



## Oakland Noir

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"San Francisco's grittier next-door neighbor gets her day in the sun in 16 new stories in this tightly curated entry in Akashic's Noir series. The hardscrabble streets of Oakland offer crime aplenty...Thompson and Muller have taken such pains to choose stories highlighting Oakland's diversity and history that the result is a volume rich in local culture as well as crime."

-- *Kirkus Reviews*

"The legendarily tough California city of Oakland finally gets an entry in the Akashic noir series."

-- *Publishers Weekly*

Brand-new stories by: Nick Petrusakis, Kim Addonizio, Keenan Norris, Keri Miki-Lani Schroeder, Katie Gilmartin, Dorothy Lazard, Harry Louis Williams II, Carolyn Alexander, Phil Canalin, Judy Juanita, Jamie DeWolf, Nayomi Munaweera, Mahmud Rahman, Tom McElravey, Joe Loya, and Eddie Muller.

In the wake of *San Francisco Noir*, *Los Angeles Noir*, and *Orange County Noir*—all popular volumes in the Akashic Noir Series—comes the latest California installment, *Oakland Noir*. Masterfully curated by Jerry Thompson and Eddie Muller (the "Czar of Noir"), this volume will shock, titillate, provoke, and entertain. The diverse cast of talented contributors will not disappoint.

From the introduction:

*Jerry Thompson: Discovering the wang-dang-doodle jams of the Pointer Sisters shifted my entire focus. Stunning black women were scatting and bebopping all the way into my soul. I think what we've put together in Oakland Noir is a volume where this city is a character in every story. He's a slick brother strutting over a bacon-grease bass line and tambourine duet. She's a white chick with a bucket of hot muffins heading to farmer and flea markets, to sell crafts and get hooked up with some fine kat with dreadlocks and a criminal record. And it's in the faces of young fearless muthafuckers pounding keyboards and snapping fingers, lips, Snapchats, and Facebook timelines. It's the core of not only Black Lives Matter but all lives matter. We are the children of fantasy and the funk . . .*

*Eddie Muller: These days, writers and readers aren't denying the darker parts of our existence as much as they used to, especially in crime fiction. Some writers just do it for fun, because it's become the fashionable way to get published. You know, "gritty violence" and all that bullshit. The genuine darkness in noir stories comes from two places—the cruelty of the world's innate indifference, and the cruelty that people foster*

*within themselves. If you're not seriously dealing with one, the other, or both, then you're not really writing noir.*

## **Oakland Noir Details**

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Author : Jerry Thompson (Editor) , Eddie Muller (Editor) , Mahmud Rahman (Contributor) , Carolyn Alexander (Contributor) , Phil Canalin (Contributor) , Judy Juanita (Contributor) , Jamie DeWolf (Contributor) , Nayomi Munaweera (Contributor) , more... Tom McElravey (Contributor) , Joe Loya (Contributor) , Nick Petruski (Contributor) , Kim Addonizio (Contributor) , Keenan Norris (Contributor) , Keri Miki-Lani Schroeder (Contributor) , Katie Gilman (Contributor) , Dorothy Lazard (Contributor) , Harry Louis Williams II (Contributor) ...less

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## From Reader Review Oakland Noir for online ebook

### **Chazzi says**

I received this from Library Thing as part of their Early Reviewers giveaway.

This selection of short stories by Oakland, Calif. writers is a thick and juicy collection of gritty noir. Each author presents a complete and solid story. There is a brooding and darkness in each that leaves you thinking about what you just read.

The stories take place in the current time and then there are ones that take place in the era when noir hit the big time. You feel that you are actually seeing and hearing what is going on. You can feel the atmosphere and the emotions of the characters.

"The Handyman" A couple who find their perfect home in a perfect apartment and create their perfect life...until their landlord brings home her husband to live with her. Their perfect world disintegrates...

"The Bridge Tender" If he could keep her talking maybe she would change her mind. Why was she there? Could he get just a little closer? Keep her talking about her little boy? Could he hang on and see this through?

If you like noir this is a good collection. It is the newest in a series of books from various places around the world. It gives a look into the darker side...

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### **Kasa Cotugno says**

There is something unique about reading an entire book of short stories set in your home town, and the fact that they're designated as "noir," makes them even more compelling. I've learned so much - for instance, a bar I pass almost daily turns out to be the longest-lived gay bar, open since 1933. Living in (mostly) sunny, moderately climed Oakland, it's intriguing to be (warned, alerted, informed) of what could be termed the other side of town, although we are constantly reminded of the urban nature of our community, causing us to never let our guard down.

Still, there are eyeopeners in this collection, stories that might more accurately be called "street noir," if there is such a thing. The entire section titled "Clusterf\*\*\*" is a good example. But there were several others set closer to home that carried with them a true noir vibe, and those were my favorites. Nice to know there are so many fine writers among what appears to be the group called millenials and/or noughts, that is, so many young writers. Not a surprise since this is a hub for younger people (see Uptown Oakland, a magnet for those generations). And that so many of them are interested in reading/producing literature.

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### **Marlys says**

A friend loaned me this book, saying that I had to read it. I thought it was good, even though I usually don't read short stories.

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## **Diana says**

OAKLAND NOIR is a new title in Akashic Books original noir anthology series. OAKLAND NOIR is edited by Jerry Thompson and Eddie Muller. Eddie Muller (a.k.a. The ‘Czar of Noir’) is also the author of one of the stories, “The Handyman”. It was interesting to read of the many accomplishments of both of these talented authors.

OAKLAND NOIR includes 16 stories featuring different areas in the Oakland, California, area. Access points include an introduction by the editors; a map with story locations highlighted by body (dead) outlines; a table of contents including III parts with 16 stories - their authors and story locations; and a chapter which highlights these very talented authors.

In the introduction, the editors give their impressions of Oakland and I liked their comments and observations. What they have put together in OAKLAND NOIR showcases (not always - well, hardly ever - in a good way) the city in every story. Oakland, itself, is the major character and protagonist.

“The Bridge Tender” by Nick Petruski (Fruitvale Bridge)

“The wishing well” by Kim Addonizio (Pill Hill)

“A murder of saviors” by Keenan Norris (Toler Heights) school funding/private schools/journalism

“Divine Singularity” by Keri Miki-Lani Schroeder (Piedmont Avenue) dark, grisly murder

“White Horse” by Katie Gilmartin (Bushrod Park)

“A Town Made of Hustle” by Dorothy Lazard (Downtown) DA corruption

“The Streets Don’t Love Nobody” by Harry Louis Williams III (Brookfield Village)

“Bulletproof” by Carolyn Alexander (McClymonds)

“The Three Stooges” by Phil Canolin (Sausal Creek) Champ, Maurice & Laurence

“Cabbie” by Judy Juanita (Eastmont)

“Two To Tango” by Jamie DeWolf (Oakland Hills) Syd is crazy

“Survivors of Heartache” by Nayomi Munaweera (Montclair) Wow, didn’t see this ending coming

“Prophets and Spies” by Mahmud Rahman (Mills College)

“Black and Borax” by Tom McElravey (Haddon Hill) p.201 great quote “The music slipped through the doorway like greasy fingers with painted red nails, red and chipped from the wrestling match between tunes.”

“Waiting For Gordo” by Joe Loya (Hegenberger Road) written as a court transcript

“The Handyman” by Eddie Muller (Alameda) very dark and painful to read

I read and reread Eddie Muller’s remarks on page 16 - “The genuine darkness in noir stories comes from two places - the cruelty of the world’s innate indifference, and the cruelty that people foster within themselves. If you’re not seriously dealing with one, the other, or both, then you’re not really writing noir.”

This anthology is a volume rich in crime, rawness, cruelty, sadness, history, diversity and culture.

I heartily recommend this title and the Akashic Books noir anthology series.

Thank you to Akashic Books for providing me with this advance reading copy in exchange for an honest review.

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## **Amy says**

Very hit or miss for me. “Waiting for Gordo” was disappointing. I grew up on the border of East Oakland

and San Leandro and find the dialogue very unbelievable. Especially the Gone with the Wind reference (his line at the end is in the book too, not just the movie- not sure if that was intentionally false?)

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## **Steve says**

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#### **?About the Contributors**

As of the time that I am writing this in late 2018, Goodreads lists around 100 books in the "Noir" series published by Akashic Books. The essence of noir fiction is that stories are dark and depressing. This series is obviously tremendously successful, but it is not one of my favorite types of fiction.

There are fine stories here, though. The book opens with "The Bridge Tender" by Nick Petrusak. Petrusak,

who used to work in the San Francisco Bay area, now works in the bookstore in Brookline, Massachusetts from which my copy of the book was purchased. This is one of the best stories in the book, and starts the book appropriately with a truly disturbing tale.

My favorite story here is "Survivors of Heartache" by Nayomi Munaweera. A young woman from Sri Lanka moves in with friends in the Montclair section of Oakland, hoping to get over the trauma of a broken marriage. There are surprises in store for both the young woman and the reader.

Eddie Muller's story "The Handyman" is about a man who makes a terrifying decision, which forever changes his life. I doubt that this man would make this decision, or that if he did, it would have this effect. However, this is still a powerful story.

"The Three Stooges" by Phil Canalin tells of a tragedy that comes from drug use, and of the possibility of redemption.

The "White Horse" referred to in Katie Gilmartin's story of that name is "Oakland's White Horse Inn...the oldest continuously operating Queer bar in the United States." "White Horse" is a moving love story, set in the time of Senator Joseph McCarthy, when any public gay romance was, quite literally, a crime.

Some of the other stories are fine, some are not, as in most anthologies of original stories. I am sure that the book would be more meaningful to anyone who knows Oakland, which I do not. I think that anyone who is willing to deal with the terrible sadness of the book will find much of it rewarding.

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### **Clint Smith says**

These were short stories set in Oakland. Yup. They sure were.

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### **Cha says**

A solid collection that captures the unique complexities of Oakland. These stories don't shy away from homelessness, gentrification, racism, homophobia, or the drug trade. There are some gems here with memorable and knowable characters, cause some of them are true to life. The stereotypical "suicide girl" turned yoga instructor. (Those are a dime a dozen in these parts) but De Wolf wrote her so well. The longtime residents with habits who love their hood and who are just trying to get by and run into trouble doing so. The deaths of Black women that go unremarked in the news. The Czar of Noir with a tale of a believable white couple who were fleeing the expense of San Francisco, only to find that not all is idyllic on the Island of Alameda. The unique vision of Keenan Norris who wrote a Noir centered around Charters schools. Who would have dreamed that Charter schools and Noir would create a special sauce so damned good?

Only in Oakland.

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### **Vera says**

I received an ARC of this book from Akashic Books, and I enjoyed reading it. The stories in this collection are not for the faint of heart - they are gritty and dark and they show many different facets to the city of Oakland. Each story had a unique voice, and I appreciated the way in which the stories were put together in the collection. The characters were all believable and the authors were all fantastic at pulling the reader into the world of Oakland. I would definitely recommend!

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### **Linda says**

I never knew this was a thing. A collection of noir stories based in various cities in the world. And being that I have a huge crush on Oakland, this was a perfect introduction to the series for me.

Almost any time I read a collection of short stories, there are some I like and some I don't like.

In this case, the first story out of the gate is jaw-dropping good. I finished it and immediately started back at the beginning, something I almost never do. And there were several other of the stories that I found very compelling and powerful. There were only one or two that left me shrugging my shoulders, which is a pretty good ratio for an anthology of this size.

But, yeah, in case the title doesn't warn you... these are dark and may crush your heart just a little bit.

4.5 stars

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### **Tonstant Weader says**

Oakland Noir is the newest in the marvelous Akashic Noir series of mystery anthologies from Akashic Books. Oakland is the city across the bay from San Francisco and is so often written about in terms of its relationship to its larger, more famous, richer, and whiter neighbor. That does not happen here. These sixteen stories are about Oakland on its own. Oakland is the only focus, with all its poverty, corruption, and contradictions.

Oakland is it own place with its own industries and its own history. It's a working class city with a diverse population that is rapidly changing. Thirty years about half the population of Oakland was black. Now they are less than 30% of Oakland's population, with whites and Latinos each hovering around a quarter, with Asians making up the rest, incredible diversity that enriches and challenges the city. You don't see that kind of dramatic change without conflict.

These stories reflect the diversity of the city. There are stories from lifelong residents and old timers and stories from immigrants. The editors made a point of choosing authors that reflect the history and diversity of the city and who actually live there. There are black men and women writers, straight and queer writers, Latino, Asian, homegrown and immigrant writers. There are stories about the wealthy and the poor, law enforcement and criminals, and mostly about everyday people just trying to make a life.

These are noir stories. They have a sensibility of their own. They are not always mysteries and they don't always have tidy endings. They certainly do not have happy endings. They feature the grim side of life, on the downsides of life, where people struggle and often do not win. Sometimes making do is the best they can hope for.

I think this is among the better anthologies in the Akashic Noir series. Perhaps I like it so much more because it is less focused on representing different kinds of writing and more on different points of view. There are no poems, even though one of the editors is a poet. There are no science fiction or fantasy stories. These are the kinds of stories I think of when I think of noir. Oakland Noir is more successful because it features a greater variety of writing viewpoints and characters rather than stylistic differences.

One of my favorite stories is "Survivors of a Heartache" that features a newly divorced woman from Sri Lanka who is sharing a house in Montclair next to a wealthy family where it's obvious there are some deep problems developing, the children are wasting away, the husband and wife are fighting...and wow, it's one of those stories that turns on a dime. Joe Loya's "Waiting for Gordo" is a transcript of a couple conversations among some gangsters who are politically astute commentators on current events such as the recent Malheur occupation. I would rather listen to them than Lars Larsen any day of the week. It's funny, profane, and in the moment...and of course, noir. And there's no such thing as noir without heartbreak, which is what many of these stories do, though perhaps none more achingly heartbreaking than Phil Canalin's "The Three Stooges" about three young men living on the street and the slim chance of changing their life's path.

I liked most of the stories in Oakland Noir. Unlike many of the books I read in this series, I have actually been to Oakland a few times. Not that this gives me any special insight with which to judge the stories, but it did make a different connection for me than the many stories of places I have never been.

So here's the thing. I love the Akashic Noir Series. It's a form of armchair travel that is so much more interesting than a guide book. Don't you understand a city better through its literature than through its promotional advertising? I also think these books are great gifts. Do you have a friend who is moving to Oakland, give them this book and maybe they will stay. Kidding! I think short story books are great gifts because you aren't choosing just one author and by choosing from this series, you can choose books that connect with the receiver's life in special ways, one featuring a place they have visited on their travels, for example. What's not to love and with a dozen or more authors, surely a few will hit a home run.

Anthology authors: Carolyn Alexander, Dorothy Lazard, Harry Louis Williams II, Jamie DeWolf, Joe Loya, Judy Juanita, Katie Gilmartin, Keenan Norris, Keri Miki-Lani Schroeder, Kim Addonizio, Mahmud Rahman, Nayomi Munaweera, Nick Petruski, noir, Noir Series, Phil Canalin, Tom McElravey

Oakland Noir will be released April 4th. I received an advance copy through Edelweiss and LibraryThing.

<http://tonstantweaderreviews.wordpress...>

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**Ashley Clark says**

This is part of a series of books that take place in (insert local area here), and feature authors from that area, and all the crimes take place in that area. I like the conceit, and I thought I would give it a whirl. Like all

anthologies of short stories from different authors, it is hit or miss. And boy, were there some EPIC misses. A few short stories were great- anchoring in the place (which, to me, is an important aspect of the series) and providing some good ol fashioned noir suspense. Some of the stories were laughable bad. I would say it had about 3 good stories throughout. Needs a MUCH better editor.

One story, for real though, sounded like what a white suburban kid would write about gang fights. It was AWFUL.

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## Doctor Moss says

I think one of the core ingredients of noir is the feel and flavor of its settings. In movies, the black and white film, the nighttime street scenes, the nightclubs and bars, are themselves characters in the stories. That's what makes this series of books, set in iconic (and maybe some not so iconic) locations so interesting.

Oakland has a ton of feel. All the "no there there", "murder capital", etc. talk kind of misses the point with Oakland. The stories in this book do it justice, I thought.

Having lived in Oakland, Berkeley, and Alameda, I knew the stories' settings, sometimes from direct experience and sometimes just from hearsay, but all give me a strong, familiar feel. Oakland is one of the most diverse cities in the United States, ethnically, economically, and racially. The stories reflect it — it's not so much that the themes are ethnic, racial, or economic, but the environment flows through like a thick blend of flavors.

Characters are drawn from all over the place — homeless drug addicts, aspiring middle-classers, troubled and untroubled gays and lesbians, kids, wealthier types with their own problems. Some of the landmarks — the White Horse Inn, the Fruitvale Bridge, Mills College, McClymonds High School, Hegenberger Road — qualify as characters in their own right.

Noir is a fuzzy category. Some of the stories here are just plain stories of down and out life. Phil Canalin's story, The Three Stooges, focuses on one night with three homeless friends, Maurice, Champ, and Lawrence. It's typical of many of the stories in the book — people living hard lives with tragedy heaped on top, almost like something you take in stride.

And then there are stories like Eddie Muller's The Handyman, where upwardly mobile slams into downwardly tragic. The story is set in Alameda, in one of its old, grand houses. You can feel it.

Then there are portraits of the modern, urban "life of crime". Joe Loya's Waiting for Gordo is told through court transcripts of police surveillance recordings. That one is set on Hegenberger Road, in the parking lot near Francesco's restaurant. If you have lived in Oakland, you've probably driven by Francesco's (it's closed now) with no idea that things like what happens here were going on. I know I did. I have to admit I got a little Pulp Fiction diner flashback reading this one.

Another poignant story is Katie Gilmartin's White Horse, set at the White Horse Inn. Despite having lived just a few blocks from the White Horse Inn, I never knew that it was the oldest, continuously operating "Queer bar" in the United States. The story is set at a time when being gay or lesbian was very risky business, not that it can't be now, and what happens in the story shows the collision between that risk, how you react to it, and any attempt to just pursue the relationships the characters are drawn to.

Really what I loved about the book was how it gave me the feel and taste of Oakland, for better and worse. I admit some of it might be slumming, for someone who never experienced the hardest sides of Oakland life. Oakland, for all its bad reputation as the city that isn't San Francisco, is a great setting for a book in this series.

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### **Woody Chandler says**

Coming fast on the heels of my reading of "Brussels Noir", this one illustrated the up & down nature of this series. Not every collection is meritorious while some knock it outta the park or come close. This was one of the latter.

I have long said that the best 2.5 years of my life were when I was stationed at N.A.S. Alameda from June 1987 to October 1989. My uncle was a professor at SFSU & I had a key to his apartment, so I was in "The City" more often than not, but I also maintained an apartment in Alameda, plus I was an OAK A's partial season ticket holder & I loved going up to Berkeley. BART was strong in the East Bay & I had an active duty G/F in San Leandro, so all of the locales in this volume were familiar to me.

Part 1 - "Not a Soft City" is what kept this from being a 5-star, but it acts as the opening number in what builds to a deafening crescendo by the end. As to the end, I would have reversed "The Handyman" & ended it with "Waiting for Gordo", but that is nit-picky. Parts 2 & 3 were filled with jarring, crazy tales, the kind that ring true with me since I was a drunken punk rocker on active duty in the U.S. Navy & I lived some of it, especially "Two to Tango". When the aforementioned G/F broke it off with me, I turned to fellow punks on both sides of The S.F. Bay as well as a few soul sisters, the latter of which provided me entrée into parts of Oaktown/Oakdale that I may not have otherwise known. This was a really good, quick, worthwhile read.

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### **Becca Minkoff says**

Love love loved this collection of stories ! A must read for all east bay residents.

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