

THE  
LAST DAYS  
OF LOUISIANA  
RED



[a novel]

Ishmael Reed

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## The Last Days of Louisiana Red Ishmael Reed

When Papa LaBas (private eye, noonday HooDoo, and hero of Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*) comes to Berkeley, California, to investigate the mysterious death of Ed Yellings, owner of the Solid Gumbo Works, he finds himself fighting the rising tide of violence propagated by Louisiana Red and those militant opportunists, the Moochers.

A HooDoo detective story and a comprehensive satire on the explosive politics of the '60s, *The Last Days of Louisiana Red* exposes the hypocrisy of contemporary American culture and race politics.

## The Last Days of Louisiana Red Details

Date : Published May 1st 2000 by Dalkey Archive Press (first published 1974)

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Author : Ishmael Reed

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# From Reader Review The Last Days of Louisiana Red for online ebook

## Starlon says

1 big middle finger to feminist and the black panther party. Lost its charm half way though when the misogyny was loaded on by the pitchfork full.

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## Bob says

Quite similar to Reed's other early-70s things I have read; heavily satirical of the varieties of political radicals crowding Berkeley at the time, and unsparing in its view of African-American sexual politics. I should think he rubbed some feminists the wrong way, but men hardly get more sympathetic treatment. The narrative is reminiscent in ways of the post-hippie quasi-surrealism of Tom Robbins, Donald Barthelme or Pynchon. The story centers around warring good/evil factions who represent white magic vs black magic implementations of Hoodoo, the syncretistic belief system and practices born out of New Orleans.

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## Anthony says

That was a wild ride.

Those were the first words that left my lips after I closed the cover of The Last Days of Louisiana Red.

The novel starts off folkloric, with a tone that could easily be imagined as the rustic voice of an aged Danny Glover sitting on the front porch in some back country New Orleans patio. That voice tells the tale of one Ed Yellings, who traveled out west to Berkeley, California. Ed was a Worker and a worker (the distinction isn't really clarified) and he aims to put an end to Louisiana Red.

What is Louisiana Red you ask? Well, Louisiana Red is the strife in society, the stuff that causes men and woman to be rude to each other, to make one another's lives a pain. We learn later that it is some sort of corporation, possibly lead by the white man to keep the black man down, and it has roots in the Oedipal complex too. I think. Well, how is that single and humble worker, excuse me, Worker, going to stop that Louisiana Red? By opening a Gumbo Business out of the Berkeley Marina of course! Isn't that what you would do? Well of course you would because if you were Ed Yellings, you'd be a thinker who knows that the Business isn't really about Gumbo, it is about stopping cancer and curing the addiction to heroin. It is a secret business that isn't much more than rice and okra and chicken. But this book isn't really about Ed Yellings, because he is a tragic guy and just as we get into his story he dies.

This is really the story about Ed's bumbling and selfish children. Wolf, the headstrong eldest son runs the Gumbo Business. Street, the second son is a thug and a hooligan and some sort of African God able to woo any woman that he lays eyes on. Sister, the oldest daughter is kind of a nobody, which is why I think she only got the name sister. And then there is Minnie, the youngest. Minnie is a Moocher, well, she is THE moocher, the leader of a cult of Moochers that believe that what's yours is mine because we are all brothers and sisters and all is for the taking. Well, Minnie's mooching philosophy causes some problems for Wolf and

she gets Street involved and everyone suffers and some of them die and it isn't quite clear what comes of Louisiana Red in the end but there certainly isn't any more cancer curing heroin heeling Gumbo. It is darn easy to say that a lot of stuff happens in this short little book. There is also a side story about a couple of Moochers named Kingfish and Brown as well as an actor named Chorus who is putting on a performance of Antigone. Somewhere in we also find a convoluted reference to the presence of the ancient Egyptian God Osiris who has been living in the zoo as an Orangutan. I might not be totally clear on that one, so don't quote me OK?

Well, it certainly was a wild ride and I did enjoy it a hell of a lot more than Mumbo Jumbo although it could be easily said that The Last Days of Louisiana Red is full of a whole lot of mumbo jumbo. That is for sure.

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## **Rand Rhody says**

(Update to an earlier review)

Fun. Weird. Reed is a talented writer, based on this, his only book I have read so far. It's enough to get me seeking out Yellow Radio and Mumbo Jumbo for starters.

A unique writing voice. In Red, the author humorously whips up a patois Gumbo of language from the homeys, the 'hood, and the ghetto; tosses in some of Sophocles's Antigone complete with Chorus; poeticizes and dramatizes in past and present tense; includes Aunt Jemima, Amos 'n' Andy, Minnie the Moocher; metamorphs Berkeley/Oakland of the '70s; and in general educates us (e.g., "loa" - a god in the voodoo cult of Haiti).

Judging by the number of Goodreaders who have rated Louisiana Red, and by the dearth of online book reviews, I get the sense that Reed's work has been underappreciated. What I meant to convey previously, and not very well, is my proposition that the American canon of modern literature has unfairly neglected Reed. I have some half-cooked theories, to be calibrated after I've read more of his work.

I found one insightful review at <https://www.nytimes.com/1974/11/10/ar...>

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## **Hudak says**

I wish I wrote some of these reviews years ago; now it is difficult for me to fully remember what I should comment on. I remember this being vibrant and impressive... so yeah.

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## **Tonya Clapp says**

Anything dealing with Louisiana culture has my attention. Although this does not take place in Louisiana, the story is rooted in Louisiana culture. This cleverly written book had me wanting to know more from the start. It was worth every second.

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## Vel Veeter says

I hadn't read this novel before, but I have read two previous Ishmael Reed novels (alongside the two other nonfiction books I also have reviewed recently). His books are something else. He writes using poetic language, conspiracy theories, oddball history, and a weighty erudition but with sparse prose.

The book I can most think of in terms of comparison is Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* in terms of a kind of postmodern paranoid sensibility, but in terms of the kind of almost Vaudevillian style and Black Arts consciousness I think a lot about George Schuyler's *Black No More*, a kind of proto Sneetches novel from the 1930s about scientist who's invented a process of skin whitening that erases, confuses, and upends racist practices and hierarchy in the US.

This book is about the murder of a hot sauce magnate who's been working on a cure to heroin addiction, plaguing the Black community. It follows in the footsteps of Reed's earlier novel *Mumbo Jumbo*, in sharing a major character, as well as a penchant for Egyptian history (ie in the sense that its cultural practice and influence predates the Greeks and therefore represents an African continental cultural hegemony over modern Western culture). And the novel plays heavily and borrows heavily as a rewriting of *Antigone*.

All of which cracks me up because a) the novel is funny, b) the novel is super weird, and c) the cover makes it look like a cookbook or a folksy memoir or another kind of Louisiana novel perhaps written by Reed's contemporary Ernest Gaines.

It's also an interesting pairing with *Blues City* because Reed's narrator is also thinking through a nascent interest in Bay area cities not named San Francisco.

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## Casey says

I didn't like this as much as I liked *Yellow Back Radio*, but that has more to do with the fact that I dislike the whole detective novel genre. However, the writing was so lively and convoluted and frustrating and colorful that I kept reading.

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## Weston says

It's sad that a lyrically talented and subversively creative writer like Reed turned this sequel to *Mumbo Jumbo* into the most disturbingly misogynistic and heterosexist books I've read in quite some time. I half-heartedly wanted to appreciate the interesting neo-Hoodoo elements of the story, but when so many of those turns end up propping up patriarchal rants it was a lost cause.

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## Lindig says

One of the finest writers who happens to be black. The urban experience is portrayed in all its gritty

splendor. He's a pretty good poet, too. I would recommend anything by this author.

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### **Mark says**

This is a sprint through some places I didn't expect to go.

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### **John says**

Satiric and racy deconstruction of Babylon. This sequel is a bit more thorough of an examination of syncretic Hoodoo. A bit Pynchon, a bit Tom Robbins. It's now a bit dated due to the anti-feminism.

Not as exhaustive and fresh as Mumbo Jumbo. Rare case of a "Western Canon" writer doing a sequel.

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### **Jack Heath says**

Synopsis: Papa LaBas, he's both a PI and a noontime HooDoo, comes to Berkeley to investigate the death of Ed Yellings.

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