

Down the River and Unto the Sea Discussion Questions

by Walter Mosley

Author Bio: (from Fantastic Fiction & author website)

Walter Mosley is the author of more than 34 critically acclaimed books and works as a screenwriter, as well. His work has been translated into 21 languages and includes literary fiction, science fiction, political monographs, plays, and a young adult novel. He is the winner of numerous awards, including an O. Henry Award, a Grammy and PEN America's Lifetime Achievement Award. He lives in New York City.



Characters:

- **Joe King Oliver** – Black. Former police detective. Ladies Man. Ex-wife is Monica Lars. Daughter is Aja-Denise Oliver. 13 years ago he was brought up on false charges of sexual misconduct/rape and held in prison for over 3 months before being released. Became a private detective – King's Detective Services. Alias - Nigel Beard.
- **A Free Man** – (was Leonard Compton) – Manny – Black militant journalist. Was a master sergeant in the Rangers and then a teacher. Created the BBB, the Blood Brothers of Broadway. Wrote articles about crimes done to black people. Arrested and convicted for shooting and killing 2 police officers, Valance and Pratt. Free Man says it was in self-defense. His defense lawyer is Braun.
- **Bob Acres** – Congressman. Wife is Cindy. They are currently separated. Joe's current case is to follow Bob and catch him in any indiscretions.
- **Antrobus Augustine** – Owner of Lone Security. Private contractors.
- **Stuart Braun** – Lawyer. Attorney for Stuart Braun, who has been convicted of shooting two police officers. He is intentionally flubbing the case. Has a daughter, Chrissie, who is 7.
- **Jocelyn Bryor** – Ex-police officer. Currently working in corporate security. Investigated Joe's case. Thought he was guilty until charges were mysteriously dropped. Showed video to Monica, Joe's wife.
- **Theodore "Burns"** – Heroin addict. Child prostitute with Miranda. Has burns all over face.
- **Lamont Charles** – Member of BBB. Suspected conman and poker player. Shot twice in back. Paraplegic.
- **Paul Convert** – Private security specialist used by the police department. (Adamo Cortez and Hugo Cumberland.)
- **Adamo Cortez** – Police officer who forced Nathali to make up Joe's crime. Fake name.
- **Hugo Cumberland** – Dirty police officer used by Barrett (Heroin smuggler/dealer) to avoid arrest. Fake name.
- **Exeter "Little X" Barrett** – Used to bring Heroin into the country. Joe was trying to arrest him when he was falsely arrested.
- **Roger Ferris** – Friend of Joe's grandmother. Lives in same retirement home as she does. Billionaire.

- **Melquarth Frost** – “Mel” – Vicious sociopathic criminal - murderer and bank robber. Joe arrested him after a bank robbery. Is now a watchmaker. Joe plays chess with Mel in the park, on occasion.
- **Miranda Goya** – (20s) Beautiful girl who Man’s BBB group saved from underage prostitution and sent to school. Makeup artist.
- **Nathali Malcolm** – Woman who accused Joe of sexual misconduct during a police investigation. Drops the charges and disappears. Alias – Beatrice Summers.
- **William James Marmot** – Security expert. Took Chrissie Braun. Tortured by Mal for information.
- **Mrs. Joanna Mudd** – Witness for A Free Man indicating that the shooting was self-defense. She is missing.
- **Brenda Naples** – Joe’s grandmother. In a nursing home.
- **Gladstone “Glad” Palmer** – Police sergeant. Joe’s friend. A man who can find “anything” or get anything done. Helped Joe get out of prison once he was setup on fake charges.
- **Alana Pollander** – (was Janine Overmeyer) – Charged for check fraud before changing her name and beginning to work for Ossa James, a political consultant/researcher. Impersonated Cindy Acres.
- **Willa Portman** – Intern for Stuart Braun, a lawyer. Wants Joe to investigate A Free Mans case.
- **Effy Stoller** – Former prostitute. Currently a masseuse. Killed her former pimp and got away with it. Joe’s current flame.
- **Coleman Tesserat** – Investment Banker. Married to Monica, Joe’s ex-wife. Aja-Denise’s step-father.
- **Henri Tourneau** – Patrolman 1st class. Joe mentored him. Henri gives Joe access to the police databases. Joe is also a friend of Henri’s father.
- **Blood Brothers of Broadway** – BBB – 5 men, 2 women. Group put together by A Free Man to help out in the neighborhood. Tanya Lark, Greg Lowman, Christopher “Kit” Carson, Son Mali, Lamont Charles. 6 of them have been murdered or disappeared. Only Lamont Charles is alive, but he is a paraplegic after being shot in the back.

Discussion Questions:

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
2. What do you think the title “Down the River Unto the Sea” means?
3. Did you like Joe? Did he grow on you? Was he a likable character? Was he intended to be likable?
4. “I like the rules. Following them proves to me I’m a civilized man.” (p135). Would you consider Joe civilized? Why or why not?
5. “You need to take care of your kids before you can think of yourself.” What do you think of that statement?
6. Why do you think Mel helped Joe?

7. Joe says he goes through all this because he wants to be exonerated. Do you think that is true? Why or why not? He was never actually convicted of the crime. Is being exonerated worth what Joe goes through?
8. How does Joe's time in jail change him? What is the author saying about prisons and the rehabilitation of convicts?
9. What do you think about what finally happened to A Free Man. Was it right? Was it justice? How else might Joe of handled it?
10. Why do you think Joe identifies so strongly with A Free Man?
11. What do you think about what Gladstone did to Joe? Was Gladstone right? Wrong? Both? Did Gladstone's actions save Joe from being killed?
12. Who is the real bad guy in this story?
13. Were the two cases (Joe's and Free Man's) actually intertwined or was it all in Joe's head?
14. Were you satisfied with the ending of the story? If you could change it, what would you do to make it better?
15. Do you think this book is the first of a series or a stand alone? Why?
16. "Down the River Unto the Sea" won the 2019 Edgar Award for Best Novel. Did it deserve the award? Why or why not?
17. Walter Mosley has a number of different books in a multitude of genres. Will you read any of them?

References:

- Fantastic Fiction – <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/m/walter-mosley/>
- GoodReads – <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/35173689-down-the-river-unto-the-sea>
- Walter Mosley Website – <http://www.waltermosley.com/online/>
- Novelist – <http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.clevnet.org/novp/detail?vid=2&sid=f598c440-4236-44bb-8229-65cf5f96ebd8%40pdc-v-sessmgr06&bdata=JnNpdGU9bm92cC1saXZl#UI=10619959&db=neh>

Walter Mosley's Books

Series:

Easy Rawlins

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Devil in a Blue Dress (1990) 2. A Red Death (1991) 3. White Butterfly (1992) 4. Black Betty (1994) 5. A Little Yellow Dog (1996) 6. Gone Fishin' (1997) 7. Bad Boy Brawly Brown (2001) 8. Six Easy Pieces (2003) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Little Scarlet (2004) 10. Cinnamon Kiss (2005) 11. Blonde Faith (2007) 12. Little Green (2013) 13. Rose Gold (2014) 14. Charcoal Joe (2016) 15. Blood Grove (2021) |
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Socrates Fortlow

1. Always Outnumbered, Always Outgunned (1997)
2. Walkin' the Dog (1999)
The Right Mistake (2008)

Fearless Jones

1. Fearless Jones (2001)
2. Fear Itself (2003)
3. Fear of the Dark (2006)

Leonid McGill

- 0.5. Karma (2011)
1. The Long Fall (2009)
2. Known to Evil (2010)
3. When the Thrill is Gone (2011)
4. All I Did Was Shoot My Man (2012)
5. And Sometimes I Wonder About You (2015)
6. Trouble Is What I Do (2020)

Crosstown to Oblivion

- Gift of Fire / On the Head of a Pin (omnibus) (2012)
Merge / Disciple (omnibus) (2012)
Stepping Stone / The Love Machine (omnibus) (2013)

Stand-Alone Novels:

- RL's Dream (1995)
- Blue Light (1998)
- The Greatest (2000)
- The Man in My Basement (2004)
- 47 (2005)
- The Wave (2006)
- Fortunate Son (2006)
- Killing Johnny Fry (2006)
- Diablerie (2007)
- The Tempest Tales (2008)
- The Last Days of Ptolemy Grey (2010)
- Parishioner (2012)
- Odyssey (2013)
- The Further Tales of Tempest Landry (2015)
- Inside a Silver Box (2015)
- Down the River unto the Sea (2018)
- John Woman (2018)

Nonfiction

- Working on the Chain Gang (2000)
- What Next (2003)
- Life Out of Context (2005)
- This Year You Write Your Novel (2007)
- Conversations with Walter Mosley (2011)
- Twelve Steps Toward Political Revelation (2011)
- Folding the Red Into the Black (2016)
- The Elements of Fiction Writing (2019)

If you liked Down the River Unto the Sea, try...

- Bitter Feast – S. J. Rozan
- Trickster's Point – William Kent Krueger
- Two Minute Rule – Robert Crais
- The Guardians – John Grisham
- Line of Sight – James Queally