



Cane River

By Lalita Tademy

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Lalita Tademy was a successful vice president at Sun Microsystems when she began what became an obsessive two-year search to uncover the story of her family's roots. It was a personal odyssey that took her back to the early 1800s and a small rural community on Louisiana's Cane River. There, digging through official records, conducting interviews, and relying on the expertise of professional genealogists, Tademy was able to bring to vivid life four remarkable women--her great, great, great, great grandmother Elisabeth; her great, great, great grandmother Suzette; her great, great grandmother Philomene; and her great-grandmother Emily. Beginning in slavery, sweeping through the Civil War, and bringing us into the pre-Civil Rights South, we follow the struggles of these four women through extraordinary hardships as they learn to empower themselves and, despite overwhelming pressures, get their due and preserve their heritage. Meticulously researched and beautifully written, this woman's Roots presents a slice of American history never before seen in such piercing and personal detail.

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Cane River By Lalita Tademy Bibliography

- Rank: #78225 in Audible
- Published on: 2001-04-06
- Format: Abridged
- Original language: English
- Running time: 383 minutes

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Lalita Tademy's riveting family saga chronicles four generations of women born into slavery along the Cane River in Louisiana. It is also a tale about the blurring of racial boundaries: great-grandmother Elisabeth notices an unmistakable "bleaching of the line" as first her daughter Suzette, then her granddaughter Philomene, and finally her great-granddaughter Emily choose (or are forcibly persuaded) to bear the illegitimate offspring of the area's white French planters. In many cases these children are loved by their fathers, and their paternity is widely acknowledged. However, neither state law nor local custom allows them to inherit wealth or property, a fact that gives *Cane River* much of its narrative drive.

The author makes it clear exactly where these prohibitions came from. Plantation society was rigidly hierarchical, after all, particularly on the heels of the Civil War and the economic hardships that came with Reconstruction. The only permissible path upward for hard-working, ambitious African Americans was indirect. A meteoric rise, or too obvious an appearance of prosperity, would be swiftly punished. To enable the slow but steady advance of their clan, the black women of *Cane River* plot, plead, deceive, and manipulate their way through history, extracting crucial gifts of money and property along the way. In the wake of a visit from the 1880 census taker, the aged Elisabeth reflects on how far they had come.

When the census taker looked at them, he saw colored first, asking questions like single or married, trying to introduce shame where there was none. He took what he saw and foolishly put those things down on a list for others to study. Could he even understand the pride in being able to say that Emily could read and write? They could ask whatever they wanted, but what he should have been marking in the book was family, and landholder, and educated, each generation gathering momentum, adding something special to the brew.

In her introduction, Tademy explains that as a young woman, she failed to appreciate the love and reverence with which her mother and her four uncles spoke of their lively Grandma "Tite (short for "Mademoiselle Petite"). She resented her great-grandmother's skin-color biases, which were as much a part of Tademy's memory as were her great-grandmother's trademark dance moves. But the old stories haunted the author, and armed with a couple of pages of history compiled by a distant Louisiana cousin, she began to piece together a genealogy. The result? Tademy eventually left her position as vice president of a Fortune 500 company and set to work on *Cane River*, in which she has deftly and movingly reconstructed the world of her ancestors. --
Regina Marler

From Publishers Weekly

Like the river of its title, Tademy's saga of strong-willed black women flows from one generation to the next, from slavery to freedom. Elisabeth is a slave on a Creole plantation, as is her daughter, Suzette. The family, based on Tademy's own ancestors, wins freedom after the Civil War, but Suzette's daughter, Philomene, must struggle to keep her family together and to achieve financial independence. The melodious, expressive voices of narrators Belafonte and Payton are a pleasure to listen to, while Moore's tougher, grittier tone conveys the hardships faced by the family. However, Belafonte and Payton sometimes ignore vocal directions provided by the novel. For example, Payton reads one passage in a whisper even though the text says "in her excitement, Philomene's voice rose... louder and louder." The complex, multigenerational tale suffers somewhat in abridgment: at times the narrative too abruptly jumps ahead by decades and some emotional situations are given short shrift, as when Philomene discovers that her daughter Bette, whom she was told died as a baby nearly 20 years earlier, is actually alive and living nearby. Still, the audio succeeds in

evoking the struggles of black women to provide better lives for their children despite all odds. Simultaneous release with the Warner hardcover (Forecasts, Mar. 12).

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From [Booklist](#)

Tademy halted a career as a high-powered technology executive to research her family's history. Her findings--four generations of strong-willed black women who survived slavery and racial injustices, maintained strong family ties, and left a legacy of faith and accomplishment--are transformed here into a powerful historical novel. The tale is told from the perspectives of Suzette, Philomene, and Emily, all born and raised in a small farming community in Louisiana. Suzette was raped by one of her master's relatives, and this set a pattern of race-mixing for her descendants. Philomene, Suzette's daughter, is desired by a powerful white man, Narcisse, and, after her slave husband is sold away and she loses her children, succumbs to his attentions. But she uses her sexual allure and a gift for premonition to secure protection and, after slavery ends, land and education for her family. Philomene's fierce determination reconstitutes the family on land she has secured from Narcisse. She is also determined that her daughter, Emily, will have every possible advantage, including, eventually, a wealthy white protector. Throughout three generations, however, none of the women escapes the social conventions forbidding interracial marriages; each is abandoned or driven away when her white protector wants to produce legal progeny. The incidental, progressive whitening of the family ends when Emily's son, T. O., marries a dark-skinned woman and reclaims his racial identity, inaugurating the line from which Tademy comes. Including old photographs and documents verifying the reality that underlies it, this fascinating account of American slavery and race-mixing should enthrall readers who love historical fiction. *Vanessa Bush*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Steven Maravilla:

This Cane River book is absolutely not ordinary book, you have after that it the world is in your hands. The benefit you get by reading this book is definitely information inside this e-book incredible fresh, you will get details which is getting deeper you read a lot of information you will get. This kind of Cane River without we understand teach the one who reading through it become critical in imagining and analyzing. Don't always be worry Cane River can bring when you are and not make your handbag space or bookshelves' come to be full because you can have it with your lovely laptop even mobile phone. This Cane River having great arrangement in word and layout, so you will not truly feel uninterested in reading.

Sonia Shipley:

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