



The Blues Detective: A Study of African American Detective Fiction

Stephen Soitos

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This illuminating book makes the case for a tradition of African American detective fiction--novels written by black Americans about black detectives and incorporating distinctly African American tropes and themes. Beginning with Pauline Hopkins in 1901, black authors consciously altered and subverted the formulas of detective fiction in significant ways. Such writers as J. E. Bruce, Rudolph Fisher, Chester Himes, Ishmael Reed, and Clarence Major created a new genre that responded to the social and political concerns of the black community.

Examining the work of these authors, Stephen Soitos frames his analysis in terms of four uniquely African American tropes: altered detective personas, double-consciousness detection, black vernaculars, and hoodoo. He argues that black writers created sleuths who were in fact "blues detectives," engaged not only in solving crimes, but also in exploring the mysteries of black life and culture.

Soitos grounds his study in African American literary theory, particularly the work of Houston Baker, Bernard Bell, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. He offers both a new way of conceiving black detective fiction and a series of insightful readings of books in this genre.

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