

Librería  
**Bonilla y Asociados**  
desde 1950



**Título:** Cambridge Companion To American Crime Fiction, The

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**Precio:** \$364.00

**Editorial:**

**Año:** 2011

**Tema:**

**Edición:** 1ª

**Sinopsis**

**ISBN:** 9780521136068

From the execution sermons of the Colonial era to television programs like *The Wire* and *The Sopranos*, crime writing has played an important role in American culture. Its ability to register fear, desire and anxiety has made it a popular genre with a wide audience. These new essays, written for students as well as readers of crime fiction, demonstrate the very best in contemporary scholarship and challenge long-established notions of the development of the detective novel. Each chapter covers a sub-genre, from 'true crime' to hard-boiled novels, illustrating the ways in which 'popular' and 'high' literary genres influence and shape each other. With a chronology and guide to further reading, the Companion is a helpful guide for students of American literature and readers of crime fiction.