

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- 1. In the book's opening chapter, Gabrielle describes growing up in two separate worlds: spending the school year at home in Pleasantville, a mostly white California suburb, and the summers in a black neighborhood in Omaha, Nebraska, with extended family. How did this duality affect her? How did she behave in each of these worlds? What did she learn from each? What accounts for the diversity of these worlds? What does it mean to "be black" or to "be white"? Can we ever escape the notion of "race"—and should we?
- 2. When she returned to Pleasantville, she recalls that she didn't share the stories of her friends in Omaha being killed by gang violence, or going to prison, or dealing drugs because these white students "didn't deserve to hear them." What do you think she means by this statement?
- 3. In the chapter "Black Girl Blues," Gabrielle describes an early moment in her career when she went to a modeling shoot and found a hairdresser who clearly didn't know how to work with hair like hers. Why didn't she speak up? Are we born with confidence or can it be learned? How can one build assurance and belief in one's self? Have you ever experienced a moment like this—when someone makes a choice that you didn't agree with, but you've didn't push back? Why do you think women especially do this?
- 4. In the chapter "Open House" Gabrielle's reflects on her parents' relationship. She describes how her mother finally reached her breaking point and decided to leave her father, after years of disconnect in their marriage. What finally propelled her decision to leave? Why do you think her mother stayed in the marriage for so long? How did both of these choices affect Gabrielle and her siblings?
- 5. Gabrielle bravely speaks out about her rape in "Code 261." One intriguing question she is asked, even now is "What where you wearing?" Why does this question trouble her? Does it bother you? Why do you think the idea that a woman's clothing—how she dresses—is an invitation for sexual violence remains prevalent in our society?
- 6. When she looks back at her first marriage, Gabrielle admits that she entered into the union with many reservations. She confesses that, from the moment of the proposal, she felt she was making the wrong decision. Why did she go through with the wedding? What compels women to continue in relationships, engagements, and even marriages that they know are wrong for them? Why do so many people sacrifice their own happiness in the name of "saving face"? Can anyone who settle truly be happy?
- 7. After giving a speech about negativity and the culture of competition at the luncheon for Essence's Fierce and Flawless Award, Gabrielle is applauded and praised for her honesty. In this chapter, she writes that "there's always an audience for negativity." Why does she say this? Do you agree with her? Do you think negativity and pain drives our culture more than joy and goodness today? What can we do to change this?
- 8. As a celebrity, and one half of a very high-profile couple, Gabrielle constantly contends with rumors about her relationship, and especially about whether or not she is pregnant. The stepmother to Dwayne's two sons, she is often asked if she and her husband will have children. How does she react to this question? Are her feelings of frustration justified? Is this question an invasion of her privacy? Why doesn't her husband get questioned the same way?
- 9. Describe the woman you met in the pages of We're Going to Need More Wine. What impressions did you take away reading the book? What did you learn about Gabrielle? What can her experiences teach us about our own lives?