

Three Girls from Bronzeville by Dawn Turner

Dawn Turner is an award-winning journalist and novelist based in Chicago. A former columnist and reporter for the *Chicago Tribune*, she spent a decade and a half writing about race and politics. She has twice served as a juror for the Pulitzer Prize in commentary and has written commentary for *The Washington Post*, CBS *Sunday Morning News* show, NPR's *Morning Edition* show, the *Chicago Tonight* show, and elsewhere. In addition to her memoir, she is the author of two novels, *Only Twice I've Wished for Heaven* and *An Eighth of August*. *Three Girls from Bronzeville: A Uniquely American Memoir of Race, Fate, and Sisterhood* was a Read Between the Ravines title.

1. What, if anything, did you already know about the neighborhood of Bronzeville before reading this book? What did you learn while reading?
2. At the very beginning of the book, Turner writes, "To understand Debra, Kim, and me—to understand what will happen to us—you have to know the place that has begun to shape us." Discuss the impact a place can have on a person's life. How does growing up in Bronzeville impact the three girls? Would their lives have turned out differently if they had grown up somewhere else?
3. Given that Turner, Kim, and Debra all essentially started from the same place, growing up in the same neighborhood and even the same apartment building, why do you think they ended up living such different lives? At what point in the narrative could you start to see their paths diverging?
4. Do you think it's possible that Turner's, Kim's, and Debra's lives might have had different outcomes? If so, how? What would have needed to happen differently?
5. Turner is almost constantly pushing Kim and Debra to make different choices, and she waffles back and forth between wanting to interfere and deciding that she can't worry about them. Is it her responsibility to push them into doing something different with their lives? Why does she seem to think it is?
6. The author, Kim, and Debra are the "three girls" referenced in the title, but the "original" three girls also feature prominently in Turner's life: her mother, Granny, and Aunt Doris. Discuss these three women and their impact on Turner's life.
7. In a letter to Turner from prison, Debra writes, "Believe me when I say that I'm exactly where I'm supposed to be at this point in my life...I will make this work for me..." What do you think about Debra's attitude towards her time in prison? Do you think she needed to hit "rock bottom" in order to be able to change her life?

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8. What are your thoughts about dealing with pain, loss, and deciding whether or not to forgive? What did you think about Raymond Jones's mother's decision to forgive Debra so quickly? What did you think about the reconciliation meeting with Terri and Whitney later on? Would you have been able to forgive in that situation?
9. Discuss the author's relationship with her father. Why does she feel the need to reconnect with him as an adult? Why is it helpful for her to frame their conversations as interviews and conduct them while taking notes? Do you think she gets what she wants out of their conversations?
10. Towards the end of the book, Turner writes, "Over the years, I'd tried to understand how people changed their lives before the clock ran out. Kim had not been able to do so. Debra had only figured it out behind bars. That question of how a person managed to start over was at the heart of the stories I pursued..." Discuss this idea—why do you think some people are able to change their lives and others aren't?
11. In the last chapter, Turner says, "I used to believe...that ours was a story about choices—three girls who made vastly different ones. But it's really a story about second chances. Who gets them, who doesn't, who makes the most of them." Do you agree?
12. Discuss urban renewal and Turner's observations of how her neighborhood changed over time. How do you think inequity in Chicago neighborhoods should be addressed?
13. The author discusses many heavy topics in the book, including alcoholism, sexual assault, miscarriage, abortion, drug abuse, murder, and racial inequities. Do you feel like she handled those topics well? Why do you think she disclosed such personal information in the book? Do you think it was a difficult decision for her to present such an unfiltered view of her, Kim's, and Debra's lives?
14. Why do you think Turner wrote this book? What was she hoping to achieve? Would you ever consider writing a memoir?
15. Were you familiar with the author's work from the *Chicago Tribune*? After finishing this book, do you plan to go back and read any of her previously published columns?