



# Listen to the Silence: Reconsidering Race in Marcia Muller's Sharon McCone Hard-boiled Detective Novels

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**Abstract.** This article examines the development of the Native identity of Marcia Muller's female private eye, Sharon McCone. McCone initially is identified with one-eighth Shoshone heritage. In *Listen to the Silence* (2000), McCone learns of her adoption and the membership of her birth parents in the Shoshone Nation. The series' second half explores McCone's Native identity, and contemporary Native experience, with increasing nuance and detail.

Sue Grafton famously pronounced Marcia Muller, author of the Sharon McCone series, the “founding mother of the female private eye” (qtd. in Walton and Jones 15). This accolade should be qualified by noting that McCone is the first female US private eye in a novel, as Maxine O’Callaghan’s Delilah West appeared in the 1974 short story “A Change of Clients” and P.D. James’ London-based Cordelia Gray series began in 1972 with *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman*. Muller undeniably remains a key figure in the history of the female private investigator, and there are 34 McCone installments to date. The author, followed by Sue Grafton and Sara Paretsky, created a long-running series that adopted aspects of the hard-boiled detective genre that had been defined by authors such as Carroll John Daly, Dashiell Hammett, and Raymond Chandler. Unlike their lone-wolf predecessors, these new female operatives led collaborative professional and full personal lives with strong ties to friends and the community. The importance of Muller’s work to this subgenre is indisputable

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