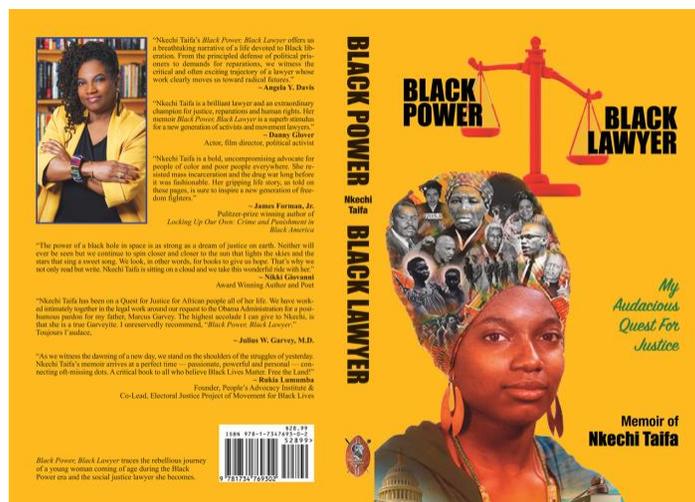


Black Power, Black Lawyer

Book Club/Study Group Discussion Questions



MEMOIR OVERVIEW

Nkechi Taifa's memoir, *Black Power, Black Lawyer: My Audacious Quest for Justice*, is the story of a girl who becomes a revolutionary. A revolutionary who becomes a lawyer. And a lawyer who fights for justice. The book stitches suspense, calamity, humor and wit into a tapestry of history, politics, law, culture and romance. Whether serious or scandalous, Taifa's audacious quest for justice is a gripping commentary on life; the perennial nature of human resistance against oppression; and her earnest embrace of what is fair and correct. Although sometimes raw, sometimes abrasive, sometimes passionate, she offers her truth, unapologetically and unfiltered, with honesty and authenticity. *Black Power, Black Lawyer* offers a uniquely personal glimpse from an insider's perspective into little known or understood parts of this country's history – from juicy stories of the more controversial and militant aspects of the Black liberation struggle, to the craziness of congressional sausage-making and the pivotal role of “strange bedfellows.”

Taifa's memoir bears witness to ancestors, people and episodes that swayed the shaping of her identity and consciousness. No matter which vantage point she found herself -- from sitting on the lap of that fine brother pulling security in the front office of the Black Panther Party to getting arrested right after graduating from law school; being accused of being an FBI agent to representing the lead defendant in the Capital Bombing case; being detained at an airport five months pregnant as an alleged enemy of the state to winning a six-figure settlement for clients in a pivotal employment discrimination suit; or to being a catalyst which sparked the change to the infamous crack cocaine laws – her quest for justice in society reigned supreme.

Ten Question Clusters to Help Guide Your Book Club/Study Group Discussion

ONE

What does the book's cover, title and sub-title convey to you? How many (if any) images on the front cover can you identify? The book is dedicated to eight ancestors who personally influenced the author. Research them and relate one thing you learned. Would you characterize Taifa's story as audacious? Why or why not? If yes, what examples would you give of her coming of age years as audacious? What about as a lawyer? Which chapter and/or section resonated with you the most? Why? Which were you least moved by, and why. Do you feel the author's detailed Table of Contents was helpful or too revealing?

TWO

Taifa once wrote a poem, "While Malcolm Preached, Trane Played," which she performed with the DC-based group, Black Notes. Part of her spoken word states "*The nation is strong when the music is strong. Black people cannot go wrong when the music is strong.*" Each chapter of her memoir is prefaced with the title of a song from the 1960's-1970's - the era of Taifa's coming of age. Do you feel there should be a correlation between music and activism? Why do you think the author chose these song titles? Do you feel the lyrics are relevant today to a new generation of activists? Are there similar songs today you would replace the book's headings with? If so, which ones would you recommend?

THREE

In promotional materials, Taifa states "although there are memoirs chronicling iconic leaders striving for justice during the well-documented civil rights era, there is scant reminiscence of the transformative journeys for self-realization of ordinary people growing up during the tumult of the Black Power era." How valid do you feel that statement is? Can you cite more than 5 coming of age memoirs with the Black Power era as its backdrop? Have you read *Assata*, by Assata Shakur? How would you compare the life trajectories of Taifa and Shakur? Does *Black Power, Black Lawyer* remind you of other books? Compare and contrast other autobiographies or memoirs you may be familiar with that cover similar themes to Taifa's memoir.

FOUR

Essentially, the first half of Taifa's memoir centers on escapades in the author's coming of age story, which was influenced by the Black Power era. The second half of her book centers on selected adventures as a Black Attorney. Do you see similarities or differences between the two intertwined sections of the book? Did one influence the other? In the "author as revolutionary" half does Taifa experience contradictions? Discuss. In the "author as lawyer" half do you think the Taifa felt certain behaviors were expected of her as a lawyer? What conundrums does she describe and how does she maneuver and negotiate the contradictions?

FIVE

It takes a lot of courage to reveal intimate aspects of one's private life. Sexual abuse, personal frailties, abortion, fears, and marital difficulties are challenges faced by many people transcending generations. Do you feel the personal aspects Taifa discusses enhance or detract from her story? Why or why not? What feelings did intimate aspects of the book evoke for you? Are there aspects of the author's personal private life that you could relate to? If you feel comfortable, discuss personal challenges you may have experienced in your life and how you overcome them.

SIX

How much of the author's subject matter were you familiar with before you read the book? Did the memoir bring to light any issue you were not previously aware of, or make you more knowledgeable about a particular issue? What new issues did you learn or gain more clarity about? What questions do you still have? Are there gaps you wish the author had gone into more detail about? Did early opinions you may have had change after reading the book? Has your interest been piqued on a particular subject matter? If you had heard of the author before or the issues she describes, did pre-conceived opinions you may have had change after reading her story?

SEVEN

If you were making a movie of Taifa's memoir, which actress would you cast as 1) high school teenage rebel Nkechi, revolutionary activist Nkechi, young lawyer Nkechi, veteran attorney Nkechi? Which scenes from the book would you highlight for the big screen? Who would you recommend direct such a movie or documentary?

EIGHT

Taifa describes her book as both "solemn and salacious," and as "part memoir, part textbook, part study guide, part expose." She says it teaches, preaches, rhapsodizes and tantalizes." Do you feel the book lived up to that description? Did the author's style of storytelling capture your interest? Was there something especially surprising about her story that you did not expect? What was it and why? If you had the chance to ask the author one question, what would it be?

NINE

The author raises several questions: "Whether one can confront the injustices and hypocrisies of society and still survive it?" "Can one be a Woke Black Girl Magic Superwoman and still have personal frailties?" "Can one challenge the dominant culture while remaining true to one's political and spiritual beliefs, have an African name, keep one's hair in its natural state, maintain a quality family life and still kick ass in the courtroom?" How would you answer these questions? Could you discern answers to them in her memoir? Taifa speaks of unconditional support from her family in all her endeavors. How important do you feel family support was to her success in life? Discuss how those without such support can still succeed.

TEN

Nkechi Taifa's memoir is ideal for opening up dialogue about numerous movements, including the Civil Rights Movement, Black Power Movement, Revolutionary Cultural Nationalist Movement, Black Studies Movement, Independent Black Schools Movement, Anti-Apartheid Movement, New Afrikan Independence Movement, Reparations Movement, Me Too Movement, Movement against Mass Incarceration, and the Movement for Black Lives. It also provides ground for fertile discussions about racism, gentrification, justice, personal relationships, entrepreneurship, and spirituality. Are there lessons that can be gleaned from her involvement in these movements and issues that can be helpful to activists today? How can her experiences be used to connect historical dots between generations?

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Foreword by Professor Greg Carr

Prologue - "Judge Not"

Red Badge at the White House
But They are *White* Revolutionaries

Chapter One

"O-o-h Child, Things Are Gonna Get Easier"

1954 and Before
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Hair, Skin and Other Crude Experiments
Media Images and Race
The Pony Incident and Emmett Till
Open Up the Casket
Me Too, Long Before #MeToo

Chapter Two

"Say it Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud"

My All-Black-Neighborhood-Jr-High-School
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Good Gurl, Bad Boyz and The Struggle
My All-White-Girls-Catholic-High-School
Lil Militant Me
Flirting with the Black Panther Party

Brothers from the Nam
The Red, Black and Green Patch
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Artistically Prophetic

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Putting Spice in Lie is Not Always Nice
The Garvey Movement Was Personal to Me

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A Black Nation in the South?
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Tulia, Tip of the Drug War Iceberg
Brining the Human Face to Capitol Hill
Roots of the Reentry Bill
Behind the Cycle
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“I Feel Good” Obama

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Junk Food Justice
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