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The Senator and the Socialite by Laurence Graham

Discussion questions used at SPL May 2013

1. What difference did it make that Blanche's family basically stayed together, despite being slaves?
2. Did this help you understand why it took so long for the US to abolish slavery?
3. What did you think of the excerpts from Henry's book. . . what impression did it leave with you on how he felt about being a slave? Do you think Blanche might have felt the same?
4. How important was Blanche's mother's understanding of the value of education and the knowledge to discern and use to their advantage, class distinctions. P 35
5. While Blanche was getting his foot in the door of politics, who do you think was using whom? P 53-54
6. What did you think of his support of President Harrison? P. 156. . . Why would he support a man who said the things he said? Did you understand Blanche's reasoning? Could you accept it?
7. What did you learn about Josephine? Was her story secondary? How much did she help Blanche achieve his goals?
8. P 166. . . Were you surprised that Josephine would belong to an organization that would help poor black families, when she wouldn't ever visit her husband's family?
9. P 182. . . the story of T John was interesting. . . what did you think about his passing and then coming back for money?
10. Were you surprised by the small circles the family moved in? Is that still typical of an elite group? Of any group?
11. P 187 - there was a strong reaction against Bruce because of concerns he didn't care enough for poor blacks . . . would you agree? Disagree?
12. How would you compare this historical book to *At the Dark End of the Street*. . . In terms of information, readability?
13. What did you think of Roscoe's time at Harvard . . . How well did he fit in socially there? Academically? Did he bridge the two worlds – white and black – better than his father did?
14. Booker T. Washington... speech p 207. . . How did the black community view that? The white community? Did this book give you more insight into Washington? Did it change your point of view of him?
15. What did you think of Roscoe's relationship with Washington? Was it honest? Was it hypocritical? Somewhere in the middle?
16. Was Roscoe spoiled? P 219
17. Were his actions typical of a child who was raised by parents who had a tough upbringing and just wanted to give their kid everything?
18. Author had an interesting set of theories on why Roscoe worked at Tuskegee. . .p 226. Did you accept them? Which do you think was most likely? Or was it a combination of the three?
19. Washington's business practices. . . Was he much different from Blanche?
20. Roscoe's and Clara's wedding. . . Yikes! P 242. What did that tell you about Roscoe? About Clara?

21. Revealing look at Roscoe and the fraternity Sigma Pi Phi p 281 - Again, what did Roscoe's actions reveal about him?
22. What did you think of the way Roscoe behaved as superintendent of the schools?
23. Which generation had it the easiest? The toughest? Or just different struggles
24. What did you think of Roscoe and Clara's children?
25. How hard is it, do you think, for families of exceptional parents to continue that tradition? Can you think of successful ones? Unsuccessful ones?
26. P355, the author states that all his life, Roscoe "had taken his family legacy more seriously than anything else." Would you agree with that?
27. Roscoe, Jr's criminal charges/Roscoe Sr's reaching out to black community – did they deserve the jail time and responses they received?
28. P 379 – last paragraph. . . could that legacy have gone any other way, considering the racial mood of the country at the time? Why do you think Blanche's grandchildren distanced themselves from his story?
29. What will you take away from this book?

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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?