Devil in a Blue Dress
by Walter Mosley

March 31 – April 30, 2017
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Welcome to the world of hardboiled fiction. This year, we explore a new type of story and a literary genre that has a lot in common with the characters and settings found in crime fiction. Hardboiled fiction is all about the detective’s attitude toward emotion and that’s where you’ll find the very reluctant sleuth, Ezekiel (Easy) Rawlins.

_Devil In A Blue Dress_ is Walter Mosley’s first Easy Rawlins novel, set in Los Angeles just after the Second World War. Easy, a recently laid off black veteran, is looking for a way to pay his mortgage when he becomes entangled in a violent world of intrigue and corruption. After Easy undertakes some errands for a local mobster and runs afoul of the police, he has no choice but to begin investigating. Of course, there’s also murder and a mysterious woman involved.

Along with Easy’s story, we’ll have some terrific companion reads by other masters of the genre like Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler along with more modern authors like Dennis Lehane and James Ellroy. If you’re just discovering the hardboiled world you, like so many others, may find these books impossible to resist.

You can find a copy of _Devil In A Blue Dress_ at the Library along with the eBook and audiobook versions. The movie with Denzel Washington is also available. We’ll have a lot to talk about in 2017. We invite you to join one of our book discussions or host one of your own.

Thanks for reading with us.

Debra Futa
Executive Director
Though the path to publication was long, the groundwork was laid in Walter Mosley’s early years. His white Jewish mother encouraged him to read European classics, and his black father told him riveting stories from his childhood in the South and service in World War II. Raised in Los Angeles by parents who married, but couldn’t obtain a marriage license until after their son was born, Mosley was aware of prejudice from an early age.

He attended the Victory Baptist Day School with its classes in black history, and graduated from Alexander Hamilton High School in 1970. During his “long-haired hippie” phase, he wandered through Europe and later attended college in Vermont, earning a political science degree. Rather than attend grad school, he worked as a computer programmer, moving to New York in 1981.

Inspired by Alice Walker’s book *The Color Purple*, Mosley took a writing course at City College in Harlem. His tutor encouraged him saying, “you’re Black, Jewish, with a poor upbringing; there are riches therein.” Later, in a *New York Times* tribute to his father, he said he began by incorporating his father’s oral stories into his writings. After using them in a variety of genres, he’s now moved on to sharing his own life experiences.

Racial inequalities figure prominently in his series of unlikely heroes such as Easy Rawlins, Socrates Fortlow, Fearless Jones, and Leonid McGill, among others. His best known works include *Devil In A Blue Dress* (1990) and *Always Outnumbered, Always Outgunned* (1997), both later made into movies. Mr. Mosley’s writing awards include the O. Henry Award, the NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Literary Work, and the Anisfield Wolf Award for works that increase the appreciation and understanding of race in America. Mr. Mosley was inducted into the New York Writers Hall of Fame in 2015 and named Grand Master by the Mystery Writers of America in 2016. His latest novel is *Charcoal Joe: An Easy Rawlins Mystery* (2016).

For more, see:

“At Dinner With: Walter Mosley; Heroes in Black, Not White” by Sarah Lyall, 1994

“The Curious Case of Walter Mosley” by Johanna Neuman 2010 September-October; Moment Magazine

“Why We Write: 20 Acclaimed Authors on How and Why They Do What They Do” Edited by Meredith Maran; Plume, 2013
**Whodunit?**  
Wednesdays, March 8 – May 10   1:00 p.m. – 2:20 p.m.

Steve Gable, Instructor  
Forever Learning Institute  
54191 N. Ironwood Dr., South Bend, IN

Dupin in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, Holmes in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, Poirot in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, and Spade in *The Maltese Falcon* find the culprits. You can, too. And you will be primed for the mystery of One Book, One Michiana. It will be a dark and stormy Spring.

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**Jazz with Merriman’s Playhouse**  
Tuesday, April 4   6:30 p.m.  
Francis Branch

The Merrimans, Stephen and Mary, along with Marian Emery and Don Lerman, discuss the art and philosophy of jazz improvisation and follow up with a performance that reflects the ambience of Walter Mosley’s *Devil In A Blue Dress*.

*Merrimans’ Playhouse* concert venue was founded by Stephen Merriman and Mary Merriman, who host Merrimans’ Playhouse Jazz Performance Series, concert performances of national and international touring jazz artists, as well as local jazz artists, and a weekly Jazz Open Session.
Forties Fashion: *Devil In A Blue Dress* and Pink Overalls
Wednesday, April 5  5:30 p.m.
Hesburgh Library, Notre Dame

Women’s fashion faced some of its greatest challenges in the 1940s. World War II meant that fabrics and plastics were devoted to the war effort. Designers created uniforms for women in the armed forces and factories, and women learned to use what they could find. Men’s zoot suits sparked fashion riots. After the war, a style revolution for women came when Christian Dior’s New Look rendered entire wardrobes obsolete. Was it a return to luxury or oppression? Join Linda Przybyszewski, author of *The Lost Art of Dress*, as she details these changes.

*Devil In A Blue Dress* Comes to WNIT's Dinner & a Book

Gail Martin, host of WNIT-TV’s Dinner & a Book, and guest Charlotte Pfeifer, associate faculty member from IUSB, talk about the novel while preparing food enjoyed by detective Easy Rawlins. Brother Sage Gillam, former WSBT radio host, will also be available. WNIT allows you inside access to the studio. Bring your questions; you may have a chance to be on camera. Light refreshments served. Register online or call 574-282-4646.

Wednesday, April 5
6:00 p.m.
WNIT Studios
300 W. Jefferson Blvd., South Bend

Science Café: Crime Detection

Explore the science behind forensics. Local experts share insights into how crimes are detected through tests and analysis. Lecture organized by Micha Kilburn, Ph.D.

Wednesday, April 5
6:00 p.m.

216 S. Michigan St., South Bend
The Studebaker: Over a Century On Wheels  
Thursday, April 6  6:00 p.m.  
Centre Township Branch  

A pink Studebaker appears in an exciting scene of this year’s One Book selection. Andrew Beckman, Archivist with Studebaker National Museum, presents the history behind the Studebaker vehicle and its impact on the city of South Bend.

Main-ly Movies presents:  
The Maltese Falcon  
Saturday, April 8  5:00 p.m.  
Main Library – Colfax Auditorium  

Hear a brief introduction by Elaine Roth, IUSB professor of Film Studies, followed by a screening of The Maltese Falcon. In this famous movie, Private Detective Sam Spade takes on a case that involves criminals and their murderous quest for a priceless statue. No Rating.

Book Discussion:  
Better Homes of South Bend/Devil In A Blue Dress  
Tuesday, April 11  6:30 p.m.  
German Township Branch  

In Walter Mosley’s Devil In A Blue Dress, Easy Rawlins bought a home of his own which he highly treasures. The year is 1948, the same time that the Better Homes of South Bend story developed locally where 22 African-American Studebaker workers got together to realize their dreams. Participate in a discussion led by professor and Better Homes of South Bend author Gabrielle Robinson about the struggle of African American homeownership after World War II.
Main-ly Movies presents: *The Big Sleep*
Saturday, April 15  3:00 p.m.
Main Library – Colfax Auditorium

Hear a brief introduction by Josh Vasquez from the IUSB Film Studies Committee, followed by a screening of *The Big Sleep.* Humphrey Bogart plays Raymond Chandler’s cynical private eye, Philip Marlowe. No Rating.

Mishawaka High School Jazz Ensemble

**Live Performance**
Tuesday, April 18  5:30 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.
Mishawaka Library – Downtown Branch
209 Lincolnway East, Mishawaka, Indiana

In honor of the One Book, One Michiana choice, *Devil In A Blue Dress,* the musicians of Mishawaka High School will perform jazz. All ages.

**Book Discussion: Devil In A Blue Dress**
Tuesday, April 18  6:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.
Mishawaka Library – Downtown Branch
209 Lincolnway East, Mishawaka, Indiana

Registration required. Teens and Adults.
An Inside Look at a Missing Person Investigation  
Tuesday, April 18  6:00 p.m.  
Tutt Branch  

In *Devil In A Blue Dress*, Easy Rawlins searches for a missing person. South Bend Police Department Detective Anthony K. Bontrager talks about what happens in real life when a missing person’s report is filed and how the investigation progresses. For more details, call 574-282-4637.

Brunch Discussion – *Devil In A Blue Dress*  
Wednesday, April 19  10:00 a.m.  
Francis Branch  

Our annual One Book, One Michiana Brunch with Tricia Sloma (WNDU) and Hank Herreman (retired SJCPL employee) continues! Enter the rough world of Easy Rawlins, a black war veteran, just fired from his job at the defense plant. It is Watts, Los Angeles: racial tensions, gangsters, and one man’s triumph of courage. Light refreshments served. Register online or call 574-282-4641.

Virtual Jazz Club  
Wednesday, April 19  5:30 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.  
Mishawaka Library – Bittersweet Branch  
602 Bittersweet Road, Mishawaka, Indiana  

Join us at Bittersweet Joe’s Jazz Club (a.k.a. the Bittersweet Branch) for a casual gathering to celebrate One Book, One Michiana’s selection, *Devil In A Blue Dress*, set during the 1940s jazz scene. We’ll screen a performance of the Harlem Renaissance Orchestra. All ages.

Affordable Housing  
Wednesday, April 19  6:30 p.m.  
Main Library – Dickinson Conference Room  

As it was for Easy Rawlins, homeownership is still an important part of life. But it’s not without difficulties. LaTasha Bosse of Real Services discusses options for affordable housing and ways to reach your goals.
*Devil In A Blue Dress* – Noir with a Twist

Thursday, April 20  6:00 p.m.

IUSB’s Civil Rights Heritage Center
1040 W. Washington Street, South Bend

Benjamin Balthaser, Associate Professor Post-1900 U.S. Multiethnic Literature, looks at the noir tradition and how *Devil In A Blue Dress* builds on works from the 1930s to the 1950s, including implicit themes of racial politics. Darryl Heller, historian and Director of the Civil Rights Heritage Center, will provide cultural context for the book’s setting. Both speakers will use clips from classic film noir to illustrate their talks. The Civil Rights Heritage Center is a wonderful setting to learn about and discuss this classic crime novel, including deeply embedded themes of race and class.
Main-ly Movies presents:

Devil In A Blue Dress
Saturday, April 22
Main Library – Colfax Auditorium

3:00 p.m.

Hear a brief introduction by Elaine Roth, IUSB professor of Film Studies, followed by a screening of Devil In A Blue Dress. Denzel Washington stars as Ezekiel Rawlins in this adaptation of the novel by African American crime author Walter Mosley. Rated R.

Find the Missing (Recent) Persons in your Family Tree
Saturday, April 22
Main Library – Colfax Auditorium

12:00 p.m. – Locating Living Relatives: 20th and 21st Century Research
1:30 p.m. – Breaking Down Brick Walls Using DNA

Genealogist Bethany Waterbury explains how to locate missing persons by putting you in contact with living relatives who may hold different pieces of your puzzle. The second lecture will answer the common question arising from DNA testing results: “What now?”. Co-sponsored by South Bend Area Genealogical Society.

Main-ly Movies presents:

Devil In A Blue Dress
Saturday, April 22 3:00 p.m.
Main Library – Colfax Auditorium

Hear a brief introduction by Elaine Roth, IUSB professor of Film Studies, followed by a screening of Devil In A Blue Dress. Denzel Washington stars as Ezekiel Rawlins in this adaptation of the novel by African American crime author Walter Mosley. Rated R.
The Elite: Local African Americans Serving in World War II
Tuesday, April 25  6:00 p.m.
River Park Branch

SJCPL’s Joe Sipocz shares World War II stories of local African American soldiers and reveals what happened when they came home. These experiences inform Walter Mosley’s characters from Devil In A Blue Dress.

Easy Cooking à la Easy Rawlins
Tuesday, April 25  6:00 p.m.
Western Branch

Learn about the history of African American dishes and how to create favorites using updated recipes with a focus on healthy eating. Sample some favorites—including a few from the book. The presenter for the evening will be local volunteer Cheryl Ashe.

Book Discussion: Darktown
Wednesday, April 26  6:30 p.m.
Main Library – Dickinson Conference room

Darktown by Thomas Mullen is a murder mystery set around the hiring of the first African American policemen in Atlanta during 1948.
CHARACTER LIST

**Easy Rawlins**  
WWII veteran, out of work in L.A.

**DeWitt Albright**  
White man who dresses all in white, hires Easy to locate Daphne

**Joppy Shag**  
Bartender, former fighter, friend of Easy’s, owner of the bar where Easy meets Albright and takes the job

**Daphne Monet**  
Frank Green’s half-sister who is passing as white, lover of Todd Carter

**Junior Fornay**  
A former acquaintance of Easy’s from the Houston days who lives in L.A. now

**Frank Green**  
Local gangster who hijacks liquor shipments and favors a knife as a weapon

**Richard McGee**  
The pimp who sells young boys to rich men

**Matthew Teran**  
Pedophile with grudge against Carter

**Mouse**  
Nickname of Easy’s friend from Houston, Raymond Alexander, not afraid of anyone, often violent

**Etta Mae Harris**  
Mouse’s fiancée

**Todd Carter**  
The man with all the money, whom Daphne steals from, and sets the action in motion

**Cliffton**  
Mouse’s partner in theft

**Odell**  
Easy’s quiet, cautious, religious friend who advises him to run from problems

**Pete Dupree**  
Former co-worker who tries to help Easy get his job back

**Coretta James**  
 Dating Pete, gives Easy information about Daphne

**Miller**  
Police officer

**Mason**  
Police officer
**Bootleg**
Alcoholic liquor unlawfully made, sold, or transported, without registration or payment of taxes.

**Craps**
A game in which two dice are thrown and in which a first throw of 7 or 11 wins, a first throw of 2, 3, or 12 loses, and a first throw of 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, or 10 can be won only by throwing the same number again before throwing a 7.

**Derby**
Also called a bowler, a stiff felt hat with rounded crown and narrow brim, worn chiefly by men.

**G.I.**
A member (or former member) of the U.S. armed forces, especially an enlisted soldier.

**Hard-boiled fiction**
A literary genre similar to crime fiction with the detective exhibiting cynical points of view in his/her inner monologue.

**Henchman**
An unscrupulous and ruthless subordinate, especially a criminal.

**Jailbait**
A girl with whom sexual intercourse is punishable as statutory rape because she is under the legal age of consent.

**Jalopy**
An old, decrepit, or unpretentious automobile.

**Mulatto**
The offspring of one white parent and one black parent.

**Noir fiction**
Related to hard-boiled fiction with the protagonist being either a victim, suspect or perpetrator instead of a detective.

**Palsied**
Paralyzed; unable to move or control certain muscles.

**Piece**
Firearm

**Pimp**
A person, especially a man, who solicits customers for a prostitute or a brothel, usually in return for a share of the earnings.

**Pistol-whip**
To beat or hit (someone) repeatedly with a pistol, especially in the head and shoulder area.

**Sharecropper**
A tenant farmer who pays as rent a share.

**Speakeasy**
A saloon or nightclub selling alcoholic beverages illegally, especially during Prohibition.

**Stetson**
A brand of felt hat with a broad brim and high crown, often worn as part of a cowboy’s outfit.

**Zoot Suit**
Man’s suit with baggy, tight-cuffed, sometimes high-waisted trousers and an oversized jacket with exaggeratedly broad, padded shoulders and wide lapels, usually worn with suspenders and a long watch chain and first popularized in the early 1940s.
**Between the World and Me**  
by Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015)  
The author presents a history of racial discrimination in the United States and a narrative of his own personal experiences of contemporary race relations, offering possible resolutions for the future.

**Forgotten: The Untold Story of D-Day’s Black Heroes, at Home and at War**  
by Linda Hervieux (2015)  
Reveals the story of the 320th Barrage Balloon Battalion, discussing how the Black battalion faced prejudice both at home and at war due to Jim Crow laws that made them second-class citizens, and allowed their crucial contributions to the D-Day invasion go unnoticed.

**The History of Jazz**  
by Ted Gioia (1997)  
A panoramic history of the genre brings to life the diverse places in which jazz evolved, traces the origins of its various styles, and offers commentary on the music itself.

**L.A. Noir: The Struggle for the Soul of America’s Most Seductive City**  
by John Buntin (2009)  
A journalist and case writer presents a social history of Los Angeles, from Prohibition to the Watts riots, focusing on the long-running war between notorious gangster Mickey Cohen and the man who would become the city’s most famous police chief.

**The Other Side of the River: A Story of Two Towns, a Death, and America’s Dilemma**  
by Alex Kotlowitz (1998)  
Explores America’s racial antagonisms through the story of two Michigan towns – one white and wealthy, the other Black and poor – and a Black boy’s death and its repercussions.
**The Black Dahlia**  
by James Ellroy (1987)  
Obsessed with finding the killer of a beautiful young woman, two officers take a hellish journey through the underbelly of postwar Hollywood (Book 1 of the L.A. Quartet).

**Darktown**  
by Thomas Mullen (2016)  
Responding to pressure from on high, the Atlanta police department is forced to hire its first black officers, but the newly minted policemen are met with hostility as color lines are crossed.

**Land of Shadows**  
by Rachel Howzell Hall (2014)  
Racially explosive Los Angeles provides the backdrop for the investigation of a suspicious suicide with haunting parallels to an unsolved murder case decades prior.

**Live by Night**  
by Dennis Lehane (2012)  
In 1926, during the Prohibition, Joe Coughlin defies his strict law-and-order upbringing by climbing a ladder of organized crime that takes him from Boston to Cuba where he encounters a dangerous cast of characters who are all fighting for their piece of the American dream.

**The Striver’s Row Spy**  
by Jason Overstreet (2016)  
Set against the backdrop of the Harlem Renaissance, 1920s college graduate Sidney Temple is tapped by J. Edgar Hoover to become the first African American FBI agent before using his position and talents to navigate ruthless adversaries at the risk of his marriage and safety.
**All American Boys**
by Jason Reynolds (2015)

When sixteen-year-old Rashad is mistakenly accused of stealing, classmate Quinn witnesses his brutal beating at the hands of a police officer who happens to be the older brother of his best friend. Told through Rashad and Quinn’s alternating viewpoints.

**Fake ID**
by Lamar Giles (2014)

When his petty criminal father’s activities land the family in the Witness Protection Program, Nick is forced to assume a new identity in a different community where he ruminates on the conspiracy his friend died trying to uncover.

**Invasion**
by Walter Dean Myers (2013)

Josiah Wedgewood and Marcus Perry were friends in Virginia, but now that they are both involved in the Normandy invasion, the differences in their positions is uncomfortable, for Josiah is a white infantryman and Marcus is a black transport driver, the only role the segregated army will allow him.

**Out of the Easy**
by Ruta Sepetys (2013)

Josie, the seventeen-year-old daughter of a French Quarter prostitute, is striving to escape 1950 New Orleans and enroll at prestigious Smith College when she becomes entangled in a murder investigation.

**What I Saw and How I Lied**
by Judy Blundell (2008)

When Joe Spooner brings an old buddy back home with him from the battlefields of World War II, Evie finds herself in a complicated situation that becomes even more dangerous when their family’s guest suddenly drowns as dark family secrets are revealed.
**The Big Sleep** (1946)
Private eye Philip Marlowe is hired to protect a General’s young daughter from her indiscretions, and finds, several murders later, that he has fallen in love with her elder sister.

**Chinatown** (1974)
A private detective hired to expose an adulterer finds himself caught up in a web of deceit, corruption and murder.

**Devil in a Blue Dress** (1995)
It is 1948 in LA and Ezekiel “Easy” Rawlins, an African-American World War II veteran, is looking for work. At his friend’s bar, he is introduced to a white man, DeWitt Albright, who is looking for someone to help him find a missing white woman assumed to be hiding somewhere in LA’s Black community. This is a Chandler-esque “who-done-it” with an African-American theme.

**L.A. Confidential** (1997)
Three detectives in the corrupt and brutal L.A. police force of the 1950s use differing methods to uncover a conspiracy behind the shotgun slaying of the patrons at an all-night diner.

**Out of Time** (2003)
A Florida police chief must solve a vicious double homicide before he himself falls under suspicion.
1. The novel's title, *Devil In A Blue Dress*, implies that Daphne Monet is the villain in the story. Is she a sinister character, or a victim of circumstance? And why?

2. Describe Easy's development as a private investigator. In what ways does he characterize stereotypes that occur in other detective stories? How does he defy those expectations?

3. Easy is given advice by many friends and acquaintances. Which characters are positive influences on him? Do any characters hinder Easy's personal growth?

4. What similarities do the characters who migrated from Houston to Los Angeles share? How does Mouse exemplify the Houston rationale?

5. How do Easy's experiences as a soldier affect the way he approaches situations? Consider his attitudes about race, violence, and homeownership.

6. Discuss some of the characters' different survival strategies as they cope with an unstable world. How does money influence their decision-making processes?

7. Are Easy's views about the connections between Jews and African-Americans typical? How does his background affect his thought process?

8. Name some of the social issues that come to light throughout the novel. How are they similar or different from modern day concerns?