



Discussion Questions for *Mississippi Solo: A Memoir* by Eddy L. Harris

1. Harris portrays the relationship between mankind and the natural world in a variety of ways, sometimes depicting exhilarating harmony, at other times giving evidence of violent clashes. How should human beings regard the forces of nature?
2. The author continually personifies the river, describing it as everything from a wise old sage to a daring adolescent. To what extent does the river personify Harris?
3. Harris has mixed feelings about the Army Corps of Engineers and the intricate system of locks that have changed the course, and the force, of the Mississippi. What is your opinion on these issues of nature versus commerce?
4. Discuss the cultural differences that emerge as Harris travels farther south. Does the scenery reflect its inhabitants, or is nature a constant in this trip?
5. Though Harris's trip is officially a solo excursion, the book features a vivid cast of characters. Which ones were most memorable for you? How would you have interacted with Harris had you been one of the strangers encountered on his journey?
6. What do you make of the fact that Harris's brother is an awkward addition to the trip, but Harris is instantly comfortable with many of the strangers he meets along the way? What is it like to travel with your relatives?
7. How might Harris's experience have changed if he had been white? Or if he had been female?
8. Does Harris's perception of racism change during this trip? Does he appear to change the perceptions of the bigots he encounters?
9. Discuss the motivations of the other boaters Harris encounters. How does his quest compare to theirs? How does his quest change as he nears New Orleans?
10. In the second paragraph of chapter three, Harris writes, "when a man has only one great notion, it becomes all the more valuable, a jewel, a prized and noble possession. He cherishes it ... all the while haunted by its existence and his burning desire to hurry up with it." What is your version of Harris's river quest, your "great notion"?
11. In what way does *Mississippi Solo* present a quintessential U.S. journey, capturing America's unique personality, history, and landscape? How would his experience have been different had he chosen one of the other massive rivers he mentions, such as the Amazon or the Congo?
12. Harris made this trip in the early 1980s. What changes might he observe if he traveled the Mississippi today?

About the Author

The author of four critically acclaimed books, *Mississippi Solo*, *Native Stranger*, *South of Haunted Dreams*, and *Still Life in Harlem*, Eddy L. Harris has generated the kind of notice and praise that attends to rise of only the finest talents. As America's premier African American memoirist and travel writer, he has written with emotional depth and courage about the Mississippi River, Africa, the South, and Harlem respectively in these books. A graduate of Stanford University, he is also studied in London and has been a screenwriter and journalist.