



Glenn Loury: An Independent Mind

Critical Thinking Questions

Loury, the Critical Thinker

What does the phrase from the slideshow "provocative critic of conventional wisdom" mean to you?

Loury said, "if we foreclose debate over contentious issues by declaring that there's only one way for a decent person at this university to think about them – how can we fulfill our mission of teaching our students to think critically?" What is critical thinking? Why do some people not like debate? What are key aspects of a productive debate?

Choose three Woodson Principles that could characterize a person who openly critiques and challenges popular viewpoints. Explain why you chose these principles.

What issue do you hold an opinion about that is different from a friend or family member? What makes people uncomfortable when a differing view is presented?

Moments of Struggle

When his girlfriend became pregnant, what choices did Loury make that reflect his mindset of responsibility, integrity, and agency? How do our choices reflect what is most important to us?

The full story of Loury's life includes his weaknesses. "By day he was an Ivy-League academic, by night he often haunted the sketchier parts of Boston and began using cocaine." Do someone's failures override their strengths and contributions to society?

What are the various ways that the public handles the reports of high-profile individuals' (e.g. athletes, politicians, businesspeople) "personal failings"? How can actions of redemption—the attempt to make amends or acknowledge wrongdoing—help the public regain trust in the individual?



Loury on Community Deterioration

In his elder years, why is Loury melancholy about the "lost world of his youth in urban, middle-class Chicago"? Compare the community you live in with the vibrant community that Loury experienced when he was your age. What do you like about your neighborhood and community? What changes do you want to see in your neighborhood and greater community?

The issues that greatly concern Loury include: economic inequity, racial attitudes, civil unrest and community violence, and threats to free speech. Which of these do you care about most deeply? How does society's response to these issues affect your future?

What social programs exist in your community? Why do some social programs become politicized?

How does Loury see the mass incarceration of Blacks rooted in community deterioration and federal/state irresponsibility? How do you see it?

As a believer in individual guilt and responsibility, what role would Loury say that you have in the renewal of your community?

Loury, Sell-out or Intellectual Trailblazer?

Was Loury a "sell-out" as his Black accusers (including his uncle) suggested? Why or why not?

How did the value he placed on his intellectual gifts, his personal morals, and his revealed political views defy stereotypes?

What is more important: individual or homogenous thinking? Why do minorities who share unpopular ideologies often remain silent? Why did Loury's supporters appreciate his statement: "I'm not hiding from the truth as I see it, nor am I apologizing for it."?

In social and educational settings, Loury was often "the only" Black man, but did not mind. Why?

How did the social capital gained in his childhood prepare Loury for his experience at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)?

Through the decades, Loury's political views shifted from liberal to conservative, progressive to independent due to his disagreements with popular voices in those movements and his disgust of social unrest in Black communities. How do the phases of societal events and personal experiences change us and our perspectives?



Additional questions for optional assignments

How do interpersonal relationships influence political paradigm shifts? Track Loury's shift through the four American political ideologies [Liberal, Conservative, Progressive, Neoconservative] and the relationships that influenced these shifts.

How do dramatic social events influence how individual people see the world? How did 9/11, the racially charged civil unrest of 2017-2020, or the COVID-19 pandemic affect people's way of thinking? What similarities and differences existed among ethnic groups? What ideas or opinions have changed for you or people in your family or social circle based on high-profile national, state, or local events?

What is the economic history of the Black communities in your city or county? What do you think needs to happen to create a flourishing path forward?