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Crime and the Nation: Prison and Popular Fiction in Philadelphia. 1786-1800 (Studies in American Popular History and Culture)

Peter Okun

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Crime and the Nation explores the correlation between fiction writing and national identity in the late eighteenth century when these two enterprises went hand in hand. The 1780s and '90s witnessed a spirited public debate on crime and punishment that produced a new kind of fiction and a new kind of prison. The world's first penitentiary-style prison opened at Philadelphia in 1790. At the same time jurists, reformers and fiction writers found new uses for the criminal. Suddenly, he was fascinating, he was edifying to the community, he was worth displaying and reforming. In a young nation whose very origins were perceived as criminal, yet clearly necessary and ultimately redeemable, crime emerged as an essential-and controversial-component of national identity. **Crime and the Nation** explores the nature of that identity, and the origins of America's unique and enduring love affair with crime and crime fiction.

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