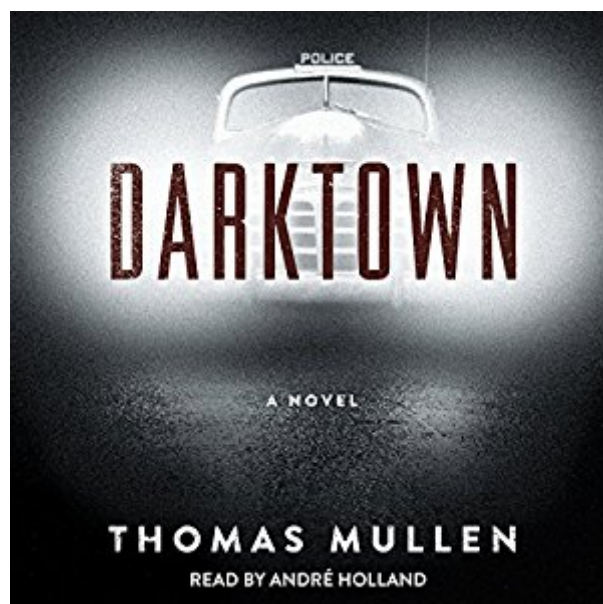


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# Darktown: A Novel



## Synopsis

In the tradition of our most acclaimed suspense writers, the author of *The Last Town on Earth* delivers a riveting and elegant police procedural set in Atlanta, a ripped-from-the-headlines depiction of a world on the cusp of great change involving race relations, city politics, and police corruption. Responding to pressure from on high, the Atlanta Police Department is forced to hire its first black officers. It's a victory of sorts, though the newly minted policemen are met with deep hostility by their white peers, and their authority is limited: They can't arrest a suspect unless a white officer is present; they can't drive squad cars; they can't even enter the station through the front door. When a black woman who was last seen in a car driven by a white man with connections to the APD turns up fatally beaten, no one seems to care except for Lucius and Boggs, two black cops from vastly different backgrounds, who risk their jobs, the trust the community has put in them, and even their own safety to investigate her death. When their efforts stall, they have to work alongside fellow officers who include the old-school cop Dunlow and his partner, Rakestraw, a young progressive who may or may not be willing to make allies across color lines. Set in the postwar, pre-civil rights South, and evoking the socially resonant and morally complex crime novels of Dennis Lehane, George Pelecanos, and Walter Mosley, *Darktown* is a vivid, smart, intricately plotted crime saga that explores the issues of race, law enforcement, and the uneven scales of justice.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

4.5 stars! Despite wearing the same uniforms as the white police force, the first black police officers

in Atlanta, GA shared none of the other benefits afforded to white officers at the time. Forced to work out of the basement of the YMCA, provided with no patrol cars, not allowed to investigate anything and not even allowed to step foot in the white police station, one has to wonder why Atlanta made them police officers at all. Darktown delved into that mystery and many more. Boggs and Smith, both black officers, one freshly back from WWII and the other the son of a preacher, commanded absolutely no respect from anyone. Not from other officers and not even from the black community, which they were tasked with protecting. It seems that the entire world resented them for one reason or another. One night, a vehicle took down a light pole right in front of them. Upon discovering the white driver was drunk, and had a bruised young, black woman in the car, Boggs and Smith called the white police. (Since they were not allowed to arrest the man themselves, they had no other choice.) But while waiting for the white cops to arrive, the man just drove off, and there was nothing the black officers could do about it. A few days later, the young black woman turns up dead and the black officers just can't let that go. Leaving off the plot so as not to spoil anything, I'll focus now on how this book made me feel. I'm aware of the shameful behavior that went on in my country, but this book went into specifics, and they were very difficult to read. The treatment of blacks in that area, during that time period, (1948), was deplorable. There's no other word for it. Every single aspect of their life was controlled by whites. They couldn't look a white person in the eye. They couldn't defend themselves, verbally or physically, when wrongfully accused of something. They had to ride in the back of the bus-often while the white people in the front openly disparaged them. Some of the incidents recounted here turned my stomach. Thomas Mullen took an unflinching look at the relationship between blacks and whites. As difficult as it was to read, I imagine it must have been even more difficult to write. To avoid making the same mistakes in the future, we have to be familiar with the mistakes we've made in the past, and this book shoves those mistakes right under our noses. Do you have the strength and stamina to look them right in the face? If you do, I highly recommend Darktown.\*Thank you to NetGalley and Atria for the free advance copy of this book.\*

It is Atlanta, 1948, and Officers Lucius Boggs and Tommy Smith are walking their beat in *Darktown*.™ They are two of only eight black police officers in Atlanta. However, their powers are, to put it mildly, limited. They have guns, but are wary of drawing them. They cannot use the police station, or even look at reports filed there, but have their own squadroom in the basement of a local building. They are paid less than white colleagues, are not allowed overtime, are unable to patrol *white* areas or arrest white suspects. Atlanta in 1948, in other words, is a

segregated, divided, unequal city where the first black police officers are both an affront and figures of fun to white police officers and viewed with suspicion by their own community. One evening, Boggs and Smith witness a man hit a lamppost and drive off. When confronted, he taunts the officers and his passenger, a young black girl, later jumps out of the car and runs away. This is the story of what happens when that young girl turns up dead and of the determination of Boggs and Smith to investigate the crime (another part of policing which is denied them). For the man in the car turns out to be an ex-cop and it does not take long to discover that the police are more than willing to overlook the involvement of one of their own. Also heavily involved in the story are Officer Denny Rakestraw and his partner, the racist, overbearing Dunlow. Rakestraw is a man who feels apart from both his fellow officers and especially his partner. Before long, he will be torn between his duty as an officer and his duty to the truth. Atlanta in 1948 is a time when he will be forced to take sides. The crime element of this novel is interesting enough, but the author really makes this time, and place, come alive. For Boggs and Smith, as well as the inhabitants of Darktown, it is a time of daily, petty humiliations. As far as the Atlanta police force is concerned, it is a time of corruption and intolerance. Politics, murder and violence combine in the segregated streets of Atlanta, when a man is attacked for straying into the wrong area, when a city is utterly divided by race and when justice is denied the citizens of Darktown. A wonderful, gritty crime novel, with excellent characters and a great plot. This is sure to be a huge hit and, considering the news stories from America, seems sadly all too relevant. I received a copy of this book from the publisher, via NetGalley, for review.

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