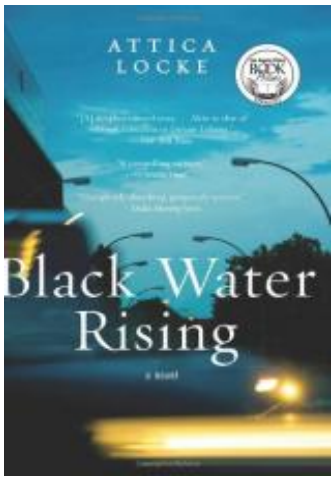
ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

Black Water Rising

by Attica Locke



About the Book

Jay Porter has long since made peace with not living the American Dream. He runs his fledgling law practice out of a dingy Houston strip mall --- where his most promising client is a low-rent call girl --- and he's determined to leave the sins of his past buried: the guns, the FBI file, the trial that nearly destroyed him. That is, until the night he saves a woman from drowning and inadvertently opens a Pandora's box. Her secrets reach into the upper echelons of Houston's corporate power brokers and ensnare Jay in a murder investigation that could cost him his practice, his family?even his life.

Discussion Guide

1. What do you think Jay?s choice to leave behind the politics of his youth for a shot at economic prosperity says about the larger American culture in 1981?

2. How does Jay?s struggle to balance his desire for personal success against his commitment to the community reflect upon the challenges for the black middle class today?

3. What are the ways in which Jay's marriage to Bernie drives him?

4. Black Water Rising is brimming with history, both political and personal. What do you think the placement of the flashbacks ? when/where/how they are woven into the story --- reveals about Jay's psyche and mental health?

5. What do you think the longshoremen's labor fight says about how far the country had come in 1981, in terms of equal rights?

6. How much of Cynthia?s behavior in the book can be attributed to the fact that she?s desperate to succeed as the city?s

first woman mayor? Does that excuse her sometimes despicable behavior? Do you have compassion for the sexism she?s up against as a woman in a position of political power?

7. Do you think Jay still has feelings for Cynthia? Does she have feelings for him?

8. Do you think Cynthia set up Jay during their radical student days? If yes, do you think she could have done so and still had genuine affection for Jay? If no, why do you think Jay is so willing to believe that she was capable of such a betrayal?

9. The story ends with Jay's decision to take on Cole Industries in court. What do you think happens? Does he win? Does it matter? Is Jay?s willingness to take on the fight more important than any particular outcome?

10. What do you think Jay would think of the city of Houston now? What would he think about America in the post-Obama years?

Author Bio

Attica Locke is a *New York Times* bestselling author whose sixth novel, GUIDE ME HOME, is the finale to her Edgar Award-winning *Highway 59* trilogy, which also includes BLUEBIRD, BLUEBIRD and HEAVEN, MY HOME. She is also the author of PLEASANTVILLE, winner of the Harper Lee Prize for Legal Fiction and longlisted for the Bailey?s Prize for Women?s Fiction; THE CUTTING SEASON, winner of the Ernest Gaines Award for Literary Excellence; and her debut, BLACK WATER RISING, which was nominated for an Edgar Award and an NAACP Image Award, as well as a *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize, and was shortlisted for the Women?s Prize for Fiction.

A former fellow at the Sundance Institute?s Feature Filmmaker?s Lab, Locke is also a screenwriter and TV producer, with credits that include "Empire," "When They See Us" and the Emmy-nominated "Little Fires Everywhere," for which she won an NAACP Image award for television writing. She co-created and executive produced an adaptation of her sister Tembi Locke?s memoir, FROM SCRATCH, for Netflix. She is currently in a multi-year development deal with Universal Television, working on adaptation of her *Highway 59* series, among other shows.

A native of Houston, Texas, Attica lives in Los Angeles, California, with her husband and daughter.

Critical Praise

"**Black Water Rising** reads like a hard-boiled thriller, but the real trick resides in Locke?s ability to personalize an overlooked part of American history and show how far-reaching, how entrenched, it is in today?s social, political, and cultural fabric."

Black Water Rising

by Attica Locke

Publication Date: May 1, 2010
Genres: Fiction, Thriller
Paperback: 448 pages
Publisher: Harper Perennial
ISBN-10: 006173585X
ISBN-13: 9780061735851