



From Alexie's *Indian Killer* to Johnson's Longmire Series: Expanding the Landscape of the American Indian Detective Novel

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Abstract. The essay examines Sherman Alexie's *Indian Killer*, a crime novel that critiques Native culture mediated through White American commerce, authors, and academics, as well as Craig Johnson's Longmire series as a development and a departure from American Indian crime fiction in the late-twentieth century.

In ethnic crime fiction, authors have mixed success avoiding appropriation as well as the creation of non-White stereotypical characters. For example, the action of Sherman Alexie's *Indian Killer* (1996) entails the appearance of a serial killer (assumed an American Indian) targeting White males in Seattle (the title, however, could have multiple meanings, such as someone killing Indians and a reference to George Armstrong Custer). Overt hate crimes against urban Indians in retaliation is concurrent in the novel with White appropriation of Native identity through adoption and literature. Case in point, local author Jack Wilson begins his own investigation of these killings. Wilson is a former cop who writes murder mysteries featuring an Indian detective Aristotle Little Hawk—with Wilson's claim of an Indian ancestor, he believes himself ideally qualified to tackle this mystery. Although *Indian Killer* presents Wilson as a wannabe Indian, the novel also explores the challenges faced by young American Indians forming identity in the homogenizing space of urban Seattle. Overall, the lack of cultural boundaries may be responsible not only for the initial killer but also for the cycle of Indian and White hate crimes in response. *Indian Killer* is a mystery

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