Introduction

Late in Ralph Ellison's 1952 classic of African American literature, *Invisible Man*, there is a scene that illustrates the contentious relationship between hip urban styles and black cultural politics that emerged in conversations about racial uplift in the twentieth century. After Invisible Man (IM) witnesses race leader turned sidewalk salesman of Sambo puppets Tod Clifton gunned down by a police officer, he wanders to a subway platform, where he contemplates the meaning of Clifton's death. Because IM is still committed to the communist organization known as the Brotherhood, he cannot comprehend Clifton's seeming betrayal of the party—his decision, as IM puts it, "to plunge into nothingness, into the void of faceless faces, of soundless voices, lying outside history."[1] It is at this moment that IM spots three young men wearing zoot suits entering the subway platform. Sporting conked hair, identical felt hats, ballooning trousers, and "too-hot-for-summer suits," these hipsters display a "severe formality," which reminds IM of an African statue, "distorted in the interest of a design."[2] Fascinated by these codes he cannot quite decipher, IM follows the zoot suiters onto the subway, where he watches them read comic books. Here IM has a realization about the limits of the Brotherhood's model for comprehending the complexities of black urban culture in relationship to political organization: "Then I saw the cover of the comic book and thought, Clifton would have known them better than I. He knew them all the time. I studied them closely until they left the train, their shoulders rocking, their heavy heel plates,

clicking remote cryptic messages in the brief silence of the train's stop."[3] Both figuratively and literally transmitting secret codes known only to the hip with their chic outfits, the zoot suiters cause IM to reflect on his own political arrogance of assuming the role of race leader.

Although this moment only takes up a few pages in Ellison's lengthy novel, it is a powerful illustration of one of the unresolved problems posed by African American literature in the twentieth century, namely, the relationships among postures of cool, black culture politics, and the literary marketplace. As consumers of mass-market fiction as well as bearers of edgy popular style, the zoot suiters highlight the cultural and class divides among urban African Americans in mid-twentieth-century America. Furthermore, the scene calls into question the black middle class's presumption of race leadership, given that the culture of the black urban working class remains illegible to them. Although IM starts off the novel thinking of himself as an exemplar of black leadership, a Booker T. Washington–type of figure responsible for the uplift of the black masses, this confrontation with the hipsters leads him to wonder if there might be something politically valuable hidden in the folds of the zoot suit. "But who knew," he asks himself, "who knew but that they were the saviors, the true leaders, the bearers of something precious?"[4] Even as this nagging question remains unanswered throughout the novel, it provides a useful starting point for the following examination of the most popular black literature of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: African American crime fiction. As a genre and culture industry that dramatizes the contradictory relationship between stylish urban outlaws and black struggles for social and political freedom, African American crime literature stages a charged dialogue about the historical significance of black popular fiction in American political and social life.

Pimping Fictions investigates the black crime fiction tradition and marketplace that has grown over the past fifty years. I use *black crime fiction* here as an umbrella term that encompasses the paperback novels written by African American criminals and prisoners in the years after World War II. This study examines the work of pioneering prison author Chester Himes, the so-called "black experience" novelists published by Holloway House Publishing Company in the 1960s and 1970s, and the popular "street literature" writers that have invented a new African American literary scene in the past decade. As the title of the book indicates, *Pimping Fictions* focuses on the quasi-autobiographical tales of pimps, players, and sex workers, as well as the fictionalized exploits of street hustlers, drug dealers, and political revolutionaries. It traces

the development of a black literary tradition that includes some of the most widely read black American authors in history, including Chester Himes, Robert Beck (a.k.a. Iceberg Slim), Donald Goines, Joseph Nazel, Odie Hawkins, Wanda Coleman, Vickie Stringer, Sister Souljah, and Nikki Turner. Their popular novels feature stories of black criminals who attempt to escape the confined spaces of modern America—prisons, housing projects, and ghetto streets. Against the backdrop of these white-constructed spaces of containment and surveillance, the criminal characters of this genre become outlaws as a radical stance against systemic white racism.

As a secondary meaning of the title suggests, *Pimping Fictions* also investigates the relationship of the black pulp writer to the paperback publishing industry. While pimping and prostitution are often the subject matter of the novels in this genre, they also operate as apt metaphors for understanding the modes of production of black crime literature. As a number of scholars of African American literature have shown, pimping can be a useful symbolic system for comprehending the black artist's precarious position in the commercial marketplace.[5] This is particularly useful in the study of black crime fiction, which has been promoted as a sensationalist exposé of America's seedy underbelly, especially following the establishment of Holloway House Publishing Company, a white-operated niche publisher of paperback novels in the late 1960s. The constraints created by the pulp publishing industry have placed black crime novelists in a particularly vulnerable position in the literary marketplace, as they have fought to strike a balance among commercial, political, and artistic imperatives. Tracing this twin development in black crime fiction—the story of the black criminal against the backdrop of the American ghetto, and the struggles of the black crime writer in the literary marketplace—*Pimping Fictions* investigates black pulp publishing's advance as a coherent body of literature and as a cultural movement worthy of scholarly attention.

The organizing argument of this study is that black crime fiction developed as a literary and political response to white-sponsored methods of containment created in the years following World War II. Urban renewal policies, Federal Housing Authority–supported white flight in every American major city with a sizable black population, and the mass incarceration of black men and women in state and federal prisons have all constituted very real geographical and social divisions in America. To borrow from Michel Foucault, the regulated spaces of the ghetto street, the prison, and the project are "heterotopias of deviation," disciplinary

spaces that regulate the behavior of people who are considered outside the perceived social norm.[6] Over the course of the twentieth century, white Americans created a range of institutional and individual methods to contain African Americans in ghetto neighborhoods and prisons. This study examines the transforming modes of representation in popular black literature as an artistic and political response to these material and symbolic spaces of racial containment. In this way, my work departs from other examinations of black crime literature, such as Jerry H. Bryant's *Born in a Mighty Bad Land* and Jonathan Munby's *Under a Bad Sign*.[7] While these works take seriously the study of black criminal self-representation, they tend to view the pimp, the hustler, and other black criminal characters as more recent literary expressions of the "bad man" character, an African American antihero that can be traced back to the ballads of Stagolee. While this kind of "vernacular criticism" no doubt has merit as a way of identifying a coherent African American cultural tradition, it also has the limitation of treating the black criminal figure as a transhistorical archetype that transcends time and place.[8] *Pimping Fictions* looks to contextualize the popular representations of black criminals by examining the literature as a creative collective response to the repressive racial regimes of Jim Crow modernity. In this way, this study builds on the recent investigations into the relationship among African American literature, the spaces of urban modernity, and cultural politics, such as Madhu Dubey's *Signs and Cities: Black Literary Postmodernism* and Carlo Rotella's *October Cities: The Redevelopment of Urban Literature*.[9] However, I shift attention away from black naturalist, modernist, and postmodernist works in order to look at how the black crime fiction genre and marketplace have been shaped by America's carceral spaces and how this literature has in turn shaped these spaces.

One of the features of black crime literature that makes it so complex is that it is saturated by contradictions in its stance toward the allure of criminal posturing as well as the respectability of the middle class. All the major innovators of the genre—Chester Himes, Robert Beck, Donald Goines, Joseph Nazel, Wanda Coleman, Vickie Stringer, and Sister Souljah—had contentious relationships with their black middle-class backgrounds, and their works illustrate a sincere ambivalence toward criminal life as a radical stance against white racism and a politically ineffectual black bourgeoisie. Many of them viewed black crime literature as a compelling, though ultimately compromised, mode of resistance to a racist society. By exploring this combination of celebration and exploitation of criminal characters that constitutes black crime

fiction—what Eric Lott in another context calls "love and theft"—we gain a better understanding of the contradictory impulses, the unstable modes of representation, and the diverse range of expressions in this genre.[10] The cross-class romances, the tales of frustrated upward mobility, and the narratives of failed revolution are as much mediations on the intraracial class conflict in African American urban life as they are critiques of white racism. By looking at black crime literature in this way—that the criminal life is a seductive stance taken up in response to a racist society and the black bourgeoisie's assumptions of cultural hegemony—the study links together a diverse range of texts, from Chester Himes's antidetective novel to the pimp autobiography of Robert Beck, from the black revolution novels of Donald Goines to the ghettopia fantasies of Joseph Nazel. In a range of complicated and contradictory ways, black crime fiction displays deeply conflicted feeling about the styles and ethos of the criminal underworld as well as about middle-class discipline and respectability. By tracing these incongruous impulses, I hope to provide a clearer understanding of African American crime literature as a paradoxical expression of black popular culture.

At one level, my discussion of black crime fiction adds to histories of African American cultural and literary movements. Although there have been a number of significant literary and cultural histories of American and African American detective fiction, including Stephen Soitos's *The Blues Detective*, Erin Smith's *Hard-Boiled*, and Sean McCann's *Gumshoe America* among many others, there has been virtually no critical attention paid to black crime writing or the culture industry that supports it.[11] The untold story of black pulp publishing and black crime literature represents an important missing chapter in the history of popular literature and African American cultural production. As a literary and cultural history of popular black crime fiction, this book looks to expand the fields of American and African American literature, popular culture, and critical race studies. In particular, this study seeks to enlarge the conversation about black cultural production by contextualizing black crime literature's creation as part of a larger history of contentious alliances between black artists and liberal white patrons. This dynamic can be seen in histories of the creation of the slave narratives, the patronage of Harlem Renaissance writers, the creation of the so-called "race records" in the 1920s, the funding of midcentury "protest" fiction, and the commercialization of hip hop.[12] I draw from a wide range of research materials collected over the past decade—including interviews with publishers, authors, and editors; unpublished letters and manuscripts;

and book contracts and other records—in order to reveal the similarly multifaceted racial history of black crime literature's production.

Pimping Fiction also looks to deepen the conversation about the relationship among black popular culture, African American political and economic freedom, and class division. Black popular culture's role in the quest for equality has been a central concern for artists, race leaders, and intellectuals at least since the formation of the Fisk Jubilee Singers in the middle of the nineteenth century, and especially following the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. For instance, Langston Hughes argues in his seminal essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" that black popular forms such as the blues could provide much-needed cultural energy and authority for black intellectuals interested in the project of racial uplift and democratic equality. He writes, "Let the blare of Negro jazz bands and the bellowing voice of Bessie Smith singing the blues penetrate the closed ears of the colored near-intellectuals until they listen and perhaps understand."[13] About a decade later, Richard Wright makes a similar argument in his polemic essay "The Blueprint for Negro Writing." He positions his own work as a rejection of Harlem Renaissance writing, claiming that "Negro writing in the past has been confined to humble novels, poems, and plays, prim and decorous ambassadors who went a-begging to white America." However, Wright also states that black folklore could aid the black novelist in the struggle to "create values by which his race is to struggle, live, and die."[14] Ralph Ellison, in both his novel and his essays, again and again looks to black popular culture as the necessary starting point of any broad-based political movement. For instance, responding to the Zoot Suit Riots of 1943, in which white police officers and servicemen roamed the streets of Los Angeles, beating up black and Chicano youths wearing the sharkskin garments, Ellison writes, "Much in Negro life remains a mystery; perhaps the zoot suit conceals profound political meaning; perhaps the symmetrical frenzy of the Lindy Hop conceals clues to great potential power—if only Negro leaders would solve this riddle. For without this knowledge, leadership, no matter how correct its program, will fail."[15] Ellison's statement about the potential political meaning of the zoot suit encapsulates what a number of radically egalitarian African American thinkers contemplated over the course of the twentieth century: black popular culture must be at the core of the project of black art and cultural politics. As a body of work that has essentially translated the urban styles and vernacular of the hip into a mode of literary expression that has been read widely among large numbers of black people, black crime

fiction can play a significant role in discussions of the past, present, and future of black cultural politics.

By providing an analysis of the poetics and politics, as well as the production and consumption, of black crime literature, I borrow from the critical frameworks provided by recent scholars of mass-market literature. Informed by the methodologies and practices of the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies, the burgeoning study of genre literature has significantly altered the way we think about romances, dime novels, pulp magazines, hard-boiled detective literature, and domestic fiction. It has also changed the way we conceptualize readers of this fiction.[16] Responding to the classic culture-industry-as-form-of-domination thesis of Frankfurt School Marxists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, and building on the work of Cultural Studies pioneers Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall, critics such as Janice Radway, Michael Denning, and Fredric Jameson have argued that mass-market books such as romances and dime novels require a distinct mode of analysis because of their unique position as commodity and bearer of cultural ideology.[17] Black crime fiction requires similar attention, as many critics have traditionally passed over this genre despite its enormous popularity among fans and its far larger cultural influence. These critics have assumed incorrectly—simply by their neglect of the genre in toto—that these books are formulaic and that their individual differences are insignificant in the face of their negative ideological effect. This view of mass culture as a form of domination is deeply problematic, as it does not account for the significant differences between individual authors of the genre, nor does it take seriously that readers are anything other than passive dupes. If we are truly invested in American and African American literary traditions and their larger relationships to cultural politics, popular movements, and social change, then black crime fiction presents us with a unique opportunity to redraw the very boundaries of what counts as the American canon and even cultural knowledge. We can no longer afford to ignore this genre of literature, if for no other reason than its complex history and modes of representation challenge our commonsense understandings of freedom and incarceration; race, class, and gender identity; and the connections between high and low culture. Furthermore, as the "other" of the African American literary tradition—a body of work that has been actively repressed in the canon-building project of the past four decades—black crime fiction has been a shadow companion to the more well-received works of Ralph Ellison, Toni Morrison, and James Baldwin. By revealing some of the unsuspected connections between

these literary traditions, as well as the unique aesthetics of black crime literature, this study seeks to begin a conversation about the meaning and significance of this genre.

Of course, a more thorough cultural analysis of black crime fiction must be aware of the complex and contradictory ideologies transmitted in these books, while remaining attentive to the style, artistry, and influence of individual authors. While on the surface, these novels appear to be generic pulp fiction, there is significant diversity among them, especially among fans of and writers of the genre. Certain texts have gone through dozens of reprints, and they have sold millions of copies, such as Robert Beck's *Pimp: The Story of My Life* (1967) and Donald Goines's *Whoreson* (1971), thus achieving the status of "classics" among readers. The representations of black masculinity promoted in these books have influenced everything from blaxploitation films to gangsta rap to contemporary African American literature. In the analysis that follows, *Pimping Fictions* negotiates a discussion of black crime fiction that treats it as a distinct expression of a particular African American literary and cultural tradition, while remaining attentive to its position as a mass-market commodity in the literary marketplace.

One of the main imperatives for understanding the roots of black crime literature is that it is now one of the driving forces of the African American literary market. On any given day, all along 125th Street in Harlem and Fulton Avenue in Brooklyn, dozens of tables overflow with the latest street literature titles from hundreds of aspiring African American authors. Also known as "hip hop fiction" as well as "urban literature," so-called "street literature" features contemporary stories of pimps, prisoners, and female hustlers. This newest incarnation of the genre has unexpectedly emerged as one of the most significant recent developments in African American literature and cultural production. By some estimates, modern street literature constitutes anywhere between 50 and 70 percent of total sales at many black bookstores around the country. Studying the history of black crime literature now can provide context for the emerging popularity of street literature and the controversies that have attended it. With such titles as *A Hustler's Wife*, *Thugs and the Women Who Love Them*, *Gangsta*, *Dime Piece*, and *Dirty Red*, these popular novels have generated much public debate over their explicit representations of violence, their literary merits, and their status as a commodity in a rapidly changing literary marketplace. They are often written in the gritty vernacular of the streets, and they document the struggles, victories, and defeats of black working-class men and

women embroiled in lives of urban crime. These books are often self-published by amateur authors or produced by independent black-owned imprints, and they are read widely by African Americans in inner-city communities and by inmates in America's rapidly expanding city, state, and federal prisons. As a literary form and a literary marketplace, street literature shares connections with earlier African American cultural movements and popular literature markets, but it also represents a brand-new mode of literary expression that has its own unique brand of aesthetics, politics, writers, and readers. A mixture of utopian fantasy and urban realism, street literature is undoubtedly the literary successor to hip hop music in expressing the popular consciousness of the black underclass. However, its roots can also be found in the best-selling pimp autobiographies and ghetto action novels of novelists Robert Beck and Donald Goines. *Pimping Fictions* delineates a literary tradition of black crime literature by outlining the themes, poetics, and politics of publishing, from the works of these early pioneers to the modern novels of street literature authors.

Chapter Breakdown

Each of the six chapters explores the development of the black crime fiction genre by investigating a particular figure within a space of containment as well as the position of the black writer in the commercial space of the literary marketplace. Chapter 1 spells out the relationship between black crime fiction and emerging forms of white containment through an examination of the groundbreaking author Chester Himes. Although Himes's Harlem Domestic novels that feature his black detective duo Coffin Ed Johnson and Gravedigger Jones have received considerable academic attention in recent years, his prison stories and the detective farce *Run Man Run* have been mostly overlooked. This chapter rethinks Himes's location in the American and African American literary canon as the forerunner to today's black crime novelist. Critical attention usually places Himes at the end of the hard-boiled detective tradition that includes figures such as Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler. However, I reposition Himes as more of a transitional figure who marks a transformation in American popular literature from white-authored detective novels to black crime novels. Focusing on Himes's *Run Man Run* (1959), I read the novel as his clearest articulation of the limits of detective fiction as an aesthetic and political form for black novelists. By privileging the perspective of the black criminal over that of

the white detective, *Run Man Run* operates as a harbinger of an emerging literary marketplace that would cater to popular black audiences and showcase the power of black voices. I also read Himes's representation of the criminal on the run as a reflection of the author's own negotiation of the emerging crime fiction marketplace. Working within the confines of a publishing industry that did not yet market black-authored books to black audiences, Himes made do with genre conventions and literary forms that were inapt to the needs of black crime novelists.

Chapter 2 investigates *Pimp: The Story of My Life* by Robert Beck, a.k.a. Iceberg Slim. The book's publication announced the emergence of a new niche of black mass-market publishing by focusing on the first-person narrative of an urban pimp. This chapter illustrates how Beck's best-selling autobiography established the narrative forms, urban vernacular, and criminal character that came to influence hundreds of subsequent black experience novels, hip hop music, and contemporary street fiction. In *Pimp*, Beck invents a figure whose postures of black cool offer a radical critique of forms of white containment, while simultaneously reproducing a naturalized oppression of women as the very basis for his freedom. Employing hip masculinity as a way of handling the containment of urban ghettoization in the American city, the pimp of Beck's narrative operates as a radical departure from of the black-criminal-as-victim represented in Himes. However, the power of the pimp depends on the expansion of ideologies of victimization of women. This chapter explores this paradoxical mix of liberation and containment as it is represented in *Pimp: The Story of My Life*. Furthermore, it outlines Beck's difficult position in the pulp marketplace, underwritten by white corporate patronage. Beck essentially created a national black audience with *Pimp*'s publication by teaming up with the white-owned mass-market paperback publisher Holloway House. Drawing on interviews with Beck's publisher, Bentley Morriss, and many others involved in the process of publishing *Pimp*, I show how Beck himself was pimped by the industry of black pulp publishing.

Chapter 3 builds the case for black crime fiction's unexpected political efficacy by examining the novels of Robert Beck's most important literary protégé, Donald Goines. Perhaps an even more influential literary figure than Beck among contemporary black street fiction writers, Goines expanded on the pimp autobiography in a variety of ways. Between 1971 and his murder in 1974, he wrote fourteen novels (and sixteen if we include those novels published posthumously) that feature the stories of pimps, pushers, prostitutes, hit men, and heist artists. He

essentially established the parameters of the popular genre, creating a blueprint for black crime writing that solidified Holloway House as the premier publisher of the black experience novel. However, by the end of his career, Goines replaced the stories of hustler heroes with narratives of underground black revolution, thereby exhibiting the radical potential of the genre. Examining the trajectory of Goines's short literary career, this chapter outlines how the exploitative practices and methods of commercial containment of pulp publishing paradoxically helped produce a radical form of race- and class-consciousness in the black crime novel.

Chapter 4 surveys the vast body of literature published by Holloway House in the second half of the 1970s, following the death of Goines and the decline in Beck's literary production. Writers such as Odie Hawkins, Joseph Nazel, Amos Brooke, Charlie Harris, and Omar Fletcher—inspired by the works of Goines and Beck—expanded the pimp-autobiography and black-revolutionary novels in keys ways. The most significant shift in the genre is that most of these later novels feature utopian solutions and happy endings. In the novels of Beck and Goines, the pimp and revolutionary enjoy momentary freedom from spaces of white containment only to be captured or killed at the novel's end. By contrast, in the books of the post-Goines era, the black protagonists escape from oppressive ghetto spaces, and they dismantle figures of white power. This chapter shows how such fantastical solutions reflect the degree to which methods of white containment in the form of ghettos, prisons, and economic stratification had calcified by the mid-1970s. In the face of such overwhelming political, racial, and spatial oppressions, the utopian crime novel provided black urban readers with entertainment and temporary escape from these conditions of everyday life.

Chapter 5 provides a cultural history of *Players* magazine, an unlikely offshoot of the black experience novel and the first commercially successful men's magazine aimed at a black audience. Started in 1973 by Holloway House's owners as a supplement to and advertising vehicle for its black experience novels, *Players* attempted to capitalize on the emerging fascination with the pimp and hustler invented in the pages of the novels. However, the black editors used the form of the men's magazine to expand the representation of the "player" in unexpected directions. Writers such as Wanda Coleman, Stanley Crouch, Joseph Nazel, and Emory Holmes took advantage of the interest in the figures of the pimp, the hustler, and the revolutionary by infusing these figures with more high-minded intellectual interests. They co-opted this character of the street for the purposes of promoting a populist political agenda under

the guise of a "titty" magazine. The player represented in the pages of this magazine was intellectually savvy and a politically aware figure, one versed in literature, art, and contemporary black social issues. Additionally, the history of *Players* in many ways mirrors that of the black experience novel with regard to its creation, production, and eventual degradation. *Players* was originally an avant-garde publication that featured one of the most impressive collections of criticism, art, and entertainment found in any black American magazine. During its prime in the mid-to-late 1970s, *Players* introduced the editorial work of now-famous poet Wanda Coleman, essays by Stanley Crouch, nude photos of Pam Grier and Zuedi Araya, fiction by Ishmael Reed and James Baldwin, and celebrity interviews with countless black personalities, including Gil Scott Heron, Maya Angelou, Sam Greenlee, Don King, Dizzy Gillespie, and others. But just like the novels published by Holloway House, *Players* suffered in quality from the white owners' focus on profits, and it eventually devolved into just another pornographic magazine as black editors and writers were increasingly forced out of the company. This chapter adds to our understanding of the genre of black crime literature by examining the expansion of the figures of the pimp, the hustler, and the player in the sphere of mass-market magazine culture.

Chapter 6 surveys the contemporary African American literary scene by investigating the popular emergence of street literature, the latest manifestation of the black crime novel. With the publication of Sister Souljah's *The Coldest Winter Ever* in 1999, Vickie Stringer's *Let That Be the Reason* in 2001, and Nikki Turner's *A Hustler's Wife* in 2003, black crime fiction has enjoyed a resurgence in popularity, garnering new audiences, particularly women. Many of the most popular and successful authors of this genre are now women, and this chapter reveals how authors such as Souljah, Stringer, and Turner have rewritten the narratives of Beck and Goines from a female perspective and for a female audience. Specifically, it looks at how the stories of the pimp, the revolutionary, and the utopian romance have been hijacked by female authors in order to reverse the exploitative gender dynamics of the black crime novel. It also investigates the rise of the self-publishing marketplace and the creation of the independent black publishing house, both of which have largely displaced companies such as Holloway House. Black crime fiction began as an expression of a largely disregarded black urban subculture in the 1960s and 1970s, published by virtually one niche publisher; however, with the materialization of self-publishing as a viable commercial and literary enterprise, black crime literature has emerged

as a driving force of the African American literature market. This book concludes with a discussion of the complex race, class, and gender politics of this new publishing industry, paying particular attention to the relationships between black-owned imprints and the large black prison population that has come to support such industries as both writers and readers. In this contemporary literary marketplace, the female entrepreneur represents a new direction in black pulp publishing, as a number of female authors-turned-publishers have figured out how to transform the mass incarceration of African America into an organized literary and commercial enterprise. As the African American prison population now approaches one million people, and as African American women represent the fastest-growing incarcerated group in the country, street literature has come to reflect the social conditions and collective wishes of a carceral society. The development of a prison-industrial-literary complex represents the most logical expansion of the entrepreneurial ethos that has always been intertwined with the development of black crime fiction. Ultimately, *Pimping Fictions*' overarching aim is to trace this relationship between developing forms of racial, social, and geographical containment and the coherent literary tradition of black crime fiction in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.