

Discussion Questions

Libertie

1. *Libertie* grew out of Kaitlyn Greenidge's research about Dr. Susan Smith McKinney Steward and her daughter. Although the characters take their origins from Steward and her daughter Anna, Greenidge expands deeply on the historical record. Why do you think she chose to write this as fiction rather than nonfiction? How does that affect what you take away from the novel?
2. Ben Daisy tells Libertie that his girlfriend "said if she were ever free, she'd spend all day covered in silk and she'd paint her face pretty ... She knew what she would do with freedom. It wasn't man's work she'd do with freedom. Not like your mama. She knew better than that." Emmanuel Chase also has a specific definition of freedom in relation to women. How do men define freedom as opposed to the way women define freedom?
3. Libertie is much darker skinned than her mother, as many people remark to them. How does that physical factor influence Libertie's perspective on the world? How does it inform her choices?
4. When Cathy Sampson opens the hospital, she makes a number of compromises. How did you feel about her choices?
5. Discuss the role of the Graces. In what ways do they influence Libertie?
6. Why doesn't Cathy want Libertie to marry Emmanuel Chase? She says to Libertie, "You choose your body over your mind." Do you agree with her assessment of Libertie's decision? What does she fear for her daughter?
7. Ella and Libertie initially have a hostile relationship, but over time, their relationship deepens as Libertie comes to understand her. How did you feel about Ella? What about the garment she embroiders--what does this reveal about Ella, about history, and about who tells it?
8. There are a number of scenes depicting the beauty of living in Haiti. At the same time, it is filled with its own secrets and limitations. How did you end up feeling about Haiti?
9. In many ways, this novel is about the relationship between mothers and children. Discuss Cathy and Libertie's dynamic, and what Libertie hopes for her own children. Were you more drawn to Cathy or to Libertie?
10. Libertie is named by her father "in honor of the bright, shining future he was sure was coming." How do you feel about Libertie's future at the end of the book? How do you feel about her choice to return to America?