Behold The Dreamers: A Novel
A compulsively readable debut novel about marriage, immigration, class, race, and the trapdoors in the American Dream—the unforgettable story of a young Cameroonian couple making a new life in New York just as the Great Recession upends the economy. Jende Jonga, a Cameroonian immigrant living in Harlem, has come to the United States to provide a better life for himself, his wife, Neni, and their six-year-old son. In the fall of 2007, Jende can hardly believe his luck when he lands a job as a chauffeur for Clark Edwards, a senior executive at Lehman Brothers. Clark demands punctuality, discretion, and loyalty—and Jende is eager to please. Clark's wife, Cindy, even offers Neni temporary work at the Edwardses' summer home in the Hamptons. With these opportunities, Jende and Neni can at last gain a foothold in America and imagine a brighter future. However, the world of great power and privilege conceals troubling secrets, and soon Jende and Neni notice cracks in their employers' façades. When the financial world is rocked by the collapse of Lehman Brothers, the Jongas are desperate to keep Jende's job—even as their marriage threatens to fall apart. As all four lives are dramatically upended, Jende and Neni are forced to make an impossible choice.

Praise for Behold the Dreamers

"A debut novel by a young woman from Cameroon that illuminates the immigrant experience in America with the tenderhearted wisdom so lacking in our political discourse . . . Mbue is a bright and captivating storyteller."
The Washington Post

"Mbue writes with great confidence and warmth. . . . There are a lot of spinning plates and Mbue balances them skillfully, keeping everything in motion. . . . A capacious, big-hearted novel."
The New York Times Book Review

"People (book of the week) Mbue's TMs writing is warm and captivating."
People

"Mbue's TMs first work of fiction to grapple with the global financial crisis of 2007-2008, but it's surely one of the best. . . . It's a novel that depicts a country both blessed and doomed, on top of the world, but always at risk of losing its balance. It is, in other words, quintessentially American."
NPR

"Mbue's masterful debut about an immigrant family struggling to obtain the elusive American Dream in Harlem will have you feeling for each character from the moment you crack it open."
In Style

"This story is one that needs to be told."
Bust

"Behold the Dreamers challenges us all to consider what it takes to make us genuinely content, and how long is too long to live with our dreams deferred."
The Oprah Magazine

"Mbue's narrative energy and sympathetic eye soon render commonplace ingredients vivid, complex, and essential."
The Boston Globe

"St. Louis Post-Dispatch is a deft, often lyrical observer. . . . [Her] meticulous storytelling announces a writer in
command of her gifts, plumbing the desires and disappointments of our emerging global
culture.â “Minneapolis Star Tribune âœA revelation . . . Mbue has written a clever morality tale
that never preaches but instead teaches us the power of integrity.â “Essence

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**Customer Reviews**

In Imbolo Mbueâ™s masterful novel, about a married couple from Cameroon fighting to live in
America and find the American Dream, there is a scene where the husband Jende, a chauffeur, tells
his rich boss, Clark Edwards, a Lehman Brothers executive, that where he is from in Cameroon as
you drive upon the Limbe city limits there is a sign that says Limbe is the city where everyone is
your friend. The Limbe sign is a symbol of ambivalence to Jende. On one hand, the loving
community connection is a place of love and innocence; on the other hand, Limbe is a city where
youâ™re stagnant, where âœyou can never be a somebody.â “This novel is about Jende and his
wife Neni, a pharmaceutical student, moving away from innocence and landing in Harlem and trying
to find the American Dream of Privilege, Power, and Consumerism. Jende and Neni are too wise
and complex to not notice materialismâ™s traps, but even their awareness and small town values
donâ™t seem to diminish consumerismâ™s spell on them. Indeed, much of the novelâ™s tension
is watching Jende and Neni, fighting tooth and claw to make it in America, bearing witness to the
obnoxious privilege and extravagance of Clark Edwards and his family. This fever dream of
consumerism, however, comes to a shrieking halt in 2008 when the Great Recession kicks Lehman
Brothers off a cliff. Jende watches his boss Clark Edwards in the aftermath of his companyâ™s
near death and he must re-evaluate his pursuit of the American Dream. At one point in the novel, he
says to himself regarding the Great Recession: “In many different ways it would be an unprecedented plague, a calamity like the one that had befallen the Egyptians in the Old Testament.”

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