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Book Club Kit Discussion Guide

Your Blues Ain't Like Mine
by
Bebe Moore Campbell
(New York, Random House, 1993)

Author:

Bebe Moore Campbell was the author of several *New York Times* bestsellers: *Brothers and Sisters*, *Singing in the Comeback Choir*, *What You Owe Me*, which was also a *Los Angeles Times* Best Book of 2001, and *72 Hour Hold*. Her other works include the novel *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine*, which was a *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year and the winner of the NAACP Image Award for literature. Bebe Moore Campbell died in 2006. [From Random House Inc.]

Summary:

The novel begins with the murder of an African-American teenager in Mississippi in the 1950's. It then traces the years from the '50s to the late '80s, from Eisenhower to George Bush following the teenager's family, the family of the murderers and other members of the Mississippi town.

Questions:

1. Armstrong Todd is the perfect scapegoat. Why?
2. Lily Cox is partly responsible for Armstrong Todd's murder. Yet, in what ways is she also a victim?
3. Floyd Cox and Clayton Pinochet appear to be two different men from two different walks of life. Examine the ways in which their relationships with their fathers are similar and in which ways Floyd's and Clayton's responses to their fathers are different.
4. Ida and Sweetbabe, Lily and Floyd junior--two mothers and two sons. How are Ida's and Lily's circumstances similar? How is Ida's character different from that of Lily's?
5. Discuss the character of Jake. Is he an enemy to his own race, an enemy, or just selfish?
6. The Illinois Central train runs through the town of Hopewell. What does this train mean to Armstrong, Lily, Ida, and Clayton?

7. What is Clayton and Marguerite's relationship like initially? How does this relationship change? Why does it change?
8. Wydell poses the question to Delotha, "What kind of mother would send her own kid to that hellhole?" Was Delotha a bad mother and responsible for Armstrong's fate?
9. Does Wydell ever become a real man? Why or why not?

Further Reading:

Richard Wright, [*Native Son*](#) (1940)

Bigger Thomas is a liar, thief, and finally a murderer in 1930s Chicago. We do not like this character, yet are compelled to ask questions about the poverty and racism that helped shape who he has become. Wright's classic novel of how racism creates exactly what it fears still resonates today.

Zora Neal Hurston, [*Their Eyes Were Watching God*](#) (1937)

Janie Crawford, a woman living in Eaton, Florida, has had three husbands, one of whom she killed. Hurston's use of dialect and capturing of life in a black community is still recognized as masterful decades later.

Toni Morrison, [*Song of Solomon*](#) (1977)

Morrison's third novel tells the story of "Milkman" Dead and his family struggling in Michigan. The novel explores the lasting effects of slavery through four generations of a family.

Lorraine Hansberry, [*A Raisin in the Sun*](#) (1959)

Hansberry's play follows the lives of three generations of the Younger family growing up in Chicago in the early days of the civil rights struggle. Follow the family's attempts to make their way out of poverty amidst the setbacks that befall them.