

2022 Kit Noir Festival  
Gordon Kit's Introductory Remarks

Thank you Dean Becker.

The first year of the Kit Noir Film Festival was foundational, focusing on the Hollywood films shown in Paris just after World War II. The French film critics were the first ones to refer to this uniquely American genre as “film noir”, owing to its dark themes and moody cinematography.

The second year of the Kit Noir Film Festival focused on the most prolific author of noir radio, television and Hollywood films, Cornell Woolrich, a 1920's Columbia University student drop-out.

During the pandemic we ran a free virtual mini-Festival...presenting films set at the US-Mexico border, which has been both a third rail in American politics and a setting for crime fiction.

This year, in *Film Noir & the Jewish Experience: WWII to the Blacklist*, we return to the foundational roots of Hollywood film noir - Jewish immigrants and refugees, who played a pivotal role in the

creation of classic Hollywood film noir. During the Festival, we will explore what was it about their culture, perspective and historical circumstances that made their contribution to classic Hollywood film noir formative.

My grandparents were Jewish immigrants to America, escaping the pogroms of Eastern Europe - over 100 years ago, arriving shortly after the birth of Cornell Woolrich.

My paternal grandfather was a union organizer and emigrated from the western region of Imperial Russia. His original surname, Kitai –is the modern Russian word for China, and may derive from the old Russian word for braid. In the old days, Chinese men wore queues (or braids). For some long lost reason, our sur-name was shortened to Kit after my paternal grandfather arrived in America.

My paternal grandmother's Belarusian internal passport referred to her as an illiterate virgin, because she spoke only Yiddish, not Russian, and being unmarried, she was presumed to be a virgin.

When I was growing up, only my maternal grandparents were still alive. They emigrated to the US from a town north of Kyiv. My maternal grandfather was a tailor. We often asked my maternal grandparents to tell us about the old country, but they refused, saying that was the past and they only wanted to look forward...the Judaic emphasis on life as it is here and now.

My parents, first generation Americans, didn't know much about their parents' past. They were not curious, and never asked. They too looked forward. In contrast, at the Kit Film Noir festival, we look to the past.

One of the reasons why I endowed this film festival is because I believe it is important to know and understand the past, as only with such an understanding can one understand the present and glimpse the future. Film is uniquely able to capture the past - an era, place, mood, and culture.

But the study of film history can be tricky and controversial, as the analysis of a film genre is

inevitably a reflection of the generation conducting the analysis, and thus changes over time.

Film noir not only reflects the history and culture of the period in which it was initially produced (the 1940's and 50's), film noir helped to mold and influence the culture of its time... and continues to do so today. That is why we are here tonight.

I want to thank Profs Ann Douglas and Rob King, and everyone at Columbia who has helped make the festival a reality....And especially thank you all for coming. Now sit back and enjoy the Festival.  
Thank you.