

Book Club Guide for *Hapa Girl: A Memoir*

1. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Loving v. Virginia* in 1967 that states could not ban interracial marriages. Previously, the 1964 Federal Civil Rights Act had overturned such laws but the state of Virginia was the last holdout. How did this ruling impact the lives of the Chai family?
2. More than two decades after the U.S. Supreme Court's decision, the Chai family discovered there were still parts of America, and people, who did not want to accept interracial couples and their families in their communities. What reasons for this fear does May-lee Chai give in her book? Can you think of contemporary examples of families that might be rejected in various communities because they are not considered "normal"? How do communities define "normal"? How do you define what is "normal"?
3. Religion has long played a role in anti-miscegenation laws in the U.S. In fact, when Mildred Loving and her husband, Richard Loving, were first arrested in Virginia in 1958 for being a married couple and thus violating the state's so-called "Racial Integrity Act," the presiding Judge Leon M. Bazile ordered the Lovings to leave the state or face 25 years of imprisonment. He explained in his opinion, "Almighty God created the races white, black, yellow, malay and red, and he placed them on separate continents. And but for the interference with his arrangement there would be no cause for such marriages. The fact that he separated the races shows that he did not intend for the races to mix."

What are the many roles that religion plays in people's lives in *Hapa Girl* and how do they impact the Chai family, both negatively and positively?

4. Chai brings up the violence on the two Native American reservations in South Dakota that occurred in the 1970s before the Chai family moved to Vermillion. What connection is she trying to draw?
5. Chai implies in her memoir that she feels people's reactions to her family would have been different if her father had been White and her mother the person of color. Do you agree? Discuss examples of images of mixed-race couples in American history and pop culture as well as contemporary examples to support your answer.
6. Near the end of the book, Chai witnesses race riots in China and realizes the hostility she faced as an adolescent "was not my fault." Are there contemporary examples around the U.S. and the world that reflect racial anxieties similar to what the Chai family encountered in their small town in South Dakota? What tools do people now have to combat such anxieties?

7. What role does the media play in creating images of what is normal and what is abnormal/threatening? What examples does Chai give in the book? What examples can you cite in the world today?

8. What are Chai's feelings about being mixed-race?

9. The crux of this memoir takes place in the 1980s. Could a similar story take place today?

10. DNA tests are giving people a more complete portrait of their own racial and ethnic backgrounds. What impact do you think such scientific tools will have on people's views about race and ethnicity?