

BOOK1: SHADES AND SHADOWS

Questions for Further Consideration

1. How do you identify *yourself* ethnically, racially, etc. For example: Irish? Italian? Jewish? African American? Native American? Eurasian? Chinese-American? Latina? Why do you identify this way?
2. How did Sara self-identify? Why do you think she saw herself in such a way?
3. Can we ever see ourselves simply as *Americans*? Why or why not? Would something important be lost if we did? If so, what? What might be gained?
4. Sara lived in a time when most Americans attended church regularly and most of those churches, outside large cities, were Protestant churches. Sara had difficulty, given the life she lived, believing much of what she heard in church or read in the Bible, yet she wanted her brother and sisters to believe it. Why?
5. *Shades and Shadows* mentions behaviors that were *taboo, and in some cases even illegal*, in America during the period: fornication, adultery, abortion, divorce, racially mixed-marriage (miscegenation). While people have never behaved in complete compliance to the precepts mentioned above, certainly many more people today act contrary to those beliefs. Are there any ways in which America is better off for the easing of some or all of these proscriptions? How do we struggle today with these issues?

6. What might Sara's early life have been like if Clay and Nisa had announced their marriage openly and lived together openly as a household?

7. According to the mores of Sara's day, she was behaving immorally by writing to Joseph, as was he in writing to her, especially once they made plans to marry. What are your thoughts on this and how might things be different or similar today?

8. Sara planned for some time to move to Washington D.C. to start a restaurant. At that time, Washington had the largest percentage of Black Americans of any city in the country and government offices were integrated to the degree that the person hiring the workers saw fit. Could Sara have gone any place else in the U.S. at that time and had the degree of freedom she had?

9. Should Uncle Robert (Massah Robert) have revealed to his mother that her second son, Holton who died during the War, was Caesar's father and Sara's grandfather? What do you think Ole Missus would have done?

10. For all appearances, Joseph was white. His first wife was white. His paramours were white. Explain, if you can, why he could find Sara, a woman of color, attractive and want to marry her. How could Sara find a man, much lighter than she, attractive?

11. Of course the money was not available by the end of the very costly (in human and financial ways) War, but what might America be like today had the "40 acres and a mule" been given to former slaves? What might have been different if slaveholders had been reimbursed for the slaves that were freed?

12. What social processes caused the federal government to ease up on the newly reinstated confederate states so that Jim Crow laws began to creep in, that lynching of blacks became almost commonplace in many states, and eventually (in Book Two) even the federal government enacted segregation? How easy is it for hard-fought-for rights to be legally eroded? Could it happen again?

13. The slave cemetery exists. My recurring dream happened. What do you think brought about Sara's story, after all these years?

14. Other questions you would like to discuss or consider...