



TEACHING FORUM: TEACHING CRIME FICTION AFTER BLM

The Novel and Not the Police

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Abstract. The author describes his attempt to design and teach a crime fiction class relevant to our era of racial criminalization and mass incarceration. The resulting class sought to de-center the detective novel and de-emphasize genre coverage, and instead invited students to explore the more varied ways that novels have responded to American ideologies of crime and criminal justice.

What are we teaching students when we teach a class on crime fiction? What I have always loved about teaching the genre is its interpretive plenitude. The crime novel is a genre about scientific rationality, and about the liberal social contract, and about the construction of masculinity, and about the activity of reading itself. As a pedagogical object, crime fiction contains multitudes.

What *don't* we teach when we teach crime fiction? The very phrase *crime fiction* usually means detective fiction, and most accounts of the genre tend to center the detective, the police, and a narrative form defined, in one way or another, by the restoration of law and order. (Think of W. H. Auden's famous definition of the detective plot: "innocence is restored," 446.) And yet, when I look back on my own crime fiction classes, I realize that the one thing I didn't talk much about, in courses devoted to a genre defined first and foremost by its depictions of amateur and professional policing, was the police. That is a particularly

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