought-provoking. And the ending/romance storyline between Obinze and Ifemelu... fail. Just...no. I think Adichie's strength is in her short story writing (although I'm hoping that rereading Half of a Yellow Sun will prove me wrong). I think, sadly, I'm falling out of love with Nigerian literature's golden girl.

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## **Debbie says**

Warning: I love being part of the crowd, and the crowd is mostly all gushy about this book. But seriously, I wish I had walked away from it. I really wanted to like it, I really did.

This was the longest book of my life!!! 610 (Kindle) pages that felt like 1,000. I would be reading along and thinking, oh, I'm a little bored, let's see how far I've gotten....and I'd look down at the bottom of my Kindle page and see that the progress bar hadn't moved an iota!!! 17 percent, really? I've read all that, and all you can give me is 17 percent?? Now, the mere fact that I was looking at my progress instead of compulsively turning pages, tells you something. The thing was just too damn long. A tome, a giant, a big bloated blob. Cut it in half, and you might have a deal. Ah, where oh where are my editing scissors?

When I first started, I was impressed. Well-drawn, complex characters. Impeccable language. Structurally sound. Keen insights into personalities. All good. I didn't feel this way for long.

Another plus, one that I'm only enjoying in retrospect, is the way the author so clearly shows the cultural differences between Nigeria and America. Adichie is super deft at zooming in on all the bumps that Ifemelu, the main character, feels as she lives as an immigrant in America. She must deal with the black and white conflict and also the African versus black American issue. Through all the confusion and attempts to fit in, Ifemelu faces tough differences in language, habits, viewpoints, and emotions. Ifemelu was sort of snobby and wasn't entirely likable, but I still believed her and felt for her. I usually like analyzing and dissecting a person's actions, motivations, denials, fears, and introspection, but here it was definitely overkill.

Adichie also did a good job of giving us a feel for life in Nigeria; that was the part I liked best. But all of it was painfully, painfully slow.

I'm dancing around the worst thing: it's a message book, and I have trouble with preachy. The second half was the worst. Not only did Adichie go overboard with the lectures on racism, she also included a lot of very boring blog posts on racism. The sophomoric lectures put forth obvious ideas, and it annoyed me. I didn't sign up to be a student in Racism 101.

And then there's the thing about hair. On the plus side, Ifemelu's obsession with all her hair problems was sometimes funny, sometimes sad, but always engaging. On the minus side of hair, Ifemelu seemed to be too much of an intellectual to be so concerned with how her hair looked. Was that a superficial side of her (and was it believable), or is it just a truth about humans?—that we all worry about our appearance, regardless of whether we are intellectuals or not. And we all know that obsessing about how our hair looks is mostly a girl thing, so is it bad press for women?

The love story, though poignant, was way too drawn out. It was the best part but the shortest part. The last 50 or so pages, when the story heats up the most, were the best. I wanted a plot-driven novel about two star-crossed lovers, and it was far from that.

I can't recommend this book, even though I want to. This kills me, since so many friends absolutely loved it. I must be honest: I never looked forward to picking up this book, which is a deal breaker right there. The bad parts—the preachiness and the excessive length—far outweighed the good parts. A painfully long read. Sorry, all I can say is 2.8.

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## **Somi says**

In Nigeria, we are brought up on foreign movies, sitcoms and TV shows, foreign books and foreign news. We know how English should be spoken, and many of us who bother to read a lot are very familiar with the colloquialisms of the west.

This is perhaps why we do not recognize how much we miss our own particularly Nigerian way of expression in the literature we read. It is perhaps why, when we read a phrase that is essentially Nigerian, in a novel like Americanah... *“Tina-Tina, how now?”* *“Why are you looking like a momu?”* *“How will you cope/how are you coping?”*... All of them, familiar Nigerian modes of speech, we are infinitely grateful.

I am probably biased towards this novel, Americanah by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, not only because Adichie's first novel, Purple Hibiscus, which I read as a very young girl, awoke in me the possibility of good writing and beautiful prose by a Nigerian like me, but because of the familiarity of the book.

It's like the word Americanah, such a Nigerian word, used to describe someone who had lived abroad for so long, they no longer understand the nuances of being Nigerian. They use American swearwords, or complain that the fries at KFC Onikan are limp, even though you see nothing wrong with them. This is when you turn to someone who understands and say, (No mind am, na Americanah), *Don't mind him, he is an Americanah*.

Adichie's latest follows Ifemelu, a bright, sharp and observant girl, from her early years in 1990's Nigeria to a life in America where, after the first rude shocks of culture change in a new world where 'fat' is a bad word and not merely a statement of fact, where colour is such a big issue that it can rule people's lives, and where everything is different, she slowly and surely starts to become an Americanah.

In Americanah, Ifemelu observes, and we are informed by her observations, she converses and we see her character, she remembers, and in her memories we see a rich story that begins in Lagos, journeys through the cities of America, and gains a body that is beautiful to savour. It is through Ifemelu's observations that we experience what Americanah is about.

Hair. Specifically Black/African hair. Why do black women hide their hair? Would Beyonce ever allow the world to see her hair the way it really is, or would Michelle Obama? These are the questions Ifemelu asks in her blog, where after having lived in the United States for a long time, she broaches issues of race, hair and life in America from the eyes of a 'Non-American Black'.

We experience race. Kimberley, the white woman who uses beautiful as a word to describe 'black', because for whichever reason, black is a word that should be said as little as possible. Kurt, to whom Ifemelu's race means nothing, and Blaine, the Black American Yale professor, whose influence, in my opinion, would be the biggest in turning Ifemelu's observations from the disinterested and amused observation of a 'Non-American Black' or 'NAB', who calmly tells Kimberly, "You know, you can just say 'black.' Not every black person is beautiful." to those of an 'American Black' or 'AB', who would say in her blog. "If the 'slavery was so long ago' thing comes up, have your white friend say that lots of white folks are still inheriting money that their families made a hundred years ago. So if that legacy lives, why not the legacy of slavery?" The old Ifemelu would have told the descendants of the slaves to 'get over it'.

We also experience love. Adichie herself describes Americanah as a love story, and this is true. There is love in almost every book, but in Americanah, it is not incidental, it is a central part of the story. Before America, race, and hair became issues, there was Obinze, the love of Ifemelu's teenage life. If Ifemelu, the daughter of a civil servant who lost his job because he would not bow to the excessive respect that Lagos Yorubas employ and call his boss 'Mummy', and uses English in such a way as to provide a hilarious sort of comic relief, is sharp and confident, then Obinze, the only son of a university professor, with his love for American books and his quiet belief in himself, is self assured and mature. They fall in love soon after they meet as secondary school students in Lagos, and when Ifemelu tells her aunt and friend, Uju about him, saying she has met the love of her life, there is a hilarious moment when Aunt Uju advises her to "let him kiss and touch but not to let him put it inside."

While most of the story is seen through Ifemelu's eyes and memories, we also get to see some of Obinze. We follow him to London, where he lives as an illegal immigrant, after failing to find a job in Nigeria, or to fulfill his dream of going to America. (He later visits America, when he becomes rich, and isn't impressed. He lost interest when he realized that he could buy his way in.) In the UK, he is arrested on the eve of his sham wedding and repatriated. In all this, Obinze never loses a certain 'solidness', that he seems to possess effortlessly. In a democratic Nigeria, where a new middle class is rising, and the money that used to be the preserve of the top army generals starts to filter down, Obinze gets lucky in the way that only happens in Nigeria, where there really is too much money, and overnight he is a very rich man.

When Ifemelu starts to hunger for home, Obinze, with whom she has lost touch, is already a husband and father. "Meanwhile o, he has serious money now. See what you missed!" her friend, Ranyinudo tells her on a call from Nigeria. (How Nigerian to say something like that!) The central question becomes, will they get back together? To some, this is a weakness of the story, the descent into the fantasy of a happily-ever-after for the heroine and hero, but it is not such a bad thing in itself - It makes enjoyable, and hopeful reading.

In summary, I loved the story. I loved the familiarity of it, Ifemelu's mother's ridiculous religiousness, her father's ludicrous use of English, Aunty Uju, Ginika, Kayode, Emenike, who is perhaps one of the more interesting characters, as he strives to shed the life he was born with, to become what he wishes to be, and all

the other different kinds of people that make up the rich tapestry that is Nigerian life.

Ifemelu is an interesting character, observant, watchful, sure of herself. Even as a teenager, she is confident in a way I wouldn't have understood at that age. Obinze, knows himself in such a way that he doesn't need to follow any crowd, or have anybody validate him. However, I did feel that the ending was rather rushed, as if the author had other things to do, and was hastily putting the final scenes together.

The main grouse I had with the book was the fact that I saw some elements from Adichie's previous works. When Barrack Obama wins the election and her cousin Dike calls her to say that his president is black like him, I remember an interview long ago where Adichie says that her nephew had said the exact same thing after the elections. It made me feel cheated. This, the similarity of her relationship with Curt to the relationship of the characters in her short story, The Thing Around Your Neck; when Obinze describes his house in Enugu, and I see the house in Birdsong, the scene of another adulterous affair in another of her old short stories. How autobiographical is her work then? I ask myself. I begin to feel suspicious, perhaps all her characters are really herself and the people she knows.

I noticed that apart from Dike, her little cousin, and Obinze, and perhaps Obinze's mother, Ifemelu does not seem very emotionally involved with the people that shape her life. Sometimes she seems like a watcher, an observer, and not a character in the story. Also, because this novel is really many observations and opinions, sometimes it does feel contrived, like a character or event has been introduced solely because they are a means to present an issue Adichie wants to discuss. Lastly, I did not find the blog interesting. Unlike the prose of the novel, the writing is not fluid, or very descriptive, and seems to jump from one issue to another, trying to cram many thoughts into one jumbled package. This may be because I am an NAB, and those issues mean little to me, perhaps the AB's would read it differently.

Regardless, Americanah is a wonderful read, sometimes laugh out loud funny, sometimes sad, but always interesting.

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### **karen says**

this is basically what was going through my head for most of the book: "AAAAAAAHHHH!!!!!"

and then, more quietly in the background, under the shrieking:

"why haven't i read this before now?"

because i was an early-adopter of adichie - i read Purple Hibiscus back when it was her only novel, and i pounced on Half of a Yellow Sun as soon as it was published and it immediately rose to the very top of my heart-pile of 'favorite books ever.'

and then this came out and i just... dallied. i bought it the week it came out, but it's just been hanging out on my shelves for years, being another unread hardcover i'd see and berate myself with, "good thing you paid hardcover price for that, asshole!"

but then one book, one new york came around and suddenly there was a force other than myself pushing me towards it, which was just what i needed to have my AAAAAAAAHHHH!!!! moment.

because it's phenomenal. and i started reading it one night, intending to just make some headway into it before pausing "pleasure-reading time" and transitioning into "getting some work done time."

which did not happen that night, because i just sank into it. figuratively. but i did quite literally sink into my reading bunker, all pillows and stuffed pals and fleece blanket and dozing cat, reading so compulsively that i couldn't even be bothered to reach over and turn on my reading lamp, instead just squinting myself into mole eyes, grandmotherly advice be damned!

this 'review' is going to be pure reader-response because i can't even approach something this spectacular with my messy and gushy words, like vomit all over a unicorn.

she's just so fucking talented - the whole ball of wax - characters, descriptions, story, observations; she's so purely expressive and astute and so damn smart. the book's gaze is broad: race, gender, class, relationships, beauty culture, the dislocation of the immigrant, all the warts america overlooks while it's busy patting itself on the back - it's tremendously entertaining and funny and true, and those blog posts are gold, my friends...

it just barely missed the five-star mark for me - i thought it poofed out a little at the end, making it *slightly* less perfect than her previous two novels, but it's by no means flawed - this is a book that no one should have on their shelves, unread, for as long as i did.

be better than me at all things!

\*\*\*\*\*

BOOM! new york is MINE!

review to come

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one book, one new york!

<http://www1.nyc.gov/site/mome/initiat...>

doing my civic duty and reading this (finally). new yorkers who do not have this read by june will be deported to connecticut.

come to my blog!

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### Rowena says

One of the best books I've read in 2013. "Americanah" is a book of great impact and importance. This is the one book by an African writer that has spoken to me more than any other.

This is a book about Africa and the African diasporic experience in the USA and England, a backdrop for the love story between Ifemelu and Obinze, teenagers attending a Nigerian university who have to leave the country because of the university strikes in Nigeria. Ifemelu moves to the States, where she attends an American university and starts a blog dealing with race issues in America, while Obinze moves to England

and ends up becoming an illegal immigrant.

The book examines the intricacies of race, especially in the USA, as well as the issue of immigration. It talks about the difference between being black in Africa and being black in the States. Adichie is seamless as she goes from country to country, from American to Nigerian, to Francophone African and English. She is a brilliant writer who gifts us with an entertaining story and introduces us to very real characters.

I found some of the themes discussed in this book similar to those discussed in NoViolet Bulawayo's "We Need New Names." This book helps show that immigrants have it tough; psychological changes, changes to identity, the need to reinvent themselves so that they can "fit in" and be accepted, and so on. Their issues often go unspoken.

Adichie is very aware at the subtleties between cultures and she highlights them well. There were some things that she touched on that I'd thought about but never really put in words. For example, people's pity when they realize you're African, and their need to talk about their charitable donations to the continent:

**"Ifemelu wanted, suddenly and desperately, to be from the country of people who gave and not those who received, to be one of those who had and could therefore bask in the grace of having given, to be among those who could afford copious pity and empathy."**

Adichie isn't shy about bringing up controversial issues, those that others keep silent about. For example, she explores the politics of natural hair among kinky hair:

**"I have natural kinky hair. Worn in cornrows, Afros, braids. No, it's not political. No, I am not an artist or poet or singer. Not an earth mother either. I just don't want relaxers in my hair...By the way, can we ban Afro wigs at Halloween? Afro is not costume, for God's sake."**

One thing I also loved was the fact that Adichie talked about Africans deciding to return to Africa after having lived abroad. She has Ifemelu saying, "And yet there was cement in her soul. It had been there for a while, an early morning disease of fatigue, a bleakness, a borderlessness. It brought with it amorphous longings, shapeless desires, brief imaginary glints of other lives she had lived."

Perhaps contrary to popular belief, not all Africans in the diaspora are fleeing from Africa; many have questioned what they are doing abroad in the first place and want to move back home. A lot of people do not realize that Africa is growing and developing and that people might actually be happy to live there. Seeing the online communication links between younger people from different African countries makes me feel hopeful that my generation will do great things in the continent.

I love fiction in general but fiction with a message is even more appealing to me. This is a story with such important social commentary. All through the book I had moments in which I said "It's about time someone addressed that!"

Highly recommended.

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## **Brina says**

A few weeks ago I read *The Thing Around Your Neck*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's short story collection, and was immediately struck with her attention to detail in stories as short as six pages long. Desiring more of her captivating prose, I chose *Americanah*, her intricate discussion on race in three countries and continents. Taking place in Nigeria, the United States, and England, *Americanah* can be viewed by many as a novel that is one of the premier looks on race over the last five years.

Ifemelu and Obinze met in secondary school in Lagos, Nigeria and even then knew that they were the love of each other's lives. Enjoying a deep relationship often absent in teenaged love, the two attended the same university in Nsukka, where Obinze's mother was a full professor. She welcomed Ifemelu into her family, and the three lived a blissful life that is usually only found in movies. This existence is shattered one day when professors go on extended strikes, denying students their basic right to an education. Ifemelu applies for and receives a Visa to the United States, while Obinze's application is mired in bureaucratic red tape. Although the two are soulmates, they do not see each other for another thirteen years.

In Nigeria, Adichie explains through Ifemelu, people are blind to race because for the most part everyone looks the same. The second Ifemelu stepped off of the plane in the United States; however, race was everywhere-- from being denied employment even at low level jobs to the way professors talk to her at first, and even the treatment her Aunt Uju, a doctor, receives from prospective employers and the way Uju's son is treated at school. Going from a race blind to a racist country, Ifemelu pines for Obinze and the way things were in Nigeria yet is embarrassed to contact him. Instead, she dates a Caucasian and a African American, two people who she has nothing in common with. Eventually, Ifemelu finds and becomes successful at blogging as a non American black who offers her unique perspective on race to the table. As these blog entries were an aside from the story line, I looked forward to reading them in between chapters in order to glimpse Adichie's gleanings on the race question.

Meanwhile Obinze immigrates to and is later deported from England. There he discovers that he is on the low end of the race totem pole. As dark skinned as he is, his only job prospects are in menial labor that he is over qualified for. Although he thinks of Ifemelu everyday, she does not reach out to him, and the two go on to lead distinct lives. Obinze does not stay in England long as he is deported to Nigeria. After seeing how he had been treated in this supposed western super power, Obinze is happy to return to the comforts of home.

Throughout this novel, Adichie offers a variety of aspects of the race question, especially in Nigeria and the United States where she divides her time. Ifemelu can go from a person who finds one magazine- Essence- where people look like her back to a country where no one questions her because everyone is the for the most part the same skin color. Because this is a novel rather than real life, Adichie ties up all of the plot lines flawlessly even the ones that appear a little far fetched. I enjoyed reading her take on race and look forward to reading her novels set entirely in Nigeria to see if there really exists such a stark contrast on race relations in these two countries. A powerful kick off to African American history month, *Americanah* earns 5 full stars.

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## **Emma Deplores Goodreads Censorship says**

UPDATE: Now with irritating author interview! See end of review.

Those of you who know me know I don't really have favorite authors: I have favorite books, occasionally favorite series. So you won't be surprised that after I thought *Half of a Yellow Sun* was amazing and *Purple Hibiscus* and *The Thing Around Your Neck* fairly good, I'm giving 2 stars (edit: 1 star) to Adichie's latest. Typical. But really, *yikes!* This isn't even a novel: it's a 477-page opinion essay with some characters thrown in.

Read the blurb and you'll be told *Americanah* is about a pair of star-crossed lovers from Nigeria, Ifemelu and Obinze, following their adventures as immigrants in the U.S. and U.K. respectively. Technically that's in the book, but *Americanah* is really a series of vignettes in which an endless parade of minor characters talk about race, nationality, and various other issues, with Ifemelu in the background. (Obinze is here more as her love interest than a protagonist in his own right, and we only get a few chapters from his perspective.)

So here's the thing. If you're looking for a book of observations about race in America, you might like this. Adichie certainly has a lot of them. But for me this bloated book was a complete slog--I read 5 others from start to finish while plodding through it. The most interesting parts of the characters' lives, the moments when something is actually at stake, are breezed through in narrative summary, while the book focuses in on mundane conversations illustrating Adichie's points about race. There's no real plot, no tension or momentum, and I found it impossible to summon any interest in the characters, as I was kept at a distance from them throughout.

There are two types of scenes here, both of which feel as if they could have been lifted directly from the author's life or the lives of people she knows, and then strung together with little sense of continuity. In the first, Ifemelu encounters someone who says something ignorant, biased or otherwise unfortunate on the subject of race or nationality. In the second, Ifemelu attends a social event where a group of people talk about race or nationality. A revolving door of bit-part characters exists to opine on these subjects: there must be 200+ named characters in this book, almost all of whom appear in only one or two scenes and are developed only through brief sketches. Even in the last 10 pages of the book, Adichie's introducing us to a whole new group of people so that they can talk about the economic problems in Nigeria. Which is representative of the extent to which the entire book is more a platform for the author to talk about issues than a story.

And perhaps because Ifemelu's primary role is as an observer who blogs about other people's foibles (actual blog entries are scattered liberally throughout), she mostly comes across as self-righteous and judgmental. When she does act, it's usually to be unpleasant: she passive-aggressively starts fights with her boyfriends, writes personal blog posts about friends without their permission, and when a co-worker criticizes her behavior, her response is to call the co-worker ugly. Ifemelu seems to tolerate other people in her life only insofar as they don't inconvenience her (and she's easily annoyed, by everything from her parents daring to visit her to a boyfriend moving on with his life after she cuts him off), and she radiates disdain for everyone she meets, even those closest to her. Normally I'm a fan of flawed female protagonists, but Ifemelu is neither interesting nor admirable, drifting through a story that seems to take readers' identification with her for granted, with little narrative awareness of her flaws.

As for the most prominent part of the book then: the discussions about race. My response was mixed. There are certainly some good observations here, and Adichie is absolutely right that there ought to be more novels about how people experience race today, instead of the endless parade of books about slavery or Jim Crow that make us feel good about how far we've come rather than challenging us to do better. Sometimes Adichie exaggerates, although not fatally so--for instance, in a shopping scene where the characters are unable to identify which salesperson helped them because the only way to distinguish between the two is that one is black and one white, and they're unwilling to mention race. This could certainly happen and says something

about American society, but Adichie seems quick to generalize, as if all Americans would react in the same way (I doubt most would be as stymied by the situation as the characters presented here). But while Ifemelu is always confident in her opinions, and gets annoyed with people who disagree with her, Adichie merely presents her conclusions rather than leading readers to make them independently. People who don't already agree with her are unlikely to be convinced.

In the end, I was disappointed because I know Adichie can write great novels, where the focus is on the characters and their story and these elements are developed brilliantly. But that isn't this book. Adichie has a character argue against subtlety in writing novels about race, but surely it's possible to talk about race honestly and tell an engaging story at the same time, rather than sacrificing the latter for the former. I give an extra half-star because the writing is not bad, because those few scenes where she stops pontificating and develops Ifemelu's experiences hooked me, because there are some good observations. But as a novel, *Americanah* is unsatisfying, and for me proved to be a tedious, heavy-handed slog, easily double the length the plot required. I'll promise here and now that if Adichie decides to publish an essay collection or memoir on the subject, I'll read it. But this cross between blog and novel results in a story and characters too thin to entertain, choked out by observations and opinions that would be better communicated in nonfiction. I simply can't recommend it, and the high rating so far completely mystifies me.

UPDATE: So I read an interview with Adichie here, in which she says:

*Still, it seems it is mostly American readers who most miss the fact that "Americanah" is supposed to be funny. I laughed a lot when writing it (although it is a bit worrying to be so amused by one's own humor). But I suppose race when bluntly dealt with does not blend well with that wonderful, famed American earnestness.*

Oh, where do I even begin? First, there's the "If you don't find my jokes funny, it's definitely not because I'm not funny, it's because you don't *get* that it's *supposed* to be funny" angle. Some writers do humor well and some don't. If you don't, best not to claim it's your readers' shortcoming.

Second, there's the "Oh, American readers in general don't think it's funny? It's definitely not because it's inside humor that's really only going to appeal to people with similar experiences. It's obviously an American problem, so let's see if I can come up with a stereotype that'll explain it!" angle. (I mean, WTF, now we're supposed to be earnest? I thought we were supposed to be fun-loving but oblivious, or something. But okay, it's pretty easy to stereotype a country of 315 million people, because whatever trait you come up with, millions of people will have it.) I'm not clear on how the elements some readers have found funny, like Ifemelu's father's pedantic way of speaking, are even related to race, but clearly Adichie would rather blame American racial attitudes (and compliment herself for her bluntness) than just admit she's not the world's best humorist.

Third, it's just so exactly something that Ifemelu would say, and the way she thinks and behaves throughout the book (superior, quick to generalize, always finding fault with others but never ever with herself) that it's really impossible to see Ifemelu as anything other than an author-insert. And you know what's 10 times more annoying than when an author you previously loved writes a book you kind of hate? When you then realize actually you don't think much of the author as a person either.

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**Julie Christine says**

"What is it with you Americans and race?" my friend Fatima asked me one day over lunch. We were in her country, France, both students at a university tucked in a shadow of an Alpine peak. "Everyone always wanted to know where I was *from*. I'd tell them France and they'd say, no, where are you *from*? It made no sense. I was born in France. I'm French." Fatima, with her brown sugar skin and currant-black eyes, then turned to her boyfriend Karim and Arabic poured from her in a river of throaty consonants and chewy vowels.

A few years later, at graduate school in the Midwest, my friend James, a PhD student from Uganda, told me he didn't know he was black until he came to the United States. We were talking about the curious strain in his African Studies graduate program between the African students and the black American students. The term "African-American" baffled him. He got it, he understood its history, but it still made little sense to him. They were Americans- not black Americans, not African-Americans, but Americans, full-stop.

Race in America is an uncomfortable subject, mostly for white Americans. We still don't know where to look or what to do with our hands. We fidget and prevaricate, we, like blond-haired, blue-eyed, wealthy, liberal Kimberley in *Americanah*, use euphemisms like "beautiful" when we refer to black women so that everyone will know that not only are we not racist, but we think blacks are particularly worthy of our praise. Chimamanda Adichie reflects our beliefs and behaviors back on us, illuminating our silliness and our masquerades, our ignorance and our misguided, but earnest, attempts to *understand* the impossible: what it's like to be something other than white in this very-race conscious society.

The thing about Adichie's novel is that it's written from a rarified world perspective. There is something very bourgeois about ruminating on race and class from ivory towers, as most of *Americanah*'s characters do. Ifemelu's early years in the United States, when she lives a hand-to-mouth existence as a college student, and her Nigerian boyfriend Obinze's harrowing months in the United Kingdom, from which he is deported as an illegal, give glimpses of how the immigrant experience unfolds in the shadow of racial discrimination. But mostly, this novel is a glossy-magazine conversation between the author and her readers about the experiences of an upper-middle class African woman in America. And I loved it. I loved her voice, her warm and personal style, the way she straddles feminism and social awareness with navel-gazing vanity. I'm not sure if I'm talking about the character Ifemelu or the author Chimamanda Adichie, but the end result is the same. This novel charms at least as much as it educates.

A Washington Post reviewer referred to *Americanah* as social satire. Satire? Really? I didn't get that. I got a very lucid, grounded, contemporary look at race, class, and the immigrant experience in three nations--Nigeria, the United States, and the United Kingdom--built loosely around a love story. Adichie dances a very skilled and entrancing *pas de deux* between classic storytelling and social edification.

Satire does foam up in the metafiction blog "Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black" written by the protagonist, Ifemelu, a Nigerian woman who comes to the U.S. as a college student. Ifemelu, whose looks and experiences are based on the author's, fills her anonymous blog with stories about the American race and class dilemmas she observes as an outsider. The blog eventually wins her a fellowship at Princeton and her immigrant experience veers into another social track entirely: the liberal elite. Because of her skin color, Ifemelu is pegged as Black and it's assumed she will somehow understand the "Black" experience in America. But Ifemelu, like my Ugandan friend James, didn't know from racial distinction until she came to the United States. She makes a decision to guard her Nigerian accent, not to straighten her hair, to make it clear that she is neither Black nor American. She is Nigerian.

And after fifteen years in the United States, Ifemelu makes the decision to return to Nigeria, opening herself

up to an experience unlike any she'd anticipated: the challenge of rebuilding her identity in a country that has moved on without her. It was a gift for this reader to have an insider's perspective on such a vast, complicated, and fast-changing nation, both before and after Ifemelu and Obinze's separate leave-takings and returns. Adichie takes the narrative many steps beyond most immigrant stories: what happens when you return home, to stay.

I had thought to withhold a star for some of the too-pat romantic relationships Ifemelu wends through and Adichie's sprawling, sometimes self-indulgent style, but I can't. I thought about this book when it wasn't in my hands, I couldn't wait to get back to it, and now, days after completing it, I'm eager to seek out more of Adichie- her writing, her speeches, her essays. I have so much to learn.

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