

Southfield Public Library

At The Dark End Of The Street by Danielle L. McGuire

Discussion questions used at SPL -- February 2013

1. Did you learn anything new about Rosa Parks while reading this book? How did her upbringing affect her decision making in life? If she had married a different man, do you think she would have taken the paths that she did?
2. Why did the ministers and other male leaders drag their feet on launching a bus boycott? What were they waiting for? Do you think they made the right decision? What would you have done?
3. Why do you think we mythologize people? Why is it easier for us to see Mrs. Parks as just a tired seamstress instead of the revolutionary she really was?
4. It was very difficult to read of how women were in such danger, even in their own homes. So much work went into trying to get men even arrested for rape, let alone to trial. How did this affect you as a reader?
5. Do you think that part of the history of civil rights was ignored by historians and the country in general? Why do you think that might have been?
6. Were you surprised at how much of a role the women played in trying to get things accomplished in the South? Were you surprised at the amount of support that they had throughout the country? Do you think we are as cohesive today for causes?
7. Did you appreciate the way the author connected the fight for civil rights to a broader cause of women's rights? Can you have one without the other?
8. It was enlightening to me, as a reader, to learn the long and painful history that led up to the Montgomery bus boycott . . . was this new to you?
9. How do you think Mrs. Parks was able to deal with such issues? She was quoted on p 52 that sometimes it was difficult to keep going. . .
10. On p 61, it was exciting to read of the way the varied women's groups came together and seemed to pave the way for the bus boycott to be successful. Did it seem as though the women were better at organizing and marshalling forces than their male counterparts?
11. Why didn't the organizers think that the teenager Claudette Colvin as their rallying point? There were certainly lots of other women who had the courage to say NO and were punished for their courage . . . why did it take them so long to launch?
12. Were there egos involved? How did the women work around those? What did you think of the men taking over from the women who organized it?
13. Were you, as a reader, upset that Rosa Parks did not have a chance to speak at the rally (p 87)? What do you think she would have said if she did have a chance?
14. It was an interesting image that the author constructed when she described the housemaids as foot soldiers . . . how important do you think they were in this particular civil rights battle?
15. Would you agree with the author's view that whites, especially white southern men, were obsessed with sex? And how hypocritical were they, accusing black men of the very things they were doing to black women? Did she help explain/make clear some of their motives?
16. I can't even begin to understand how they could have such a double standard . . .
17. Would you agree or disagree that rape can be a weapon of war . . .

18. I was impressed at how open the women were of acknowledging that they were sexually attacked, especially compared to how we treat rape victims today . . . names never mentioned, faces hidden in shadows. Why do you think they spoke so loudly?
19. There was a quote on p 97 about being nobodies from nowhere . . . why do you think the women who did so much were ignored not only by the press but by the leadership of the Civil Rights movement?
20. Why do you think Martin Luther King was the man chosen to be lead? What did he have that the other ministers didn't?
21. There wasn't much said in the book about music, but on p 124 the author did mention how upset the white parents were when their children listened to black singers and entertainers . . . do you think that music had an impact on breaking down some of the walls?
22. So many awful things were related in this book . . . How crazy did someone have to be to do what they did to the little boys involved in the kissing game?! Was that a sign of how desperate the white establishment was to hang on to the power they did have?
23. How, as a country, could we not see the hypocrisy of how we treated our own citizens yet complained of how other countries were acting?
24. Were you heartened as you read of at least some convictions? But then, did that go away when you read about some of the actions of the police and the courts?
25. It was interesting to me how she compared the sexual slander thrown at African Americans to the whole McCarthy-era Communist witch hunt . . . would you agree with that?
26. How would you compare Joan Little to Rosa Parks in the image game? She certainly didn't have the upstanding position Rosa did, but why did they use her as a way to make a strong statement about the rights of a woman?
27. Do you think, as groups, we speak up as much as we did in the past? How has technology changed how we communicate?
28. Do you feel as though things have changed much? Are women still being attacked sexually, in words and deeds?
29. Why do you think the author wrote this book? Who should be reading it?
30. Did you hear about the woman in Somalia who was sentenced for reporting a rape? A reporter who interviewed her – but never published the interview – was also jailed.
<http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/somali-court-rape-victim-reporter-jailed-article-1.1255855>

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General discussion questions

- For the person who chose the book – What made you want to read it? What made you pick it for the book club? Did it live up to your expectations?
- How is the book structured? First person? Third person? Flashbacks? Narrative devices? Do you think the author did a good job with it?
- How would you describe the author’s writing style? Concise? Flowery? How is language used in this book? Read aloud a passage that really struck you. How does that passage relate to the book as a whole?
- How effective is the author’s use of plot twists? Were you able to predict certain things before they happened? Did the author keep you guessing until the end?
- Did the book hold your interest?
- How important is the setting to the story? Did you feel like you were somewhere else? Did the time setting make a difference in the story? Did the author provide enough background information for you to understand the setting and time placement?
- Which is stronger in the book – the characters or the plots?
- Would you recommend this book to someone else? Why? And to whom?

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Link to the author's webpage

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<http://atthedarkendofthestreet.com/>