

A Good Country Discussion Guide:

The author begins her research by recalling the places she's lived in America and the color lines she's tripped over. Can you recall a color line in any of the places that you've lived? Was it a particular street? A division in your school or workplace? A way that you were seen or saw other people in your community?

The author uses two modes to examine the color lines in the places she's lived, memory and research. Choose a color line you recall clearly and take a moment to focus on it. Can you imagine the people and the institutions that kept it in place? Was it something the people around you acknowledged or did not acknowledge? What can you remember thinking and feeling about the color line and how it shaped your experiences?

Consider where you might begin to find the origin of that color line. Would its history be in a local or research library? Would it be in the oral histories of people still present, or people who have been displaced? Do you feel that you would be able to discover that history?

The author describes her experiences as a Muslim American before 9/11, after 9/11, and again after Trump was elected. Does her experience resonate with your own feelings or experiences during these periods, or does it feel unfamiliar?

Muslims make up about 1% of Americans. Given this, most Americans likely don't know any Muslims personally, and fewer still have the opportunity to ask questions they might have about Muslim faith or experiences. Do you feel that reading *A Good Country* helped you better understand the experiences of Muslim Americans? Which of your ideas about Islam and Muslims were challenged by the author's narrative? Which were affirmed?

The author describes a personal relationship in which she is shocked to learn that her partner's intentions and priorities were very different from what she believed them to be. How do you think this shaped the author's reaction to anti-Muslim attitudes after 9/11? How did it shape her desire to understand how they might affect her children?

Many Americans have ways in which they feel marginalized, encouraged to assimilate, excluded from curriculums and narratives, or misrepresented in popular culture. Were there ways that the author described these experiences that helped you better understand your own struggles or the struggles of someone in your own life?

The author presents nearly two dozen discrete histories across a dozen cities. Which of those histories was familiar, and which were unfamiliar? Were any of these histories surprising? Did any of these histories help you to see or understand a color line in your own community?

Did reading these histories all together affect your impression of the state of racial justice in America?

The author often makes history current by explaining how a historical moment gave rise to a modern problem or debate. For example, the battle for school segregation gave rise to the debate over "school choice" or public funding of private school options, sundown towns gave rise to widespread segregation that persists in Midwestern suburbs, and the Japanese Internment gave rise to a permanent dispossession and diaspora of Japanese Americans. Were there any descriptions of the historic origin of a current reality in *A Good Country* that surprised you?

The author ultimately moves her family from the United States to Canada. Do you feel like that was a reasonable response to her personal situation and her examination of American history? Why or why not? What else might she have done?

The author draws some conclusions about America as a settler colonial society. America is often presented as the history of a post-colonial society because European colonies declared their independence after the Revolutionary War. Is America a settler colonial society, or is it a post-colonial society? Or is it different things for different people?

If large numbers of people living in America see themselves as colonized, and others insist that America has already had its revolution, in what scenario can these two very different experiences of America be reconciled? Is it possible for people living in America today to understand themselves as unified? Should they?