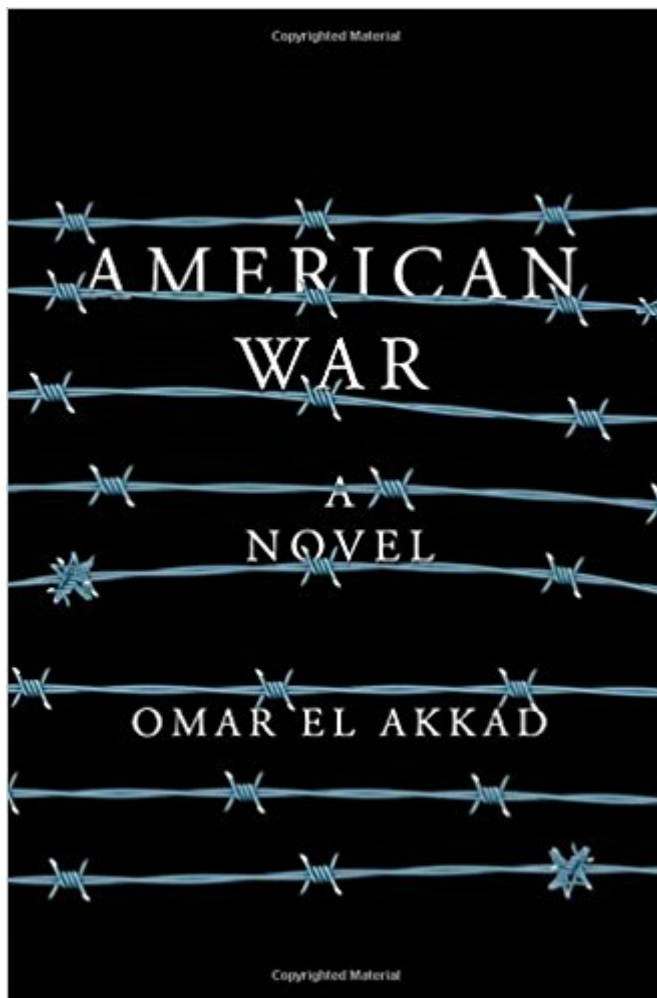


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American War: A Novel



Synopsis

“Powerful . . . As haunting a postapocalyptic universe as Cormac McCarthy [created] in *The Road*, and as devastating a look as the fallout that national events have on an American family as Philip Roth did in *The Plot Against America*. . . . Omar El Akkad’s debut novel, *American War*, is an unlikely mash-up of unsparing war reporting and plot elements familiar to readers of the recent young-adult dystopian series *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent*. • Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times* An audacious and powerful debut novel: a second American Civil War, a devastating plague, and one family caught deep in the middle • a story that asks what might happen if America were to turn its most devastating policies and deadly weapons upon itself. Sarat Chestnut, born in Louisiana, is only six when the Second American Civil War breaks out in 2074. But even she knows that oil is outlawed, that Louisiana is half underwater, and that unmanned drones fill the sky. When her father is killed and her family is forced into Camp Patience for displaced persons, she begins to grow up shaped by her particular time and place. But not everyone at Camp Patience is who they claim to be. Eventually Sarat is befriended by a mysterious functionary, under whose influence she is turned into a deadly instrument of war. The decisions that she makes will have tremendous consequences not just for Sarat but for her family and her country, rippling through generations of strangers and kin alike.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

An Best Book of April 2017: *American War* will give you chills. Set in in 2075, Omar El Akkad’s debut presents a fractured and frightening America, where the sun burns hot and the country has

turned into war zones and refugee camps. Over the course of two decades, Akkad traces the fate of the Chestnut family, who flee their home in the south and spend the better part of their lives in a sprawling, impoverished encampment. This is where Sarat, a young, brave, tomboy, comes of age: “Perhaps the longing for safety was itself just another kind of violence—a violence of cowardice, silence, submission. What was safety, anyway, but the sound of a bomb falling on someone else’s home?” Albert Gaines, a radicalized Southerner, takes Sarat under his wing, equipping her with the fervor and tactics needed to win the war. Akkad piercingly describes the ravaged towns, the gel packets of fruit rations, the torturous effects of growing up in war. Written with precise care for the fictional truth—news articles, press releases, and oral histories emerge throughout—the book sounds a warning blast. American War is a disquieting novel of immense depth, and possibly a classic of our time. —Al Woodworth, *The Book Review*

“Follow the tributaries of today’s political combat a few decades into the future and you might arrive at something as terrifying as Omar El Akkad’s debut novel, *American War*. Across these scarred pages rages the clash that many of us are anxiously speculating about in the Trump era: a nation riven by irreconcilable ideologies, alienated by entrenched suspicions. . . . both poignant and horrifying.”—Ron Charles, *The Washington Post* “Whether read as a cautionary tale of partisanship run amok, an allegory of past conflicts or a study of the psychology of war, *American War* is a deeply unsettling novel. The only comfort the story offers is that it’s a work of fiction. For the time being, anyway.”—Justin Cronin, *The New York Times Book Review* “El Akkad . . . has an innate (and depressingly timely) feel for the textural details of dystopia; if only his grim near-future fantasy didn’t feel so much like a crystal ball.”—Leah Greenblat, *Entertainment Weekly* “Powerful . . . If violence and conflict feel distant, journalist Omar El Akkad’s debut novel brings them home. . . . Despite its future setting, it’d feel wrong to call *American War* a work of science fiction. Hell, it’d even feel off to call it dystopian, given that it’s so few steps removed from our reality.”—Kevin Nguyen, *GQ* “*American War* is an extraordinary novel. El Akkad’s story of a family caught up in the collapse of an empire is as harrowing as it is brilliant, and has an air of terrible relevance in these partisan times.”—Emily St. John Mandel, author of *Station Eleven* “El Akkad has created a brilliantly well-crafted, profoundly shattering saga of one family suffering in a world of brutal power struggles, terrorism, ignorance, and

vengeance. American War is a gripping, unsparing, and essential novel for dangerously contentious times.

• Donna Seaman, Booklist (starred review) “Terrifyingly plausible . . . Part family chronicle, part apocalyptic fable, American War is a vivid narrative of a country collapsing in on itself.

• Publishers Weekly (starred review) “Gripping and frightening . . . Well written, inventive, and engaging, this relentlessly dark tale introduces a fascinating character. . . . Highly recommended.

• James Coan, Library Journal (starred review) “Striking . . . A most unusual novel, one featuring a gripping plot and an elegiac narrative tone.

• Rayyan Al-Shawaf, The Boston Globe “Sarat is a fascinating character. . . . Thought-provoking [and] earnest . . . El Akkad’s formidable talent is to offer up a stinging rebuke of the distance with which the United States sometimes views current disasters, which are always happening somewhere else. Not this time.

• Jeff VanderMeer, Los Angeles Times “Depicting a world uncomfortably close to the one we live in, American War is as captivating as it is deeply frightening.

• Jarry Lee, BuzzFeed.com “American War is terrifying in its prescient vision of the future.

• Maris Kreizman, New York magazine/Vulture “Astounding, gripping and eerily believable . . . masterful . . . Both the story and the writing are lucid, succinct, powerful and persuasive.

• Lawrence Hill, The Globe and Mail (Toronto) “Ambitious . . . [a] complex, thoroughly imagined domestic dystopia.

• Terra Arnone, National Post (Toronto) “Omar El Akkad has created an American future that is both terrifying and plausible. In a world seared and flooded by global warming, the U.S. has fractured again into North and South. The barbarism that ensues is all the more awful because we know the rivers and the cities. And we know these people: they are our neighbors; they are us. Through the eyes of a young girl El Akkad lets us see the soul-crushing toll of war. It was only in the stunned minutes after I’d finished the novel that I realized he had also taught us how to make a consummate terrorist.

• Peter Heller, author of The Dog Stars and Celine “American War, a work of a singular, grand, brilliant imagination, is a warning shot across the bow of the United States. Omar El Akkad has created a novel that isn’t afraid to be a pleasurable yarn as it delves into the hidden currents of American culture and extrapolates from them to envision a deeply tragic potential future.

• David Means, author of Hystopia “Omar El Akkad’s urgent debut transmutes our society’s current dysfunction into a terrifying yet eerily recognizable future, where contemporary global and local conflicts have wreaked havoc on American soil. The threads between today and that future are his masterfully shaped characters. Their resilience, savagery,

and humanity serve both as a portrait of who we are but also what we might very well become. • Elliot Ackerman, author of *Dark at the Crossing* “Depicting a world uncomfortably close to the one we live in, *American War* is as captivating as it is deeply frightening. • Jarry Lee, *Buzzfeed.com* “*American War* is terrifying in its prescient vision of the future. • Maris Kreizman, *New York* magazine “Piercing . . . Written with precise care for the fictional truth . . . the book sounds a warning blast. *American War* is a disquieting novel of immense depth, and possibly a classic of our time. • Al Woodworth, *Omnivoracious.com* “Although set in America, [El Akkad’s] riveting story in many ways transcends politics, with details so impeccable and a plot so tightly woven that the events indeed feel factual. • Alice Cary, *BookPage* “A dystopian vision . . . cannily imagined . . . But above all, El Akkad’s novel is an allegory about present-day military occupation, from drone strikes to suicide bombers to camps full of refugees. • Kirkus Reviews “Stunning.” • Michele Filgate, *O, the Oprah Magazine*

American War takes place in a late-21st-century America that is a shell of its former self, broken by internal strife, rising seas, extreme weather and bioterrorism. The Second American Civil War isn't fought over race (these Americans appear to mostly be over racial hangups) but power... specifically, fossil fuels. The ascendant world powers are Asian and Muslim. In this future, the Muslim "Bouazizi Empire" got popular revolution right on the fifth try, and the Red Crescent is running the refugee camps in the Free Southern States. And we meet Sarat, the protagonist of the book, at age 6, in a Louisiana that's mostly underwater, as her parents are starting to talk about getting work permits to move North. The book is a study of how terrorists are made, and the arc of Sarat's life, from atrocities in the refugee camp her family fled to, to her recruitment, her successful missions, her capture and torture, and ultimately her awful revenge, have many real-world parallels that aren't too hard to spot, or intended to be. Still, the book is deft, entertaining, and provocative. The central conceit of the book can be found in these lines given to Karina, a nurse who emigrated to the US from what was left of Bangladesh after the seas rose: "...the misery of war represented the world's only truly universal language. Its native speakers occupied different ends of the world, and the prayers they recited were not the same and the empty superstitions to which they clung so dearly were not the same... and yet they were. War broke them the same way, made them scared and angry and vengeful the same way. In times of peace and good fortune they were nothing alike, but stripped of these things they were kin. The universal slogan of

war, she'd learned, was simple: If it had been you, you'd have done no different." I ripped through this in three days, reading an hour or so longer a night than I had really intended to. Haven't picked up a piece of fiction that I didn't want to put down in a while.

Entertaining. The exposition was a bit confusing at the outset - was hard for me to follow with all of the details. But the spirit came through, especially with the characters. And the story firmed up about a 1/3 of the way in. The writer's development of the protagonist was nice. Overall I enjoyed the book. Not sure I would recommend it to anyone. But I'll keep an eye on the author. He has promise.

I enjoyed this book because it speaks to many of the current political concerns in our country, while also looking back to our history. The author has a writing style which is very easy to read. I recommend this book to anyone interested in post-apocalyptic tales.

Very well-written book, with interesting characters and believable plot. Like a window into the mentality of the South during the actual Civil War, as well as an interesting play on dynamics in the Middle East. Post-apocalyptic done very, very well!

Well written and interesting ideas about the next civil war. Great first novel. Hope you have more ideas to write about

Fascinating reading. Upside down in style and thought.

While fictional, this book touched on a lot of possible realities for our countries future. It was heart warming and at times painful to understand how war can devastate a family both directly and indirectly. It definitely takes its toll on a person. That's what makes the main character so believable, and so relatable.

Such an impressive piece of literature. Dystopia, but through compelling character development. The mystery narrator at the outset that is only revealed at the end was compelling.

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