

**Stephen Mack Jones**

Contemporary Authors Online. 2018. Lexile Measure: 1040L.

COPYRIGHT 2019 Gale, a Cengage Company

Updated: June 14, 2018

Born: Lansing, Michigan, United States

Nationality: American

Occupation: Writer

Updated: June 14, 2018

**Table of Contents:**

Awards

Career

Further Readings About the Author

Personal Information

Sidelights

Writings by the Author

**PERSONAL INFORMATION:**

Born in Lansing, MI. **Addresses:** Home: Farmington Hills, MI.

**CAREER:**

Writer, playwright, and poet. Formerly worked in marketing.

**AWARDS:**

Kresge Arts in Detroit fellowship.

**WORKS:****WRITINGS:**

*August Snow*, Soho Crime (New York, NY), 2017.

**Sidelights**

Prior to making his leap into the writing world, Stephen Mack Jones worked within the marketing industry. It wasn't until he was chosen to become a literary fellow of the Kresge Arts in Detroit program that he made the switch to writing full time. He has since published creative work in the form of plays, poems, and novels.

*August Snow* is Jones's introductory novel. According to an interview featured on the *Publishers Weekly* website, the novel was inspired partly by several incidents of protests and police brutality that have unfolded across the country, as well as a series of controversial events in Michigan, Jones's home state. The novel stars titular protagonist, *August Snow*, a police officer who has decided to

return to his hometown of Detroit. He has recently come into quite a bit of money, garnered by a triumphant court case tied to his former law enforcement career within the city. However, his return doesn't stay happy for long. Snow soon finds himself entangled in another case of foul play. It becomes up to him to get to the bottom of a violent incident, but the truth may be dirtier than he ever could have suspected. *Booklist* contributor Henrietta Verma remarked: "Veterans and other readers who enjoy a story of military loyalty and old friends should try this." A writer in *Kirkus Reviews* called *August Snow* "a very pleasurable read" and added: "This mostly terrific debut holds out the promise that we are at the beginning of an excellent new series." A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer commented: "Convincing smartass dialogue brings the Detroit denizens of poet and playwright Jones's first novel to life." On the *Boston Globe* website, Daneet Steffens wrote: "His is that rare tale that, despite its thriller-level violence, maintains a fiercely warm heart at its core--and ends far too quickly." A contributor to the *Aunt Agatha's* website stated: "As readers we also meet the one of the few African American private eyes on the scene, so this is a welcome book and I hope the start of a series." *Chicago Tribune* reviewer Laura Pearson felt that Jones "proves himself a natural entertainer." On the *Lansing State Journal* website, Ray Walsh remarked: "This is a well-polished first novel with exceptionally strong characters and unexpected plot twists." He added: "It's a superb start for a new series." Shannon E. Kolkedy, a reviewer on the *Toledo Blade* website, stated: "Jones clearly has an affection for Detroit and draws on his familiarity with the city to make the scenes come alive." Kolkedy continued: "And the author's background as a playwright is evident in the strong one-on-one dialogue that keeps the story moving."

#### FURTHER READINGS:

### FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

#### PERIODICALS

*Booklist*, December 15, 2016, Henrietta Verma, review of *August Snow*, p. 21.

*Kirkus Reviews*, December 15, 2016, review of *August Snow*.

*Publishers Weekly*, November 21, 2016, review of *August Snow*, p. 89.

#### ONLINE

*Aunt Agatha's*, <http://auntagathas.com/> (February 16, 2017), review of *August Snow*.

*Boston Globe Online*, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/> (March 14, 2017), Daneet Steffens, review of *August Snow*.

*Chicago Tribune Online*, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/> (August 30, 2017), review of *August Snow*.

*Kirkus Reviews Online*, <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/> (December 6, 2016), review of *August Snow*.

*Lansing State Journal*, <http://www.lansingstatejournal.com/> (February 24, 2017), Ray Walsh, "Detroit-Based *August Snow* a Superb Debut for Crime Novelist," review of *August Snow*.

*Mystery Tribune*, <https://www.mysterytribune.com/> (May 4, 2017), "Debut Crime Novel *August Snow* Gets on Hollywood Hot List," review of *August Snow*.

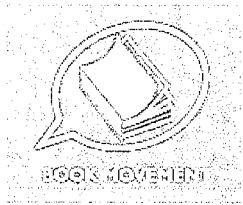
*News Herald*, <http://www.thenewsherald.com/> (April 23, 2017), Kurt Anthony Krug, "Farmington Hills Playwright Publishes Mystery Novel *August Snow*," review of *August Snow*.

*NPR Online*, <http://www.npr.org/> (June 29, 2017), Nancy Pearl, review of *August Snow*.

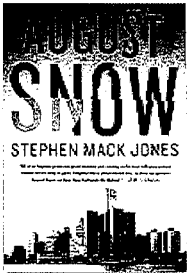
*Penguin Random House Website*, <http://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/> (February 14, 2017), summary of *August Snow*.

*Portsmouth Review*, <http://portsmouthreview.com/> (February 23, 2017), summary of *August Snow*.

*Soho Press Website*, <https://sohopress.com/> (August 30, 2017), author profile.

[MEMBERS](#)[GIVEAWAYS](#)[TOP CLUB PICKS](#)[BEST BOOKS INDEX](#)[SHOP](#)[SUBSCRIBE](#)[AMAZON](#)

## BKMT READING GUIDES



### August Snow

by Stephen Mack Jones

Published: 2017-02-14  
Hardcover : 320 pages

0 members reading this now  
0 club reading this now  
1 member has read this book

From the wealthy suburbs to the remains of Detroit's bankrupt factory districts, *August Snow* is a fast-paced tale of murder, greed, sex, economic cyber-terrorism, race and urban decay.

Tough, smart, and struggling to stay alive, *August Snow* is the embodiment of Detroit. The son of an ...

Also available in:  
*Kindle Edition Audible Audio Edition*

- ☐ Add to Club Selections
- ☐ Add to Possible Club Selections
- ☐ Add to My Personal Queue

ADD THIS BOOK

[Email to club](#)

Be the first  
to rate this book!



### MEMBER LOGIN

user name

password

☒ Remember me

[Forgot your login/password?](#)

### BECOME A MEMBER *it's free*

Join the leading website for book clubs with over 35,000 clubs and 20,000 reading guides.

[SIGN UP](#)

### SEARCH OUR READING GUIDES

Enter title, author, keyword, or ISBN

[SEARCH](#)

Alphabetical by Title ▼

[SEARCH](#)

Jump to Introduction ▼

### INTRODUCTION

From the wealthy suburbs to the remains of Detroit's bankrupt factory districts, *August Snow* is a fast-paced tale of murder, greed, sex, economic cyber-terrorism, race and urban decay.

Tough, smart, and struggling to stay alive, *August Snow* is the embodiment of Detroit. The son of an African-American father and a Mexican-American mother, August grew up in the city's Mexicantown and joined the police force only to be drummed out by a conspiracy of corrupt cops and politicians. But August fought back; he took on the city and got himself a \$12 million wrongful dismissal settlement that left him low on friends. He has just returned to the house he grew up in after a year away, and quickly learns he has many scores to settle.

It's not long before he's summoned to the palatial Grosse Pointe Estates home of business magnate Eleanore Paget. Powerful and manipulative, Paget wants August to investigate the increasingly unusual happenings at her private wealth management bank. But detective work is no longer August's beat, and he declines. A day later, Paget is dead of an apparent suicide—which August isn't buying for a minute.

What begins as an inquiry into Eleanore Paget's death soon drags August into a rat's nest of Detroit's most dangerous criminals, from corporate embezzlers to tattooed mercenaries.

### EDITORIAL REVIEW

No editorial review at this time.

### EXCERPT

No Excerpt Currently Available

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

No discussion questions at this time.

### WEBLINKS

There are no web links at this time.

1 Printable PDF (Free) - Download PDF Down

2 Printable PDF (Free) - Download PDF To View

## Generic Mystery Questions

*Use our general questions for any mystery, crime, or suspense book to get your discussions off to a good start.*



Mysteries can tie us up in knots, but we always use LitLovers to unravel our discussions.

Harold Houdini  
--New York City

1. Talk about the **characters**, both good and bad. Describe their personalities and motivations. Are they fully developed and emotionally complex? Or are they flat, one-dimensional heroes and villains?

2. What do you **know**...and when do you know it? At what point in the book do you begin to piece together what happened?

3. Good crime writers embed **hidden clues**, slipping them in casually, almost in passing. Did you pick them out, or were you...clueless? Once you've finished the book, go back to locate the clues hidden in plain sight. How skillful was the author in burying them?

4. Good crime writers also tease us with **red-herrings**—false clues—to purposely lead us astray. Does the author try to throw you off track? If so, were you tripped up?

5. Talk about the **twists & turns**—those surprising plot developments that throw everything you think you've figured out into disarray.

a. Do they enhance the story, add complexity, and build suspense?

b. Are they plausible or implausible?

c. Do they feel forced and gratuitous—inserted merely to extend the story?

6. Does the author ratchet up the **suspense**? Did you find yourself anxious—quickly turning pages to learn what happened? At what point does the suspense start to build? Where does it climax...then perhaps start rising again?

7. A good **ending** is essential in any mystery or crime thriller: it should ease up on tension, answer questions, and tidy up loose ends. Does the ending accomplish those goals?

**a.** Is the conclusion probable or believable?

**b.** Is it organic, growing out of clues previously laid out by the author (*see Question 3*)?

**c.** Or does the ending come out of the blue, feeling forced or tacked-on?

**d.** Perhaps it's too predictable.

**e.** Can you envision a different or better ending?

---

8. Point to **passages** in the book—ideas, descriptions, or dialogue—that you found interesting or revealing, that somehow struck you. What, if anything, made you stop and think? Or maybe even laugh.

---


9. Overall, does the book **satisfy**? Does it live up to the standards of a good crime story or suspense thriller? Or does it somehow fall short?

---

10. **Compare** this book to other mystery, crime, or suspense thrillers that you've read. Consider other authors or other books in a the series by the same author.

*(Questions by LitLovers. Please feel free to use them, online or off, with attribution. Thanks.)*

top of page

Site by **BOOM** (<http://www.boomsuper.com>)  (<http://www.boomsuper.com>)

Go

► [Listen Live](#)

# Between the Lines: August Snow

By [ZINTA AISTARS \(/PEOPLE/ZINTA-AISTARS\)](#) • SEP 8, 2017



[Share \(http://facebook.com/sharer.php?](http://facebook.com/sharer.php?u=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.tinyurl.com%2Fy3gujfak&t=Between%20the%20Lines%3A%20August%20Snow)

[u=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.tinyurl.com%2Fy3gujfak&t=Between%20the%20Lines%3A%20August%20Snow\)](http://facebook.com/sharer.php?u=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.tinyurl.com%2Fy3gujfak&t=Between%20the%20Lines%3A%20August%20Snow)



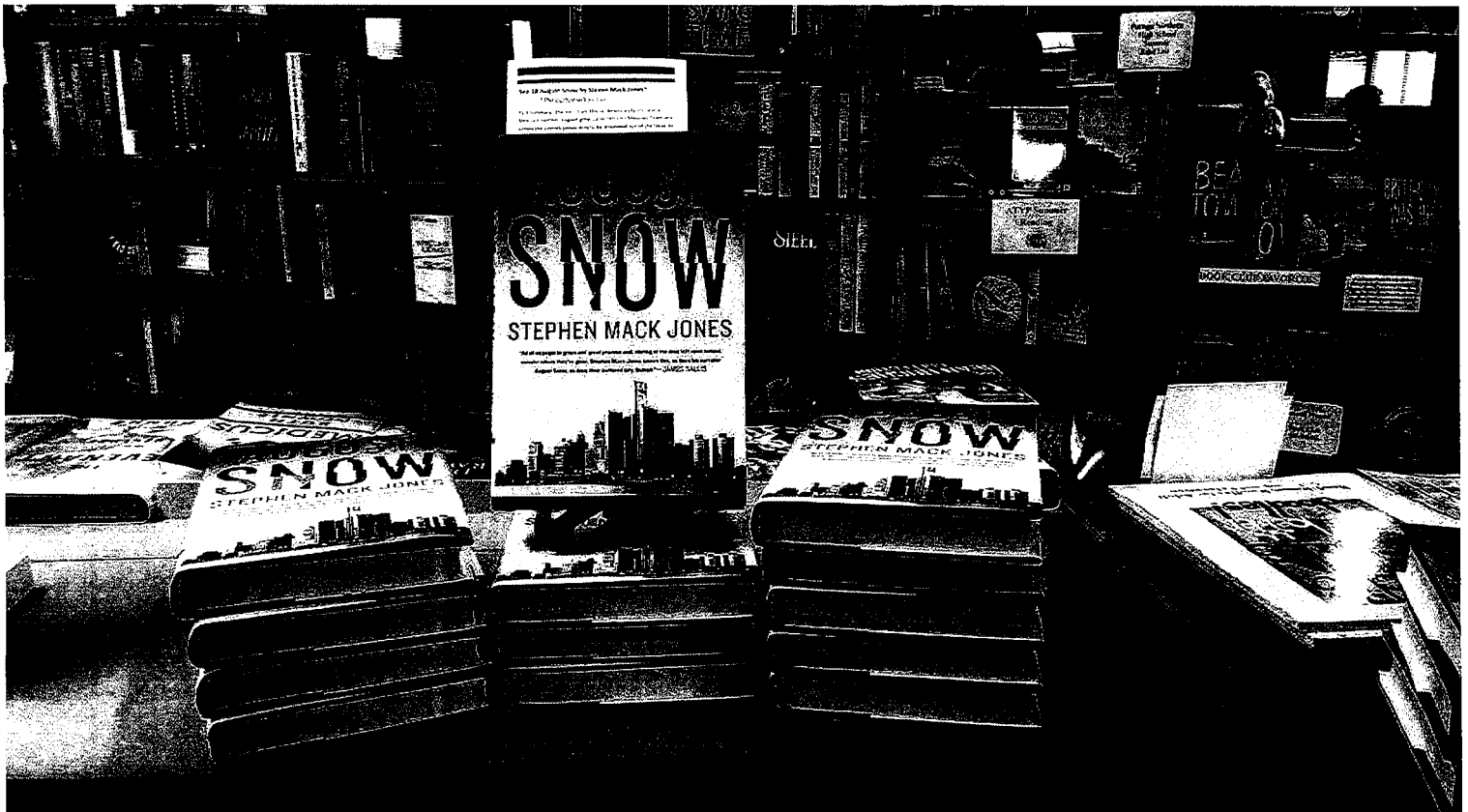
[Tweet \(http://twitter.com/intent/tweet?](http://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.tinyurl.com%2Fy3gujfak&text=Between%20the%20Lines%3A%20August%20Snow)

[url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.tinyurl.com%2Fy3gujfak&text=Between%20the%20Lines%3A%20August%20Snow\)](http://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.tinyurl.com%2Fy3gujfak&text=Between%20the%20Lines%3A%20August%20Snow)



[Email \(mailto:?](mailto:subject=Between%20the%20Lines%3A%20August%20Snow&body=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.tinyurl.com%2Fy3gujfak)

[subject=Between%20the%20Lines%3A%20August%20Snow&body=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.tinyurl.com%2Fy3gujfak\)](mailto:subject=Between%20the%20Lines%3A%20August%20Snow&body=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.tinyurl.com%2Fy3gujfak)



[http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wmuk/files/styles/x\\_large/public/201709/august\\_snow-kazoo\\_books.jpg](http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wmuk/files/styles/x_large/public/201709/august_snow-kazoo_books.jpg)

*Stephen Mack Jones's first novel*

CREDIT JOHN WENGER / KAZOO BOOKS

Stephen Mack Jones writes award-winning poetry and plays, and he's won a Kresge Arts in Detroit Literary Fellowship. But one day, inspiration seemed to fall right out of thin air and he soon found himself writing his first novel, *August Snow* (<https://sohopress.com/authors/stephen-mack-jones/>) (SoHo Press, 2017), a hard-boiled detective story.

## Listen

8:16

### *Between the Lines with Stephen Mack Jones*

Jones says the book's origins were a bit unusual. The title came to him before the book, and it popped into his mind as he was mowing the lawn.

"For me, mowing the lawn is kind of a Zen activity," Jones says. "Check your brain at the door and go back and forth, mowing the lawn. Those two words — August Snow — settled on my mind, and I had a brief laugh about that. It doesn't snow in August, ha ha. Then over a course of a couple weeks, those words settled like a thistle on my brain. I realized I'm either going to have to do something with this, or seek therapy."

## Listen

19:48

### *A conversation with Stephen Mack Jones*

Jones bypassed therapy and sat down to write a novel instead. Jones says writing requires a bit of madness, and a lot of discipline and persistence.

"Writing is also cheaper than therapy," Jones says, laughing. He describes the main character he developed as, "...a man shaped by his parents. I think overall, in some odd way, the book is a tribute to my mother and father. August's father demanded a sense of honor and integrity from his son. His mother taught him how to emotionally see people. He's also shaped by the Marines and the City of Detroit."

Born in Lansing, but now a resident of the greater Detroit area, Jones includes gritty and accurate details of Detroit as an integral part of the novel. The book opens as Snow, a police detective, has recently won a lawsuit against corrupt officials in the department. He wins millions of dollars in a settlement and uses much of it to rebuild his Detroit neighborhood. But he's drawn into an investigation of a Detroit bank owner's murder.



([http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wmuk/files/stNicole\\_Robertson.jpg](http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wmuk/files/stNicole_Robertson.jpg)).

Stephen Mack Jones

CREDIT NICOLE ROBERTSON / SOHO PRESS

Jones will speak, sign books, and answer questions at the kickoff event for a new Michigan mystery book club on Monday, September 18, at 6:30 p.m. at Parchment Community Library

(<http://www.parchmentlibrary.org/>). The event is free and open to the public. For more information, call

<https://www.wmuk.org/post/between-lines-august-snow>



# Do Some Damage

## AN INSIDE LOOK AT CRIME FICTION

### DO SOME DAMAGE

*Do Some Damage is a group of crime writers, each with a different voice and something to say.*

#### SUNDAY



Claire Booth

#### MONDAY



Marietta Miles

#### MONDAY



Dharma Kelleher

#### TUESDAY

Thursday, August 9, 2018

### Interview with Stephen Mack Jones

By David Nemeth

*Back at the beginning of 2017, Stephen Mack Jones's "August Snow" was published by Soho Crime. It took some time for me to get to it, okay, over a year, and damn was it worth it. I wrote that it was "a fine private detective novel filled with great writing and a timely mystery." If you haven't had a chance to read it, buy it or check it out of your local library. You will not be disappointed.*



Stephen Mack Jones

**David:** A recent review or interview called your book a "sleeper hit." I don't know about the hit part, it was much more of a hidden gem. But a lot of that has changed now with the awards: winning the Hammett Prize for Crime Fiction and nominated for the 2018 Shamus Award for Best First Private Eye Novel and Strand Magazine Critics Awards Best First Novel. How did you come to terms with writing what you know was a good novel and then hearing only crickets to the buzz that "August Snow" is getting today?

**Steve:** I came to peaceful terms with the sound of crickets early on, D. Frankly, those sounds are the only way I can focus on the job at hand and that's to create vivid, emotionally engaging stories. I think any writer who puts the noise of fame, fortune and millions of cheering worldwide fans at the forefront of their storytelling is bound to be sorely disappointed. To be honest with you it was enough for me when my agent called to tell me a publisher made an offer for AUGUST SNOW! I mean, the offer wasn't nearly enough to nab me that little six-bedroom champagne-and-shrimp shack on the coast of Ibiza—but, come on! Somebody wanted to buy words I'd strung together! And in a traditional publishing world that's becoming more top-genre exclusive, bestseller-driven and, in some ways, myopic in terms of creative investment, that to me was a major accomplishment. The traditional way to the bookstore—producing the story, finding an agent, trusting that agent to find the right publisher for your work and pocketing an advance—can be a long, hard slog. Fewer and fewer folks find they have the patience for that slog in an age of digital upload and e-book download instant gratification. The traditional way to the bookstore is like choosing to be Sisyphus—the query letters, the rejections, all in an effort to push that 80,000-word manuscript up and over the crest of the hill. I guess my point

### Featured Post

#### The Return of the DSD Podcast

By Steve Weddle  
You've waited years for the return of the DSD podcast. The wait is over. Subscribe: iTunes SoundCloud In ...

### Subscribe To

- ☒ Posts
- ☒ Comments

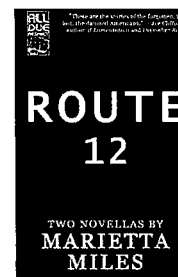
### Contact

Email Us

### Scott Adlerberg



### Marietta Miles



### Claire Booth





Scott Adlerberg

## WEDNESDAY



Thomas Pluck

## WEDNESDAY



SA Cosby

## THURSDAY



David Nemeth

## THURSDAY



Derek Farrell

## FRIDAY



Renee Asher Pickup

## SATURDAY

is, I was well prepared and frankly happy to have sales of the book top out with my mom, brother and maybe a cousin or in-law. At a family discount, of course. Enough copies to say, "Look! I did it! I finally pushed the rock over the hill!" That the book is getting "buzz" these days—courtesy of Soho's marketing efforts, the Hammett Award and other nominations, and film interest—just gives me a deep sense of satisfaction and gratitude.

**David:** You come to the novel writing game late in life—you're giving a 50-something blogger some hope. How has your age helped or hindered you with the publication of "August Snow"?

**Steve:** I consider myself the poster-elder for AARP and second careers, man! Listen. Everybody knows this is a youth-obsessed culture—and that youth obsession puts a lot of pressure on a person to "succeed" by a certain age. If you haven't reached your creative and economic life-goals by 25 or 30, then your dreams and ambitions are just fodder for the scrap heap. Might as well just settle in to being a cost-accountant to feed the baby and meet the mortgage. I used to feel that pressure and it's awful. It's especially awful if you're a college-educated minority and you're hitting walls and pitfalls set up only for you. Something happened to me when I hit forty; I found I really didn't give a shit about anybody else's limited timeframe for my success!

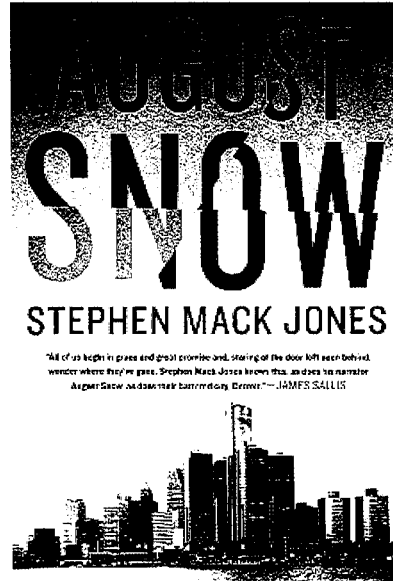
Success for me after forty simply became a matter of staying true to myself, my family and my writing—whatever came of it. And that's the attitude that helped me stay true to the storytelling of AUGUST SNOW.

**David:** The character of August Snow is half African-American and half Mexican American. He grew up outside of both cultures and is always having to prove himself. When we meet Snow, he's an ex-cop who has turned on crooked cops and now he's out of that group. In the creation of Snow, you've seemed to have isolated him by making it difficult to be part of a group. I thought writers were supposed to like their protagonist. What did Snow ever do to you?

**Steve:** August and me, we cool, D! Seriously, though, isolation is sometimes the best way to find out who you truly are. Mentally, spiritually and physically. Isolation can help separate the wheat from the chaff so that you become stronger and possess more clarity of purpose. August has certainly walked through fires. And in walking through those fires he has more clarity of who he is: He's a guy who doesn't see himself as an ethnic anomaly or racial dichotomy; rather he embraces the best of his two familial cultures. And while his experiences as a Marine and as a Detroit cop may have tested him morally and ethically, he found a way to incorporate the best of both into his personal way of life. So, yeah—I may have knocked him around a bit in AUGUST SNOW and maybe a little bit more in the upcoming LIVES LAID AWAY, but I think he's a better man for it. Did that sound like something a strict Catholic father would say about a son?

**David:** Before writing "August Snow", you've written poetry and plays as well as read extensively. At the beginning of the book, you name drop a lot of writers, but one struck me and that was Rudolph Fisher. I have since gone out and purchased "The Conjure-Man Dies". Can you talk about your writing influences and, in particular, what influenced the writing of "August Snow"?

**Steve:** You got a couple minutes? I mean, 'cause a whole bunch of folks have made an impact on me over the years. Everybody from Ray Bradbury, Robert Silverberg, Octavia Butler and Ursula Le Guin to Agatha Christie, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Robert B. Parker and Walter Mosely. And then there are the poets. Always the poets! Federico Garcia Lorca, Pablo Neruda, Octavio Paz, Nikki Giovanni, Langston Hughes, Rainier Maria Rilke and Seamus Haney. Reading poetry is where I learned—and continue to learn—the weight, color, music, and nuances of words. In some ways, I'd like to think of August Snow as the love-child between Robert B. Parker and Octavio Paz. (That image is going to be in your head for a



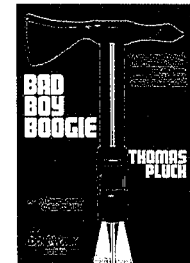
Scott Adlerberg



Scott D. Parker



Thomas Pluck



SA Cosby



Scott Adlerberg



Jay Stringer



Scott D. Parker

## Followers

## Followers (261)



Follow

@DoSomeDamage

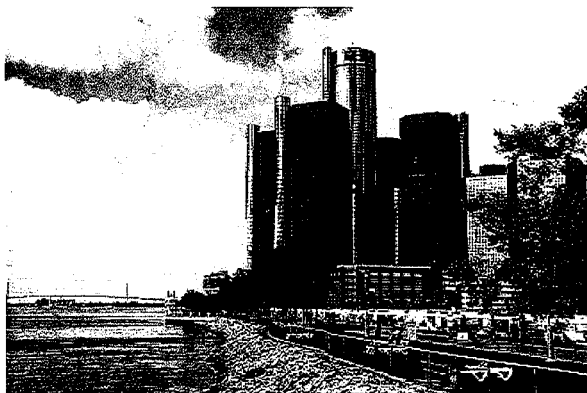
follow me on Twitter

very—long—time.)

**David:** I read that your father, who is in his nineties, is a prolific reader. What was it like handing him a copy of your book "August Snow"? And, did he like it?

**Steve:** My father passed away in 2003 at the age of eighty. Thirteen years before August Snow. That being said he had an insatiable appetite for reading. From William Shakespeare and George Eliot to Isaac Bashevis Singer, Studs Turkel and The Wall Street Journal. Not bad for a blue-collar guy who quit school in the tenth grade so he could work to financially help out his mom and dad, brothers and sisters. My mother is, at the age of ninety-three, still a prolific reader. I'll never forget visiting her maybe two, three years ago. She spent nearly an hour regaling me with the many reasons I should read Doris Kearns Goodwin's Abraham Lincoln biography TEAM OF RIVALS! Yeah, to be honest with you, I was a bit nervous about my mom reading the book. She's Catholic and a Puritan at heart. Alcohol and profanity do not cross her lips. Conversely, alcohol and profanity are familiar companions of August's. So, yeah—I was afraid she might say, "Your father and I spent a lot of money on your education—and this is how you squander it? Writing about alcohol and guns and sex, never mind the profanity!" But her reaction after reading the book was very positive and in line with what I've heard from a number of other people: She enjoyed the story, the intrigue and the relationships that are built between the neighbors on Markham Street in Mexicantown. And the food I mention throughout the book made her very hungry!

**David:** There's a lot of love for Detroit in "August Snow". As much as Snow's life would have been better in Europe where he escaped to after leaving the police force, he felt the pull to come back to the city. For many of us who have only seen news footage of abandoned buildings and talk of debt, can you tell us what makes Detroit so special?



The GM Renaissance Center in Detroit

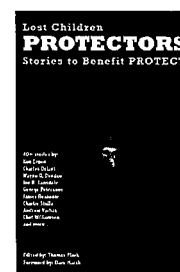
**Steve:** The national news media seems stuck in a mid-to-late-sixties time-loop when it comes to their shorthand assessment of Detroit. They love the pious sound of their own studio voices as they spout unctuous pity for Detroit and its residents: The pervasive poverty. The "ruin porn" of burnt out houses and shuttered factories. The unbridgeable black-white divide. The incompetent and corrupt mismanagement of city government. The only thing missing from their nightly news assessment of Detroit is black-and-white footage of a concrete wall topped with razor wire and the Stasi scanning the area for defectors trying to escape to Chicago! Yes, there's poverty and burnt out houses and shuttered factories—but not of the bizarre all-encompassing magnitude the news media might have you think. To begin with, the city that gave you Motown in the '60s and '70s has since given the world EDM (Electronic Dance Music) and Techno in the '90s and the 21st century. I very much doubt you'd have Diplo, The Crystal Method, Massive Attack, Deadmau5 or Koan Sound if you didn't first have Kevin Saunderson or Juan Atkins or Derrick May. Artists living on the edges of society: Marginalized black communities. The LGBTQ community. Young people in search of a new audio stimulus. And from Detroit's recent bankruptcy woes came a new model for economic sustainability and membership expansion for art museums across the country based on the innovations-by-necessity from the Detroit Institute of Arts. I guess what I'm getting at is the fact that Detroiters are tough. Resilient. We're fighters and our creativity is at its best when we have to fight. If you're not from Detroit it's easy to think one right hook and we hit the mat. But the count never gets to ten because we get back up, bloodied and bruised, and with a smile, we say, "Is that all you got?" Everybody wants the story of the fall. The truth of Detroit's spirit is how we rise. Every day. All day.



## Renee Asher Pickup



## Steve Weddle



## Do Some Damage:

Interview with Russ  
Source: www.stevemc  
I've read several of you  
magazine that's suppo  
mean as an author first

July 30 at 3:38pm ·

Russel McLea  
that Steven For  
a grant relief i  
for proof).  
July 30 at 11:46g

We're on Facebook

## Search This Blog

Search

## Blog Archive

- 2019 (103)
- ▼ 2018 (310)
  - 12/30 - 01/06 (1)
  - 12/09 - 12/16 (5)
  - 12/02 - 12/09 (6)

**David:** Can one really get good Mexican food in Detroit?

**Steve:** Oh, hell yes, you can get good Mexican food in Detroit! You can also get good Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Indian, Italian and Brazilian! You want really good Greek souvlaki or Lebanese baba ghanoush? Yeah, we got that! Soul-food from the American South, soul-food from the south of France and the soul-of-soul foods from Nigeria—yeah, no problem. Did I hear you say sushi? What'chu want, man? California Roll? Spicy Tuna Roll? Come and get you some! Vegetarian and vegan? Try Seva in Midtown, Detroit Vegan Soul on the East Side or The Nosh Pit in Hamtramck. And speaking of Hamtramck—where else you gonna go for really good Polish and Hungarian food? This ain't a town that makes it easy to go on a diet, ma brotha!

**David:** Let me give you a chance to promote your new book which is coming out in 2019. Tell me about "Lives Lead Away". (Pre-order)

**Steve:** Ya know, D, the last thing you wanna do is give an ex-ad guy a chance to promote something. But since you swung the door wide open, yes, January 8th of 2019 will see the release of the next book in the August Snow series, LIVES LAID AWAY. After the body of a nineteen-year old undocumented Hispanic woman dressed as 17th century French Queen Marie Antoinette is dredged from the Detroit River, August finds himself up against a "lake rat" neo-Nazi biker gang and a rogue Immigration & Custom Enforcement (ICE) unit, both neck-deep in human trafficking. This outing is going to cost August a lot in terms of neighbors and friends, especially when an old nemesis from his Detroit cop days named Marcus "Duke" Ducane plays a dangerous game of up-jump-the-devil. Things get very personal very fast in LIVES LAID AWAY which plays out against a suffocating 90-degree/forty-percent humidity Michigan summer.

**David:** Give me five books to read, genre doesn't matter. I was going to ask for only poetry books, but I didn't want to limit you.

**Steve:** To begin with I highly recommend either of two non-fiction books by Harry G. Frankfurt, professor emeritus of philosophy at Princeton University: On Bullshit or On Truth. Compact volumes that are amazing studies of—well—bullshit and truth. I'd also suggest Anna Leigh Clark's tremendous non-fiction and profoundly moving investigation of the Flint water crisis titled The Poisoned City. And any time's a good time to dip into a poetry collection by Seamus Haney, Rainier Marie Rilke or Octavio Paz. Taken in small bites with a nice Pinot Noir, I'd suggest Jim Harrison's last collection of essays A Really Big Lunch. Is that five books? I think that's just four. Okay, last book. For whatever reason I find myself almost on a yearly basis going back to Kurt Vonnegut's Galapagos. Couldn't tell you why. Don't know. It just is. And so it goes . . .

Posted by David Nemeth at 2:30 AM



Labels: Stephen Mack Jones

## No comments:

[Post a Comment](#)

## Links to this post

[Create a Link](#)

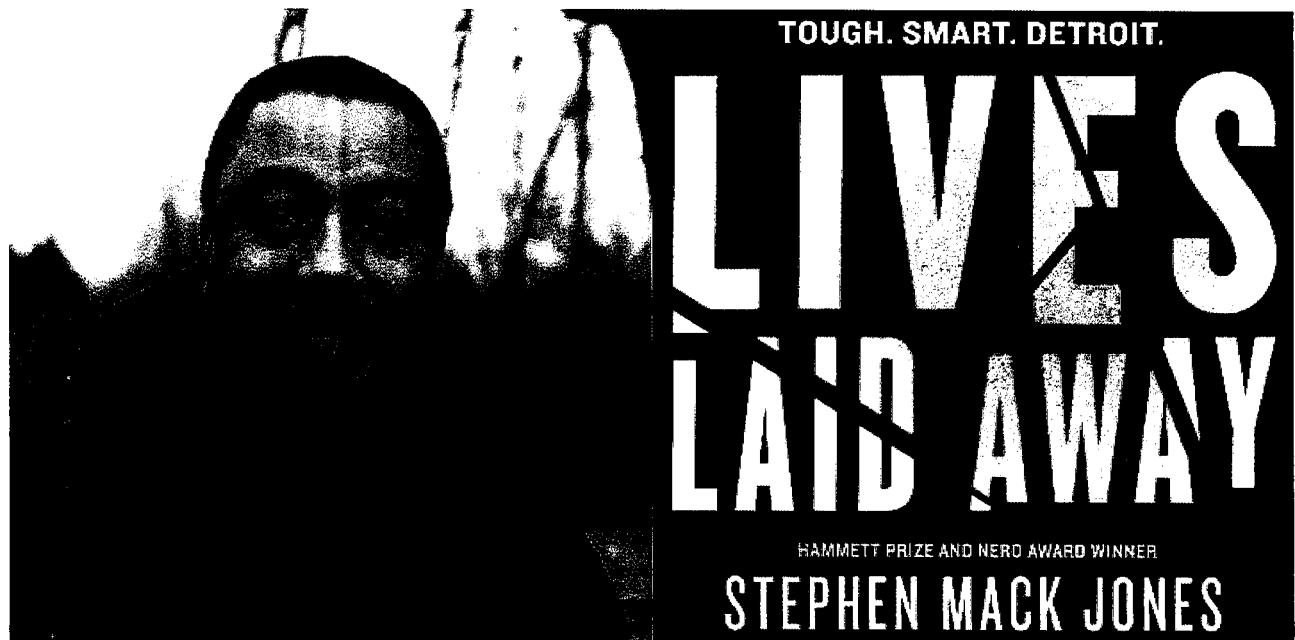
[Newer Post](#)

[Home](#)

[Older Post](#)

[Subscribe to: Post Comments \(Atom\)](#)

- ▶ 11/25 - 12/02 (6)
- ▶ 11/18 - 11/25 (7)
- ▶ 11/11 - 11/18 (4)
- ▶ 11/04 - 11/11 (7)
- ▶ 10/28 - 11/04 (5)
- ▶ 10/21 - 10/28 (6)
- ▶ 10/14 - 10/21 (7)
- ▶ 10/07 - 10/14 (6)
- ▶ 09/30 - 10/07 (6)
- ▶ 09/23 - 09/30 (7)
- ▶ 09/16 - 09/23 (7)
- ▶ 09/09 - 09/16 (7)
- ▶ 09/02 - 09/09 (5)
- ▶ 08/26 - 09/02 (7)
- ▶ 08/19 - 08/26 (5)
- ▶ 08/12 - 08/19 (5)
- ▼ 08/05 - 08/12 (6)
- A Day Job  
Writer and  
Multiple  
Sources of  
Income
- Jim Jones and  
writing villainy
- Interview with  
Stephen  
Mack Jones
- Angel Colon on  
Pull and Pray
- Chicken Diapers  
for Dinner
- Smoky Skies
- ▶ 07/29 - 08/05 (6)
- ▶ 07/22 - 07/29 (8)
- ▶ 07/15 - 07/22 (5)
- ▶ 07/08 - 07/15 (6)
- ▶ 07/01 - 07/08 (7)
- ▶ 06/24 - 07/01 (7)
- ▶ 06/17 - 06/24 (6)
- ▶ 06/10 - 06/17 (6)
- ▶ 06/03 - 06/10 (7)
- ▶ 05/27 - 06/03 (6)
- ▶ 05/20 - 05/27 (6)
- ▶ 05/13 - 05/20 (7)
- ▶ 05/06 - 05/13 (6)



# STEPHEN MACK JONES ON DETROIT, CRIME FICTION, AND WORKING CLASS HEROES

## Diving Deep on an Innovative New Detective Series

FEBRUARY 22, 2019 BY DWYER MURPHY

Detective fiction needs a shot in the arm every now and again. That was the feeling of reading Stephen Mack Jones's 2017 debut, *August Snow*, which introduced its eponymous hero to the world—August Snow, a former Detroit cop who banked a \$12 million wrongful dismissal suit against the force and now finds himself with time on his hands and a habit of getting involved in neighborhood business. He's a private eye of a sort, a man with a keen sense of justice, investigative skills, a distaste for the powerful and entrenched, a side business in home restoration, and a deep and abiding love for the city of Detroit. Snow's home base is Mexicantown (he's the son of an African-American father and a Mexican-American mother), which is under threat in his new novel, *Lives Laid Away*, as stories go around town about ICE raids on mom and pop shops and the body of a young Latin woman floating up in the Detroit River. For Snow, it's an attack on the community and the people he loves. In classic detective tradition, the case proves a deeply entangled conspiracy pointing all the way up to the city's highest echelons of power.

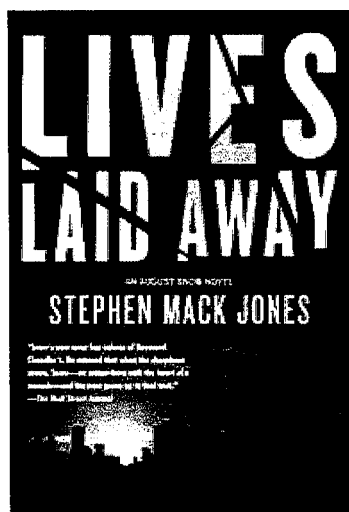
While only two novels deep, the August Snow series is as promising as any crime fiction to come around in a long while, tapping into the iconoclasm and social justice streaks of midcentury noirs, but taking them in a modern direction, exposing human trafficking rings, abuses of immigrant communities, gentrification, and economic declines and revivals. It's heady, exhilarating stuff. I reached out to Stephen Mack Jones to talk about the new book, working class heroes, and what makes Detroit a perfect city for crime fiction.

**Dwyer Murphy:** Borderlands have always been a big part of crime fiction—whether we’re talking stories about narcotraffickers, Scandinavian cops, or Eastern bloc divided cities. I think a lot of people forget Detroit is right there on the border. That’s a big part of *Lives Laid Away*. Does Detroit share qualities with other border towns?

**Stephen Mack Jones:** Here’s the thing, Dwyer: Michigan has over 3,000 miles of shoreline courtesy of the Great Lakes. More shoreline than any other state, save for Alaska. And a lot of that fresh water is shared with Ontario, Canada. Bottom line is, the problems and challenges you might think unique to border states like New Mexico, Texas and Arizona are right here—just add 95,000 square miles of water. Michigan in general and Detroit specifically have long been a major hub for human trafficking, contraband, etc. And while the media and the government obsess over southern border walls, Michigan and again specifically Detroit are major entry points for the undocumented who, at the invite of the Canadian government, have worked the large Canadian farms and, at the end of a season, choose to risk it all in pursuit of the still potent promise and alluring mythology of the “American Dream.”

ARTICLE CONTINUES AFTER ADVERTISEMENT

I look at the contemporary crime fiction landscape and can’t find another hero with as ambivalent a relationship to the police as August Snow. It’s beyond complex. In a lot of ways, it reflects the community’s relationship to the police, too. Is that something you set out to explore when you started the series?



Yeah, August has a very complicated relationship with the Detroit Police Department. I mean, what happens when you get booted from a job you loved and felt you were exceptionally good at? I personally know that kind of experience—that confusion, bitterness, anger and embarrassment, spiraling and crisscrossing in your head, pressing down on your soul. All because you didn’t kiss the right butt or shake the right hand. Being a political pariah is like having a ghost riding your back; you know it’s there, but you can’t see it and no one else

wants to acknowledge its existence. Add to this the ambivalence many communities of color have felt over the generations toward law enforcement. Suddenly, August finds himself in some sort of nether land. Somewhere between loving the law—seeing its great potential—and knowing the law doesn’t necessarily equate with justice. It’s a relationship typified by his often uncomfortable and jagged relationship with Detective Captain Leo Cowling. It’s easy to say the two don’t get along. But frankly, I think August is a bit envious of Cowling because Cowling is still part of the Brotherhood of Blue.

**Would you identify August Snow in the tradition of “working class heroes”? That kind of feeling for the community seems to be one of his central characteristics.**

I’d say that’s a fair assessment, Dwyer. I come from a blue-collar background. The thing I think some people forget sometimes is how aspirational blue-collar communities are. My dad worked at GM’s Oldsmobile for nearly forty-years, blue-collar, skilled tradesman tinsmith. Among the many things he used to tell my brother and I was, “I’m not working at that place just to have you follow me into a damned factory.” Blue-collar is often romanticized. The “backbone of the middle-class.” Nobody ever talks about the backs that have been broken in an effort to lift their children above the poisoned air of a



factory. The deafening noise and limb-crushing machinery. August was born and raised in a blue-collar community. A community that values hard work, sincere effort and vision for a better life. It's who he is.

**August's African-American and Mexican heritages are both very important to him. That's not an identity we've seen explored in fiction often. Who would you say are some of August's heroes? The parts of his heritage that mean the most to him?**

Frankly, I don't think August sees a cultural dichotomy in himself. There's no line in him that divides the black half from the Mexican-American half. As far as he's concerned, he got the best of what both cultures offer—from food and literature, to configurations of language. As to his heroes—surprise!—he's a lot like me: His biggest heroes will always be his folks. His mom and dad. The people who heavily invested in setting him on a true-north path in life. Beyond his parents, I'd say his heroes are people who have stood up in life. People like Sitting Bull and Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. and Miss Rosa Parks, Cesar Chavez and General Colin Powell and Frieda Kahlo, et al.

ARTICLE CONTINUES AFTER ADVERTISEMENT

**These books emanate a warm feeling toward so many pockets of Detroit. Were there neighborhoods or locales that you really wanted to memorialize here, places you felt like you just had to get right and to do them justice?**

First and foremost, I love Mexicantown! Southwest Detroit, man! The food, the people—it doesn't get much more genuine and embracing than that. Since Detroit's on the rise, I worry about so-called “gentrification”—some folks are

referring to Mexicantown as “East Corktown” and, baby, that just ain’t right. Ever hear of a school called Cristo Rey High School? This school is like a high-school Notre Dame, Harvard or Princeton for middle-class and underprivileged kids! Their graduation rate, college enrollment and college scholarship rates are off the freakin’ charts! I’ve been invited to talk there twice and every time I leave thinking, “My God! These kids are smarter and more driven than I’ll ever be!” Go Wolves! I also love Farmington/Farmington Hills, a couple miles northwest of Detroit. Nothing like the cheap movies and buttered popcorn at the Civic Theatre. Great place to raise kids. Lots of land, beautiful parks. They truly support the arts. And in the summer, nothing like the ice cream at Silver Dairy! Hell, I might even stop for a dollar cone during a Polar Vortex.

**Writing crime fiction in Detroit, does the legacy of Elmore Leonard loom large?**

Oh, yeah! Elmore Leonard and Loren Estelman! I never had the opportunity to meet Mr. Leonard, but I have met Mr. Estelman—what a gracious, generous gentleman. Helluva writer!

**What is it about the city that lends itself so well to a good, wild crime novel?**

Everything crashes, collides, sparks, rips, melds, morphs, connects and disconnects here almost on an almost hourly basis: cultures, religions, politics, ethnicities, music, food, drink, upper class, middle class, no class and raggedy-ass. It’s a town that’s been knocked down, made cruel fun of, stereotyped, blood-typed and written off. As I like to say, Detroit may have taken a right cross to the chin that sent it to the mat—but never for a full count. Next thing you know, we’re on our feet and we got a lightning fast combination coming in for your solar plexus and jaw. This is a tough town. It’s also a generous town.

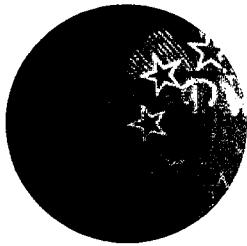
**In *Lives Laid Away*, immigration raids and crackdowns are really blows against working class communities and families, a nasty tear at the social fabric, something the characters have to band against to oppose. Was there some impetus or event in the community, something you saw or read about, that spurred you to write about this and to make it the centerpiece of a novel?**

The impetus was the inescapable flood of news—television, newspaper, online, radio—illustrating in graphic and ugly detail how we’re losing the humanity—the compassion—we as Americans were once known for. That so-called “shining beacon on a hill.” Families being separated. Kids in cages. Agents eating at Mexican restaurants and instead of paying the bill, they arrest the cook that just fed them (this happened in Ann Arbor, Michigan.) The institutional racism we once quietly acknowledged as existing now shouts and roars and screams in your face. In *Lives Laid Away*, I wanted to address all of this, but I didn’t want to stand on a political soapbox with a megaphone. I wanted to communicate the street-level loss and cruelty and pain of this altered reality we’re all upside down in.

**Reading this burgeoning series, the closest books I think of in terms of the atmosphere are Leonardo Padura’s Mario Conde novels—something about that close-knit, going-way-back working class vibe that makes sense whether it’s Havana or Detroit. I wondered if there are other writers you look to for inspiration, or books you think resonate with your work in interesting ways?**

Leonardo Padura’s Mario Conde novels? I’m not familiar with him. Gee, thanks, Dwyer! Now I have to sneak more book purchases past my wife! I’ve always loved poetry—the Spanish and Mexican poets. Folks like Federico Garcia Lorca and Octavio Paz. Love—absolutely love!—Nikki Giovanni and Bob Kaufman. Rereading Kurt Vonnegut or Agatha Christie always goes well with a good bourbon. These days, I’m like a dog waiting at the door for the

next James Benn “Billy Boyle” World War II mystery or Timothy Hallinan “Junior Bender” misadventure. Right now, I’m making my eyes bleed and hands shake with S.A. Cosby’s tough-minded *My Darkest Prayer*. I think maybe I should make some time to get back with Ray Bradbury and Ursula La Guin. They may have to wait until this third August Snow is with my publisher for care, feeding and a fresh nappy...



Dwyer Murphy

Dwyer Murphy is the managing editor of CrimeReads.



**WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR CRAZY  
THRILLER PLOTS COME TRUE**

**FEBRUARY'S BEST DEBUT THRILLERS  
AND CRIME NOVELS**

