

Discussion questions for *A City So Grand*

Were there any events or developments that you had no knowledge of prior to reading the book, such as the Great Fire of 1872, or the Great Railroad Jubilee?

Of the events and developments highlighted in *A City So Grand*, which do you think had the most profound impact on the city of Boston or the nation? Why?

Could something have been done differently to prevent federal troops from returning Thomas Sims to captivity? Do you think word was leaked of the Vigilance Committee's plan to rescue Sims?

What were your thoughts in reading about Sims being marched through the streets of Boston to the deck of the Acorn for his return to slavery? Can you compare it to any other historic events/moments, in Boston or elsewhere?

How familiar were you with the struggles — and resilience — of Boston's Irish population? What aspect of their plight did you find the most poignant?

Imagine that the affluent Back Bay neighborhood does not exist, and developers today are working up plans for the massive landfill project. Would the project be as successful today? As profitable? As efficient? What obstacles would exist today that weren't an issue in 19th century? What resources/technology would make it easier for today's developers?

The city of Boston rebounded in a remarkably quick manner to the devastation of the Great Fire of 1872. Despite a financial depression, the city's businesses and government worked together to rebuild. If the fire were to happen today, would the rebuilding be as fast and efficient?

Would you say that Boston is best known for its prominence in education, medicine, or its historic milestones in the building of our nation? How did your perception of Boston change after reading *A City So Grand*?

What impressed you most about the events of Boston in the second half of the 19th century? What did you find most disappointing?

If you could highlight only one section of the book to illustrate the character of the City of Boston, which would it be and why?

If you hadn't been involved with this book discussion, would you have chosen to read *A City So Grand* on your own? Do you typically read non-fiction or history?

After reading *A City So Grand*, do you want to read other books about related topics (Boston history, abolitionists, the Civil War, the history of railroad transportation, anything written by Steve Puleo?)