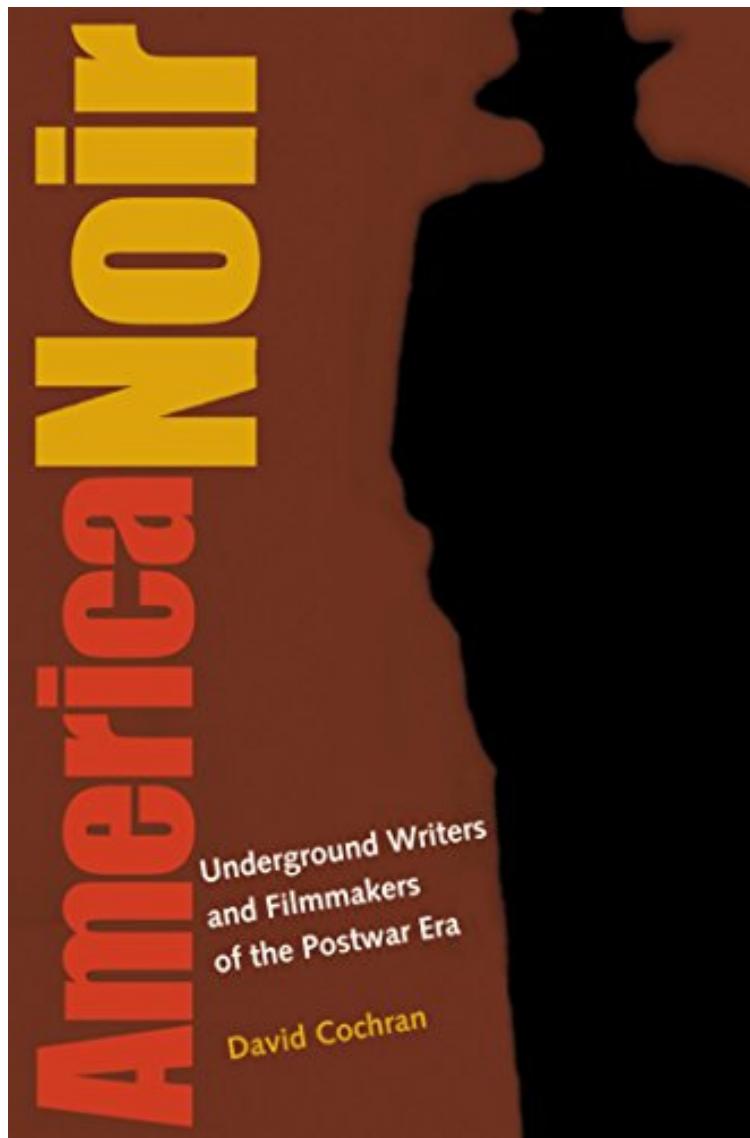


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America Noir: Underground Writers and Filmmakers of the Postwar Era

David Cochran

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David Cochran : America Noir: Underground Writers and Filmmakers of the Postwar Era before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised America Noir: Underground Writers and Filmmakers of the Postwar Era:

12 of 12 people found the following review helpful. Not an easy read, but a GREAT read!By dadenaAs a tail-end "baby boomer" I have long been fascinated with the changes taking place in popular culture throughout my adolescent years and into adulthood. A long-time fan of MAD magazine, I never really understood the counter culture statements

being made in the magazine or how they reflect society as a whole. David Cochran's treatise, "America Noir: Underground Writers and Filmmakers of the Postwar Era" describes the propagation of a subculture which was not afraid to assert that all was not as rosy as the dominant culture would purport. Reading the book was very much NOT like reading a novel or one of Rod Serling's short stories. To a certain extent, the book reads like a history text. *America Noir* consists of five parts: The Killer Inside Me-Roman Noir Authors; Progress and Its Discontents-Science Fiction and Fantasy Authors; Outside Looking In-Minority Authors; Little Shop of Horrors-Independent Filmmakers; and Cracks in the Consensus-Liberal Artists. These five parts "connects the dots" to form a cohesive picture of the events, attitudes, and expressions which have marked the changing of American society from the period immediately following World War II to the current time. I have a better grasp of the causes underlying the changes in society from the time I was a kid myself to now when I have adolescent kids of my own. I'm sure I will soon go out to experience some of the books and movies described in "America Noir." It is an excellent addition to my library. 4 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

PEELING BACK THE UNDERBELLY OF AMERICA By Kevin Stewart

As a photographer who enjoys images more than text these days. This book is so well written that one "sees" images while David Cochran unfurls text in a manner that mimics the tendencies of the writers discussed within the book itself. Cochran knows his politics, his "POST WAR ERA" history and his subjects so well that while reading I had to keep looking at the cover to remind myself why I got the book. It goes beyond the call of duty. Because of this book, I will be able to ascertain how the current bevy of movies being made on Marvel Comics and dark subject matters stack up to the tone of the era in which they were drawn. Also, I know better why American people are in the shape they are in. With more unresloved issues and more neurosis its a wonder how we have survived this long. Thank God for the Underground Writer and Filmmakers of the Postwar Era, there are valves to let some steam off.

In *America Noir* David Cochran details how ten writers and filmmakers challenged the social pieties prevalent during the Cold War, such as the superiority of the American democracy, the benevolence of free enterprise, and the sanctity of the suburban family. Rod Serling's *The Twilight Zone* featured victims of vast, faceless, bureaucratic powers. Jim Thompson's noir thrillers, such as *The Grifters*, portrayed the ravages of capitalism on those at the bottom of the social ladder. Patricia Highsmith, in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, placed an amoral con man in an international setting, implicitly questioning America's fitness as leader of the free world. Charles Willeford's pulp novels, such as *Wild Wives* and *Woman Chaser*, depicted the family as a hotbed of violence and chaos. These artists pioneered a detached, ironic sensibility that radically juxtaposed cultural references and blurred the distinctions between "high" and "low" art. Their refusal to surrender to the pressures for political conformity and their unflinching portrayal of the underside of American life paved the way for the emergence of a 1960s counterculture that forever changed the way America views itself.

America Noir is a must for any student of the noir tradition in American culture....Entertaining and enlightening. -- BookPage

About the Author David Cochran teaches history at John A. Logan College in Carterville, IL. He lives in Herrin, IL.

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About halfway through Charles Willeford's debut novel, *High Priest of California* (1953), the narrator, Russell Haxby, a successful though amoral used-car salesman, drops off his date Alyce. Unsuccessful in his immediate attempt to seduce her, Haxby has nonetheless begun formulating a long-term strategy toward achieving his goal. Before returning home, he walks into a tavern and orders a drink. Sitting at the bar, he surveys the other customers, noticing the man next to him is approximately his size. Then, without warning or provocation, Haxby says, "I put my drink down, raised my elbow level with my shoulder, and spun on my heel. My elbow caught him just below the eye. He raised a beer bottle over his head and my fist caught him flush on the jaw. He dropped to the floor and lay still. I threw a half-dollar on the bar and left. No one looked in my direction as I closed the door." Returning home, Haxby puts the "Romeo and Juliet Overture" on the turntable. "I poured a glass full of gin and played the overture several times while I finished the drink. After this emotional bath I felt wonderful. I went to bed and slept soundly all night. Like a child." With this one indelible scene, Willeford presented his vision of the quintessential postwar American man. Beneath the pleasant exterior of a successful used-car salesman lies a soul equally capable of lashing out in meaningless, anonymous violence or appreciating the beauty of Tchaikovsky. While at this point in the novel the events do not come as a complete surprise--earlier Haxby had kneed a parking attendant in the groin for pointing out that he had parked in the wrong spot--the realization that the core of his soul Haxby is utterly without conscience prepares the reader for the ultimate revelation that Haxby will treat the people in his life with the same cavalier disdain he shows toward his customers at the car lot.