



**ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND SOCIETAL UNDERLININGS IN NOIR LITERATURE:
MOTIVATIONS, UNDERTONES, AND CRITICISMS**

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ABSTRACT

American Noir was a literary crime fiction genre that spanned from the 1920s to the 1950s. The genre, characterized by pessimism, realism, existentialism, and immorality, was written very much as a criticism of American capitalism. The economic time periods associated with noir's existence were almost all involved with advancing capitalism. My research analyzes and compares how noir (and in particular crime in noir) changes alongside the development and evolution of economic principles and economic structure. I attempt to conceptualize how trends and changes in production, consumption, corporate power, inequality, and general economic organization influence criminal motivation, the mode in which crime is committed, and how crime is policed within the noir genre.

I focus on five noir novels each from different economic time periods – Dashiell Hammett's 1929 novel *Red Harvest*, James M. Cain's 1934 novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, Raymond Chandler's 1939 novel *The Big Sleep*, Dorothy B. Hughes's 1947 novel *In a Lonely Place*, and Raymond Chandler's 1953 novel *The Long Goodbye*. I examine how the evolution of capitalism from the prosperous 1920s, to The Great Depression, to The New Deal, to World War II, and finally to The Golden Age of Capitalism translates to issues such as class struggle, class-consciousness, social anxiety, and power structure – all of which are causations and motivations for crime in noir. Several noir themes, including crime, remain present throughout the genre's history. However, the *nature* of these themes change and are dependent on the economic time period in which a given noir novel was written.