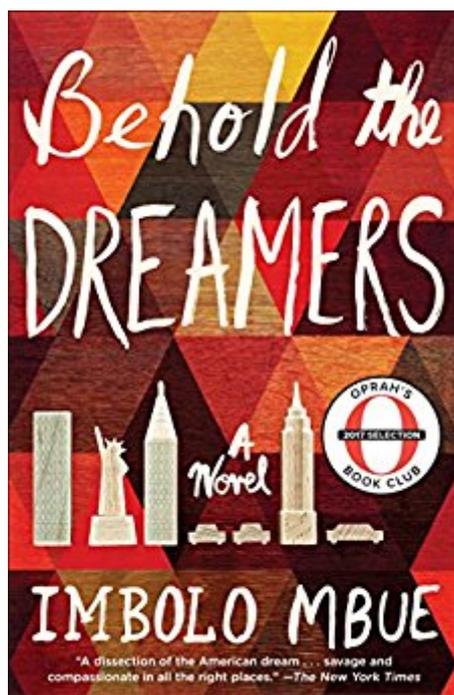


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Behold The Dreamers (Oprah's Book Club): A Novel



Synopsis

A compulsively readable debut novel about marriage, immigration, class, race, and the trapdoors in the American Dream—the unforgettable story of a young Cameroonian couple making a new life in New York just as the Great Recession upends the economy.

New York Times Best Seller Winner of the PEN/Faulkner Award Longlisted for the PEN/Open Book Award An ALA Notable Book NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY NPR The New York Times Book Review San Francisco Chronicle The Guardian St. Louis Post-Dispatch Chicago Public Library BookPage Refinery29 Kirkus Reviews

Jende Jonga, a Cameroonian immigrant living in Harlem, has come to the United States to provide a better life for himself, his wife, Neni, and their six-year-old son. In the fall of 2007, Jende can hardly believe his luck when he lands a job as a chauffeur for Clark Edwards, a senior executive at Lehman Brothers. Clark demands punctuality, discretion, and loyalty—and Jende is eager to please. Clark’s wife, Cindy, even offers Neni temporary work at the Edwardses’ summer home in the Hamptons. With these opportunities, Jende and Neni can at last gain a foothold in America and imagine a brighter future. However, the world of great power and privilege conceals troubling secrets, and soon Jende and Neni notice cracks in their employers’ façades. When the financial world is rocked by the collapse of Lehman Brothers, the Jongas are desperate to keep Jende’s job—even as their marriage threatens to fall apart. As all four lives are dramatically upended, Jende and Neni are forced to make an impossible choice.

Praise for *Behold the Dreamers*: “A debut novel by a young woman from Cameroon that illuminates the immigrant experience in America with the tenderhearted wisdom so lacking in our political discourse . . . Mbue is a bright and captivating storyteller.” —The Washington Post “A capacious, big-hearted novel.” —The New York Times Book Review “Behold the Dreamers’ heart . . . belongs to the struggles and small triumphs of the Jongas, which Mbue traces in clean, quick-moving paragraphs.” —Entertainment Weekly “Mbue’s writing is warm and captivating.” —People (book of the week) “[Mbue’s] book isn’t the first work of fiction to grapple with the global financial crisis of 2007–2008, but it’s surely one of the best. . . . It’s a novel that depicts a country both blessed and doomed, on top of the world, but always at risk of losing its balance. It is, in other words, quintessentially American.” —NPR “This story is one that needs to be

told. **•** “Behold the Dreamers challenges us all to consider what it takes to make us genuinely content, and how long is too long to live with our dreams deferred. **•** *O: The Oprah Magazine* “[A] beautiful, empathetic novel. **•** *The Boston Globe* “A witty, compassionate, swiftly paced novel that takes on race, immigration, family and the dangers of capitalist excess. **•** *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* “Mbue [is] a deft, often lyrical observer. . . . [Her] meticulous storytelling announces a writer in command of her gifts. **•** *Minneapolis Star Tribune*

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Customer Reviews

I was caught up in the story and always looked forward to finding out what would happen next. The characters were well developed and interesting. It gave what felt like a legitimate feel for what life would be like for an immigrant with an uncertain future. I found the contrast between the main characters' response to the idea of returning to Cameroon interesting--probably pretty typical. The writing itself lacked creativity and power.

This is one of the best books I've read in a while and I'll be recommending wholeheartedly to friends and family. Great insight on the lives of these characters, the struggles of this poor immigrant family and the struggles of this wealthy American family. Great reminder that regardless of our social status, we all face challenges.

Brief summary, no spoilers. This story is told primarily from the point of view of an African couple from Cameroon who have come to New York just prior to the stock market crash in 2007. The couple is Jende and Neni Jonga. They were unable to marry in Cameroon because Neni's father didn't find Jende of high enough status to marry his daughter. Nene previously had a daughter with Jende who had died shortly after her birth but now also has a young son named Liomi who leaves with her for New York. Neni had arrived earlier to the US with Liomi and when Jende joins them in their home in Harlem, they are able to marry and he is able to find work as a chauffeur for a wealthy executive named Clark Edwards at Lehman Brothers. They both seem to be living the Great American Dream. Nene has her heart set on becoming a pharmacist and she does exceptionally well at school. She also works for Clark's wife Cindy - a spoiled yet unhappy woman with a part-time home in the Hamptons. Neni loves the US and all its potential - she never wants to leave despite any hardships. Over the course of the book, we go through the troubles and tribulations of Jende as he not only faces deportation, but also loses his job as Lehman Brothers dissolves. On the good side, this book does a good job putting us in the shoes of an immigrant desperately fighting to gain residency status in the United States and the obstacles he or she must face. Your heart really goes out to Jende and Neni both and you will definitely find yourself rooting for them. In critique, other than Neni, and at times Jende, the characters never truly came alive for me. I thought the white characters were all very stereotypical and in particular, the mother Cindy seemed so one-dimensional. Clark was not much better. The conversations between the characters - especially those between Clark and Jende - felt so stilted and at times really more to give the reader an understanding of what was happening in the world (stock-market in particular) at the time rather than an organic discussion between two people. These conversations between most of the characters served more to explain what was going on and to move the action forward more than anything else. There really is a great story here, but the writing often felt a bit amateurish and not all that sophisticated. Recommended for book club discussions. There is definitely a political message here (not subtle at all in this book) so be aware of that.)

Not only do I fit perfectly in the shoes of some characters, but this depicts my hometown, Limbe, and dreams of living in America, the modern day land of "milk and honey" as everyone back home believes and think. Bought this book to read on my trip to Europe, but spent an entire night reading it, left with nothing to read on my return flight tomorrow, smh. Wished i could stop so it serve its purpose, but No! There's no stopping, especially as Neni has to deal with being a submissive wife, and return home. Crushing her dreams of being a pharmacist someday, and the quest for her kids to have a better life. (I could continue) Pray your books be as solid as your debut. Good job Imbolo. #proudvictoriapikin

This was a beautifully written book about an African Family who move to New York City seeking the American Dream. What they find is getting fired from a job, low wages, immigration nightmares, an apartment in Harlem filled with cockroaches and stress of unimaginable magnitude. After two years of living this nightmare, the family reluctantly decides to return to Cameroon, their original home. I highly recommend this book to readers. It's fantastic.

well written and the various characters and their interactions were well developed and seemed realistic. It made an excellent book club discussion with many differing opinions as to what immigrants are subject to

Excellent story. Very real and well written. Lots to learn from the reality of coming to the U.S. and what immigrants have to live and go through. Some are fortunate to find good people that will help them in the transition. Not all are so lucky and even then, family life suffers through the whole process.

So glad Oprah recommended this book. Can't believe it is the authors first novel. Hope she writes more. Loved her story about immigrants from Cameroon and their journey in America. Also the very real story about a wealthy family that showed that success doesn't always bring happiness

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