



Reading Group
Guide

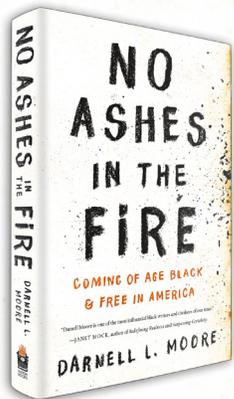
NO ASHES IN THE FIRE

COMING OF AGE BLACK
& FREE IN AMERICA

“Darnell Moore is one of the most influential black writers and thinkers of our time.”

—JANET MOCK, author of *Redefining Realness* and *Surpassing Certainty*

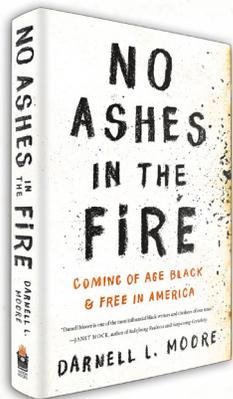
DARNELL L. MOORE



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. In Chapter One, Moore writes “In my home, and on my block, the sounds of giggling black youth and the smells of late-summer barbecues in my black neighbor’s backyards lessened the impact of the ruckus and putrid smell that might have impeded the black joy we channeled.” What is the role of joy in the midst of environments that are not typically understood as conducive to it?
2. Throughout the memoir, we come to understand that Moore holds on to his imagination and visions of possibility despite the obstacles and difficulties he faced. Can you relate? When have you had to stay determined despite adversity?
3. By homing in on the history of Camden, NJ, and his family, Moore creates a microcosm of the larger systems of oppression in American society. Did this help your understanding of the narrative of American history? If so, how?
4. In Chapter Five, Moore writes “The places I’ve run to seemed to always figure as mythical havens of possibility even if they were gripped by the same conditions that zapped hope out of the people and city I tried to abandon.” When have you believed you were running away from a problem and found you were closer to it? How did you overcome/weather/process that experience?
5. In Chapter Six, Moore describes a lesson he learned after graduating from Seton Hall University: “I had realized the process of unbecoming the right kind of black man would not kill me. No. It would be the road to unflinching liberty, good love, a liveable life, and a more human self.” Have you ever had to unlearn how to be something or someone you thought you had to be? What was that like for you?
6. Does Moore call readers to action—individually or collectively? Would readers be able to affect the desired outcome?
7. Can you point to specific passages that struck you personally?
8. What is the story’s impact on you? How does the memoir you have just read change the way you think about your own life story?



AN INTERVIEW WITH DARNELL



1. What drove you to want to write this book?

I've long wanted to write a book that honors, in some way, the lives of Black LGBTQ+ young people who come of age in the America. I also wanted to write a book I wish someone had written for me, a book I needed that reminded me of the necessity of my existence.

2. What inspired you to use the structure that you did? How did you balance your personal family narrative with history and context development?

The structure was a bit of an experiment. The narrative loops and moves between the specificity of personal and broader social analyses. I did not want to assume that all readers would engage the text with a deep, contextual understanding of, say, my hometown Camden if the prevailing, publicly mediated, narrative is that Camden, NJ, is an unredeemed "hood." Social, historical, and political contexts are critical in how the story is read.

3. What was your writing method like?

I write best when my spirit is leaping and when my heart is on fire. When I was writing *No Ashes in The Fire* I spent all of my writing time alone, in Atlanta. I like to write in silence and solitude so that I can fall apart, walk away from the laptop or notepad, take a stroll outside to jot down notes, scream, hide under my covers, knock out, delete pages, and then return to the blank screen with words that I can live with and love. It's a strange and hard and beautiful and messy process. But it works for me.

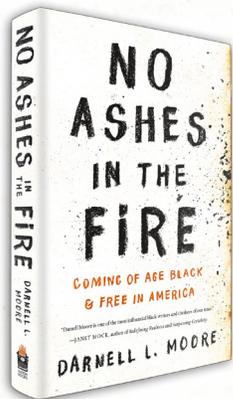
4. Was it hard to write about yourself and your family? How have they responded to the book?

Writing about my family and my personal life was both emotionally taxing and liberating. I welcome every opportunity I am presented to unfasten the binds used to lock down pains and secrets. That is the only way we can be freed from their hold. My family has been supportive. I believe the writing may transform all of us.

5. What is something positive you have perceived about sharing this story?

I am moved by the reality that so many people, whom I may not have imagined as the audience I was writing to, have resonated with the book. How beautiful it is to know that stories can serve as bridges to connection.





EXTRAS



FURTHER READING

- [REDEFINING REALNESS](#) and [SURPASSING CERTAINTY](#) by Janet Mock
- [THE HOME THAT WAS OUR COUNTRY: A MEMOIR OF SYRIA](#) by Alia Malek
- [HOW TO SLOWLY KILL YOURSELF AND OTHERS IN AMERICA](#) by Kiese Laymon
- [BUTTERFLY BOY: MEMORIES OF A CHICANO MARIPOSA](#) by Rigoberto González
- [THE NEW TESTAMENT](#) by Jericho Brown
- [INVISIBLE MAN GOT THE WHOLE WORLD WATCHING: A YOUNG BLACK MAN'S EDUCATION](#) by Mychal Denzel Smith
- [DON'T CALL US DEAD](#) by Danez Smith
- [ZAMI: A NEW SPELLING OF MY NAME](#) by Audre Lorde
- [BROTHER TO BROTHER: NEW WRITINGS BY BLACK GAY MEN](#) edited by Essex Hemphill
- [IN THE LIFE: A BLACK GAY ANTHOLOGY](#) by Joseph Beam
- [WHEN THEY CALL YOU A TERRORIST: A BLACK LIVES MATTER MEMOIR](#) by Patrisse Cullors and Asha Bandele

SPOTIFY PLAYLIST

The [No Ashes in the Fire playlist](#) was created by [DJ Just Love](#) specifically for and inspired by the book. Each song corresponds with a moment in the telling of Darnell's life. <https://spoti.fi/2G7FSVC>

“In doing the playlist, I read the book and let the moments allow my feelings to create the soundscape. It was important for me to honor the love, not belittle the pain, and acknowledge the tenderness; even at the sharpest points. *Ashes* is emotive and I wanted to home in on that at critical points, musically.” —DJ Just Love