Motley, Willard (1912-1965) Encyclopedia Article

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The publication of Willard Motley's first novel *Knock on Any Door* in 1947 established the African American writer and former Works Progress Administration worker among the leading American naturalist novelists, together with Richard Wright, James T. Farrell, and Nelson Algren. The book, which chronicles the progressive corruption of Italian American teenager Nick Romano by Chicago slum life, was in its third printing five days after its publication and remained on the *New York Times* best-seller list for nearly one year. The novel was condensed and published in such popular magazines as *Look, Omnibook,* and *New York Post and Home Week-End Magazine.* A movie version was directed in 1948 by Nicholas Ray, starring Humphrey Bogart and introducing John Derek as Nick Romano. Motley wrote a sequel to *Knock on Any Door,* along with three other novels, but he was never able to repeat the commercial success of his first book.

Further Reading:

Abbot, Craig S. "Versions of a Best-Seller: Motley's *Knock on Any Door." Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America.* Vol. 81, No. 2, 1987, 175-185.

Fleming, Robert E. *Willard Motley.* Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1978.