

Tales from the Social Justice Crypt: History, Pedagogy, and Horror in the Classroom

My stories are about humans and how they react or fail to react, or react stupidly. I'm pointing the finger at us, not at the zombies. I try to respect and sympathize with the zombies as much as possible.

– George A. Romero¹

Katrina Yeaw

University of Arkansas at Little Rock

IN A LITTLE ROCK, Arkansas classroom, undergraduate students are introduced to George Romero's classic 1978 zombie movie, *Dawn of the Dead*, in my course on gender and horror.² As the film opens, we learn of the expanding zombie apocalypse and the ensuing chaos from reporters in the television studio of WGON in Philadelphia. The film shifts to Roger (played by actor Scott H. Reiniger) as he and his SWAT team raid a tenement building. The predominantly Puerto Rican and Black Caribbean residents ignore the order to turn over their dead and leave their homes for quarantine hotels. As the SWAT team moves in on the tenement building, Wooley (Jim Baffico), a veteran police officer, threatens to "BLOW ALL THEIR LITTLE LOW LIFE PUERTO RICAN AND N—— ASSES RIGHT OFF..."³ He then yells:

HOW THE HELL COME WE STICK THESE LOW LIVES IN THESE BIG-ASS FANCY HOTELS ANYWAY? S—MAN. THIS'S BETTER THAN I GOT. YOU AIN'T GONNA TALK 'EM OUTA HERE. YOU GOTTA BLOW 'EM OUT. BLOW THEIR ASSES!⁴

During the actual raid, a combination of police violence and zombie carnage does in many Black and Puerto Rican residents, and SWAT team officer Peter Washington (Ken Foree) eventually kills Wooley after witnessing Wooley indiscriminately murdering the residents of the building. Two SWAT team members and two employees of WGON eventually flee the city, using a news helicopter, before setting down at a suburban shopping mall.

Critics have primarily viewed *Dawn of the Dead* as a critique of the consumerism of the “Me” generation.⁵ The four survivors go on a shopping spree and eventually end up reproducing familiar domestic arrangements (and gender roles) even as the deceased residents of the area plague them. In the film’s climax, the arrival of a biker gang destroys the relative tranquility of their surrogate family. As in Romero’s earlier film, *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), white vigilantes, not the zombies, are the greatest threat to our protagonists’ survival.

Even though most of the film focuses on suburban spaces, the opening of *Dawn of the Dead* highlights George Romero’s use of zombie gore to criticize racial injustice in American society, centered on the specific geography of urban Philadelphia. The zombie apocalypse of the film is a heightened version of the very real urban decay that afflicted many American cities in the 1970s. Although Philadelphia was not as severely affected as cities like Detroit or Chicago, it still lost a quarter of a million residents during that decade.⁶ Much like many of the former white residents of Philly, the survivors in *Dawn of the Dead* seek safety in the whiter and more tranquil suburbs, which are contrasted with the chaos of the urban tenement building.

Along with an image of middle-class urban flight, the film highlights, in the first few minutes, the racist nature of policing in Philadelphia, the tension between minority communities and the police, and concerns over urban space and housing. Wooley’s claim that the police need to “blow their...asses right off” may allude to the recent violence of the Vietnam War, but also predicts the future use of military tactics in American urban spaces. In Philadelphia, these tactics resulted in the police bombing of the Black liberation organization MOVE in West Philadelphia in May 1985. When the fires burned out, the bombing killed six adults and five children, destroying sixty-one houses and leaving 250 residents homeless.⁷

Dawn of the Dead was not Romero's first film to include social criticism. Romero has claimed that the depiction of domestic racism in his previous zombie film, *Night of the Living Dead* (1968),⁸ was purely accidental.⁹ However, the white vigilantes' murder of its lone Black survivor, Ben (Duane Jones), and the subsequent burning of his body along with the "ghouls" (the original name for Romero's zombies), connects the film to the legacy of anti-Black violence and lynching. Romero released the film shortly after the assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, guaranteeing that audiences would see parallels between *Night of the Living Dead* and racial violence in America. In retrospect, Elliott Stein called it the "first-ever subversive horror movie."¹⁰

Getting students in Arkansas to engage with the history at the center of zombie or other horror films in my gender and horror course is often easier than introducing students to more traditional works of history. Although horror cinema has long been treated as cheap, frivolous, and ultimately forgettable, the genre provides a unique opportunity to bring social and racial justice issues into the classroom and engage with critical social theory. The starting point for us as educators is: How do we get students to ask historically specific questions? Horror can be a tool to make this possible.

My course on gender and horror emerged from the challenges of the second half of the COVID-19 pandemic. After two years of remote learning and social distancing, I asked myself: How can I effectively engage students? Drawing on bell hooks's argument that "excitement in higher education" has the potential to disrupt "the atmosphere of seriousness assumed to be essential to the learning process," I wanted to teach a course that was academically rigorous, but also fun.¹¹ As a historian of the Middle East and North Africa who works primarily on colonial violence, my research is rewarding, but these subjects can also be heavy. There were days during the pandemic when I could not face questions of human trafficking or genocide. Rethinking my approach to teaching, I decided to incorporate my background in gender studies with my love of horror films. Hence, my "Gender and Horror" course was born.

My approach to horror films is informed by the insights of theorists such as Carol Clover and Robin Means Coleman, who have recognized horror's potential as a tool for social criticism.

Carol Clover argued that horror movies, especially the slasher genre, “not despite but exactly because of its crudity and compulsive repetitiveness, give us a clearer picture of current sexual attitudes... than do the legitimate products of better studios.”¹² What Clover asserted about gender and horror, Robin Means Coleman argued about race in horror, maintaining that horror has been a vehicle to explore racial attitudes in America and “disrupt or eviscerate our assumptive, dominant views of each other’s place in the world.”¹³ In essence, the horror genre continues to serve as a powerful mirror reflecting and critiquing societal norms and attitudes on gender, race, or other facets of human experience.

Beyond highlighting horror’s role as a tool of social criticism, the premise of this article is that teaching horror films provides an opportunity not only to evaluate and disrupt sexual and racial attitudes, but also to introduce students to critical social theory related to the study of gender, sexual minorities, race, and ethnicity. As students confront the classic monsters of the horror genre—the zombies, vampires, werewolves, witches, ghosts, and murderers that at times haunt all our dreams—they are forced to confront and ask questions about what “weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living” in American society.¹⁴ Marx referred to it as tradition. Today, we call it the history of misogyny, homophobia, and racism in America.

In addition to introducing students to social criticism, horror films are an opportunity to add diverse voices to my class. Mainstream filmmaking is overwhelmingly white and male (as are the filmmakers recognized by the major awards).¹⁵ Horror tends to be the testing ground for young and upcoming directors, allowing for a more diverse set of voices than bigger-budget films.¹⁶ Jordan Peele’s directorial debut, *Get Out* (2017),¹⁷ which will be discussed later in this article, was one of these films, and its commercial and critical success helped make it possible for him to follow up with two more ambitious projects: *Us* (2019) and *Nope* (2022).¹⁸ Peele’s production company, Monkeypaw Productions, has also greenlit several of the recent works of Black horror, including *Candyman* (2021), directed by Nia DaCosta.¹⁹ Thus, teaching horror films fosters an appreciation for the diverse voices and perspectives of the genre.

Approaches to Gender and Horror at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock

I teach at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UA Little Rock), a medium-sized public university in the American South. As an educator, it is a challenging moment to teach with an eye toward social and racial justice in the classroom in a Republican-controlled state. As many know, “Critical Race Theory” became one of the great boogeymen of conservatism in the United States after President Joe Biden’s election in 2020 and an umbrella term used by the Right to describe any teaching or discussion of issues related to racism, sexism, or systemic inequality.²⁰ Despite the challenges created by the political environment in Arkansas, which has been at the forefront of passing legislation regulating what can and cannot be taught in the classroom,²¹ students appear more open to discussions of gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity in courses related to horror themes.²²

There are several ways that someone could approach teaching a course on gender and horror. I divide the course into four roughly chronological modules: (1) The Classics of Modern Horror and Feminist Criticism; (2) Rethinking the Classic, Gendered Tropes of Horror; (3) Gender and ‘Prestige Horror’ of the 2010s; and (4) Horror in the post-#MeToo Era (see **Appendix A** for class schedule). Module 1 primarily covers horror movies from the 1960s to the 1980s, starting with *Psycho* (1960) and ending with an analysis of the slasher genre.²³ Module 2 looks at horror movies in the 1990s and early 2000s, while Modules 3 and 4 look at recent developments in the genre. Although there are many films that I could have chosen to teach, I opted to focus the first module on films that, in my view, have come to define the genre. The later modules prioritize films with gendered themes and the recent work of female directors, including Karyn Kusama, Jennifer Kent, Ana Lily Amirpour, Nia DaCosta, and Mimi Cave.²⁴ The only film by a male director I teach that was released after 2008 is *Get Out*.²⁵

Choosing which films to teach is not without its challenges. By their very nature, horror films deal with disturbing topics, including murder, rape, kidnapping, torture, and cannibalism, to name a few. As central protagonists, women are often the primary focus of this

violence. Seeing this type of violence depicted onscreen may be upsetting to some students, particularly those who have experienced trauma. The use of content warnings to alert such students to potentially distressing subjects has been debated extensively in traditional and online media; unfortunately, there is no consensus on how to approach violence and other traumatic topics in the classroom.²⁶ However, students who sign up for a horror film course are inclined to be self-selecting and generally seem to be on board with the idea of an entire semester of watching horror films. Of course, some subjects tend to be more distressing, even to horror lovers. For this reason, I usually avoid films with highly graphic depictions of violence or rape, including films in the rape/revenge genre and those characterized as belonging to the “torture porn” or French “New Extreme” sub-genres of horror. If a film or discussion in a given week raises a particularly troubling topic, especially sexual violence, I do provide a content warning. Students are encouraged to speak to me privately if they have any specific concerns.

Another thorny issue is teaching films by famous directors who have been accused of sexual misconduct, such as Alfred Hitchcock and convicted rapist Roman Polanski.²⁷ While this is not a new discussion, the #MeToo movement has reinvigorated a debate about what to do with the work of creators who have done monstrous things. I reluctantly continue to include the work of these directors in my syllabus, but I have asked my students to watch their films with an eye on the film’s content. As Constance Grady has argued, we should not ask, “Is this artist monstrous?” but “Is this work of art asking me as a reader [or audience] to be complicit with the artist’s monstrosity?”²⁸ For example, when my students watch *Rosemary’s Baby*, I ask my students: Does a film like *Rosemary’s Baby* ultimately push us to side with Rosemary or her abusers? They have responded that the film not only sides with Rosemary, but also that the content of the film “speaks volumes to how he [Polanski] could justify his actions in real life.”²⁹ I have also asked students explicitly if the film should be removed from the syllabus considering Polanski’s crimes, to which no student has ever replied “yes.” However, I had a student say that they “would struggle more watching his modern works” since they find it “disgusting that he’s just chilling and living his best life after the horrible things he’s done.”³⁰ This is a sentiment I completely agree with. In my mind,

these are valuable conversations, and it is useful to evaluate how a director like Polanski, who is openly hostile to women's rights, made a film that can be read as a story about male entitlement and lack of female bodily autonomy.³¹

Beyond the content of the course, one of my key goals is to teach critical historical analysis. In my experience, students often need more guidance in evaluating cultural artifacts than analyzing more traditional primary sources. When I ask my students to examine the assigned films during in-person discussions or on discussion boards, I encourage them to consider three main aspects of the film: background, context, and gender analysis. To help guide students in their readings of films as historical objects, I ask them the following questions:

1. **Background on the film:** When was it released? Who is the director? Who is the screenwriter? Is it connected to a particular studio? Does the film fit within a particular genre of horror? Why? Or why not?
2. **Context of the film:** All horror films are about collective anxieties. What major historical events happened during the period when the film was made, such as wars and social movements? What trends or societal changes were taking place? How have these influenced the film? How did the movie comment on, reinforce, or even critique social and political issues when it was released, including issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality?
3. **Gender analysis of the film:** How does the film deal with gender? Does the film contain identifiable gendered assumptions? How does the movie depict women and/or gender and sexual minorities? Does it use specific gendered tropes? Give specific examples from the film to support your analysis.

Students develop a more nuanced understanding of the films through this analytical framework and gain insight into the cultural, social, and political dynamics that shape their production and reception.

While students can generally provide a good background and do some gender analysis when they arrive in my classroom, teaching students to write thoughtful historical analyses is more difficult. When asked to write about the context of a film, students in my classes often start by simply listing events that occurred around a film's release, but need help conceptualizing how films reflect the periods in which they were made in a broader sense. For example,

at the beginning of the semester, it would not be uncommon to see students list events like the Watergate hearings, the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam, the Ted Bundy killings, *Roe v. Wade*, and the women's rights movement for a film release in the 1970s.³² It takes time for students to understand how to make a nuanced argument about how the Vietnam War influenced the depictions of the deranged Hitchhiker (Edwin Neal) and his cannibal clan in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974) or how anxiety about the state of the American family and the decline in religiosity is reflected in Regan MacNeil's (Linda Blair) possession in *The Exorcist* (1973).³³ Developing students' ability to craft nuanced historical analyses of films requires helping them to understand the intricate ways movies reflect and comment on the broader societal and cultural anxieties of their times.

Since developing this nuance takes practice, I give students ample opportunities to hone their skills through weekly writing assignments and a final film analysis paper. In the weekly writing assignments, I ask students to write responses to the questions above about background, context, and gender analysis in an initial discussion post. They then must ask two peers a question about any aspect of the film related to the topic of the class. By the end of the week, they must respond to questions their peers have raised on their initial posts. I jump in regularly to add context, provide feedback, ask my own questions, and occasionally mediate arguments. For example, when we discuss Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979), I might ask a student about the *Nostramo*'s navigator, Lambert (Veronica Cartwright).³⁴ Most students are not aware that she is canonically a transgender woman, so I provide this detail and ask how it might or might not change their analysis of the character.³⁵ Their discussion board responses are evaluated on mechanics, number and length of postings, connection to the film and readings, and critical thinking and interaction (see **Appendix B** for discussion rubric). Through this iterative process of writing, discussion, and feedback, students are given the opportunity to improve their analytical skills and cultivate a deeper understanding of how gender norms are reflected in films.

The remainder of this article will examine how I use three films, *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), *Let the Right One In* (2008), and *Get Out* (2017), to explore issues of gender, sexuality, and race in my course on horror and gender. Beware that there will be spoilers moving forward.³⁶

***Rosemary's Baby*, Monstrous Men, and Gender in the Classroom**

One of the first films introduced in my classes on gender and horror is perhaps the most controversial: Roman Polanski's 1968 film *Rosemary's Baby*. In this film, Rosemary Woodhouse (Mia Farrow) and her struggling actor husband Guy (John Cassavetes) move into the Bramford, an apartment building with a nefarious history. Their eccentric and colorful neighbors, the Castelevets (Ruth Gordon and Sidney Blackmer), befriend them. Soon afterward, Rosemary discovers that she is pregnant. Little by little, Rosemary finds herself cut off from her old life while becoming increasingly convinced that something is wrong with the Bramford, her neighbors, and possibly her pregnancy.

While *Rosemary's Baby* is ostensibly about Satanism, witches, and the occult, it is also about how violence and patriarchy haunt the domestic sphere. It is one of my favorite films to teach because it allows for a discussion of how horror films are shaped by the gendered attitudes of the period in which they were made. When my students first watch *Rosemary's Baby*, I ask them to consider how gendered concerns of the late 1960s are reflected in the movie, given that the film was produced at the height of the counter-culture movement and at a time when attitudes towards the place of women in American society were changing dramatically. Besides her modern Vidal Sassoon haircut, Rosemary seems to reject the new ideas about femininity circulating at the time, having no ambition beyond that of a wife and mother. Despite this, the film reflects debates of the period about how isolation and dependency make women susceptible to abuse and coercion and rob them of authority.³⁷

Rosemary's Baby speaks to mid-century debates about women and gender in American society, but also depicts universal themes that remain relevant to contemporary audiences. Unfortunately, one in four women in the United States still faces abuse from an intimate partner. While the experience of carrying the Devil's son moves the film into the realm of the supernatural, many women (and men) can relate to the abuse faced by Rosemary. At the root of this abuse in the film is rape and forced impregnation, which is a common theme in the horror genre. Another famous example is in *Alien* (1979), in which a man is forcibly impregnated with

an alien embryo that bursts through his chest.³⁸ This theme has become even more relevant in the aftermath of the overturning of *Roe vs. Wade*, especially in a Republican-controlled state such as Arkansas, where all abortions are illegal, with no exception in the case of rape or incest.

While I include *Rosemary's Baby* because of the discussions it brings into the classroom and the fact that it is an often-referenced film on gender and horror, my students usually find the character of Rosemary too passive to relate to. As a modern audience, we tend to want Rosemary to overcome her abusers. As one of my students said: "I hoped she would just stab everybody and steal her demon baby" at the end of the film.³⁹ Rosemary is intelligent and proactive, but the forces arrayed against her are too formidable to escape alone.

The modern viewer's desire for Rosemary to fight back is particularly strong when Rosemary awakens after being drugged by her neighbor, Minnie Castevets (Ruth Gordon). Guy attempts to explain Rosemary's injuries by claiming he had sex with her while unconscious, saying, "I didn't want to miss a baby night," and then quips, "It was fun, in a necrophile sort of way."⁴⁰ This comment is oozing with the condescension of a man who does not expect to be challenged despite the long scratches down her side. My students struggle with the fact that Rosemary seems to move on from this violation rather quickly. This is an opportunity to help my students understand the dramatic shift in attitudes toward sexual violence since the 1960s. At the time the film was made, sexual intercourse by "forcible compulsion" was not considered rape in the state of New York if the victim was the rapist's legal spouse.⁴¹ It was not until the mid-1980s that attitudes began to shift around acquaintance rape, date rape, and marital rape.

Despite my valid reasons for teaching *Rosemary's Baby*, it is not a comfortable decision. Looking at Mia Farrow's tiny, battered body on the bed after the rape, it is impossible not to think of Samantha Geimer (née Samantha Gailey) and the other four girls Polanski is accused of drugging and assaulting. It is not an easy scene to watch, knowing what we do about Polanski. For students unfamiliar with Polanski's history, I provide a brief overview of the facts of the Samantha Geimer case in my lecture and link to an article about the most recent allegations against him.⁴²

In the week my students discuss *Rosemary's Baby*, my students are also introduced to the work of Laura Mulvey and her classic criticism in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" of how male filmmakers structured Hollywood cinema in a way that reinforced male power and privilege, both within the narrative and in the act of cinematic spectatorship.⁴³ Polanski is not a director who seeks to undermine male privilege in his visual storytelling. During the pivotal rape scene in the movie where Rosemary is naked and surrounded by the nude Satanists, my students see one of the many examples of how the camera takes on a masculine viewpoint, objectifying Rosemary as a passive object of desire even during scenes depicting overt sexual violence. The male gaze comes up in my students' discussions of various films during the semester, from *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and *Halloween* to films by female directors such as *Jennifer's Body*.⁴⁴

***Let the Right One In*, Vampirism, and Queer Representation**

In contrast to *Rosemary's Baby*, the second film is slightly more obscure. *Let the Right One In* (*Låt den rätte komma in*) (2008) is a Swedish horror film by director Tomas Alfredson, based on a 2004 novel of the same title by Swedish writer John Ajvide Lindqvist.⁴⁵ Set in the suburbs of Stockholm in the 1980s, Oskar (Kåre Hedebrant) is a 12-year-old outcast chronically bullied at school. His life changes when he meets a strange girl named Eli (Lina Leandersson) in the courtyard of his building; she recently moved there.⁴⁶ As their friendship grows, Oskar discovers that there is something unusual about Eli.

There are two significant revelations regarding Eli throughout the film. First, Oskar begins to suspect that Eli is a vampire who survives on human blood, and, later, it is revealed that she was assigned male at birth.⁴⁷ Eli repeatedly tells him: "Oskar, I'm *not* a girl."⁴⁸ This statement references both her vampiric nature and her gender identity. In the film, she is trans-coded. The film does not dwell on her transness and takes her self-identification seriously as female. The revelation is never addressed in the dialogue, but instead is shown through visible surgical scars, which Oskar views briefly while she changes. In a world where trans people are often

depicted as abnormal or even monstrous, Oskar continues to desire a relationship with Eli. The fact that she needs to murder people to feed is what troubles him.

Because vampires are often connected with sexual fluidity, *Let the Right One In* continues a long history of queer representation in vampire media. Bisexual women and lesbian characters are particularly ubiquitous in vampire films. One of the earliest examples is *Dracula's Daughter* (1936), a sequel to Bela Lugosi's depiction in *Dracula* (1931). After *Dracula's Daughter*, this theme was common in exploitation films of the 1970s, including films like *The Vampire Lovers* (1970), *Daughters of Darkness* (1971), *Lust for a Vampire* (1971), the *Blood Spattered Bride* (1972), and *Vampyres* (1974). As Andrea Weiss argued:

[The] archetypal lesbian vampire rose to prominence at the exact point in time when the concept of lesbian identity was first coming into widespread public discourse... Indeed, that particular image of the lesbian vampire represented a displacement of anxiety over the potential for the lesbian feminist movement, gaining momentum from second-wave feminism and the aftermath of Stonewall.⁴⁹

Lesbian vampires came out of their coffins, so to speak, just as female same-sex desire became more visible in American public life. The male heroes of these films ultimately alleviated the audience's perceived anxiety about uncontrolled female sexual desire by hunting down the lesbian vampires to reinforce puritanical and patriarchal values.⁵⁰

While *Let the Right One In* is not a perfect trans allegory, its positive representation of transgender characters was unusual during the aughts. At a time when trans characters were still often objects of derision, it portrays the transgender friendship and chaste desire between two children with empathy. To make the film more mainstream, Matt Reeves omitted these details from the 2010 American adaption (titled *Let Me In*) in which Eli is renamed Abby (Chloë Grace Moretz) and is cis-gendered. As one of two foreign-language films in the course,⁵¹ I ask my students to research the development of gay rights in Sweden, particularly attitudes toward trans rights. This encourages them to situate the film within a particular historical moment and as a product of a specific cultural milieu.

Given the politicization of trans identity and trans existence in Republican-controlled states, it is a challenging time to teach about sexual and gender minorities. Trans children and their families have come under particular scrutiny. Thirty states have restricted access to gender-affirming care for minors or are considering laws that would do so, including several pieces of legislature in Arkansas. It is estimated that 146,300 transgender youth are in danger of losing care.⁵² Since taking office in January 2025, President Trump has intensified this assault on transgender rights by signing executive orders that assert there are only two genders, prohibiting trans women from competing in sports, and eliminating funding for gender-affirming care for transgender youth.⁵³ In this political environment, it is rewarding for my classroom to be a safe space to discuss the depiction of a transgender child with my students.

My students generally love discussing queer themes in *Let the Right One In* and other horror films and reading Andrea Weiss's analysis of lesbian vampires as a reflection of "the instability of the heterosexual social order" in the 1970s.⁵⁴ Horror has a considerable queer following, generally reflected in the sexual orientation and gender identities of many students who enroll in my class. Even though queer people have often been excluded from the horror genre or equated with deviancy within it,⁵⁵ they have found an affinity with many of its films and characters, from Carmilla to Dr. Frank N. Furter to the Babadook. S. Trimble argued that horror's strength lies in its malleability. It is especially "kaleidoscopic" and cathartic for those cast as monsters in our society.⁵⁶ Horror is always about fear of the other, and the LBTQA+ community remains the ultimate other in our society.

While my students generally respond positively to *Let the Right One In*, some aspects of the film make them uncomfortable, especially the age gap between Eli and Oskar, with one student saying that they "had a hard time enjoying the film." Though Eli is portrayed as an eternal 12-year-old, she is considerably older than Oskar, possibly having lived centuries. My students' concern about their age differences reflects the increased recent attention to the predatory nature of relationships between adults and teenagers and their depictions in popular culture.⁵⁷ Vampire media has long

been guilty of romanticizing relationships between teenage girls and grown men, with recent examples including such popular series as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *The Vampire Diaries*, and *The Twilight Saga*.⁵⁸ In this media, the older male vampire often stalks, controls, and manipulates his teenage victim/lover while his actions are depicted as an expression of devotion and timeless love. I am looking at you, Edward Cullen (Robert Pattinson).⁵⁹ Given the recent discussion of power imbalances in relationships, these dynamics should be reevaluated. Despite this, the fact that Eli appears to be frozen in the mentality of a child makes the age difference between Oskar less clear-cut.

My students are right that *Let the Right One In* is ultimately a dark and tragic trans romance. At the film's beginning, Eli is living with a middle-aged man, Håkan, who appears to be her father, but is in fact her familiar. When Håkan fails in one of his attempts to procure a victim, he dumps concentrated acid over his face to prevent the authorities from identifying him. Eli visits him in the hospital, feeds off him, and he falls to his death. As my student said, Håkan's death hints at Oskar's possible future; "he will probably end like Håkan" while Eli will "physically stay 12."⁶⁰ The portrayal of Eli and Håkan's relationship is a poignant reminder of the unsettling aspects of love and survival, leaving viewers contemplating their intertwined fates.

Get Out, Liberal Racism, and Race in the Classroom

In addition to discussions of gender and gender identities in horror films, the final issue that my classes explore is the depiction of race in horror films. While African Americans are significant consumers of horror films, they have not always been well represented in the genre. Before the 1970s, George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) was one of the only horror films with a Black protagonist. The rise of exploitation films and the influence of the Black Power movement opened a new space for more Black characters and Black creators to make horror films, including *Blacula* (1972), *Ganja & Hess* (1973), *Sugar Hill* (1974), and *J. D.'s Revenge* (1976),⁶¹ although this space largely closed by the 1980s. In the last five years, there has been a growth in Black horror films driven by a new generation of Black filmmakers.

Given Jordan Peele's role in bringing creative Black voices to the horror genre, it is difficult not to include one of his films on my syllabus, despite my effort to focus on recent work by female filmmakers. The last time I taught "Gender and Horror," I had a difficult time deciding whether to prioritize a Black female filmmaker or Jordan Peele's contribution to the genre, so I gave students the option of writing their discussion post on either Nia DaCosta's *Candyman* (2021) or Peele's *Get Out* (2017).⁶² Despite my indecision, together, these films are good companion pieces for looking at different aspects of the Black experience in America, with *Get Out* tackling interpersonal racism, while *Candyman* focuses on systemic violence and community trauma. Next time I teach the course, I plan to cut a film from Module 1 and include both. For this article, I will focus on *Get Out*.

In *Get Out*, Chris Washington (Daniel Kaluuya) is a Black photographer from Brooklyn who visits his the family of his white girlfriend, Rose Armitage (Allison Williams), in upstate New York. Upon arriving at their house, the family is welcoming, but there is something off-putting about them, their Black servants, and their white friends. In a twist reminiscent of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956),⁶³ Chris discovers that the Armitage family is abducting Black men (and women) so that Rose's father, Dean Armitage (Bradley Whitford), can transfer the consciousnesses of their older white friends into young Black bodies.

Where *Rosemary's Baby* showed how horror films could be used to critique women's lack of bodily autonomy, *Get Out* uses the horror genre to comment on race in the United States by showing how casual racism operates in white spaces or, as one of my students stated, "the scary comes from white people getting away with bad s—."⁶⁴ During a garden party with the Armitages' rich white friends, the partygoers touch Chris repeatedly and objectify him, trotting out stereotypes about Black men's athletic abilities and sexual prowess. These seemingly "well-intentioned" white people are evaluating him as merchandise to decide whether they want to bid on his body. As Aja Romano argued, the film portrays the "partygoers' 'benevolent' racism as what it actually is: a cover for a system of dehumanization" that Black men are subjected to.⁶⁵ In this way, *Get Out* masterfully uses the horror genre to expose and critique the insidious nature of racial microaggressions and

systemic dehumanization, challenging viewers to confront and dismantle ingrained racial biases.

Of all the subjects connected to questions of social justice, issues of race and racism may be the most difficult to teach in the current political environment. While one should never downplay the danger of current rhetoric around trans, gender non-conforming, and queer people or the violence faced by trans people, especially trans women of color,⁶⁶ thus far, it seems to have had less impact on students' attitudes about sex and gender in my classroom.⁶⁷ This contrasts with teaching about race. Growing up in a state seeped in neo-Confederate ideology, many white students are reluctant to discuss race. The rhetoric pushed by conservative politicians and news outlets has made discussions even more polarized. Students in discussion forums have argued that historians are pushing "biased or altered versions of history" and that the 1619 Project teaches history that is "obviously a fabrication to promote hatred and division of the American people."⁶⁸ Despite these challenges, addressing race remains crucial in the classroom.

The fact that *Get Out* asks the viewer to confront ingrained racial biases is one of the reasons that it is a powerful teaching tool. As Ibram Kendi argued, "The only way to undo racism is to consistently identify it, describe it, and then dismantle it."⁶⁹ Echoing this sentiment, one of my students remarked, "We need to see, so that we can change reality. Because there is reality in these films, and it is heartbreaking."⁷⁰ Beyond merely identifying microaggressions, the film prompts viewers to examine how their actions may dehumanize others and encourages them to strive for better. Jordan Peele articulated this point in an interview, stating, "There are still a lot of people who think, 'We don't have a racist bone in our bodies.' We must confront the racism within ourselves."⁷¹ In this way, *Get Out* serves not only as a catalyst for recognizing and confronting racism, but also as a powerful tool for fostering self-reflection and promoting collective change in the classroom.

As a relatively recent film, it can be difficult for students to evaluate how the film was a product of a particular cultural moment in the United States. Peele has been helpful in this regard since he has spoken extensively about the film's production. When he wrote the film, it had a different ending in which Chris kills Rose and is arrested for her murder. In the film's final scene, we see him in

prison, with the implication that the system is stacked against him as a young Black man. In the director's commentary, Peele explained that he wrote the film during the Obama era, when we lived what he called a "post-racial lie." However, by the time he shot the film, the conversation around race had shifted in the United States due to several high-profile shootings of Black men and boys,⁷² and Peele felt like the film needed a more uplifting ending and a hero. Hence, Chris's friend Rod (Lil Rel Howery) rescues him.⁷³ In my lecture, I show students the alternate ending with the director's commentary and emphasize how political movements, like Black Lives Matter, can bring about significant cultural changes, even over a relatively short period, and are reflected in films and other cultural artifacts.⁷⁴

Along with watching *Get Out*, my students revisit Laura Mulvey's argument about the male gaze in film by reading bell hooks's essay, "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators."⁷⁵ In this essay, hooks argues that Black women have a critical, resistant viewing stance developed in response to their marginalization and misrepresentation in mainstream media. During the discussion, a student emphasized the importance of reading feminists of color in courses on gender, stating that hooks "really made me rethink everything I've felt and read about feminism, especially in film,"⁷⁶ reiterating hooks's point that "Many feminist film critics continue to structure their discourse as though it speaks about 'women' when actuality it speaks only about white women."⁷⁷ Incorporating hooks's perspective alongside more traditional white feminist film theory enriches our understanding of gender representation in film, highlighting the need for intersectional approaches in feminist scholarship.

Conclusion

While I do not have the space to discuss all the films on my syllabus in this article, my "Gender and Horror" course ends by looking at the influence of recent debates about misogyny, male entitlement, and the objectification of women with the film *Fresh* (2022), directed by Mimi Cave. In the movie, Noa (Daisy Edgar-Jones) meets the charming Steve (Sebastian Stan) at a grocery store and begins dating him. A fun weekend getaway turns into a nightmare when Noa is drugged and held captive, learning that Steve and his wealthy male clients have appalling appetites. *Fresh*,

along with *Promising Young Woman* (2020) and *Barbarian* (2022), has been one the best films to tackle issues raised by the #MeToo movement, looking at how society victimizes women and fails to hold men accountable. As we learned from the recent conviction of Danny Masterson and accusations against Johnny Depp, the monsters in our society do not come with a mask and machete; cute, charming, and successful men can be predators. The “good guys” are the true villains of the post-#MeToo horror film.

Introducing my students to the classic and new villains of the horror genre has been immensely rewarding. It has allowed me to expose my students to some of the foundational texts of feminist film theory, including the work of Laura Mulvey, Carol Clover, Barbara Creed, and bell hooks. When I ask students to read film critic Robin Wood and contemplate how the gender norms of Reagan’s America are reflected in 1980s slashers like *Friday the 13th* (1980) or consider how slogans like “Girl Power” that originated in Riot Grrl movement went mainstream with films like *Scream* (1996),⁷⁸ my students do the work of evaluating films as specific historical artifacts that reflect and, at times, subvert the norms of the period in which they were created. Finally, I use gender and horror to bring social justice pedagogies into the classroom.

Teaching gender and horror is part of my overall approach to teaching. Many of us consider the best ways to engage students in humanities, reflecting concerns over enrollment. Almost all humanities have seen a decline in majors over the last decade. History has been particularly hard hit by these diminishing numbers, with the number of bachelor’s degrees awarded declining by seven percent yearly between 2012 and 2018.⁷⁹ The emphasis on STEM education has driven part of this. As educators in history, we must find new and creative ways to attract students to our programs. Despite this nationwide downturn in the humanities, our history program has managed to maintain consistent numbers in both our undergraduate and graduate programs, regardless of falling enrollment in the university overall. Part of our department’s success has been our emphasis on teaching and offering creative and engaging courses that speak to our students’ interests.

Notes

1. George A. Romero, as quoted in Scott Eric Hamilton and Conor Heffernan, eds., *Theorising the Contemporary Zombie: Contextual Pasts, Presents, and Futures* (Cardiff, United Kingdom: University of Wales Press, 2022), 7.
2. I would like to thank Dr. David Baylis, who inspired me to write this article and suggested the title.
3. *Dawn of the Dead*, directed by George Romero (Laurel Group, 1978).
4. *Dawn of the Dead*, directed by George Romero.
5. Stephen Harper, "Zombies, Malls, and the Consumerism Debate: George Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*," *Americana: The Journal of American Popular Culture* 1, no. 2 (Fall 2002); Elliott Stein, "The Dead Zone," *The Village Voice*, January 7, 2003, <<https://www.villagevoice.com/2003/01/07/the-dead-zones/>>; A. Loudermilk, "Eating 'Dawn' in the Dark: Zombie Desire and Commodified Identity in George A. Romero's 'Dawn of the Dead,'" *Journal of Consumer Culture* 3, no. 1 (March 2003): 83-108; K. William Bishop, "The Idle Proletariat: *Dawn of the Dead*, Consumer Ideology, and the Loss of Productive Labor," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 43, no. 2 (April 2010): 234-248; Matthew Bailey, "Memory, Place and the Mall: George Romero on Consumerism," *Studies in Popular Culture* 35, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 95-110.
6. Ray Suarez, *The Old Neighborhood: What We Lost in the Great Suburban Migration, 1966-1999* (New York: The Free Press, 1999), 59.
7. Katharine Hall, "Martial Politics, MOVE and the Racial Violence of Policing," *Politics* 44, no. 4 (September 2021): 621-633.
8. *Night of the Living Dead*, directed by George Romero (Image Ten, 1968).
9. Joe Kane, *Night of the Living Dead: Behind the Scenes of the Most Terrifying Zombie Movie Ever* (New York: Citadel Press, 2010), 32.
10. Stein, "The Dead Zone."
11. bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 1994), 7.
12. Carol J. Clover, "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film," *Representations*, no. 20 (Autumn 1987): 188.
13. Robin R. Means Coleman, *Horror Noire: Blacks in American Horror Films from the 1890s to Present* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 9.
14. Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (Moscow, Russia: Progress Publishers, 1972), 245-246.
15. Even in a course on gender and horror, women directed only five films on my syllabus, and all were released after 2008. This is because the film industry remains overwhelmingly male dominated. Of the top 100 highest-grossing films of 2022, women directed five films. No films directed by women broke the top twenty-five. Of these five films, two were directed by Black women. The exception in 2023 has been the critical and commercial success of *Barbie*. For more information, see Kim Elsesser, "Women Still Underrepresented Behind the Camera Of Box Office Hits, New Report Shows," *Forbes*, January 4, 2023, <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/kimelsesser/2023/01/04/percent-of-women-behind-the-scenes-of-top-films-declined-in-2022-according-to-new-study/>>.

16. Major directors who got their start in horror films include Kathryn Bigelow, Peter Jackson, Sam Raimi, Guillermo Del Toro, and David Lynch.

17. *Get Out*, directed by Jordan Peele (Monkeypaw Productions, 2017).

18. *Nope*, directed by Jordan Peele (Monkeypaw Productions, 2022); *Us*, directed by Jordan Peele (Monkeypaw Productions, 2019).

19. *Candyman* was the first film directed by a Black woman to open at number one at the box office. For more information, see Sonia Rao, "With 'Candyman,' Nia DaCosta becomes the First Black Female Director to Debut a Film at No. 1," *The Washington Post*, August 30, 2021, <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/arts-entertainment/2021/08/30/nia-dacosta-candyman-box-office/>>.

20. Sarah Schwartz, "Map: Where Critical Race Theory Is Under Attack," *Education Week*, June 11, 2021, <<https://www.edweek.org/leadership/map-where-critical-race-theory-is-under-attack/2021/06>>.

21. State of Arkansas Executive Department, "Executive Order 23-05 to Prohibit the Indoctrination and Critical Race Theory in Schools," January 10, 2023, <<https://governor.arkansas.gov/wp-content/uploads/EO-23-05-Prohibit-Indoctrination.pdf>>; Austin Gelder, "Arkansas Education Department Nixes AP African American Studies Course at Last Minute," *Arkansas Times*, August 12, 2023, <<https://arktimes.com/arkansas-blog/2023/08/12/arkansas-education-department-nixes-ap-african-american-studies-course-at-last-minute>>.

22. Though it often receives less media attention than more populous states, Arkansas has also been at the forefront of attempts to criminalize the lives of gender minorities. In 2021, Arkansas became the first state to ban gender-affirming care, including puberty blockers, hormones, and medical procedures for trans youth under 18. A judge struck down the bill in 2023. Since taking office, Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders signed a series of bills targeting transgender individuals and those who are gender non-conforming in the state, including an attempt to reinstate the ban on gender-affirming care by making it easier to file malpractice suits against doctors who provide this care to minors and restricting access to bathrooms and other gender-restricted spaces. For more information, see Madeleine Carlisle, "Trial Begins Over Arkansas Ban on Gender-Affirming Care for Trans Youth," *Time*, October 17, 2022, <<https://time.com/6222222/arkansas-gender-affirming-care-trial/>>; Shawna Mizelle and Devon M. Sayers, "Arkansas Governor Signs Bill that Restricts Transgender Students' Bathroom Use in Schools," CNN, March 22, 2023.

23. *Psycho*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock (Paramount Pictures, 1960).

24. *Jennifer's Body*, directed by Karyn Kusama (20th Century Studios, 2009); *The Babadook*, directed by Jennifer Kent (Umbrella Entertainment, 2014); *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night*, directed by Ana Lily Amirpour (Kino Lorber and Vice Media, 2014); *Candyman*, directed by Nia DaCosta (Monkeypaw Productions, 2021); *Fresh*, directed by Mimi Cave (Legendary Pictures and Hyperobject Industries, 2022).

25. *Get Out*, directed by Jordan Peele.

26. Victoria L. Dickman-Burnett and Maribeth Geaman, "Untangling the Trigger-Warning Debate: Curating a Complete Toolkit for Compassionate Praxis in the Classroom," *Journal of Thought* 53, no. 3-4 (Fall/Winter 2019): 35-52; Kidada E.

Williams, "Trauma and Trigger Warnings in the History Classroom: A Roundtable Discussion," *The American Historian*, May 2015, <<https://www.oah.org/tah/may/trauma-and-trigger-warnings-in-the-history-classroom/>>.

27. There have been numerous accusations against Alfred Hitchcock for inappropriate sexual advances, sexual harassment, and groping. For more information, see Brent Lang, "Tippi Hedren Recounts What Happened When She Turned Down Alfred Hitchcock's Advances," *Variety*, December 13, 2017, <<https://variety.com/2017/film/news/tippi-hedren-alfred-hitchcock-the-birds-sexual-harassment-1202637959/>>.

28. Constance Grady, "What Do We Do When the Art We Love Was Created by a Monster?" *Vox*, June 25, 2019, <<https://www.vox.com/culture/2018/10/11/17933686/me-too-separating-artist-art-johnny-depp-woody-allen-michael-jackson-louis-ck>>.

29. HIST 4390 Student, "RE: Rosemary's Baby Discussion Post," discussion post for "HIST 4390: Gender and Horror," University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Little Rock, AR, August 30, 2023. Students' names have been redacted to protect their privacy and comply with student privacy laws such as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

30. HIST 4390 Student, "RE: Rosemary's Baby Discussion Post," discussion post for "HIST 4390: Gender and Horror," University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Little Rock, AR, August 30, 2023.

31. Roman Polanski has openly claimed that the use of birth control pills "masculinize" women and that seeking equality between the sexes is idiotic. For more information, see Abby Ohlheiser, "Roman Polanski Thinks the Birth Control Pill 'Masculinized' Women," *The Atlantic*, May 26, 2013, <<https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2013/05/roman-polanski-thinks-birth-control-pill-masculinized-women/314878/>>.

32. HIST 4390 Student, "the exorcist," discussion post for "HIST 4390: Gender and Horror," University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Little Rock, AR, September 15, 2023.

33. *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, directed by Tobe Hooper (Vortex, Inc., 1974); *The Exorcist*, directed by William Friedkin (Hoya Productions, 1973).

34. *Alien*, directed by Ridley Scott (20th Century-Fox, 1979).

35. The detail that Lambert is a transgender woman only appears in *Aliens* (1986), the sequel to *Alien*. Though played by a cisgender actor, this makes her one of the first transgender characters in a science fiction film.

36. *Rosemary's Baby*, directed by Roman Polanski (William Castle Productions, 1968); *Let the Right One In*, directed by Tomas Alfredson (EFTI, 2008); *Get Out*, directed by Jordan Peele.

37. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, eds., *Woman, Culture, and Society* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974), 7-8.

38. Forcing a woman (or man) to carry an unwanted pregnancy is found in several other horror films, including *Demon Seed* (1977), *The Brood* (1979), *The Fly* (1986), *False Positive* (2021), and *Immaculate* (2024). For more information, see Erin Harrington, *Women, Monstrosity and Horror Film: Gynaehorror* (Abingon, United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis, 2017).

39. HIST 4390 Student, e-mail message to Katrina Yeaw, September 2, 2023.
40. *Rosemary's Baby*, directed by Roman Polanski.
41. The principle that marriage is blanket consent that a wife cannot withdraw was taken from the writing of the seventeenth-century English jurist Lord Matthew Hale. Hale received increased attention after he was cited in the majority opinion in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022), which overturned *Roe v. Wade* (1973). For more information, see Amanda Taub, "The 17th-Century Judge at the Heart of Today's Women's Rights Rulings," *The New York Times*, May 19, 2022, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/19/world/asia/abortion-lord-matthew-hale.html>>.
42. Constance Grady, "Roman Polanski is Now Facing a 5th Accusation of Sexual Assault Against a Child," *Vox*, October 23, 2017, <<https://www.vox.com/culture/2017/8/17/16156902/roman-polanski-child-rape-charges-explained-samantha-geimer-robin-m>>.
43. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 6-18.
44. *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, directed by Tobe Hooper; *Halloween*, directed by John Carpenter (Compass International Pictures, 1978); *Jennifer's Body*, directed by Karyn Kusama.
45. Alfredson made one alteration to the title. For the film, he changed "right" from the masculine form to the feminine form in the title, pointing to Eli's feminine identity. For more information, see Fae Basir, "Oskar Loves Eli: *Let the Right One In* and Trans Romance," *Fangoria*, December 8, 2022, <<https://www.fangoria.com/original/oskar-loves-eli-let-the-right-one-in-and-trans-romance/>>.
46. I choose to use she/her pronouns for Eli, though they/them would also be appropriate. They/them pronouns are generally preferred by my students.
47. By depicting Eli as a transgender child, Tomas Alfredson corrected an issue with the original source material. In the novel, Eli is depicted as a castrated boy rather than a trans girl. Once this detail is revealed, the pronouns for Eli switch from feminine to masculine in the narrative, and the novel deadnames Eli by using their birthname "Elias."
48. *Let the Right One In*, directed by Tomas Alfredson.
49. Andrea Weiss, "The Lesbian Vampire Film: A Subgenre of Horror," in *Dracula's Daughters: The Female Vampire on Film*, ed. Douglas Brode and Leah Deyneka (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2014), 22.
50. Until recently, queer creators and women were rarely involved in producing these films; it has been debated whether these films exploit sapphic themes in hopes of seeming transgressive or purely for titillation. Ellis Hanson challenged this reading of lesbian vampire films, arguing that "lesbian desire" in these films does not reinforce patriarchal ideals. Instead, it "functions as a destabilizing, even derailing, force in the paranoid narrative that seeks to demonize and contain it." For more information, see Ellis Hanson, "Lesbians Who Bite: Abjection as Masquerade," in *Out Takes: Essays on Queer Theory and Film*, ed. Ellis Hanson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 184.
51. The other foreign-language film is the Persian-language vampire Western, *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* (2014), directed by Ana Lily Amirpour.

52. Elana Redfield, Kerith J. Conron, Will Tentindo, and Erica Browning, "Prohibiting Gender-Affirming Medical Care for Youth," UCLA School of Law, Williams Institutes, March 2023, <<https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/bans-trans-youth-health-care/>>.

53. Scott Skinner-Thompson, "Donald Trump's Executive Orders Aim to Create Jim Crow for Trans People," *Slate*, February 3, 2025, <<https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2025/02/donald-trump-anti-trans-executive-orders-jim-crow.html>>.

54. Weiss, "The Lesbian Vampire Film," 22.

55. Two of the most prominent examples are Norman Bates's (Anthony Perkins) cross-dressing in *Psycho* (1960) and trans-coded, but misgendered, serial killer Jame "Buffalo Bill" Gumb (Ted Levine) in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991).

56. S. Trimble, "A Demon-Girl's Guide to Life," in *It Came from the Closet: Queer Reflections on Horror*, ed. Joe Vallese (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2022), 13.

57. Anna Leszkiewicz, "The Casting of Chloë Moretz in I Love You, Daddy Fetishises a Female that Doesn't Exist," *The New Statesman*, October 20, 2017, <<https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/film/2017/10/louis-ck-chloe-moretz-i-love-you-daddy-sexist-stereotypes>>.

58. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, created by Joss Whedon (aired on WB and UPN, 1997-2023); *The Vampire Diaries*, created by Kevin Williamson and Julie Plec (aired on The CW, 2009-2017); *The Twilight Saga*, directed by Catherine Hardwicke, Bill Condon, David Slade, and Chris Weitz (Summit Entertainment, 2008-2012).

59. *The Twilight Saga*, directed by Catherine Hardwicke, Bill Condon, David Slade, and Chris Weitz.

60. HIST 4390 Student, "Re: discussion nine," discussion post for "HIST 4390: Gender and Horror," University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Little Rock, AR, October 27, 2023.

61. *Blacula*, directed by William Crain (American International Pictures, 1972); *Ganja & Hess*, directed by Bill Dunn (Kelly-Jordan Enterprises, 1973); *Sugar Hill*, directed by Paul Maslansky (American International Pictures, 1974); *J. D. 's Revenge*, directed by Arthur Marks (American International Pictures, 1976).

62. *Get Out*, directed by Jordan Peele; *Candyman*, directed by Nia DaCosta.

63. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, directed by Don Siegel (Allied Artists Pictures, 1956).

64. See Aja Romano, "How *Get Out* Deconstructs Racism for White People," *Vox*, March 7, 2017, <<https://www.vox.com/culture/2017/3/7/14759756/get-out-benevolent-racism-white-feminism>>; Jason Zinoman, "Jordan Peele on a Truly Terrifying Monster: Racism," *The New York Times*, February 16, 2017, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/16/movies/jordan-peelee-interview-get-out.html>>.

65. Romano, "How *Get Out* Deconstructs Racism."

66. The Human Rights Campaign estimated that at least thirty-two transgender people were killed in the United States in 2022. There has also been a rise in white supremacists and neo-Nazis targeting LBTQA+ and drag events across the country in 2023. For more information, see Hannah Schoenbaum, "Report Says at Least 32 Transgender People were Killed in the U.S. in 2022," *PBS News*, November 16, 2022, <<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/report>>.

says-at-least-32-transgender-people-were-killed-in-the-u-s-in-2022>; Chantelle Billson, “‘White Lives Matter’ Neo-Nazi Admits Firebombing Church over Drag Queen Event, Court Told,” *PinkNews*, April 4, 2023, <<https://www.thepinknews.com/2023/04/04/ohio-church-drag-firebomb-ne-nazi/>>.

67. People under 30 are far more likely to support protections for trans individuals and oppose the banning of gender-affirming care for minors. They are also more likely to know a transgender person personally. For more information, see Kim Parker, Juliana Menasce Horowitz, and Anna Brown, “Americans’ Complex Views on Gender Identity and Transgender Issues,” Pew Research Center, June 28, 2022, <<https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2022/06/28/americans-complex-views-on-gender-identity-and-transgender-issues/>>.

68. HIST 4390 Student, “Causes of the Civil War,” discussion post for “HIST 4309: Historian’s Craft,” University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Little Rock, AR, December 1, 2022.

69. Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist* (New York: One World, 2019), 9.

70. HIST 4390 Student, “Get Out,” discussion post for “HIST 4390: Gender and Horror,” University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Little Rock, AR, November 29, 2023.

71. Jordan Peele, as quoted in Zinoman, “Jordan Peele on a Truly Terrifying Monster.”

72. While there are too many names to mention specifically, police murdered Michael Brown (2014), Tamir Rice (2014), Eric Garner (2014), Freddie Gray (2015), Philando Castile (2016), and Alton Sterling (2016) in the period around the production of this film. Say Their Names.

73. “Jordan Peele’s Commentary on Alternate Ending of *Get Out* (2017),” video, 3:31, posted by Fear: The Home of Horror, January 24, 2018, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JUMGzioWST4>>.

74. *Get Out* is a rich and layered film that allows for many interpretations. This article only touches on a few aspects of the film that my class explores. Since I have primarily taught *Get Out* in my course on gender and horror, we also discuss the construction of Black masculinity, and the role Rose plays in Chris’s dehumanization as the central white female character in the film. I have also taught *Get Out* as part of an independent study on race and horror films. This is a course that I hope to continue to develop in the future.

75. bell hooks, “The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators,” in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992), 115-131.

76. HIST 4390 Student, “Get Out,” discussion post for “HIST 4390: Gender and Horror,” University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Little Rock, AR, November 29, 2023.

77. hooks, “The Oppositional Gaze,” 123.

78. *Friday the 13th*, directed by Sean S. Cunningham (Paramount Pictures, 1980); *Scream*, directed by Wes Craven (Dimension Films, 1996).

79. Robert B. Townsend, “Has the Decline in History Majors Hit Bottom?” *Perspectives on History*, February 23, 2021, <<https://www.historians.org/perspectives-article/has-the-decline-in-history-majors-hit-bottom-data-from-2018-19-show-lowest-number-since-1980-march-2021/>>.

Appendix A: “Gender and Horror” Class Schedule for Fall 2023

Module 1: The Classics of Modern Horror and Feminist Criticism

Week 1: The Birth of Modern Horror

Lecture 1: *Psycho* and the Birth of Modern Horror (Note: I discuss sexual assault)

Film:

Psycho (1960)

Reading:

Smelik, Anneke. 2007. “Feminist Film Theory.” In *The Film Book*. Edited by Pam Cook. London: British Film Institute, 491-585.

Optional Readings:

Modleski Tania. 2016. *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory*. 3rd ed. New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 1-14.

Williams, Linda. 2004. “Discipline and Fun: Psycho and Postmodern Cinema.” In *Alfred Hitchcock’s Psycho: A Casebook*. Edited by Robert Kolker. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 164-204.

Week 2: The Demon Seed

Lecture 2: The Demon Seed (Note: I discuss sexual assault)

Film:

Rosemary’s Baby (1968)

Reading:

Mulvey, L. 1975. “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” *Screen* 16.3: 6-18.

Week 3: The Undead

Lecture 3: Gender and the Undead

Film:

Night of the Living Dead (1968)

Optional Films:

Dawn of the Dead (1978)

Day of the Dead (1985)

Videos:

Zarka, Emily. 2020. "The Origins of the Zombie, from Haiti to the U.S." *Monstrum*. PBS. October 16. <https://www.pbs.org/video/the-origins-of-the-zombie-from-haiti-to-the-us-kywe4q/>

Zarka, Emily. 2020. "Why George Romero Changed Zombies Forever." *Monstrum*. PBS. October 16. <https://www.pbs.org/video/why-george-romero-changed-zombies-forever-cuymr0/>

Reading:

Wood, Robin. 1978. "Return of the Repressed." *Film Comment* 14.4 (July): 25-32, 80. <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/uair.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/return-repressed/docview/210234247/se-2>.

Optional Reading:

Grant, Barry Keith. 2017. "Taking Back the Night of the Living Dead: George Romero, Feminism, and the Horror Film." In *Zombie Theory: A Reader*. Edited by Sarah Juliet Lauro. Saint Paul: University of Minnesota Press, 212-222.

****Please submit your genre and the 4-5 movies you will use for your genre analysis assignment on Blackboard under the assignment folder by Friday, September 8, at 11:59 PM.***

Week 4: Satanism and Possession

Lecture 4: Satanism and Possession

Film:

The Exorcist (1973)

Optional Film:

The Omen (1976)

Reading:

Clover, Carol J. 1992. "Opening Up." In *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film - Updated Edition*. Revised. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 65-113.

Optional Readings:

Creed, Barbara. 1986. "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection." *Screen* 27.1 (January/February): 44-71. [This reading is assigned in Week 6.]

Trimble, S. 2022. "A Demon-Girl's Guide to Life." In *It Came from the Closet: Queer Reflections on Horror*. Edited by Joe Vallese. New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 12-16.

Week 5: The Proto-Slasher

Lecture 5: The Proto-Slasher (Note: I briefly discuss the crimes of American serial killer Dean Corll)

Film:

The Texas Chain Saw Massacre (1974)

Reading:

No new required reading this week. I would suggest reviewing Wood's "Return of the Repressed."

Optional Reading:

Clover, Carol J. 1987. "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film." *Representations*, no. 20: 187-228. [This article will be required reading in Week 7.]

Week 6: The Monstrous-Feminine

Lecture 6: The Monstrous-Feminine (Note: I discuss sexual assault)

Film:

Alien (1979)

Reading:

Creed, Barbara. 1986. "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection." *Screen* 27.1 (January/February): 44-71.

Optional Readings:

Review Carol Clover's argument about *Alien* in "Opening Up." In *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*, 65-113.

Jones, Tim. 2017. "Alien Violation: Male Bodily Integrity in an Equal Opportunity Rape Culture." In *Alien and Philosophy*. Edited by William Irwin, Kevin S. Decker, and Jeffrey A. Ewing. Wiley-Blackwell, 178-185.

Week 7: The Final Girl

Lecture 7: The Final Girl

Films:

Halloween (1978)

Sign up for a second slasher movie.

Reading:

Clover, Carol J. 1987. "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film." *Representations*, no. 20: 187-228.

Optional Reading:

Wood, Robin. 2003. "Horror in the 1980s." In *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan—and Beyond*. Expanded and Rev. Ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 168-180.

Optional Videos:

Schonig, Jordan. 2022. "Slasher Horror and Film Form: Killer POV and the Jump Scare." Film & Media Studies. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JUMGzioWST4>

The Movies That Made Us. 2021. Season 3, Episode 1, "Halloween." Directed by Brian Volks-Weiss. Aired on October 12 on Netflix.

Module 2: Rethinking the Classic, Gendered Tropes of Horror

Week 8: Meta

Lecture 8: Meta (Note: I discuss police brutality)

Film:

Scream (1996)

Optional Film:

Scream 2 (1996)

Reading:

West, Alexandra. 2018. *The 1990s Teen Horror Cycle: Final Girls and a New Hollywood Formula*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company Inc, 3-12, 63-81.

Optional Reading:

Karlyn, Kathleen Rowe. 2009. "Scream, Popular Culture, and Feminism's Third Wave." In *Motherhood Misconceived: Representing the Maternal in US Films*. Edited by Heather Addison. Albany: State University New York Press, 177-198.

***Assignment 1: Genre Analysis due Sunday, October 15 at 11:59 PM**

Week 9: Stay out of the Forest (Optional)

Lecture 9: Stay out of the Forest

Week 9 will be a Reading Week. It is an opportunity to catch your breath and start thinking about your final project. If you missed a week of discussion or could have done better, you can complete Week 9.

Film:

The Descent (2005) (British)

Reading:

Marriott, James. 2021. *The Descent*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 9-16, 61-72.

Week 10: Queer Horror and Vampirism (Gender and Sexual Minorities)

Lecture 10: Queer Horror and Vampirism

Films:

Let The Right One In (2008) (Swedish)
Sign up for a second lesbian vampire film.

Reading:

Andrea, Weiss. 2014. "The Lesbian Vampire Film: A Subgenre of Horror." In *Dracula's Daughters: The Female Vampire on Film*. Edited by Brode Douglas and Leah Deyneka. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 21-36.

Optional Reading:

Hanson, Ellis. 2012. "Lesbians Who Bite: Abjection as Masquerade." In *Out Takes: Essays on Queer Theory and Film*. Edited by Ellis Hanson. Durham: Duke University Press, 183-222.

*Several of the films from the 1970s are exploitation films. If you would rather avoid sex or nudity, I suggest avoiding that decade's films. *Dracula's Daughter* (1936) is also a safe choice.

Week 11: Revenge

Lecture 11: Revenge

Film:

Jennifer's Body (2009) [Watch until the end of the credits]

Optional Film:

Promising Young Woman (2020) [Note: This film deals with sexual assault]

Reading:

Grady, Constance. 2018. "How Jennifer's Body went from a flop in 2009 to a feminist cult classic today." *Vox*. Oct 31. <https://www.vox.com/culture/2018/10/31/18037996/jennifers-body-flop-cult-classic-feminist-horror>

Optional Readings:

Grady, Constance. 2021. "The bubblegum misogyny of 2000s pop culture." *Vox*. May 25. <https://www.vox.com/culture/22350286/2000s-pop-culture-misogyny-britney-spears-janet-jackson-whitney-houston-monica-lewinsky>

Machado, Carmen Maria. 2022. "Both Ways." In *It Came from the Closet: Queer Reflections on Horror*. Edited by Joe Vallese. New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 17-20.

***Gender Analysis Rewrite due November 5 at 11:59 PM**

Module 3: Gender and ‘Prestige Horror’ of the 2010s**Week 12: Motherhood**

Lecture 12: Motherhood

Film:

The Babadook (2014)

Optional Film:

Hereditary (2018)

Reading:

Drake, Grae. 2018. “*The Babadook*.” In *The Female Gaze: Essential Movies Made by Women*. Edited by Alicia Malone. Coral Gables: Mango, 232-242.

Optional Reading:

Barton, Micheala. 2019. “I am Your Mother! Exploring the Maternal Sub-Genre of Horror.” *Screen Queens*. October 7. <https://screen-queens.com/2019/10/07/i-am-your-mother-exploring-the-maternal-sub-genre-of-horror/>

****Assignment 2: Film Analysis Outline due Sunday, November 12 at 11:59 PM***

Week 13: The Universal and the Particular

Lecture 13: The Universal and the Particular

Films:

A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night (2014)

Guillermo del Toro’s *Cabinet of Curiosities*. 2002. Season 3, Episode 1, “The Outside.” Directed by Ana Lily Amirpour. Aired on October 26 on Netflix.

Reading:

Decker, Lindsey. 2020. “The Transnational Gaze in *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night*.” In *Women Make Horror: Filmmaking, Feminism, Genre*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 170-182.

Week 14: Race and Gender

Lecture 15: Race and Gender

Film:

Get Out (2017)

or

Candyman (2021)

Reading:

hooks, b. 1992. "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators." In *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Boston: South End Press, 115-131.

Optional Readings:

Sobande, Francesca. 2019. "Dissecting Depictions of Black Masculinity in *Get Out*." In *Gender and Contemporary Horror in Film*. United Kingdom: Emerald Publishing Limited.

"Candyman: The Official Companion Guide." 2021. Langston League. https://dx35vtwklhj9.cloudfront.net/universalstudios/candyman-social-impact/syllabus/Candyman_TheOfficialCompanionGuide_Final.pdf

Module 4: Horror in the post-#MeToo Era

Week 15: Male Entitlement

Lecture 15: Male Entitlement

Film:

Fresh (2022)

Optional Film:

Barbarian (2022)

Reading:

Lord, Annie. 2020. "'Torture the Women!': How Horror's Final Girls are Turning the Tables on Misogyny." *The Independent*. March 10. <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/features/invisible-man-horror-movie-midsommar-witch-final-girls-hitchcock-a9390356.html>

Optional Readings:

Cheung, Kylie. 2022. "Sexist Disbelief Is Taking Over the Horror Genre." *Jezebel*. October 10. <https://jezebel.com/sexist-disbelief-is-taking-over-the-horror-genre-1849608771>

Rao, Telaj. 2022. "From 'The Menu' to 'Fresh,' Movies Are Exploring the Horrors of Rich-People Food." *The New York Times*. November 22. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/22/dining/the-menu-fine-dining.html>

****Final Assignment: Film Analysis or Research Project due December 11 at 11:59 PM***

Appendix B: Discussion Rubric

<div> <div>Name</div> <div>Discussion Rubric</div> </div>				
<div> <div>Description</div> <div>This rubric is used to grade weekly discussion postings, worth 5 points per week. Make sure to check in several times during the week and to respond to others' posts.</div> </div>				
<div> <div>Rubric Detail</div> </div>				
<div> <div>Levels of Achievement</div> </div>				
<div>Criteria</div>	<div>Need Improvement</div>	<div>Basic</div>	<div>Good</div>	<div>Outstanding</div>
<div>Mechanics</div>	<div>0 Points</div> <div>Posting is hastily written and contains many errors, or no postings.</div>	<div>0.25 Points</div> <div>Posting(s) contain grammar and spelling errors, which interfere with clarity.</div>	<div>0.4 Points</div> <div>Postings contain few grammar and/or spelling errors, which do not detract from clarity.</div>	<div>0.5 Points</div> <div>Postings contain no grammar or spelling errors.</div>
<div>Number/Length of Postings</div>	<div>0 Points</div> <div>No discussion posting for the week.</div>	<div>0.5 Points</div> <div>One discussion posting, or more than one, but very brief, and/or posted at deadline.</div>	<div>1 Points</div> <div>Three adequate discussion postings, or more than two brief postings, or discussions posted at deadline.</div>	<div>1.5 Points</div> <div>Four or more substantive discussion postings posted in a timely manner.</div>
<div>Connection to Film and Readings</div>	<div>0 Points</div> <div>No evidence that student has completed film. The posts lack citations.</div>	<div>0.5 Points</div> <div>There is little evidence that the student has completed film or readings. Some attempt is made to cite the film or readings.</div>	<div>1 Points</div> <div>Postings refer to some of the assigned materials, but may not engage with the major themes of the film, or address all of the readings. The film and readings are cited correctly.</div>	<div>1.5 Points</div> <div>Postings engage with the film in a sophisticated manner. Postings bring in secondary sources to support the analysis and cite materials correctly.</div>
<div>Critical Thinking & Interaction</div>	<div>0 Points</div> <div>Posting does not address questions.</div>	<div>0.5 Points</div> <div>Posting does not fully address questions and does not engage with other students' posts.</div>	<div>1 Points</div> <div>Postings address most of the questions, or all, but without much depth. Some engagement with other students' postings. Posting may be repetitive.</div>	<div>1.5 Points</div> <div>Postings thoroughly address all questions and engage thoughtfully with other students.</div>