

Southfield Public Library

Everyone's Reading:

Once In A Great City: A Detroit Story by David Maraniss

Discussion questions used at SPL April 11 & 12, 2017

Book Club Questions provided by The Everyone's Reading Committee—

1. Compare the re-birth Detroit is currently experiencing with the period 1962 – 1964 that the author calls “a time of uncommon possibility.”
2. The author writes about Detroit dying from its own design - from the construction of freeways rather than mass transit, to the growth of the suburban shopping malls and the predominance of single family homes purchased by the factory workers earning a good living wage. Do you agree and do you think these phenomena persist today?
3. Based on the details laid out in the book regarding Detroit before 1967, what do you think Detroit would be like today, had the 1967 riots never taken place?
4. Maraniss talks about how the 2011 Chrysler Super Bowl Ad inspired him, not to buy a car, but to write about what the city meant to America. Do you feel he accomplished his goal? Why or why not?
5. Do you feel the people, stories and events in the book adequately and fairly depict the city at the time? Are there other stories or events that you felt could have been included to give the reader a better perspective?
6. What events or story surprised you most about the book? Did you learn anything about Detroit that you didn't know?
7. Did the author feel like the music of Motown changed the city? Would you agree with his opinion? If you were a young person in the 60's, how did Motown music influence you? Does it still matter in the music world?
8. The city of Detroit made a great effort to welcome Martin Luther King during his visit in 1963, even telling him that he would find no dogs or fire hoses here. How important was it that the white government – from the governor to the mayor to the police chief – made such an effort?

9. The unions played a great role in the building up of the middle class and of the city. Walter Reuther was a big player in that. Were you surprised to read of his commitment to the civil rights movement?

10. Would the city have taken a different course if it had been awarded the Olympics? Where do you think it could have gone?

11. The author spoke of many of Detroit's iconic buildings and landmarks. Which do you remember and why?

12. While the city was at a peak during the time of the book's content, we are trying to make a comeback today. Do you see similarities between then and now? Where do you think this once great city is heading?

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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: