

Introduction to Crime Fiction

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review

- ▶ setting: the land of dreams and the odor of trash
 - ▶ horizontal and vertical, like Chandler
 - ▶ ...but also not like Chandler
- ▶ the color line: variations
 - ▶ the kids in Santa Monica
 - ▶ Albright's menace—and sexuality
 - ▶ police brutality (1948, 1990)
 - ▶ the “worst kind of racism”
 - ▶ the upside of being “invisible”

1952	b. Watts, LA (black father from Louisiana; Jewish Communist mother from NY)
1957	Chester Himes, <i>For Love of Imabelle</i> (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett)
1964	Civil Rights Act passed
1965	Watts riots in response to police brutality
1968	assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.
1971	attends Goddard College, VT; "hippies"
1977	BA Poli Sci, Johnson State College
1981?	works for Mobil Oil as a computer programmer
1982	Alice Walker, <i>The Color Purple</i> (New York: HBJ; influences Mosley)
1980s	writes a novel, "Gone Fishin'"; rejected
1988	LAPD launches Operation Hammer crackdown
1990	<i>Devil in a Blue Dress</i> (New York: Norton)
1991	<i>A Red Death</i> (New York: Norton); many more Easy Rawlins novels follow

1992	Bill Clinton acclaims Mosley (Mosley on Clinton, 2012: “He was better at satisfying the Republican agenda in economics than anybody”)
1995	<i>Devil in a Blue Dress</i> , dir. Carl Franklin (TriStar)
1996	president, Mystery Writers of America
1997	<i>Gone Fishin’</i> (Baltimore: Black Classic)
1998	<i>Blue Light</i> (science fiction)
2008	joins <i>Nation</i> editorial board
2020	National Book Foundation Lifetime Achievement Award

the big reveal

- ▶ What's the earthquake?

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I had only been in an earthquake once but the feeling was the same: The ground under me seemed to shift. I looked at her to see the truth. But it wasn't there. Her nose, cheeks, her skin color—they were white. Daphne was a white woman. Even her pubic hair was barely bushy, almost flat. (204)

- ▶ What does this suggest about the significance of Daphne/Ruby's secret?

the question of the question of race

“You ain’t no different than me. We both just people, Daphne. That’s all we are.”

“I’m not Daphne. My given name is Ruby Hanks and I was born in Lake Charles, Louisiana.” (207)

“You just like Ruby,” Mouse said....

“That’s just like you, Easy. You learn stuff and you be thinkin’ like white men be thinkin’. You be thinkin’ that what’s right fo’ them is right fo’ you. She look like she white and you think like you white.” (209)

► Is Mouse right?

“before ancestry had been discovered”

Black, Jew. Both outsiders, even here....

The young people are forgetting what bound the disparate sides of my family together. And so that delicate bond, so beautiful and revealing, is scarring over with antipathy that derives from ignorance and a brand of self-hatred that identifies the me in you and hates you for it.

“What Is It Like to Be Both Black and Jewish?,” *Nation*, September 28, 2011.

Primo was a real Mexican, born and bred. That was back in 1948, before Mexicans and black people started hating each other. Back then, before ancestry had been discovered, a Mexican and a Negro considered themselves the same. That is to say, just another couple of unlucky stiffs left holding the short end of the stick. (*Devil*, 181)

double consciousness

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essay and Sketches* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1903), 3, [HathiTrust](#).

- In what ways might Mosley represent a version of double consciousness in the novel?

love story

I never felt drawn to a woman the way I was to Daphne Monet. Most beautiful women make me feel like I want to touch them, own them. But Daphne made me look inside myself. She'd whisper a sweet word and I was brought back to the first time I felt love and loss. I was remembering my mother's death, back when I was only eight, by the time Daphne got to my belly. (184)

"They don't have names. They're just the ones who won't let us be ourselves. They never want us to feel this good or close like this. That's why I wanted to get away with you." (186)

the voice

“Fuck you!”

“Uh-uh, Easy. That don’t make you brave. Brave is findin’ that white man an’ yo friend. Brave is not lettin’ them pull this shit on you.” (199)

The voice said, “Don’t cry or beg, Easy.”...

“Evenin’, Frank,” somebody said in a friendly tone. It wasn’t me. I could tell that it was real because Frank froze. He was still staring at me but his attention was at his back. (151)

the detective explains it all

“Anyway,” I continued, “he [Matthew Teran] wanted Howard and Frank of the kill Mr. Carter and make it look like a robbery. But when they got in the house and found that thirty thousand dollars they got so excited that they just ran without even doin’ the job.” (213)

“All I know is what I just said,” I said as innocently as I could. (215)

“I know who killed that Richard McGee.”

“Who?”

“I can’t see where it helps either of us for me to tell you. Best t’keep that to myself.” (149)

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“You could try Junior Fornay against that print.” (216)

bodies and reasons

Daphne's father	Frank Green	"He came home and fell in my bed" (207)
Daddy Reese	Mouse	\$1000 (49)
"my share of them" (95)	Easy	"the heat of war" (95)
Howard Green	Joppy Shag	"a mistake" (189)
Navrochet Reese	Mouse	"so useless" (34)
Coretta James	Joppy	"He was scared by then" (189)
Richard McGee	Junior Fornay	"he badmouth me some" (170)
Matthew Teran	Daphne Monet	"he laughed" (206)
Frank Green	Joppy? no, Mouse	"Hell it don't!" (208)
Joppy	Mouse	"I felt cold then" (205)
DeWitt Albright	Mouse	"I could hardly believe it" (210)

All the dead men that I'd ever known came back to me in that instant. Bernard Hooks, Addison Sherry, Alphonso Jones, Marcel Montague. And a thousand Germans named Heinz, and children and women too. Some were mutilated, some burned. I'd killed my share of them and I'd done worse things than that in the heat of war. (95)

I felt cold then. Joppy had been my friend but I'd seen many men die and I cared for Coretta too. (205)

► Is justice served?

next

- ▶ Watch *Knives Out*
 - ▶ note the timecodes for one scene reflecting on crime fiction itself