



# Our Man in the Dark

*Rashad Harrison*

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**Our Man in the Dark** Rashad Harrison

**A stunning debut historical noir novel about a worker in the civil rights movement who became an informant for the FBI during the months leading up to the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**

Feeling underappreciated and overlooked, John Estem, a bookkeeper for Dr. King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), steals ten thousand dollars from the organization. Originally planning to use the money to seed a new civil rights initiative in Chicago, he squanders the stolen funds.

To the bookkeeper's dismay, the FBI has been keeping close tabs on Dr. King and his fellow activists—including Estem—for years. FBI agents tell Estem that it is his duty, as an American and as a civil rights supporter, to protect the SCLC from communist infiltration. The FBI offers Estem a stipend, but in case he has any thoughts about refusing the assignment, they also warn him that they know about the stolen money.

Playing informant empowers Estem, but he soon learns that his job is not simply to relay information on the organization. Once the FBI discovers evidence of King's sexual infidelities, they set out to confirm the facts to undermine King's credibility as a moral leader and bring down the movement. This timely novel comes in light of recent revelations that government informants had infiltrated numerous black movement organizations. With historical facts at the core of *Our Man in the Dark*, Harrison uses real life as a great inspiration for his drama-filled art.

## Our Man in the Dark Details

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Author : Rashad Harrison

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# From Reader Review Our Man in the Dark for online ebook

## Alexis Villery says

John Estem has led a life where he has been constantly ridiculed, teased, and disrespected. As a bookkeeper for the SCLC, he hopes to gain respect and participate the movement. Even here he is under-appreciated and ignored. Hoping to gain some self-respect and win the affections of his long-time friend, Candy, John steals money from the SCLC which starts a series of events where John can't be sure how is friend or foe. John finds himself working as an informant for the FBI and taking orders from a gangsta. Soon he's in over his head and unable to find the respect he so needed.

After accepting this book for review, I became very intrigued with the noir style. After doing a bit of research I discovered that noir fiction is a type of crime story with a cynical twist where almost all the characters in the story are troubled and there is no hero figure. Morality and inhibitions are not strong points and a doom-like theme dominates. This story definitely fits the bill. I liked how the entire plot was unpredictable and there were plenty of twists and turns. After a while, I stopped trying to guess what would happen next. I had to sit back and watch the drama unfold. None of the characters are especially loveable, or even likeable, which is consistent with the style. I found that I started to view John the same way many of the other characters did. I pitied him and found his actions to be quite naive and deplorable. While there was a lot of action especially toward the end of the book, I felt like I wanted more action in the earlier parts of the story rather than hear the same inner thoughts from John. His self-pity and thoughts about gaining respect were quite repetitive. Additionally, I thought the conversations between Dr. King and John were a bit stilted and out of place. They sounded too formal and a bit unrealistic.

Overall, if you are interested in historical noir, I think you'll enjoy this dark read that brings many twists and surprises.

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## Lou says

The Martin Luther King days of the 1960's that's the time-line you are transported to in this novel. An outstanding work involving history, corruption, G-men, mobsters, Klux Klan and the Martin Luther King.

The main protagonist a black male one who started out as an accountant for Martin Luther King's circle gradually climbed the ladder and had the choice of pickings for company, the FBI, a black mobster, the trusted inner circle of the MLKing and one lovely beauty of a singer. This story is more than just behind the scenes of King's office, it's has a noir thriller feel a throwback to the writings of Hammett and especially James M.Cain. A compelling story Its gripping and written with some real style of writing I like. It is a first person narrative and does not waste a word. Murder, racism, love and money. The men lust for women and money and the main protagonist is just desperate to win the heart of one lady that's off limits. There's plenty of heart here and human mistakes set in a time of struggle, it is shocking at times the spin involved and the mistakes that Luther King and the movement made. Stephen King has done so well with his time travel novel 11.22.63 involving some history from the days of Kennedy and here Rashad Harrison has done so well representing the Martin Luther King days. The story ends at the well known Fall of King. This is one you are bound to like.

*"You don't owe him nothing," he says. "What, you think you and him are friends? You think you're some type of civil rights leader? You're not with them-you're with me . Me and you are the same. That's your problem, little man, you don't realise you're one of us. You still got yourself caught up in some bourgeois Negro dream. You want to be an accountant, a respectable member of the Negro community. Nice car. Nice house. You dream of a day when you can walk down the same side of the street as a white man and he'll tip his hat at you as if you were the same as him, that shit won't happen. There ain't no place out there for you as some Negro professional. You bourgeois Negroes still believe in fantasy of a black paradise, where all the businesses and banks are Negro, and the money is Negro too. That's a dream. All the assets of all Negro banks combined can't match a country bank in Kansas. Look around you. Open your eyes. You throw cocktail parties society parties, and debutante balls, and you speak proper English, hoping that a white man will look at you one day and say, 'you know what? These darkies ain't so bad.' It won't happen. Stop believing in fantasies. There's only one Negro business, and that's vice. I'm talking dope, liquor, gambling, and pussy. That's big business, little man. That's how a nigger makes some real money In a white man's world. That's how you get your pockets stuffed. Real money, not this fake shit you motherf\*\*\*\*\* chase. Meanwhile, I'm over here making real money, providing real services. My customers come to see me with confidence. They can relax, because they know I'll be here night after night. When they put down their money for a good time, they're investing in their sanity. I don't know what you Negroes believe in, but it's a f\*\*\*\*\* dream. I don't mean to be so hard on you, little man. I understand your motivations. Even though we have different approaches, we want the same things. I'm just trying to show you the right way to do it. You've got to think realistically."*

*"Thank you for your candour, Count. Maybe you're right. You've given a lot to think about. But I need a chance to work it over."*

*"Look at my back." He removes his shirt and shows me a patchwork of scars across his shoulder blades. "A white man did this to me when I was a boy. Caught me trying to steal chickens to feed my family. I still thank him for it, though. Changed my life. 'Cause that's when I learned to stop trying' to make it in this world- I learned I have to make my own. You are in my world. I am a hunter, and boy, you are scarin' the game away. You know what that mean? You taking food out of my mouth! You causin' me to starve. And starvin'....that's a slow death. Is that what you want? You want me to die a slow death?" He folds his shirt neatly on the table. He then grabs his pistol and cocks it at my temple. "Is that what you want? For me to die slow? Cause I don't wish that on you. I want you to die quick as hell."*

*"when you talk to Martin, he's engaging and effervescent. His mastery of such an array of weighty subjects and his interest in you can be both impressive and overwhelming at times. He be blind not see how much people expect of him. Even the innocent of interactions demand that he charm, impress, and enlighten and prove himself worthy of such adulation. But when the conversation's over, and the spotlights of admiration are dimmed or cast elsewhere, I can almost see him fading, moving through the SLC like a gauzy semblance of his public self."*

*For him, danger lurks everywhere. It was this way from the beginning, but he seemed to be aware of the romantic quality of his adventures, accepting his responsibility to the movement*

*like some gallant knight savoring not only the victory but also the significance of the battle. You can see it in the footage that accompanied his arrival on the national stage, in that first mug shot following his arrest in Montgomery, or when the police officers slammed his shoulder into the counter of a booking station right in front of Coretta-there's still a roguish glint in his eye. Like the photos of World War II vets broken, beaten, bloody, but smiling from the scorched rubble of Gothic ruins.*

*Something changed after Harlem. He must have looked down at that blade in his chest, it's ornament handle snapped off and staining the autographed copies of *Stride Toward Freedom* with his blood, and thought how trivial it is to put your life on the line for a book signing. No blistering water hoses or prodded dogs and their angry masters, no marchers, no protesters-just an endless parade of stargazers. Yes, after that, he was different. Every day every hour, every second-all of it was borrowed time."*

Also here the review.

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## **Susan says**

I read about a quarter of the book.

Estem is a bookkeeper for King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference. He is basically someone who can't get anything right and has been handed a hard life which includes polio and an abusive father. He is the protagonist and there is nothing likable about him and his morals are quickly circulating the drain. There is no one likable. Even King comes across poorly as he allows one of his inner circle to badger and tease Estem. There is no sense that Estem will ever rise above his situation. He steals money, gets "blackmailed," by the FBI to spy on King and become beholden to a gangster. The book is written in first person narrative. So you have a nonstop litany of his woes and bad choices.

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## **Ryan says**

I'm going to be honest right up front. I'm going to be honest about something that, I have a feeling anyway, will put me in the minority on this one. I really didn't care about this one. I didn't hate it, but after I put it down, I felt nothing; zip, zero, nada, nothing. It's been a few days since I've finished it, and to tell you the truth, I had to reread the synopsis on the dust jacket to really remember what the book was about.

I know part of the problem is that the book has a really noirish vibe to it. I can't really call it noir, because it wasn't gritty enough for me, so we will go with noirish (even if it's not a real word.) I love noir though, so I think part of the problem is that it just didn't go far enough for me. It's like when you are really craving pizza, it's all you can think about, and when they bring it to your door, it has the wrong damn toppings. They sent you pepperoni and black olives instead of sausage and mushrooms. It's still good, just doesn't satisfy you the way you wanted.

The other issue, at least I'm going to blame my bland response to this one, is what else I was reading at the time. I was reading a few golden age mysteries and a cozy at the same time. I think the juxtaposition between what those offered me and what this was giving me, just didn't work. I know we aren't supposed to compare books, especially books that have nothing to do with each other, but that's easier said than done. When I'm in love with my other reading and not feeling the same way about this one, it made it very hard to put those others down and pick this one back up.

With all that being said, and for the most part I could have ignored all of that, what I really kept me from connecting with this book was it's main character, John Estem. I just didn't like him. This has a noir feel to it, so I was expecting the characters to be flawed, which they were. With John though, as flawed as he was, I couldn't find anything about him that I liked. I found him to be rather boring and despite the self awareness he had, a trifle pathetic. I'm not really sure if all the blame can be laid at John's feet, but since he's an easy scapegoat, he will have to deal with it.

Now I don't want anyone to think the book is a waste of time. Like I said in the beginning, I think most people will like this one. For that matter, if I were to read this at a later date, I may actually end up liking it. I think the author has a wonderful sense of words and description. His style, at least in this book, is concise and wonderfully easy to read, without dumbing it down for the audience. He dealt with some serious subject matter, some of which given some of the historical characters involved, I found to be very interesting and even a little brave. I guess what I'm trying to say is ignore the first 4 paragraphs of this review, and base your decision on this last one. I don't want to be responsible for someone not reading this book.

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### **J.L. says**

I thought the portrayal of King was powerful and I was completely mesmerized by John Estem as a character and thoroughly impressed with this blend of historical and noir fiction with a literary slant. If you liked Jonathan Lethem's *Motherless Brooklyn* or Ellison's *Invisible Man*, you will love this!

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### **Megan says**

I couldn't put this book down. The author writes his characters so vividly and he puts so much detail into accurately describing 60's Atlanta. Although it's historical fiction I found this book to be really educational about the civil rights movement from a different point of view. I highly recommend this book and am looking forward to more from this author.

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### **Kristen says**

My review for the Historical Novel Society:

John Estem is an accountant apprenticing with one of the few black CPAs in the country in the 1960s. Even better, he's working for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, with Dr. Martin Luther King. On the downside, his CPA boss is a bully, making fun of his brace and limp (the result of childhood polio) in front of Estem's heroes—including Dr. King, Andrew Young, and Ralph Abernathy. Estem pilfers \$10,000 and

suddenly two white guys are tailing him. Next thing Estem knows he's patriotically informing on his hated CPA boss to the FBI. Estem so wants to believe the agents, that his boss is a communist, a danger to the country and to Dr. King. If that were true, Estem would be a star. Except that's not the way it plays out, of course. Estem passes on information that allows the FBI to potentially sabotage the civil rights movement.

The book is a noir thriller, and so in addition to the FBI, corruption, and civil rights heroes, there's also seedy nightlife, gangsters, and beautiful women. The core of the story, though, is Estem's understanding that he's in the company of giants. "I never believed in humanity as he did," Estem says of Dr. King.

Author Harrison couldn't have been braver in his choice of a (fictitious) protagonist: a self-pitying, traitorous accountant—not an obvious candidate for a hero's journey. Neither would a literary agent likely recommend writing about Martin Luther King Jr.'s struggles to stay faithful to his wife. That Harrison pulls it off—and with a debut novel, no less—is truly a testament both to his heart and to his writerly talents.

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### **Rodney says**

Not sure why more people aren't talking about this book.. Harrison does an excellent job weaving historical facts with fiction. Intriguing! A constant theme in this book focuses on the good and bad in man.. everyone has the potential for greatness and typically the environment/situation determines if a person will live in that gray area. The title of the book reflects on all the characters.. all the characters in some respect was hiding something.. not necessarily bad, but just potentially something they didn't want other people to know. Enjoyed it and I'm sure other people will as well.

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### **Pam says**

I have to preface this review by admitting that I failed history in school. It was one of my least favorite subjects.

But as of late, I have discovered historical fiction. Historical fiction, when it is good, makes me want to learn more. Find out what is true and what is not true.

Our Man in the Dark is good historical fiction. It is a historical noir novel about a worker in the civil right's movement who becomes involved with the FBI.

John Estem is an accountant working for Dr. Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference. After he steals \$10,000 from the organization, he is approached by the FBI. They want him to act as informant; they are concerned with communism infiltrating the organization. If he refuses, they remind him that they know about the money.

The rest of the story unfolds, exposing all of the bad qualities that human beings possess.

I have no idea what facts in the story are true. I do not know if the FBI had tapes on Martin Luther King. I do



not know if they infiltrated the SCLC. What I do know is that book makes me want to learn more.

What elevated this book from a standard historical fiction was the writing. I love a good noir, and Rashad Harrison did not disappoint.

"The allure of money and its hold are undeniable. I would love to strut for her and let her have a glimpse of the man I've been hiding away. I have tried persistence, but never money. I've never tried it because I've never had any. This is tragic considering that every day I track its movements. I know money's habits. I know where it breeds, where it rests, and where it feeds, but it remains elusive. Like a frustrated hunter, I lose its scent somewhere."

See?! It's all good. I look forward to reading more from this author!

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## **Babydoll says**

"...being invisible and without substance, a disembodied voice, as it were, what else could I do?" This first line in the epigraph of the novel, *Our Man in the Dark*, belongs to the eminent writer, Ralph Ellison. The quote is taken from the text of his highly acclaimed literary classic; *Invisible Man*. Author Rashad Harrison makes his fictional literary debut, by creating a noteworthy novel, whose message seems to echo that of Ellison's work. The plot features the main character, John Estem, who, similar to the nameless narrative in *Invisible Man*, feels that his identity is invisible, due to the refusal of others to discern and accept him. His invisible state makes him isolate himself from the world. In an attempt to break out of his self-inflicted prison, he becomes involved in compromising situations along with questionable people. Surviving tragic events, because of multiple poor decisions, enables Estem to embrace his true self and honor his individual complexities. What became a brilliant plot in Ellison's novel also created some achievement for this novel as well. Although not quite on the same level of the classical literary brilliance of *Invisible Man*, *Our Man in the Dark* does receive a nod of recognition for its exceptional portrayal of several prestigious individuals, during a critically historical time within the Civil Rights era.

What happens to the human psyche, when one has been chastised, ridiculed, and rejected their entire life? Does that sacred line of morale become jeopardized in the wake of redemption and retribution? Author Harrison does a superb job of addressing these questions, through the pulse of the main character.

Meet John Estem. A single, middle-aged resident of 1964 Atlanta. The humid Georgia atmosphere is smoldering with tension due to the strength of the movement. Estem seems to live a fairly decent life, working as a bookkeeper for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), Dr. Martin Luther King's prestigious organization. On paper, Estem presents as quite an upstanding man. Although walking with a permanent limp from the effects of surviving polio, he is an alum of Morehouse College, one of the few African Americans able to work toward a licensure to practice accounting, and is employed by one of the most influential men of that era. However, the authentic John Estem is invisible. Hidden behind periods of mockery he received because of his handicap, the lack of acceptance from his overbearing father, and an enduring love of years for a woman who constantly denied him, due to his inadequacies, seems to negatively effect him. Years of insecurities and lack of self-esteem seem to ooze out of his pores, which he wears visibly like a badge of honor. After hitting his breaking point, Estem decides to take his fate into his own hands and embezzles money from the SCLC account, in an attempt to establish a better life in Chicago. When two crooked FBI detectives, with motives to sabotage Dr. King, approach John, along with a well-known vicious gangster with his own malicious plans, Estem's life will drastically change causing him to

reach a point of revitalizing his life.

Our Man in the Dark is a titillating mystery, sure to keep the reader glued to every page with an undeniably intriguing plot and compelling characters. I recommend this book to others.

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## Screenplaydiva says

As you know, I'm a fan of historical novels. So I jumped on the chance to read OUR MAN IN THE DARK for TLC Book Tours.

OUR MAN IN THE DARK centers around Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the civil rights movement during the 1960s. However, King isn't the protagonist of the novel, but a fictional character named John Estem who works as a bookkeeper for King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference in Atlanta. When Estem finds out King's funds contain an extra \$10,000, which hasn't been used, Esteem figures he can use the money for one of the marches. But then greed overtakes Estem and he takes the money and spends it on frivolous items.

Soon the FBI is on to Estem and asks him to be their informant within the SCLC in order to find out if King has any Communist leanings. What Estem discovers is not that King is involved with Communist politics, like the FBI suspects, but the revered preacher who is not only powerful in his convictions for civil rights, but is also human and with faults like any man.

OUR MAN IN THE DARK is a fascinating novel filled with tension, secrets, lies, fear, and humanity in the darkest corners of the heart. Estem is not your typical go-get him heroic protagonist. He's lonely and self-conscious about his crippled leg due to polio as a child. Estem desperately wants to belong to King's group and doesn't want to just be the invisible bookkeeper on the sidelines. He feels the world is against him, which during this time in history, actually, is. We've come a long way in civil rights, but in some ways we haven't — women, people of color and sexual orientation — still struggle to have their voices heard. The most ironic thing about the turbulent time of the 60s, when J. Edgar Hoover was trying to get the goods — from communist activity to romantic relationships — on everyone, was that Hoover, himself, had his own personal problems.

My favorite scenes in the novel are those featuring Dr. King. While reading I could easily picture King's booming voice filled with fire when rallying a large crowd, but the public persona of King is quite different than the soft-spoken and quiet man featured in OUR MAN IN THE DARK. I cringed when Estem would do the wrong things and when the FBI forced him to listen to taped recordings of King's infidelity, thinking to myself this was so unfair.

With every turn of the page, OUR MAN IN THE DARK becomes tenser. I worried for Estem's safety and what he'd gotten himself into with the FBI and Count, a neighborhood gangster — from embezzling to eventually...well you'll have to read the book to find out. At one point in the story, an FBI agent who's hired Estem tells him: "You really fucked up now." I said to myself, "yeah, no kidding."

The story is rich in noir flavor and colorful settings featuring the bustling offices at the SCLC, smoky nightclubs and brothels, dangerous alleyways, and swanky hotels. The characters of OUR MAN IN THE DARK are vibrant and leap off the page — from the fictional to the famous — especially when Estem gets involved with Count, who owns a nightclub/brothel, to repay the money. He sinks deeper and deeper into his

own troubled mind.

Not only does the story center around the true facts that the FBI applied sinister tactics, particularly using paid informants to take down the civil rights movements, but how Estem tries to figure out his own role within King's group and how he can make a difference in the world, but also is afraid of change. The most important thing Estem discovers is how people who have hired him to do their bidding have even darker secrets of their own. Estem states, "...all of us are on the side scared of change, all of us desperate for inclusion, to receive that pat on the back from the establishment."

Reviewed book as part of TLC Book Tours. Review copyright of Reel Swell Productions and featured on my blog, "That's Swell!"

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## **Audra (Unabridged Chick) says**

What a perfect way to start 2012!

I began this book while my wife was running her New Year's Day half marathon, and in her three hour run I almost finished it. Then my wife wanted me to, like, congratulate her on her run and talk about how pretty the locale was, and really, all I wanted to do was get back to this book. It was so good, I really wanted the world to go away so I could just flippin' read.

Set in 1963, the story is told by John Estem, an accountant working for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Crippled after surviving a childhood bout with polio, Estem wants to show his father, his mentor, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his unrequited love, Candice, that he's a mover, a complicated, successful man worth knowing. His aspirations draw the attention of the FBI, who contact him about identifying Communist elements in the Civil Rights Movement. From then, Estem's world changes as he learns more about King, the FBI, and himself than he wanted to know.

Seriously, I loved this book. Estem himself is the hook, a fascinating, complicated character I liked despite, really because of, his flaws. But every other character in this book was marvelous -- complicated, surprising, real, shocking -- and Harrison's uncomfortable exploration of Dr. King's personal life was well done.

I especially adored Harrison's writing style. This book has those great memorable lines that I so enjoy in noir, that unexpected splash of lyricism and poetry among the unadorned, bald ugliness:

*The woman singing with the band is Miss Candy, also known as Candice. She looks just like what her name implies -- bad for you, but oh so good. Her singing is awful, but she's not up there for her voice. She's like a sepia-tinted dream with fiery red lips flickering in the darkness.*  
(p4)

Also, for those who are curious about why I consider this a historical: it's a contemporary novel that begins and ends in the past (1960s-1980s), set in a very distinctive historical era (the Civil Rights Movement), and features historical figures in fictionalized elements. I know that's not the current definition of histfic, but there you go.

Even if you're not typically a noir or mystery fan, consider this novel if you enjoy complicated characters

and some wiggle-in-your-seat discomfort about our lionized heroes. Plus, the writing is really lovely and I think Harrison is an author to watch. I can't wait for his next novel!

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## **Toni says**

By this time we are all familiar with the FBI's activities in trying to discredit the reputation and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and all of the information they acquired during their lengthy investigation. Someone had to be on the inside, right, to feed them the info that they wanted. In this debut novel, John Estem, is that person. Estem, who could have easily been the protagonist in Ellison's *Invisible Man*, embezzles money from the SCLC, where he is employed as a bookkeeper. He has lofty dreams of starting his own branch of the movement in Chicago, an area he believes is overlooked. Estem instead blows the money. The FBI is already monitoring the activity of Dr. King and the SCLC and they use the knowledge of Estem's indiscretion to recruit him to their ranks.

Our Man in the Dark is at its essence a noir mystery that follows John Estem's journey as he is torn between his allegiance to his people and the movement, his duty to his country, and his desire to be seen as someone important. Two things I had a problem with:

The dialogue attributed to Dr. King during personal moments sounded a little too "speechy" and formal.

There's a scene where the rumors about J. Edgar Hoover's alleged homosexuality are discussed. That's something that we know about now, but I doubt that FBI field agents in the 60's would have heard about it. Especially since Hoover was still alive and would have squashed any talk of that.

Other than that, I enjoyed reading about how the motives of one seemingly insignificant person can affect an entire movement.

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## **Patty says**

This very intriguing book is written in a noir style that takes a bit of getting used to. But once you get into the rhythm of the writing you are in for a trip down a rabbit hole to the beginning of the Civil Rights movement. John Estem, the protagonist is a very flawed man. He had polio as a child and has to wear a brace. His father has made him feel like less than a human being let alone a man. John has made it through school and is trying, hard, to become one of the very few black CPAs in the country. He has a job working for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and thinks he is closer to Martin Luther King than he is.

Wanting to be noticed he steals \$10,000 from the Conference to ostensibly start a movement in Chicago but he is lured by his darker side into buying some fancy clothes and a new Cadillac to impress his childhood love. She is involved with a gangster named Count who runs a bar/lounge where she is a singer/hooker.

The FBI is looking for a way to get a man inside to spy on Dr. King and they are aware of Estem's thievery. They leverage that into having him pass them information but Estem doesn't want to spy on Dr. King so he makes a deal with Count to get the money to pay back the Conference. And so the circle is created. All of the relationships will be entwined into an explosive ending - and I don't mean Dr. King's assassination.

This is a whole different kind of historical fiction. Based on more recent history it delves into a very difficult time period in this country's history. Martin Luther King did a whole lot of good in his life but he was as human as any other powerful man who couldn't keep it in his pants. The FBI was looking to use this to destroy the Civil Rights movement. Apparently there was a contingent of blacks that didn't want change either - the ones making money on segregation. But it was a change that was necessary and it was a change that was going to happen no matter what the FBI did.

The characters surrounding Dr. King are interesting and well developed. The only thing I had a problem with was the conversations that Estem and Dr. King had late at night. It seemed odd that Dr. King would be sharing these types of thoughts with a virtual stranger in his organization. Maybe I am thinking of the man he became rather than the man he was when he started but it just didn't feel right as I was reading it. It felt like it was forced for the sake of the plot. But it's a small complaint in a compelling novel. A novel that brings to life a very un-American practice by the government that is supposed to be guarding our rights not destroying them.

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## **Karen Miller says**

All John Estem wanted out of life was to feel important – to feel needed. Stricken with polio at a young age, and with only average intelligence and average looks, it doesn't seem that wish will ever be fulfilled.

But when he starts working for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference – the civil rights organization headed by his hero Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. – he wants to believe his fortunes may soon change.

“Martin and I are very close,” he tells anyone who will listen. He even intimates that he writes some of the great man's speeches. It's too bad no one believes him, and that he's so often reminded that he's only the organization's bookkeeper.

He's put down by his supervisor, who pays him little attention unless he needs him to crunch some numbers or run errands to the dry cleaner.

He's ignored by a semi-talented nightclub singer who he's had a crush on since childhood.

He's bullied by the nightclub owner, who laughs at his disability and has his goons beat him up – just for fun.

So when someone finally tells him that he's just as valuable as he always thought he was, and offers him the opportunity to prove it, he jumps at the chance.

“Mr. Estem, the country is under attack. You may not see it on the surface – our enemy is cowardly and attacks from the shadows – but every day, foreign interests threaten to unravel the very fabric of American society. This is a matter of national security. Our agents can't do it alone. We need help from the public, good American men like you. We are at war, Mr. Estem, and the FBI – America – needs your help.”

All he has to do is report on the activities of the SCLC, he's told. And in return he'll receive a stipend of one hundred dollars a week, the appreciation of his country, and the promise that the FBI won't inform the SCLC that Estem has embezzled ten thousand dollars from the organization.

Estem readily agrees, imagining himself a patriot for doing so. However, when he finds that he's also expected to report on the extramarital activities of Dr. King he wants to bow out, but finds out he's too deep to simply walk away.

Our Man in the Dark is a debut novel written by Rashad Harrison, a contributor to [MedicineAgency.com](http://MedicineAgency.com), an online journal of political and cultural commentary.

Touted as a thriller and historical noir, Harrison's book mixes fictional characters with real-life people, and the very real intrigues carried out by the FBI against civil rights leaders in the name of protecting national security, preventing violence, and maintaining the existing social and political order.

It's well-known that King and the SCLC were favorite targets of the Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) designed by the FBI to monitor, infiltrate, and discredit domestic political organizations; which serves to seem to make *Our Man in the Dark* all the more believable.

Believable? Yes. Thrilling? Historical noir? While the novel is entertaining and has its good points, I'd hesitate to say that it rises to the thrilling or historical noir level.

One of the problems is that while Estem is a well-developed and realistic character he is, well, simply boring. He's not very likable, but he's not totally unlikable, either. He's simply ordinary – not the stuff that heroes or anti-heroes are usually made of. Even when Estem was running for his life I read, with interest, to see what would happen, but my blood never raced with excitement or anticipation.

There were also no new titillating details revealed about the inner-working of the SCLC or the personal life of Dr. King as it is pretty well-known that some of the organizers had homosexual leanings, some had Communist connections, and some carried on extramarital affairs.

And while there were a few twists thrown into the plot, they were just not exciting. Nothing that might make you say, "Oh wow! I didn't see that coming."

While *Our Man in the Dark* is a decent read, a page-turner it is not. For those looking for a thriller – or historic noir – my advice would be to look elsewhere.

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