

A web site that can serve as an excellent companion to “Somewhere in the Night” is **film noir studies**: http://www.filmnoirstudies.com/essays/no_place.asp

Where Nicholas Christopher uses a personal, poetic approach to the topic, this excellent website by noir scholar John J. Blaser and his wife Stephanie L.M. Blaser offers the reader an analytical, objective framework for understanding this rich and complex set of stories.

The Blasers’ prose is clean and powerful. Here is how they introduce their subject:

A dark city street bathed in shadows. A seedy office with “Investigations” stenciled on the door. A winding road along the ocean cliffs. An isolated house on the outskirts of town. The scenes of *film noir* are all disturbingly familiar, as are the archetypal characters: the hard-boiled detective, the dangerously alluring *femme fatale*, and the well-heeled villain surrounded by gun-toting thugs. But even so, it is the visual style – canted camera angles, deep-focus shots, high-contrast lighting – and ultimately subversive message that are the hallmarks of classic *film noir*.

Subversive is right! The Blasers take a slightly different tack as they sail into these same dark waters, centering their focus on what they feel is the film noir’s true enemy: the American family. “Perhaps its favorite target is the most fundamental value of all — the family.” It is their thesis that the generation disillusioned by the Depression and the traumatic revelations of World War II sought to deconstruct the American dream before they could believe in it again:

In classical Hollywood cinema, as in American culture generally, the family and home life are celebrated as a safe haven from the world outside and a common aspiration of each generation. When we say that a film has a “happy ending,” we often mean that the male hero and his female love interest are united in marriage — or seem to be headed in that direction — before the closing credits. Indeed, many of the most popular films of the 1930s and '40s depict the family almost as a cure-all that will save the hero from any trouble, if he or she can only learn to appreciate it. Thus, Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) runs away from home, but discovers in the end that “There’s no place like home”; George Bailey in *It’s A Wonderful Life* (1946) nearly attempts suicide, only to find that friends and family make any crisis worth living through; and even Scarlett O’Hara in *Gone With the Wind* (1939) comes to value Tara, the family home, above all other things.

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Film noir, they argue, was a way of dismantling this most treasured assumption.

The Blasens lay out a clear template for the film noir student in their table of contents:

1. Introduction
 2. World War II
 3. Pro-Family
 4. Anti-Family
 5. Femme Fatale
 6. Good Woman
 7. Marrying Type
 8. Transformation
 9. Film Noir's Epitaph
- Endnotes

The web site now includes an invaluable *film noir* timeline, an extensive glossary, and links to other sites.