

Diamond Doris Discussion Questions

by Doris Payne

Author Bio: (from Wikipedia)

Doris Marie Payne (born October 10, 1930) is an American convicted jewel thief. Payne was born in Slab Fork, West Virginia to a coal miner named David Payne and his wife Clemmie Gilbert Payne. She was one of six Payne siblings. Payne's crimes have spanned six decades. She has been arrested many times and is considered a career criminal.



Characters:

- **Doris Payne** – International jewel thief. Black woman. 2 children – Ronnie and Rhonda. Born in W. Virginia in a mining town. Lived on Hough in Cleveland and in Shaker Heights. Has stolen jewelry from around the world. A.k.a. Thelma Creighton Wright.
- **Mr. Benjamin** – White, Jewish grocer in Slab Fork, where Doris grew up.
- **Harold “Babe” Bronfield** – Fence and nightclub owner. Well connected Jewish man. Married to Myra. Has a relationship with Doris.
- **Margherite Wendell Chapman** – Black woman accused of one of Doris’ crimes. Ex-wife of Willie Mays. Managed the careers of entertainers.
- **Frank and Dominic Lonardo** – Cleveland mobsters.
- **Ada Lurch** – Jewish woman recently out of prison (and who owns a brothel) who helps Doris find a fence.
- **Ma Clemmie Payne Mitchell** – Doris’ mother. Abused by Doris’ father. Moved with Louise to Cleveland.
- **Robert Mitchell** – Doris’ stepdad. Her mother’s second husband. Churchgoing man.
- **Louise Payne** – Doris’ older sister.
- **Shirley** – Doris’ friend. Small time street criminal.
- **Kenneth “King” Tolliver** – Doris’ long-term boyfriend. Cleveland drug dealer. He has an adult daughter, Linda.
- **Mr. Withers** – Black man who owned a small ice cream and candy store in Cleveland.

Discussion Questions:

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
2. The story is told from Doris’ point of view. Did you like the way the story was set up? Why or why not?

3. How did Doris' childhood in the West Virginia mining town, Slab Fork, affect her views on race, male/female interactions, and independence?
4. How did Doris' experience at Mr. Benjamin's store affect the way Doris saw the world? (When he treated her differently when another customer came in and the watches.) Why do you think he did that?
5. Why do you think that each part of the book started with a description of a diamond's value? Color, clarity, cut, and carat.
6. Doris says the solution to getting away with stealing is confusion and familiarity. What do you think of that statement?
7. Doris initially justified her jewel heists by calling it "taking" instead of "stealing." Do you think that changing the "name" of something can make it different? Why or why not?
8. What do you think about Doris' relationship with Babe?
9. Doris ended up in custody in France for about a year. Why do you think she continued stealing after almost being caught? Would you have continued after something like that happened to you?
10. Doris spends a lot of time describing her outfits during each heist. Why do you think they are so important to her?
11. "I believe a woman shouldn't have to bend over backward to get the respect she deserved. As long as I was willing to follow the truth of life rather than the rules of life, a good life was always within arm's reach." (Chapter 16) What do you think of that statement? What does it mean to Doris?
12. What do you think about Doris' story about the butterfly head and the letter to Jesus? (Chapter 16) Why do you think she included it in her book?
13. Doris never gets married, but has a couple of unconventional long-term relationships. Why do you think Doris refused to marry? How did her feelings about men influence her thievery?
14. How did Doris' mother's death affect her?
15. Doris lived in West Virginia, Cleveland, Chicago, Madison, and Atlanta. Which do you think she considered her real home?
16. Doris' life goal is to become a master jewel thief of international renown. Do you think she achieved that goal? Why or why not?
17. Doris is arrested for some of her crimes later in life. Do you think she got what she deserved? Why or why not?
18. When Doris looks back at her life, how do you think she feels about it? Why?
19. How much of this story do you think is true? How much is exaggerated? How much is it just telling "people what they want to hear"?
20. ***Diamond Doris*** is a memoir. Will you read other crime memoirs like it? Why or Why not?

References:

- GoodReads – <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/43245874-diamond-doris>
- New York Post – <https://nypost.com/2015/10/29/octogenarian-jewel-thief-should-call-it-a-career/>
- Wikipedia – https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doris_Payne

If you liked Diamond Doris, try...

- Ballad of the Whiskey Robber: A True Story of Bank Heists, Ice Hockey, Transylvanian Pelt Smuggling, Moonlighting Detectives, and Broken Heart – Julian Rubinstein
- The Last Madam: A Life in the New Orleans Underworld – Christine Wiltz
- Alice Diamond and the Forty Elephants – Brian McDonald
- Till Death Us Do Part – Vincent Bugliosi & Ken Hurwitz
- Catch the Sparrow – Rachel Rear

Doris Payne's Crimes & Arrests

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doris_Payne)

Payne's crimes have spanned six decades. She has been arrested many times; she is a career criminal. Payne is noted for stealing a 10-carat diamond ring, valued at \$500,000 (US), from Monte Carlo in the 1970s. She fled to France, but was detained in Nice and later extradited back to Monte Carlo, where she was held for nine months before being released, as the Monégasque authorities were unable to locate the stolen gem. Payne was arrested in Ohio in the 1980s after she escaped from federal custody during a hospital visit.

On Friday, January 22, 2010, Payne was arrested in Costa Mesa, California for removing the tags from a \$1,300 Burberry trench coat from a Saks Fifth Avenue store and subsequently leaving the store with the coat.

On October 29, 2013, Payne, age 83, was arrested on felony larceny charges for stealing a \$22,500 diamond-encrusted ring in Palm Desert, California. Payne pled guilty. On April 30, 2014, she was sentenced to two years in prison, followed by two years on parole, and was ordered to stay away from jewelry stores. She was released three months later, however, due to prison overcrowding.

In July 2015 she was reportedly stealing again and was believed to have stolen a \$33,000 (US) ring, although this has not been proven.

On October 23, 2015 she was caught on security cameras putting Christian Dior earrings valued at \$690.00 in her pocket at an Atlanta, Georgia Saks Fifth Avenue store. She was arrested and charged with shoplifting by Officers from the Atlanta Police Department.

Payne has openly spoken about her crimes and has used at least 20 aliases, at least ten social security numbers and at least nine dates of birth.

It is alleged in Charlotte, North Carolina, that on July 11, 2015, Payne visited a jewelry store at SouthPark Mall. After she left, store employees realized a diamond ring valued at \$33,000 was missing from a showcase. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department did not issue an official statement or APB, but local ABC affiliate WSOC-TV obtained a copy of an email sent to all area jewelers regarding the alleged crime and alerting them to be on the lookout. An arrest warrant was issued for Payne in August 2015, by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg sheriff's department.

In Atlanta, Georgia, on December 13, 2016 she was again arrested on larceny charges. On July 17, 2017 she was arrested for stealing \$86.22 worth of merchandise from an Atlanta area Wal-Mart, while wearing the ankle bracelet from her previous arrest.