

**CFP: CULTURE WARS AND HORROR MOVIES:
SOCIAL FEARS AND IDEOLOGY IN CONTEMPORARY
CINEMA**

(edited volume cfp)

When Jordan Peele's *Get Out* made its big screen debut in 2010, it was met with instant, widespread praise among worldwide audiences for its creative blending of horror conventions and social commentary. As part of the horror film trend known as "social horror" (Heba, 1995; Kronja, 2016), *Get Out* championed the filmic representation of sociopolitical ideologies in the United States at a time when horror codes and sociocultural issues acquired recognized critical distinction. Parallel to current divisive sociopolitical disagreement, contemporary horror movies are emerging as a reproduction of what dominates popular culture and the current political framework: culture wars.

In the 2010 book, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*, M. Fiorina, J. Abrams and J. Pope turned the spotlight on commonly believed myths about American sociopolitical reality, claiming that Western civilization and, specifically, the United States are deeply divided in their fundamental political views. Confrontations between social conservative and progressive forces in American society, described as "culture wars" by sociologist James D. Hunter (1991), are as much a reality today as they were in the past. Beginning in the 1960s, the United States has experienced a partisan conflict over cultural issues such as gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, religion, immigration and ecology which is actively exported as a model to other cultural spheres, such as contemporary cinema. According to theses on the present-day existence of culture wars, salient battles have led contemporary cinema to characterize these issues as "new fronts in the culture war" (Castle 2018), thereby giving reasons to revisit the culture wars debate.

This edited volume seeks to examine recent culture wars manifestations in American popular culture, considering their impact and representation in the field of horror cinema. In many contemporary examples of the genre, these ideologically charged battles over opposing moral values and fundamental belief systems are a substantial part of the definition and development of horror films. *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) as a commentary on Cold War paranoia and racism, or *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), as an allegory of women's liberation, are two good examples of the penetration of social references in the genre. In this way, American horror film hinges on

cinematically constructed fears of the Other, an Otherness “both drawn from and constitutive of any given era’s cultural history” (Benshoff 2000:31). However, the changing spectrum of filmmakers, producers and other agents involved in the making of these films in the 21st century has reached a turning point pitting the “normal” (white, middle-class, heterosexual, male) vs. the “monstrous” (defined by racial, sexual, class, gender, ideological markers). In this horror film trend, the “monster”, the foregrounded “other” is rooted in historically specific cultural and social horrors, which set the stage for the ideological depiction of contemporary culture wars.

The horror genre has long been ripe for social commentary precisely because it subverts the idea of what “villainous” is, allowing us to subtly empathize with the subject we fear while exploring why we fear it (Solórzano and Yosso 2002). In other words, these marginalized subjects become narrative agents who take possession of the gaze, and whose act of looking emerges from them. Moreover, culture wars and horror cinema do not shy away from the most diverse polarized issues: from religious dilemmas, immigration, and gender violence to racism or ecological consciousness. We are not only concerned with horror genre conventions and their sociocultural references, but also with the way in which the genre appropriates a divisive, polarized society, and what results from this situation in a global context. Thus, for example, consider the way *Happy Death Day* (2017), *Antebellum* (2020) or *The Invisible Man* (2020) can be analyzed as operating in the Black Lives Matter and #MeToo context by mobilizing horror film conventions to represent polarized social views as they are experienced today.

The widespread social discontent with recent political actions has been connected to recent horror films, which can be taken to be examples of a critical framework that attempts to understand social divisions today. Therefore, we ask ourselves the following: How can we create a framework for the analysis of conflicting and divisive sociocultural representations in contemporary horror cinema? Are American horror films becoming more polarized in their representation of social values? Have movements such as #MeToo, Black Lives Matter or new narratives of slavery in film contributed to making this trend even more salient? Which conventions of the genre challenge traditional values and ideals within 21st century horror cinema? By what means are these movies taking sides on the current culture wars?

Contributors to this edited volume are invited to critically analyze the ways in which the ideology of culture wars has made its way through recent American horror cinema across different nations, topics and visual aesthetics. From indigeneity, race criticism, religion and ecology to issues such as post-feminism, gender violence, immigration, and social media as surveillance, the areas and films to be explored include but are not limited to:

- The relationship of social horror and indigeneity (*The Dead Can't Dance*, 2013; *Violet*, 2015)
- Horror articulations of the Neo-slavery and the Old South (*Get Out*, 2017; *Antebellum*, 2020)
- Gender/Genre: the culture wars in the #MeToo era (*The Perfection*, 2018; *The Invisible Man*, 2020)
- Spaces and limits of the culture wars: borders, race, ethnicity (*Planet Terror*, 2007; *Vampires vs. The Bronx*, 2020)
- Endangered society and nature: Eco-horror (*Take Shelter*, 2011; *The Incident*, 2014)
- Representations and constructions of culture wars and immigration (*Don't Breathe*, 2016; *His House*, 2020)
- Postmodern social horror: parody, pastiche, self-reflective humor (*Happy Death Day*, 2017; *Midsommar*, 2019)
- Religion, faith and the Southern Gothic: (*The Skeleton Key*, 2005; *Mother!*, 2017)
- Horror, surveillance, and social media (*Ratter*, 2015; *Spree*, 2020)
- Social horror and late capitalism (*The Purge*, 2013; *A Quiet Place*, 2018)
- The monster as a symbol of Othering vs. a figure of resistance
- The reception of social horror movies: cinematic responses to the culture wars

Works Cited

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If you are interested in proposing a chapter, please send an abstract of 400-500 words and a short biographical note including the author's academic affiliation no later than 21st March 2022 to **socialhorrorvolume@gmail.com**

Manuscripts should not have been previously published, and should not be submitted simultaneously for publication in another edited volume collection or medium.

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