

## WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT FATIMA SHAIK



Fatima Shaik is a writer and journalist from the Seventh Ward of New Orleans. She is the founder of the Communications Department at Saint Peter's University and a trustee of PEN America. Her work often focuses on race and culture, especially within Creole communities.

She is known for blending historical research with narrative storytelling, helping bring overlooked histories to a wider audience. She spent nearly two decades analyzing and translating rare handwritten records to research and write her novelesque work of nonfiction, *Economie Hall: The Hidden History of a Free Black Brotherhood*, which won the 2022 American Book Award.



## BOOK CLUB KIT

## QUESTIONS: *ECONOMIE HALL: THE HIDDEN HISTORY OF A FREE BLACK BROTHERHOOD* (2022)

- What role does the *Economie* play in the lives of its members, beyond providing a social circle and financial support?
- How does focusing on individuals like Ludger Boguille shape your understanding of history? How would the book have been different if it had instead focused on the *Economie* as a broader whole?
- How does the book challenge common assumptions about free Black communities before, during, and after Reconstruction? How does the book help shape your understanding of how these common assumptions came about in society?
- In what ways do members of the *Economie* balance adaptation and resistance in a society that denies them their liberties and dignity?
- How did members of the *Economie* conform to or deny ideas of respectability politics?

## MAKING CONNECTIONS

- How does this book connect to narratives about Reconstruction and its aftermath? How does its connection to events that took place outside of New Orleans (e.g. the Mexican Revolution) help you better understand both the text and those events?
- Consider other texts that explore community building under oppression. What parallels or distinctions can you identify between the groups and their strategies for survival?
- How does Shaik's portrayal of New Orleans' culture compare to other literature about the city during the same period?
- How might the strategies of the Economistes be compared to modern grassroots or activist organizations? How do the challenges and successes of the Economistes inform these groups' efforts?
- Why do you think this history remained hidden for so long? What is the significance of reading it today? What parallels can you find?

## LITERATURE AS PRAXIS

- How can learning about groups like the *Economie* influence modern activism or community organization?
- Where do you see mutual aid practices today in your community? How could you contribute time, money, or skills to support them? What makes the mutual aid system different from other kinds of activism?
- The book highlights struggles for education and voting rights. How do these issues continue to shape society today?
- Are there systems of inequality today that are not touched on heavily in the book? How can you foster equity in your community?
- How can you help preserve or amplify underrepresented voices in your community? Are there local literacy programs that you could volunteer to tutor at? Are there local museums that you could visit?

## COMMUNITY RESOURCES

- [Equal Justice Initiative](#)
- [Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture](#)
- [NAACP Local Chapters](#)
- [National Urban League](#)
- [Color of Change](#)

## ADDITIONAL READINGS

- Octavia Butler, *Kindred* (1979)
- Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937)
- John Kennedy Toole, *A Confederacy of Dunces* (1980)
- Anne Rice, *The Feast of All Saints* (1979)
- Lalita Tademy, *Cane River* (2001)
- Colson Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad* (2016)