

Darktown

Thomas Mullen

Mullen's latest (following *The Revisionists*) travels back to pre-civil rights Atlanta in 1948, when the police department is forced to integrate despite violent resistance. The first black cops are not permitted to drive a squad car or make arrests, face overt contempt from their white colleagues, and limit their territory to the area known derisively as Darktown. On patrol one summer night, new officers Lucius Boggs and Tommy Smith discover a young black girl fatally shot and discarded like garbage. They had previously seen her in the car of a white man who assaulted her, but Lionel Dunlow, the ranking white officer who responded to their call, released him. Risking their precarious careers, Boggs and Smith try to find justice despite lacking any investigative power. The case soon expands to implicate fellow officers and even a congressman, but the duo may have a tentative ally in rookie white policeman Dennis Rakestraw, who despises his partner Dunlow's brutal racism but has yet to stand up to it.

VERDICT As his previous historical novels have proven, Mullen is skilled at bringing the past to life, both socially and visually (a TV adaptation produced by actor Jamie Foxx is already planned). Some readers may brace against the routine use of epithets, but fans of well-written literary thrillers will want this expert example.

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