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If He Hollers Let Him Go

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This is a re-issue of Chester Himes' first novel, originally published in 1945. Himes was born in Jefferson, Missouri in 1909. At the age of 19 he was sentenced to twenty years in Ohio State Penitentiary for armed robbery. Inside, he read Hammett and Chandler and in fact, became a writer, publishing stories in Esquire before his parole in 1936. Himes turned to novels, but with no real success, so he emigrated to France where, in 1956, S?rie Noir editor Marcel Duhamel persuaded Himes to try his hand at detective fiction. The result was For Love of Imabelle (aka A Rage In Harlem), the rest, as they say, is the Harlem cycle. Himes is not only a key name in the hardboiled school of crime writing, he is also a key name in black American writing. Generally labelled a 'protest novel', If He Hollers Let Him Go is more than 'just' a protest novel about the fate of a black shipyard worker in a racist society. If He Hollers Let Him Go is also where the 'protest novel' meets the 'tough guy novel', and its prose is straight out of the top drawer. If He Hollers Let Him Go tells the story of Bob Jones, leaderman of a gang of black workers at the Atlas Shipyard, LA, in the 1940s. Bob Jones is well placed: he has a good job (as a leaderman he is protected from the draft), he drives a '42 Buick Roadmaster, and has a black middle-class girlfriend, a social worker, whose father is a doctor and 'community leader.' However, the segregated society in which he lives is fraught with tension. Bob can kow-tow to the racism-know his place, and stay there-or rail against it. After a run in with a white woman at work, which costs him his leaderman's job, Bob decides on the latter course.

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