



# Making the Footprints: A Tribute to Eleanor Taylor Bland

*Norlisha Crawford and Caroline Reitz*

**Abstract.** Eleanor Taylor Bland was a pioneering figure in series detective fiction by African Americans and by women. Her sleuth, Marti MacAlister, balanced a commitment to the genre and to expanding its capacities to include the personal as well as professional aspects of her characters' lives.

Eleanor Taylor Bland died 14 years ago on 6 June 2010. Although none of the essays in this theme issue take up her work directly, her impact on the field of female crime fiction through the creation of detective Marti MacAlister, the hero of 13 books, ripples throughout this issue. A Crime Writers of Color award bears her name, suggesting the degree to which over time Bland had connected many authors with herself and with each other. In thinking about Bland's legacy and the ways the field has changed from when she entered in 1992 and left it with her final McAlister novel, *A Dark and Deadly Reception* in 2005, we appreciate her quiet power, her clear creative choices, and the ways she tried to make crime fiction a more capacious genre.

Bland titles the "Introduction" to *Shades of Black*, a collection of crime and mystery stories by African American writers she edited in 1998, "What a Difference a Decade Makes." She states that in "1992, Gar Anthony Haywood and Walter Mosley were the only two African-Americans publishing mystery novels" ("Introduction" 1). Before that year was over, Barbara Neely's *Blanche on the Lam* (an Agatha Award winner for best first novel) and Bland's *Dead Time* were published. By 1998, in *Shades of Black*, Bland counted 46 African Americans who were working in the mystery genre.

Although born in Boston, Bland lived much of her adult life in Waukegan, Illinois, a

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