

WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT MAURICE CARLOS RUFFIN



Maurice Carlos Ruffin is a 21st-century writer and a native of New Orleans. His work focuses on race, identity, inequality, and the complexities of Black life, particularly in the South. He enjoys writing stories that reflect his community, and that discovery led him from a career as a lawyer to that of a writer.

His first novel, *We Cast a Shadow*, was a finalist for the PEN/Faulkner Award, the Dayton Literary Peace Prize, and the PEN America Open Book Prize. His second novel, *The Ones Who Don't Say They Love You*, was a 2023 One Book One New Orleans selection and a New York Times Editor's Choice. *The American Daughters* is a National Bestseller. He lives in New Orleans and teaches English at Louisiana State University.



BOOK CLUB KIT

QUESTIONS: *THE AMERICAN DAUGHTERS* (2024)

- Knowing that Ady was a real person, how did she and the Daughters (who represent all the women who fought for freedom from slavery) shape history? Can you see the results of their efforts in New Orleans today?
- Lenore and Ady have a close relationship in the story built on love, safety, and belonging. What does Lenore represent in this novel? How does she inspire Ady?
- There are many moments of violence in this novel, from the Confederates setting fire to Black businesses and mistreating enslaved people to Ady killing multiple men. How does violence function as an important piece of the narrative? Is violence ever necessary?
- Sanite is one of the many Black women throughout history who were enslaved and unable to protect their children as a result. How do familial bonds function throughout the novel? Did Sanite's legacy contribute to Ady's eventual freedom?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

- In the prologue, Ruffin presents a story within a story, based on a journal fragment and transcript from a relative of the real Ady. Does this framing change the meaning of the text? Do the themes feel larger or more personal?
- The novel's main setting, the French Quarter in New Orleans, is rich in history, culture, and music. How does this environment shape the story and influence Ady and other characters? Could the story work in a different setting?
- Although the American Daughters are fictional, enslaved women like Mary Bowser acted as spies. Does this historical reality change how you view the novel's speculative elements? Are there other examples of groups achieving big results quietly?
- How does the novel challenge common beliefs about slavery, especially regarding enslaved women?
- As historical fiction, how does the book contribute to or diverge from familiar ideas about slavery and its legacy?

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

- [End Slavery Now](#)
- [NOLA Coalition](#)
- [Black History Month](#)
- [History of Slavery in America](#)
- [NAACP](#)
- [National Sexual Violence Research Center](#)

LITERATURE AS PRAXIS

- Ady's father and Emmanuel are sold and separated from their families, reflecting lasting effects of slavery. How can you help connect Black families to their ancestors? Are there archives or history centers near you that need volunteers?
- The novel highlights the impact of women's hard work and sacrifice. How can you honor Black women who fought for freedom in the 1860s today? How can you use your passions to make an impact and support the women in your life?
- Like the burning of the Mockingbird Inn, many communities—including New Orleans—were devastated by the Civil War. How can you support efforts to rebuild these communities? Are there local organizations you can volunteer with or donate to, or ways to support Black-owned businesses?

ADDITIONAL READINGS

Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985)
Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (1987)
Maurice Carlos Ruffin, *We Cast a Shadow* (2019)
Jesmyn Ward, *Let Us Descend* (2023)
Lauren Wilkinson, *American Spy* (2019)