



***American Spy* by Lauren Wilkinson**

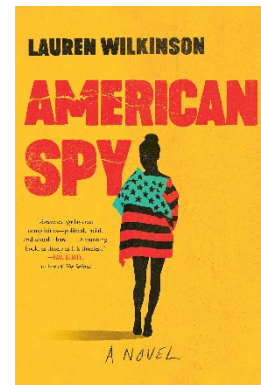
Group Discussion Guide

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

The questions and discussion topics that follow are designed to enhance your group's discussion of *American Spy*, by Lauren Wilkinson

ABOUT THIS NOVEL

Inspired by true events, *American Spy* chronicles the life of a Black woman recruited to the CIA during the height of the Cold War. Set in 1986, the novel follows young CIA agent Marie Mitchell and the two opposing forces in her life: her identity as a Black woman and her consequently vexed relationship with the history of the institution she serves.



DIGITAL RESOURCE

Author Lauren Wilkinson Answers Your Questions About 'American Spy'
PBS News Hour

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JBkoVzUzUww>



American Spy Discussion Questions

1. Marie is a talented intelligence officer with the FBI, but she is also a young Black woman working in an old boy's club, constantly overlooked for every high-profile squad. How does this relate to the barriers Black people, and specifically Black women, face in the workplace today?
2. Wilkinson writes that Marie's mother "passed" as a white woman, while her father was a visible leader in the Black community. How does this affect Marie's own perspective on race and identity?
3. Early in the book, Marie writes of her FBI colleagues: "[U]nlike me, they weren't people who'd had their existence politicized on their behalf." How does this resonate for you amid conversations about race in the U.S. taking place today?
4. Marie writes to her sons:
"People always used to ask me why I was a Fed, because it seemed to them that what I did for a living didn't line up with what they expected of me. In that way, it was shorthand for asking what I believe in, the question was a way of asking who I really was. The answer is here, in the way I feel stuck between these two legacies. And simultaneously like I should claim both and neither." (pg 263)
Marie felt this way because of common stereotypes placed on her by others. How can we collectively work together to combat stereotypes in our communities?
5. Marie has many identities, starting from the fact that she's a Black woman trying to make it in a society run by white men, which means — as her policeman father tells her — that she's already living the double life of a spy. "It's easier," he says, "if they think you're one of them." How does the statement by her father relate to Black America today?
6. W.E.B. DuBois famously wrote about the concept of double consciousness: The existence of African Americans 'behind the veil' of segregation hidden from the view of most white people, but also moving in the 'white' world. As such, African Americans have knowledge about their own lives, about the functioning of the veil, and about the activities of those who live on the other side of the veil. How do we see double consciousness reflected in the book?

AFTER YOUR CONVERSATION

We would love to hear about your conversation. If you would like to share any of your discussion notes, comments or photos with Legacy Foundation, please send them to mfishback@legacyfdn.org