

# Southfield Public Library

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## *The Garies and Their Friends* by Frank J. Webb

*Discussion questions used at SPL February 8 & 14, 2017*

1. The book opens with the telling of an ex-slave “passing for white”, what are your thoughts about the incident? Were you appalled? Did you find that it was cruel for Mr. Garie to treat his friend in that manner or was he trying to make a point? The point being “that a man can be a gentleman even though he has African blood in his veins.” Was it okay for Mr. Winston to let the people of the South believe he was white and was he trying to make same point?
2. Do you find it curious that the Mr. Ellis would put Charlie “in service”? What do we know about the Ellis family? What would possess a free man of color to agree to allow his child, a male boy child who can read and write be a servant?
3. Mr. Garie is a white man who owned slaves but has since married and fathered children by his slave Emily but currently lives in Philadelphia a free state without emancipating Emily and their two children. Why does Mr. Garie not see that the United States is not a free country for all especially Emily and his children?
4. In Chapter V ...“it is a fearful thing to give birth to an inheritor of chains...” Emily shared with Mr. Garie after telling him she was pregnant with their third child. Think about what she is saying and reflect on the bondages of slavery. Are there things today, in 2017, that you could point out/express and feel that would be equally as disturbing about our society and community upon inspection? What fears still exist for mothers of black children?
5. Page 122-123. The description of the portrait of Toussaint L’Overture is telling in what ways? Why do you think the author talks of Toussaint L’Overture the way that he does with respect and reverence?
6. How does this book compare to Eric Foner’s *Gateway to freedom* the telling of the abolitionists, Southern people’s attitude toward slavery and people of color (free people of color), and Northern laws and practices that kept the bondages of slavery tight?
7. Is Mrs. Bird an abolitionist or simply a kind hearted lady who does not see color but a boy in need? Do you think she sees Charlie as her lost child (Charlie)? Is this good or bad?
8. Page 166, Chapter XVI—The scheme that Mr. Stevens hatched to drive property values down was one that enlisted violence, discrimination, and unlawful behavior that persisted

centuries later in American business practices, political maneuverings and race relations. What parts of his plan still exists in 21<sup>st</sup> century America? For example: Gerrymandering (manipulate the boundaries of (an electoral constituency) so as to favor one party or class) or redistricting cities for political power plays and election outcome guarantees.

9. What do you think of the “scheme” to have Clarence and Emily pass as white children? Given the times and prevailing treatment of people of color/African Americans would you be opposed to or in favor of them “passing as white”? Why or why not?
10. Lets examine Clarence’s decision not to tell “little Birdie” that his mother was biracial. He was advised to share all but his fear of losing her stopped him. He suffered greatly because of it. Would the outcome have been any different had he told his white fiancé about his ancestry himself? If so, in what ways?
11. What do you think about the style of the book? How is it written? Did the old English style of speech help or hinder the story? Was the language/vernacular (dialect spoken) of the era difficult to read?
12. Were there any surprises in the book for you? If so, please explain.
13. Who do you think the book was written for? Is it simply a romance story or an indictment of the times/era and the racial bigotry, violence, and discrimination that existed.

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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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*Title:*

*Discussion questions taken from a website:*

*website address:*



