

Homegoing, Yaa Gyasi, New York: Penguins Random House, 2016, \$12.06, softback

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Yaa Gyasi, a Ghanaian-American, published her award-winning historical fiction book *Homegoing* in 2016. Following the descendants of an Asante woman named Maame, the novel paints a complex picture of the intertwined histories of Ghana and the United States from the 1700s to the present day. Gyasi conceived the idea of the story as a college student on a visit to Ghana. Gyasi had a shocking experience when she visited the Cape Coast Castle by the idea of African women living on the top levels of the castle as the wives of colonists, while others were kept in the dungeon for their sale as slaves. Gyasi used historical accounts written by Africans and African-Americans to center each chapter around critical historical moments.

Gyasi's depiction of the treatment of Africans and African-Americans and the treatment and roles of women reflect dramatic changes. In *Homegoing*, gender and racial inequality and slavery are significant themes, and Gyasi uses the descendants of Maame to challenge the roles of women in Ghanaian and American history. In doing so, she illustrates both the adverse effects of women's ill-treatment as property and the positive aspects of marriage and motherhood. Gyasi's experience of being a black,

Ghanaian woman living in the 21st century United States portrays inequality of the people of color. In the novel, it took Willy a long time before she secured a job. She was considered too dark to sing at the jazzing. As she relates, a very slender and tall man held a paper bag up to her cheek, saying to her, "too dark" (209). The injustice of gender inequality animates this scene, as the man explains that her dark complexion might not have mattered if only, she was a man.

While womanhood appears in a positive light at times, through depictions of motherhood and sisterhood, the larger structure of Gyasi's story and the portrayal of women in the final two chapters is a criticism of gender politics in the United States today. Esi's female descendants must deal with forced marriage, absent fathers, and difficulty finding jobs due to gender disparity. Marjorie's school teachers respect her but not her peers due to race and gender (269.) Esi's descendants live in Africa from the 18th through 20th centuries, depending on marriage and motherhood to shape their lives. Effia, Maame's other daughter's marriage to a white man, results from the money it will bring her family. Some African families impose marriage on women, and the care for the family and the nurturing of children is their lot.

Gyasi further illustrates the control of women and their degradation by men. In most parts of Africa, men were considered superior and did not appear weak" (38). Despite this ill-treatment, women in this novel show their agency by pushing back. Maame's daughters Effia and Esi's lives reflect the treatment of women in our society. However, Maame is a victim of rape and a slave girl for the Fante family. Maame counters the view about slavery. Maame teaches her daughter Esi that slaveholders are the weak ones when she asserts that "Weakness is treating someone as though they belong to you. Strength is knowing that everyone belongs to themselves" (44). Esi constantly remembers Maame's assertions, which inspired her strength during her captivity by white and African men. Esi was taken to the Cape Coast Castle by slavers, put in a dungeon with the other women, and raped as she awaits her sale into slavery to the United States against her will. Esi worked on plantations in the United States as a slave. Through these depictions of women, Gyasi shows how enslavement disempowers women and men and is a force of disunity in the American nation.

Gyasi surpasses other authors in similar fields in her depiction of colonization, gender stereotypes, sexism, violence, racism, slavery, and systemic oppression. The novel represents the forces that shape families and nations, presenting an emotional and thought-provoking power in a contemporary world. Gyasi's storytelling genre presents a historical setting to families, policymakers, educators, young people of color, and the essentials of heritage and identity. Each chapter of the book's narratives presents the perspective of a descendant of Effia or Esi, one representative of the two generations. Gyasi's scrutiny of the West African Atlantic slave trade and its impact is the novel's strength.