E. Lynn Harris’s *Invisible Life: A Novel*

Questions for Discussion

1. What is E. Lynn Harris really saying about the “choice of being gay”? (p.92,189, 245-6) What is his theory of bisexuality? (248, 206, 211)

2. What audience is Harris writing his book for and how does that impact the importance of the text? How does the style in which he writes help to describe his audience?
   - Groundbreaking topic for his very general audience

3. What does this book reveal about the Black community?
   - P. 41 being black and wealthy
   - P. 143 the Black Church (saved from homosexuality- p. 175)
   - P. 198 the Black community v. being gay
   - P. 204, 206 shades of black

4. How does Harris’s language emphasize the importance of color?
   - p. 69 Focus on color of people and things

5. How does the dichotomy of the north v. south play out in the text?
   - P. 168
   - His return home
   - He and Nicole wanting to settle down in the south
   - Description of Kelvin as definitely not from the south but rather from the north east (Philadelphia)

6. In what ways are Raymond's reactions to the gay community in New York similar to his feelings about being a black man at a white high school and college? Do you think Raymond's sense of himself as an "outsider" is inevitable for minorities in a predominantly white and straight society?

7. Why is Kyle, whose background is similar to Raymond's, able to be perfectly open about being gay? What does Kyle's choice of lovers who are "not his equal in looks, economic standing or intelligence" [p. 74] reveal about him?

8. How does Raymond's visit to his parents help you understand his difficulties in coming to terms with his bisexuality? Why can't he and his mother talk openly about it? Do the events of the weekend, as well as conversations Raymond and his father have throughout the book, justify Raymond's feeling that his father would take his sexual orientation as "a personal slap in the face" [p. 88]?

9. What was your reaction to Raymond and Quinn's conversation about their successful efforts to remain "undercover gay guys" [p. 132]? Is their behavior strictly a private matter? Does their willingness to tolerate anti-gay jokes and comments make them accomplices in perpetuating society's prejudices? Do Quinn's deception of his wife
and Raymond's decision to let Nicole assume he is straight [p. 143] reflect a lack of respect for women?

10. In thinking about Basil and other black men who lead secret lives, Raymond says "Had I stayed in Alabama, my life would have been similar. There was no way I would involve my family in my gay lifestyle. Besides, I came to realize that it was a lifestyle and not my life" [p. 168]. Is sexuality merely a "lifestyle" or does it define us in a fundamental way? To what extent are Raymond and the other characters in the novel defined by their sexual behavior and their attitudes about sex and love?