



America Noir: Underground Writers and Filmmakers of the Postwar Era

David Cochran

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B-movies, crime novels, science fiction- all of these forms of mass media came into their own in the 1950s. Dismissed by critics as dehumanizing to both author and audience, these genres unflinchingly exposed the depths of American life at a time when it was not politically correct to do so.

David Cochran details how, at the height of the Cold War, ten writers and filmmakers challenged such social pieties as the superiority of American democracy, the benevolence of free enterprise, and the sanctity of the suburban family. Rod Serling's *The Twilight Zone* related stories of victims of vast, faceless bureaucratic powers. Jim Thompson's *The Grifters* portrayed the ravages of capitalism on those at the bottom of the social ladder. Patricia Highsmith's *The Talented Mr. Ripley* featured an amoral con man who infiltrated the privileged class and wreaked havoc once there. All of these artists helped to set the stage for the 1960s counterculture's challenge to the established order. In doing so, they blurred the lines between "high" and "low" art.

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