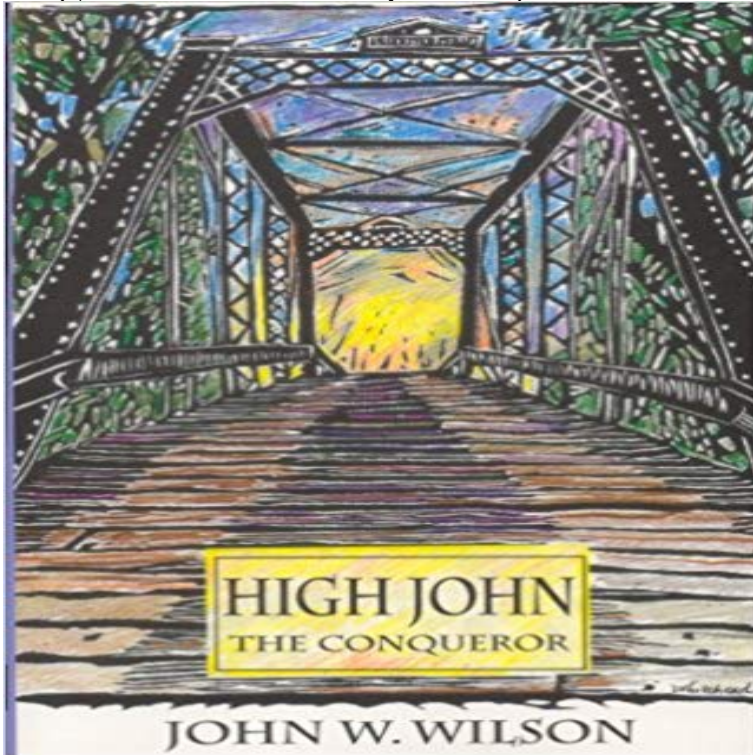


## High John the Conqueror (Texas Tradition Series)



Set in the river bottoms of southeast Texas where the Navasota and Brazos rivers come together, *High John the Conqueror* tells the story of African American cotton farmers struggling to hold on to their land during the last years of the Great Depression. Central to the story are sharecroppers Ruby Lee and Cleveland Webster and John Cheney, a rich, white plantation owner who has farms and tenants and sharecroppers scattered all across the Brazos/Navasota country. Ruby Lee and Cleveland are sharecroppers on Cheneys land, but Cleveland's parents are struggling to hold on to the farm they have owned since the end of slavery. The Websters are about to lose their forty acres because of one flood too many and one final disastrous crop failure. John Cheney is rich enough to withstand droughts and floods, and as blacks lose their land Cheney buys it up. The Webster family land is next on Cheneys list of foreclosures. Cleveland thinks John Cheney also has an eye for Ruby Lee. In telling the story of the Websters and John Cheney, John W. Wilson captures the hopelessness of poor southern blacks during the Depression. Wilson succeeds with quiet authority in getting inside the mind and heart of a proud young black man. His portrayal of the Webster family is neither sentimental nor patronizing, and he avoids the temptation to which many white writers succumb of stereotyping black characters. He renders dialect without giving in to Uncle Remus spelling or minstrel-show comedy. John W. Wilson, who grew up in the town of Navasota in the Brazos country, is equally skilled at capturing the feel of a small town and the farming area around it.

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