



The African American Experience in Crime Fiction: A Critical Study

Robert E. Crafton

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An immensely popular genre, crime fiction has only in recent years been engaged significantly by African American authors. Historically, the racist stereotypes often central to crime fiction and the socially conservative nature of the genre presented problems for writing the black experience, and the tropes of justice and restoration of social order have not resonated with authors who saw social justice as a work in progress.

Some African American authors did take up the challenge. Pauline Hopkins, Rudolph Fisher and Chester Himes led the way in the first half of the 20th century, followed by Ishmael Reed's "anti-detective" novels in the 1970s. Since the 1990s, Walter Mosley, Colson Whitehead and Stephen L. Carter have written detective fiction focusing on questions of constitutional law, civil rights, biological and medical issues, education, popular culture, the criminal justice system and matters of social justice. From Hopkins's *Hagar's Daughter* (published in 1901), to Hime's hardboiled "Harlem Detective" series, to Carter's patrician world of the black bourgeoisie, these authors provide a means of examining literary and social constructions of the African-American experience.

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