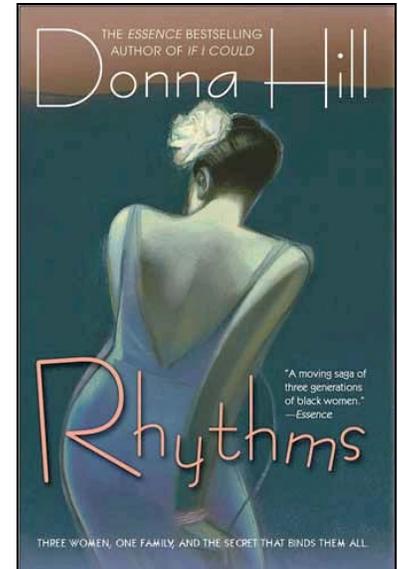


READING GROUP GUIDE

Rhythms by Donna Hill



St. Martin's Press
ISBN: 0-312-30069-7 (paperback)

Introduction to *Rhythms*

It all began in 1927, in the small town of Rudell, Mississippi, after the sudden and tragic death of Cora Harvey's parents. She has nothing left except her burning desire to become a singer. But her dream will never come true in Rudell, especially if she marries the man she adores, Dr. David Mackey. So when she sets out for Chicago, everyone in the close knit community, including David believes that the next time they see Cora, her name will be in lights. However, it's not long before Cora finds herself back in Rudell and back in David's arms harboring a secret she dare not reveal. . . A secret that will cause her daughter, Emma to flee Rudell with no intention of ever looking back. And even when Emma finds the perfect man and happiness at last, she is determined to do whatever it takes to keep her family's shameful past at bay. Then the dream that began with Cora comes full circle with her beloved granddaughter Parris whose melodic voice fills the dimly lit nightclubs of New York City. Yet, when tragedy strikes, opening a door to the past, Parris discovers the hidden truths that have ripped the family apart---but which may ultimately bind them together at last.

From the dusty roads of the Delta to the pulsing metropolis of New York City, *Rhythms* is a rich, unforgettable tale about loss and healing, redemption and love.

Reading Group Guide Questions

1. Although slavery was "officially" over in 1865, what impact did slavery still have on the Harvey family, their descendants and the town of Rudell? Does it still have an effect today?

2. Throughout history, the church and the church community have been backbones for African Americans. Why do you believe that to be true or not --and if so, then why did the church turn its back on Cora?
3. When Joshua told his daughter, Cora, "be careful what you wish for"? What did he mean?
4. How would you characterize the mother/daughter relationships in *Rhythms* and how did those relationships impact the daughters?
5. Could you empathize with Emma's disdain for her mother and her situation? Why or why not?
6. Do you feel that Emma should have tried to make it as a black woman? Or was her decision to "pass" her only choice? Why or why not?
7. Did you believe that Emma was really going to drown her infant daughter? Why or why not? And why do you believe Emma made the decision she did regarding Parris?
8. What was the psychological makeup of Emma, which allowed her to keep her secret for so many years?
9. What was Parris' real role in the story and in the lives of Emma and Cora? What are the parallels between Pearl, Cora, Emma and Parris?
10. Do you believe Cora was justified in not telling Parris the truth about her mother much earlier? Was Cora justified in keeping her own secret all those years? Why or why not?
11. Do mother's today still have difficulty talking to their daughter's about sex and love as Pearl did with Cora? How does this impact on a young woman's feelings of sexuality?
12. Were the relationships between the men and women in *Rhythms* affirming? Why or why not?
13. Do you believe that Parris and Nick found Emma? Describe what you see as the reunion.
14. Why do you think Michael chose to stay with Emma after discovering what she had done? Was Emma deserving of his forgiveness? Why or why not?
15. Each of the primary male characters: Joshua, David, Michael and Nick were all strong men in their own way. How did each of them demonstrate that strength in their relationship with the women in their lives and those around them?
16. Each of the women: Pearl, Cora, Emma and Parris held a dream. How did that dream manifest itself and to what extent: good or bad?
17. Do you feel the historical elements of the story added a richness to the novel or weighed it down?
18. Do you feel that the author realistically dealt with the issue of racial identity sufficiently in the story? Why or why not?
19. What, in your opinion, was the turning point in *Rhythms*, the element that set the future events into motion? Why?
20. What, in your opinion, is the central theme that weaves *Rhythms* together? Why?
21. Who was your favorite character in *Rhythms* and why? And if there was one scene that totally gripped you, what would it be? Why?
22. What sets *Rhythms* apart from other novels that you've read recently? Would you recommend it to a friend or readers group?

About the Author

Donna Hill has fifteen published novels to her credit and has been featured in *Essence*, *The Daily News*, *USA Today*, *Today's Black Woman*, and *Black Enterprise* among many others. She has appeared on numerous radio and television station across the country and her work has appeared on several bestseller lists. She works full time as a Public Relations Associate for the Queens Borough Public Library system, and organizes author-centered events and workshops through her promotions and management company ImageNOIR.org. Donna lives with her family in Brooklyn, NY.