

Reading Group Guide

Shadow of Death

1. The Detroit riots of 1967 anchor the historical setting of *Shadow of Death*. What impact do the riots have on Detroit? What was the spillover to urban America? What was the root cause of the civil unrest? Do you think these factors are at work today? To a greater or lesser degree than fifty years ago?
2. The author, Patricia Gussin, was a medical student at the exact time and place of the Detroit riots. She had two young children when she started in 1967, and she had two more children before she graduated in 1971. How much of *Shadow of Death* do you think is autobiographical? How well do you think Laura handled the balance between medical school and her family?
3. What do you think Laura should have done the night she was attacked? What would have been the repercussions had she reported what happened to the police? Told her husband?
4. Do you feel that Lucy Jones's escape from the cycle of urban poverty is realistic? What made it possible? Now, fifty years later, do you think it's easier or harder to break out of the crime and drug-infested pockets of urban America?
5. If you were a marriage counselor, how would you advise Laura and Steve? As their story evolves, would your initial advice change? What's your prognosis for their marriage?
6. What did you like most about Laura? What did you like least? Do you think she is hypocritical for "excusing" herself for making the unethical decisions she made?
7. Snake is a young man with potential, but a victim of a hopeless society. How did you feel about him at the end of the book?
8. Did the ending surprise you? Do you think it should have ended in another way?

9. Did *Shadow of Death* make you think about the polarization of our society? That the United States is really two countries—one sophisticated—one third world—and that our biggest crime as a nation is indifference to our urban pockets of poverty?