

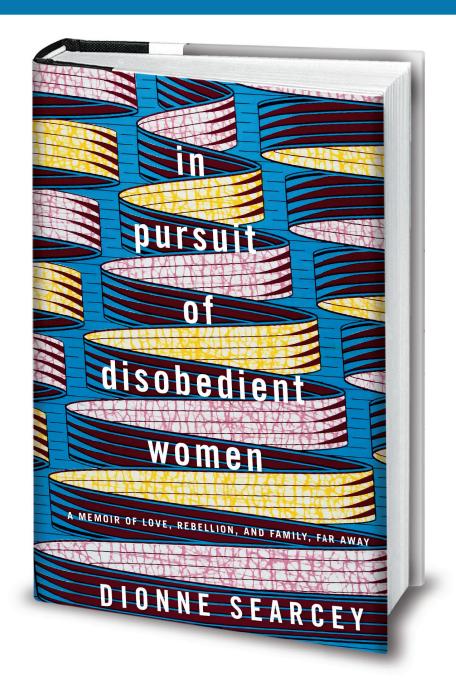
A NOTE FROM DIONNE SEARCEY

Dear Reader,

In Pursuit of Disobedient Women offers a window into a place off the radar for most of the Western world. I hope my book gives you a glimpse into the give-and-take of an American woman in a dual-career family while telling some very relatable stories of women living in dramatically different circumstances than any of us find ourselves in. Their cleverness at overcoming patriarchy in all its forms offers compelling and inspiring reading.

Thank you for selecting my book for your club. I hope you love it.

-Dionne



FACTS ABOUT THE WEST AFRICAN REGION

Population:

West Africa is part of the fastest-growing region in the world and home to a massive "youth bulge," where young people make up the bulk of the population. In all of Africa, the population of youth is expected to grow to over 830 million people by 2050.

Poverty:

The average poverty rate for sub-Saharan Africa is about **41 percent**, according to the Brookings Institute. Of the world's **28 poorest countries**, **27** are in sub-Saharan Africa—all with a poverty rate above **30 percent**.

Unemployment:

The countries in West and Central Africa have some of the highest rates of unemployment in the world. Every 24 hours, nearly 33,000 young men and women across Africa join the search for employment, according to the United Nations. About 60 percent will wind up unemployed. Thousands of people try to illegally sail to Europe to look for work. Most West Africans use a route across the Mediterranean that has been named the world's deadliest, claiming 15,750 lives since 2014, according to the International Organization for Migration.

Inequality:

Compared to other regions on the continent, West Africa has the greatest number of countries with more than **30 percent** of the population living on **less than \$1.90 a day**, according to Oxfam. The wealthiest one percent of West Africans own more than everyone else combined in the region. Five of Nigeria's richest men have a combined wealth of **\$29.9 billion**—more than the country's entire national budget for 2017. But about **60 percent** of its citizens live on **less than \$1.25 a day**, the threshold for absolute poverty. In Ghana, West Africa's second biggest economy, one of the richest men earns more in a month than one of the poorest women could earn in **1,000 years**.

Women and education:

Women in West Africa are more educated than ever before, but the state of education for girls and women still needs much improvement. An estimated **70 percent** of the poorest girls in Niger, for example, have never attended even primary school, according to Oxfam. In Nigeria, the government has enrolled increasing numbers of girls in school in recent years, but many drop out. Despite substantial progress over the last two decades, girls still have on average lower levels of educational attainment than boys in West and Central Africa, according to the Global Partnership for Education. This is in part because many girls in the region are married while still children, often before they may be physically and emotionally ready to become wives and mothers.

FACTS ABOUT THE WEST AFRICAN REGION (continued)

Women in the African workforce:

In Nigeria, women make up between 60 and 79 percent of the rural labor force but they are 10 times less likely to own their own land than men. They represent only 3.5 percent of the population owning farmland in the country. One in four women lack reproductive autonomy or "the power to decide when, if at all, to have children," due to unmet family planning needs along with low contraceptive use—17 percent compared to 64 percent globally, according to a report from the Sahel and West Africa Club Secretariat. Girls in sub-Saharan Africa spend 160 million more hours than boys in the same age group on house chores, according to the Pew Research Center. And on average, women spend up to six times more time than men on unpaid care work—cooking, cleaning, collecting water and firewood, and caring for children, the ill and the elderly.

Many girls in low-income households have to drop out of school, get married early, and spend their time cooking, cleaning, and caring for family members. These restricted ambitions also manifest later, with fewer African women represented in boardrooms or heading companies.

Women in the American workforce:

Women in the class of 2016–17 earned more than half of bachelor's degrees, master's degrees and doctorate degrees. Women of all races and ethnicities outperformed men at all degree levels in 2015–2016. Women in 2019 earned 79 cents for every dollar earned by men.

Married American mothers spend almost twice as much time on housework and childcare than married fathers, according to Pew. Although American mothers, including those with young children, are far more likely to be working now than in past decades, they spend more time on childcare today than did moms in the 1960s. In S&P 500 companies, women are less represented higher up on the corporate ladder. Just 5 percent of CEOs of those companies are women.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. In the book, Dionne reflects on the media and Hollywood's portrayals of West Africa and West African culture. How did reading In Pursuit of Disobedient Women change how you see the region?
 - What specific details affected how you pictured it?
- 2. Dionne's work-life balance is an ongoing struggle throughout the book (moving her family, taking dangerous assignments, etc.). If you were in her shoes, would you have made the same choices? Why or why not?
- 3. If you are a parent, what's one moment you've felt "mom/dad/parent guilt"? How did you deal with that?
- 4. At various points, Dionne and Todd were forced to reassess their roles in their household. Has there been a time in one of your relationship where the balance shifted?
 - How did you handle that?
- 5. Dionne's life and background differs greatly from the backgrounds of the women whose stories she told in the book. Do you think that affected how she shared their experiences? If so, how?
- 6. Dionne struggles to settle back into family life after coming home from assignments. If you were in her position how much or how little would you share of your experiences with your family?
 - What do you think is the best way to get people to understand what another person's hardship is really like?
- 7. Throughout the book, Dionne struggles to find "front-page worthy" stories that do not solely focus on war. By the end of the book, do you feel like she accomplished her goal?
- 8. Do you think it's fair that Todd doesn't want Dionne to take the Paris assignment?
 - If you were Dionne, would you have taken the assignment anyway?
- 9. Think of all the women whose stories Dionne shared in the book. Is there one woman's story that you connected with the most?
 - Do you feel there are any parallels to your own life?

