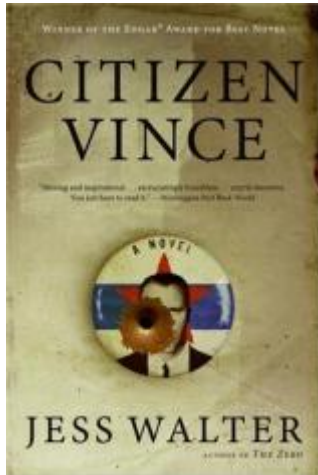


Citizen Vince

by Jess Walter



About the Book

ONE DAY YOU KNOW MORE DEAD PEOPLE THAN LIVE ONES.

It's the fall of 1980, eight days before the presidential election that pits a beleaguered hangdog Democrat against a suspiciously sunny Republican. In the Pacific Northwest, a small-time thief named Vince Camden is headed to his witness-protection job at Donut Make You Hungry. But Vince is about to learn that it's not so easy to leave your old self behind --- especially when your old self is being hunted by a killer. Over the next unforgettable week, Vince will find himself enmeshed in a local politician's troubles, torn between a beautiful young law clerk and a neurotic prostitute, playing poker with a not-yet-celebrated New York Mafioso, and looking for redemption in --- of all places --- a voting booth.

Discussion Guide

1. The epigraph of **Citizen Vince** comes from the Tao Te Ching: "A great nation is like a great man ... he thinks of his enemy as the shadow that he himself casts." How does Ray Sticks serve Vince's shadow? Who is the shadow that Dupree must confront? And Beth? Jimmy Carter?
2. Vince Camden's interior monologue is often in the second person ("One day you know more dead people than live ones.") What does this say about him? When do we generally think of ourselves as you, in the second person? How is Vince's interior monologue sparked by the presidential debate?
3. As he's listening to the debate between Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan, Vince thinks that we sometimes miss the larger tides of history because we're so focused on waves of news and gossip. How are the issues that the candidates debate similar to the issues our country faces now? How are the issues and the rhetoric different?
4. Does Vince's infatuation with Kelly represent more than just an attraction to a beautiful girl? How does it differ from his relationship with Beth? What is it the two women want? Does the woman that Vince winds up with in the end of the book tell us anything about the true nature of the changes he has made?
5. A handful of fictionalized versions of historical figures appear in **Citizen Vince**, from John Gotti to Jimmy Carter. How do these "real people" affect your enjoyment of the novel? Do they lend it some credence or do they distract from the story? Why do you think the author chose to include these characters?

6. The sense of place is as important to Citizen Vince as any of the characters. How do Spokane and New York differ in Vince's eyes? How do they differ in Ray's eyes? By the end of the book, why does Vince think of Spokane as his home?

7. The novel doesn't make it clear which candidate Vince voted for. Who do you think he voted for? Does it matter in the framework of the novel?

8. Vince only reads the beginning of novels, because he is so often let down by the endings. Novels, he thinks, can only end one of two ways, artfully (forced and manipulated) or truthfully (ambiguously or more often, badly). How do you think he would like the ending of **Citizen Vince**?

Author Bio

Jess Walter is the author of six novels, including *THE ZERO*, a finalist for the 2006 National Book Award, and *CITIZEN VINCE*, winner of the 2005 Edgar Allan Poe Award for best novel. He has been a finalist for the *L.A. Times* Book Prize and the PEN USA Literary Prize in both fiction and nonfiction. His books have been *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and NPR best books of the year and have been translated into 20 languages. He lives in Spokane, Washington.

Critical Praise

Here are characters who seem to live of their own volition, who talk out of a terrible inner need to make themselves known and understood, who reveal not just themselves but the yearning heart of our great flawed democracy.

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