



## For immediate Release

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### Author Walter Mosley Receives Los Angeles Public Library's 2011 Literary Award

City Librarian Martín Gómez Presents Award at  
Dinner Gala Honoring Mosley, Sunday, June 12

**Los Angeles, June 12, 2011** -- Best-selling author Walter Mosley was presented with the Los Angeles Public Library 2011 Literary Award by City Librarian Martín Gómez at the 16th annual awards dinner held on Sunday, June 12, at the Central Library in downtown Los Angeles. The fund-raising event was sponsored by the Library Foundation of Los Angeles, a non-profit organization dedicated to raising awareness and funds for the Los Angeles Public Library.

"I am deeply grateful for the acknowledgement and the existence of the Los Angeles Public Library," said Mosley in accepting the award. "Knowledge is not so much in quantity of access; not in a test score but in a freely active mind and the concert of active minds that come together under one roof. That roof is the Los Angeles Public Library and it is the shining beacon for the hope we have of making it out of the cold." [The complete text of Mosley's remarks is attached.]

The Literary Award is presented to an author for his or her outstanding contribution to literature. Mosley has penned more than 34 critically acclaimed books, including the major best-selling mystery series that began with *Devil in a Blue Dress* and features "Easy Rawlins," a private investigator and World War II veteran living in Los Angeles' Watts neighborhood. His work has been translated into 21 languages and includes literary fiction, science fiction, political writing and a young adult novel. He is the winner of numerous awards, including an O. Henry Award, a Grammy and PEN American's Lifetime Achievement Award.

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Peter Persic, Public Relations & Marketing Director

Past honorees of the Library's Literary Award include Stephen King, Tom Brokaw, Larry McMurtry, Tony Kushner, Norman Mailer, Harper Lee, Susan Sontag, August Wilson, David McCullough, Carlos Fuentes, E.L. Doctorow and John Updike.

"We're pleased to be honoring Walter Mosley, a native Angeleno and one of our city's greatest writers," said City Librarian Martín Gómez. "With his popular Easy Rawlins series, Mr. Mosley has vividly brought to life an important era of our history and paints a rich picture of our city. His diverse body of work celebrates the wonders of reading, and I encourage everyone to enjoy Mr. Mosley's books at the Los Angeles Public Library."

During the literary awards event, guests gathered for a short cocktail reception, followed by the awards program and remarks by Mosley in the Maguire Gardens. Guests proceeded into the Central Library for dinner and activities throughout the library.

The Los Angeles Public Library serves the largest and most diverse population of any library in the nation. Its Central Library, 72 branch libraries, more than six million books, and state-of-the-art technology accessible at [www.lapl.org](http://www.lapl.org), provide everyone with free and easy access to information and the opportunity for life-long learning.

The Library Foundation of Los Angeles ([www.lfla.org](http://www.lfla.org)) is a non-profit organization that supports all of the activities and programs not funded by the City. Since its creation, the Foundation has raised more than \$80 million to support the free programs and services that reach hundreds of thousands of people each year. The Foundation's fundraising efforts enhance the Library as a center for literary and cultural learning, thereby enriching the lives of every Angeleno.

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## **Walter Mosley Recipient of 2011 Los Angeles Public Library Literary Award**

Remarks Delivered at June 12, 2011, Awards Gala

The first words I think of when considering the library are shelter and refuge; shelter being a physical thing and refuge being a state of mind.

Thousands of years ago, during the last Ice Age, human beings were nomadic creatures moving from place to place, looking for food, and running from predators. At an early age children had to learn to keep up or perish. There was little time for play or contemplation, just long hard days of foraging and fighting followed by interminable nights of exhaustion and hunger.

When the world warmed up and humanity found that there were long periods in which they could settle and rest—all things became possible: music and art, agriculture and laughter, childhood and dreams that only children can have. And for many millennia the human race existed in a kind of realistic Eden. Where gods grew and the world was put under a scrutiny heretofore unheard of. Knowledge was shared and expanded and amended; language was honed and the first jokes were told and laughed at. Stories came into existence and religion and history branched out from the same root.

Don't get me wrong – there were still wars and conflicts, crimes and injustices, people still died and felt the pangs of loss. There was rampant infant mortality, deadly animals on the prowl, and the rage of nature. But still it was the beginning of all our knowledge. The long journey from the stone arrowhead to the space shuttle started here.

There were wise women and men that served as the repositories of who we were and where we came from, what we could be and what we were becoming. And there were long afternoons of contemplation and awe.

Time passed and civilization, for better and for worse, grew. The division of labor and the burden of technology and economics were laid upon the backs of the worker (the vast majority of the people) who found themselves spending fewer and fewer hours wondering and more and more years praying for a better world after death.

We built great buildings and sprawling cities, thick walls and engines of destruction, all to protect, to shelter. But this shelter cost us much of our freedom (our free time) while our health and refuge became akin to physical and mental illness because there is no wonder on the production line, no value in a joke told among friends. There is no happiness insurance in spite of the Declaration of Independence.

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We, the bulk of the people, find that our lives are intricately and inextricably intertwined with the demands of commerce. We work long hours and make just enough to get by. For every extra dollar we make there is a tax or a surcharge, more rent or a hidden interest rate; even in the products we have to buy to survive there is too often an insidious planned obsolescence.

Our children volunteer to fight not so much out of patriotism but because there is no clear future in wonder and contemplation, there is precious little hope under the New Ice Floes rolling out from the banks, insurance companies, and even from the democracy we so covet; the democracy that has the audacity to fight wars without a draft.

It's hard to find work in the new America.

You get a job and they give you an office or, more likely, a cubicle. But you can't read a book there, sit back and consider the lessons never taught in schools there. And when that job is over you're supposed to leave. And when the phone rings it is not you that answers, it is the employee.

Even at home you are not secure. You own the mortgage, yes. But without a job the chances of you living out your life on that front porch are small. You have paid for the streets, you might have even paved them, but you can't sleep there. You fought the war. They told you that you won. You defended America but there is no promise that it owes you anything.

There is precious little shelter and almost no refuge for the great majority of Americans. And almost none of what we have is assured; not our jobs, homes, retirement plans, liberties, health, maybe not even our next meal.

There is very little that is certain. But the library is. The library is our shelter and refuge; it is the place where you can always sit at a desk, pull down just any old book, sit back and wonder how life was for a citizen under the rule of ancient Rome. You can express yourself there and the librarian will not turn you in.

You have political representatives that seem to work for other masters, and

lawyers that talk so fast that you get dizzy, drunk – and then they roll you until every dollar is gone and you say thanks.

But the librarian is there to help you learn. She or he is there to guard your freedoms and to feed your mind. The librarian is the sentinel and the library is the outpost for you to build an identity in a world that wants you to conform to its every physical and economic need. The library eschews predators and vermin; it keeps the lights on.

The cubicle at work is not yours. The street is not yours. Maybe even your home or

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apartment is not yours but the library, the library is.

The library is a doorway to our past and our futures. It doesn't charge what the market can bear; it isn't afraid of a child's curiosity; it doesn't tell you what to think or how to dress. If you work in a library you're working for yourself. If you daydream in a library the front desk feels like they've done their job. If you sit at a computer there wondering why people have to vote in a booth once every four years rather than meet en masse online every Thursday evening the Librarians are comfortable with being revolutionaries too. They're willing for you to recast democracy, to envision a world where the masters aren't bankers, real estate moguls, and investment brokers.

The librarians are not meek schoolmarms running around shushing the exchange of ideas; they are what our congressional representatives and school teachers should be; they are what our banks and our unions should be; they are the shelter and the refuge for our minds and our bodies.

Thomas Jefferson thought that we should have a revolution every generation or so. The ferment for that radical democratic kind of thinking has pretty much dried up in the country – but not in our libraries. You can be jobless and homeless, poor, overworked, and in all other ways pressured; but in the library you are a peer, a free agent, a potential not a statistic. Our greatest hope is in the unassuming, quiet rooms and stacks of the libraries. Our greatest defenders sit at the front desks and lobby for our access to knowledge, shelter, and refuge.

And so here I am – deeply grateful for the acknowledgement and the existence of the Los Angeles Public Library.

Knowledge is not so much in quantity but in the quality of access; not in a test score but in a freely active mind and the concert of active minds that come together under one roof.

That roof is the Los Angeles Public Library and it is the shining beacon for the hope we have of making it out of the cold.

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