



PROJECT MUSE®

Folklore/Cinema

Sharon R. Sherman, Mikel J. Koven

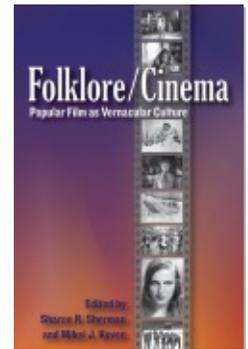
Published by Utah State University Press

Sherman, Sharon R. and Mikel J. Koven.

Folklore/Cinema: Popular Film as Vernacular Culture.

Utah State University Press, 2007.

Project MUSE.muse.jhu.edu/book/9394.



➔ For additional information about this book

<https://muse.jhu.edu/book/9394>

Access provided at 2 Apr 2020 18:17 GMT with no institutional affiliation



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Allegories of the Undead

Rites and Rituals in Tales from the Hood

CAROL E. HENDERSON

ED GUERRERO ARGUES in *Framing Blackness*, "Hollywood's unceasing efforts to frame *blackness* are constantly challenged by the cultural and political self-definitions of African Americans, who as a people have been determined since the inception of commercial cinema to militate against this limiting system of representation" (1994,3). Guerrero's comments point up the systematic continuums that create discursive battles that shape and inform national and international discussions about not only African American people's subjectivity but also their woundedness. Because of the volatile nature of race, African Americans have had to represent the brutality of their historical experiences in ways that amplify the literary, social, and oral replications of these themes expressed in America's collective memory.

In the 1995 horror film *Tales from the Hood*, director/screenwriter Rusty Cundieff reworks the textures of these traumas by eerily refashioning the cultural dynamics that shape our understanding of the bitter reality that haunts the psyches of three urbanites in the film. Of key concern in my discussion are the refigurings of folk culture that shape the dialogue in these tales and recontextualize the basis for examining the unresolved issues of racism and self-hatred embedded in the African American urban experience. As Ralph Ellison and Toni Morrison have argued elsewhere, folklore or *vernacular art* (as it is also known) is black America's legacy of self-awareness, often communicated in harsh and honest terms (O'Meally 2004, 4). The self-reflexivity of the art is its enduring quality because it functions not only as a vehicle of change but also a portal into the way the past is evaluated, remembered, and used by its contemporaries. Cundieff "conjures up" some of the remnants of this past in his film as he reconsiders the psychological and metaphysical costs of hauntings that mar the African American racial memory and prevent reconciliation in the present. In the end, these tales tell the

stories of the undead in ways that reflect the material reality of violence and ritual in the urban community.

Tales of the Undead

In reassessing the cultural and political consciousness of Cundieff's art, we may be tempted to rename the film *Tales of the Undead* because of the narrative intimacy Cundieff uses to reclaim the past—a past that is haunted, as Toni Morrison states elsewhere, by “signs, visitations, and ways of knowing that [encompass] more than concrete reality” (McKay 1983, 414). The overall approach of *Tales* reflects this twining of life in the here and hereafter, stressing, in particular, the spiritual and psychic wrangling of spirits who have died unceremoniously and remain restless. Their unsettling appearances throughout the film—some appear as dead men walking the streets of Los Angeles after an unjustifiably brutal murder by corrupt police officers; others manifest themselves as little dolls whose souls have been spirited into archeological figures painted in a mural at a former plantation—point up Cundieff's parodic riffing of ancestral reckoning and spiritual retribution.

Cundieff's film directs attention to a long line of cultural narratives that have considered the impact of death on the African American community. From the imposing phototexts of the deceased by photographer James Van Der Zee to the conjure stories of reincarnation by writer Charles Chesnutt,¹ African American artists have measured the continuous cycle of life, charting with painstaking acuity the imaginative ingenuity African Americans have used to preserve themselves, their families, and their human dignity in the face of overwhelming odds.

Still, the didactic nature of these narratives stresses the iniquitous follies of those in the African American community who, like the flying Africans, lose their wings “owing to their many transgressions...” (All God's Chillen 2004, 132). Their inability to “find their way back” to a cultural or spiritual center shapes the tenor of many of the conjurer or trickster stories intended to prick the consciousness of their listeners. The structure of *Tales* encourages this interpretation. Through a series of interfacing vignettes and subplots, the film conveys the conundrum of a group of young gang members whose insatiable appetite for a missing drug shipment leads them to the premises of Mr. Simms (Clarence Williams III), an eccentric mortician. Simms's role in the film is evident from the beginning: he is the trickster, the storyteller whose connection with the dead gives him omniscient power. While the three hold a gun to

Simms's head, he weaves his moral tales of revenge and reprisal, using the enchanted objects and twisted corpses in his mortuary.

There is the body of a rookie police officer, Clarence Smith (Anthony Griffith), whose failure to intercede on behalf of Martin Ezekiel Moorehouse (Tom Wright), a promising African American civil-rights activist, results in the beating and death of Moorehouse, who is then framed as a heroin addict by three white police officers. The sully of Moorehouse's name ensures that the press will taint his activist legacy. Yet, as this vignette makes clear, it is Clarence's job to make sure history is *rewritten*. Clarence's culpability in *allowing* Moorehouse's death to go uninvestigated creates a mental and spiritual dilemma for him. He descends into a personal hell—becoming an alcoholic and recluse. We are led to believe that Moorehouse's ghost coerces Clarence into bringing the three officers to his grave. There, revenge is enacted, and the three officers die a brutal death. In the end, Clarence is seen strapped into a straitjacket in a ten-by-ten-foot cell. We are never told how he gets from the cell to the coffin. But the master narrative fills in this gap: more than likely, Clarence is executed because he is charged with the death of the three officers.

Simms's next tale revolves around the twisted corpse of a professional domestic batterer, Carl (David Alan Grier), whose soft-spoken and calm exterior (he obsessively wears a shirt and tie) masks the grotesque monster within. Carl's constant abuse is obvious on the body of Walter (Brandon Hammond), the son of the woman Carl is dating. Despite the pleas of his teacher and the school nurse, Walter cannot find words to express the brutality he witnesses each night. Subsequently, Carl's come-uppance comes at the hands of this fragile young boy, whose enchanted childhood drawings give him the power to destroy the monster who beats him and his mom nightly.

The third tale centers on an enchanted object, a wooden doll. As Simms explains, this doll once held the soul of a slave who was massacred at a plantation by a master who did not want to free his slaves after the Civil War. He, along with hundreds of other men, women, and children, was lynched and burned. Their restless spirits were then housed in wooden dolls made by dollmaker Miss Cobbs (who is also a conjurer). A former Klansman turned politician, Duke Metger (Corbin Bernsen),² moves into the house as a political stunt to garner votes. He even employs as his public-relations expert an up and coming young buppie named Rhodie (Roger Smith), who, as his name suggests, will go along with just about anything as long as the price is right. Rhodie dies in the house of his ancestors after tripping over one of the dolls that

lies unseen at the top of the stairs. The ironic nature of his death, along with that of Metger (who is eaten alive by the dolls while draped in the American flag he tries to hide behind), serves as a reminder of the reprimand exacted from those who desecrate the memory of the ancestors.

Simms's final anecdote leads the three young men to the coffin of a young man they know as Jerome (Lamont Bentley), aka Crazy K. Jerome's life unfolds through a series of flashbacks that parallel his violent gang life with his days in prison and his inability to be rehabilitated through an experimental program run by Dr. Cushing (Rosalind Cash). Through a visual montage that interweaves shots of historical violence against blacks with those depicting gang violence, Cushing hopes to persuade the hardened Crazy K into changing his evil ways. Her motherly wit, reminiscent of the African *griots* of the past, manipulates time and violence becomes the language reinvented and translated in the "chamber chair" of her makeshift laboratory. As her name suggests, Cushing attempts to mitigate the nefarious effects of poverty and nihilism on Crazy K's psyche, but her hopes to negotiate a treaty between him and his hood prove futile. Even the ghostly apparitions of those Jerome has killed in the past (including a young girl of ten) do not move him.

This arrogance leads to his subsequent death at the hands of other gang members (the three who hold Simms hostage at his funeral home) who, likewise, lack the power of discernment. And in a marvelous twist that demonstrates the preeminence of karma and the *intracultural* power of the trickster, these three young men meet their own perverted fate at the hands of the demoniacally transformed Simms when the last three coffins in the basement of the mortuary contain mirror images of themselves.

The eerie appearance of Mr. Simms masks the interrogative relationship between his character and role in the film. While Simms's *behavior* (i.e., character) seems based on the perceptions of an old "crazy" man who appears to have lost touch with his surroundings and his people, his *role* as an elder foreshadows the ingenuity he uses to outwit and condemn his captors. As Elizabeth Ammons reminds us, the essence of tricksterism is "change, contradiction, adaptation, surprise" (Ammons and White-Parks 1994, xii). Simms's eccentric and seemingly loony demeanor signals a return to the southern trickster, whose tales of revenge against obstinate slave masters peppered the plantation literature of the previous century. Simms's character extends this paradigm, directing attention to the socioeconomic elements of deprivation and cynicism that enslave so many young black men in urban centers.

Simms's inability to reach the moral center of these young men points up the self-reflexive nature of folk culture, which warns, "You will reap what you sow."

In addition, the inability of Stack (Joe Torry), Bulldog (Samuel Monroe, Jr.), and Ball (De'aundre Bonds) to recognize that they too are the "walking dead" presupposes toward the end of the film that certain urban dwellers are *sleepwalkers* (borrowing a term from Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*), unaware of their own blind moral ambition and spiritual deprivation. That the boys do not recognize Simms as the devil further demonstrates their own disconnectedness from the lore of folk culture that teaches youngsters to "beware of the boogeyman!" As Simms states in the opening dialogue of the film, "Death...comes in many strange packages." Yet in the spirit of ancestral forgiveness that grounds *Tales*, Stack, Bulldog, and Ball are given chance after chance to redeem themselves through the telling of the tales. But because of the arrogance and ignorance these young men display toward an elder (they hold a gun to Simms's head at one point and hit him with the butt of the gun at another), their fate is sealed.

As a trickster, Simms's character blurs the boundary between enforcer and healer of the cultural wounds in the hood. That he takes the time to tell his tales to these gang members suggests the didactic quality of his role. Critics such as Jacqueline Fulmer have argued that Simms is both trickster and conjurer because "in folklore, the conjurer performs two ways: by conjuring or tricking someone and by curing those who have already been conjured" (2002, 431). I think that the *order* in which the tales are told suggests that the trickster Simms knows Stack, Bulldog, and Ball have been "conjured" by the circumstances of life in the hood: the cyclical repetitiveness of oppression, hatred, poverty, and violence. Analogously, Simms's folk character exposes the irony of contemporary slavery—an enslavement bound by ignorance of purpose and linked to the past by the painful normalcy of violence against African Americans.³ Simms's eccentricitieshis madness—are a direct result of what he witnesses on a daily basis in the hood: the unreconciled striving of a people "with an almost morbid sense of personality and moral hesitancy which is fatal to self-confidence" (Du Bois [1908] 1989, xxi) and human decency.

Cundieff's allusions to two industries fueled by urban life—mortuaries and illegal drug activities—do not go unnoticed. Because these characters (Simms, Bulldog, Stack, and Ball) constitute the structural link that joins each of the additional stories to the film, the overarching plot of *Tales* links African and African American folklore to the horrific

internalizations of people trapped by the temperament of the oppressor. Each of the subplots concretizes the complex interrelationships of fleeting eruptions of social discontent. The overlapping effect—the interrogation of the causes of racism and violence that vex the community—is seemingly contained in the frame story and its characters. Their guises (one aspect of folklore’s continuing influence in the film) coincide with the structure, principles, imagery, and reversals that shape the horror genre, whether in film, literature, or television. The rites and rituals performed in the film (in one instance, each of the gang members takes a hit off a joint in a ceremonial attempt to gain courage to enter Simms’s funeral home; in another, corrupt policemen desecrate the grave of a well-respected fallen black political hero by urinating on his headstone) render these abusers of cultural norms impotent and sanction the retribution of ancestral violations.

Because the wounds of the past do not disappear easily, characters such as the corpse Moorehouse⁴ and the conjurer, Miss Cobbs (the ghost of the dollmaker), invite contemplation of race and gender within the context of the film, as American history serves as a parallel text to folk history. Liberation comes from telling these stories because both approaches question the benign depictions of white domination in American culture and, more importantly, underscore the tumultuous influence race exerts on identity formation in these various communities. As the mortician Simms aptly states, “Reality is a matter of perception...; perception is a cornucopia of clashing and divergent ideas.”

As it stands, *Tales from the Hood* references most of the traditional folkloric elements in popular culture. *Scream* (1996), *Urban Legend* (1998), and *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997) are just a few of the recent movies that reveal the hedonistic disregard for moral character exhibited by white suburban youth. Their egregious coupling of sex and violence lays the groundwork for a more extensive investigation of the connections between sexuality and physical or economic dominance. These movies, along with *Tales from the Hood*, weave an interesting tapestry of cultural “punishment” enacted against the young who ignore the wisdom of the elders.

In a similar way, the monsters who dole out retribution to those who fail to turn away from their selfish ways serve as a warning to sojourners. According to Mark Kermode, the slasher film and the urban legend known as “The Hook” are similar because they revolve around the morally archetypal character of sexual promiscuity. Mikel J. Koven extends Kermode’s paradigm, arguing that the enduring power of both these films and the legend rests in their “close call with death” (Koven 2003).

That is, in meeting death head on, either consciously or unaware, the surviving protagonist lives to tell the tale as a moral warning to others, thereby creating a “hook” that resonates with the other characters and audience alike (2003). In this context, *urban legend* acquires broader meanings because it becomes not only a reflection of society’s hopes and fears but also an indigenous account of America’s social history.

To this end, the fantastic—defined as the world where we live by Tzvetan Todorov (2000)—distinguished from the uncanny—the world that is likewise known and unknown—transcends common ways of knowing because it encodes a pedagogical and epistemological system of storytelling that reaffirms the uncommon occurrence in understandable terms. Likewise, this text—displayed in visual signs—speaks the unspeakable in cognitive categories that challenge our understanding not only of horror but also history within the confines of the horrific. Thus, the social-script is interrogated and the cultural text reified through a process of oral/visual literacy.

These allegories codify the unifying myths and dreams that the dominant culture revisits through mass culture. The dismantling of social and political ideologies worshipped in certain strata of society fuels the renegotiation of folk traditions in American culture. Ideological primers such as materialism, vanity, and compulsive sexuality reappear as rhyming didactic elements whose effectiveness stems from the influential reality of existing norms. The cover of the video case for *Tales from the Hood* depicts a skull with sunshades that cover the sockets of its empty eyes. If the eyes are indeed the windows to the soul, the emptiness of the nihilistic deprivation that pervades many urban centers is reflected back to the viewer of this film in a self-reflexive form of the monstrous Other—an Other historically affirmed in the mythologies of racism that undergird the representations of poverty so prevalent in Hollywood screen images. By incorporating and adapting these representations, narratives, and images, Cundieff reinscribes the filmic language of horror so that these images can now be read in a distinctly black voice that simultaneously frames and reformulates the genre. Moreover, the hood, in this sense, becomes its own reflective center, straddling the borderlands of the imagined and real elements of this space. If the hood is indeed the site “where nightmares and reality meet on the streets” (*Tales’* tagline), then the architects of this nightmare become the progenitors of an urban legacy that is replicated in the communal traditions of a people whose inheritance is siphoned away by the everyday realities of city living.

The Paradox of Horror

The paradox of horror is that we must revisit, more often than not, the origin of our fear. The production of *Tales from the Hood* coincided, eerily, with the barely repressed fears of an American society grappling with the resurgence of blatant acts of racism that demonstrated a reckless disregard for black life. The 1990 videotaped beating of Rodney King and the spectacle of the O.J. Simpson trial loomed large in American popular culture. So, too, did the 1989 Charles Stuart case and the 1994 Susan Smith case, which exemplified the national perception of African Americans as venal and inhumane.

The murder of Martin Moorehouse, the first tale in the film, reflects the angst of this cultural vortex and reveals the ever-present fear of “high-tech” and “low-tech” lynching that permeates the African American male psyche. This “racial ritual of keeping the Negro ‘in his place’” (Ellison 1964, 276) has played itself out in repetitious formulations centered on maleness—images that continue to define power relationships in American society. According to Sandra Gunning, the image of the black man has continually functioned as an ever-evolving metaphor in our national discourse of power (1996, 3). History has demonstrated that whenever mainstream power is threatened, reconfigured, or socially realigned, violence—literal or rhetorical—is the method of defense. If the rope or gun used in these acts of domination represents low-tech lynching, high-tech lynching encompasses the repressive actions implemented against black males whom society has deemed “strange fruit” within America’s infrastructure of privilege and politics. Moorehouse’s death at the hands of corrupt racist white cops who deem him a political agitator can then be viewed as a reflection of this interracial wrangling. His beating and subsequent death (which stems from a routine traffic stop) underscores the vulnerability black men feel in the presence of the law. Racial profiling is the cause of this angst. That Cundieff and coproducer and coscreenwriter Darin Scott chose Billie Holiday’s version of Abel Meeropol’s song “Strange Fruit” as background music while Moorehouse is savagely assaulted emphasizes the black man’s vulnerability: the past and present become one in the battered physical frame of the “prophet” Martin Ezekiel Moorehouse.

Cundieff’s savvy in weaving fact with fiction in this scene enables him to rewrite the cultural narrative of lynching. As Fredric Jameson argues in *The Political Unconscious*, we must foreground the interpretive frameworks or codes through which we receive and read texts: “texts come before us as the always-already read” (1981, 9). It is the goal

of folklore, then, and its accompanying devices, tricksterism and resistance, to “mess up the order...,” to disrupt what is normal (Ammons and White-Parks 1994, vii). *Tales* accomplishes this feat. Where in the historical record, the victim is castrated, disembodied, dismembered, and silenced, *Tales* provides a forum for the victim to “talk back” to his aggressors in horrific fashion, in acts of retaliation that seldom occur in public circles. The brutal deaths of these rogue cops—one has his head completely severed from his body; another is killed by flying hypodermic needles from a crack alley that nail him to a muraled wall emblazoned with an image of a crucifix (flipping the script if you will)—suggest that spiritual law will right the wrongs in the end.

So the film simultaneously reworks the historical master narrative of lynching that found many African American men and women killed by “parties unknown.” Because these lynchings were more often than not public ceremonies carried out in the presence of white judges, attorneys, and law-enforcement officials, *Tales* confronts the larger issue of social accountability for historical wrongs in American history and foregrounds the anonymity of passive compliance with racist ideologies.

That the dead exact revenge against the living in this film underscores the narrative of lynching. Moorehouse’s spiritual return in the psyche of the young black rookie who witnesses his beating reveals that *witnessing* such an act carries with it the burden of genealogical transference. In “Can you be BLACK and look at this?” Elizabeth Alexander poses a central question concerning African American racial memory and the paradoxical nature of witnessing, which includes recognizing yourself in what you see. She asks, “What do the scenes of communally witnessed violence...tell us about the way that ‘text’ is carried in the African-American flesh?” (1994, 77) Embedded in Alexander’s probing analysis is a series of cultural touchstones—mnemonic wounds—that return the reader to the repressed racial subtext associated with the national failure to recognize black communal pain. As Alexander rightly determines, “African-Americans have always existed in a counter-citizen relationship to the law; how else to contend with knowing oneself as a whole human when the Constitution defines you as ‘three-fifths’?” (1994, 77). This fact alone *reaggravates* the cultural wounds evident in the African American racial memory. What is less clear, however, is the damage done to individuals subjected to daily assaults upon their persons. The four central characters and subcharacters in *Tales* suggest that these assaults leave fissures in the troubled minds of their sufferers.

That films such as *Candyman* (1992), *Bones* (2001), and *Tales from the Hood* pose these and other questions concerning the impact of urban decay and economic and social disenfranchisement upon the African American community means that the national consciousness is being pricked and cannot continue to exist in the comfort of its amnesiac haze. But as Audre Lorde reminds us, "...we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals" (West 1993, 93). The horror of this inability to reach across developing patterns of human communication points to a more troubling paradox associated with human nature and the effects that witnessing has on the seer. As Ellison so poignantly illustrates, the "sleepwalkers" are those with the most power—to see or not to see. They can choose to acknowledge the character of a man or hide it under the myths of distorting glass insidiously created by American society ([1947] 1994, 1). The potency of these myths and the unyielding power they have over those individuals who create and use them freely is movingly embodied in the mental and spiritual breakdown of the black rookie cop Clarence Smith. His descent into a mental and spiritual hell is as much a result of his naïveté (he really did believe that his fellow officers would take Moorehouse to the hospital) as his disillusioned belief that his blue uniform will help him make a difference. As Elizabeth Alexander aptly points out, "African-American viewers have been taught a sorry lesson of their continual, physical vulnerability in the United States, a lesson that helps shape how it is we understand ourselves..." (1994, 78). It is this feeling of angst that frames the context for understanding the undercurrent in *Tales*, a film that asks the question: "Where do we go from here?"

Allegorical Returns

Kelly Oliver argues in her study *Witnessing* that your ability to bear witness to trauma involves a working through of your own feelings of inadequacy to avoid the repetitious compulsion of "recalling the ways in which you were made into an object" (2001, x). In short, bearing witness to torture or enslavement recalls the trauma of that original experience. In depicting the overlapping actions of Smith and gang member Crazy K, Cundieff and Scott act as elders themselves by creating a continuum that extends from the previous centuries of black male existence to the present. Viewed through the lens of African American folklore, this conversion narrative refigures the dynamic of the ritualized and tortured black male figure through a psychic rememorialization that allows the living to re-member him and demonstrates the community's responsibility to

educate, recall, and reach out to those who have forgotten how to fly. As the folk tale “The Parable of the Eagle” states, “My people of Africa, we were created in the image of God, but men have made us think that we are chickens, and we still think we are, but we are eagles. Stretch forth your wings and fly! Don’t be content with the food of chickens!” (Aggrey 1971, 135). The goal of the listener, the reader, and critic alike is to remind others—through written, oral, or visual means—to look beyond the first story and absorb the second story, that narrative that lies below the surface. If we fail to examine this morphological structure of storytelling—its legends and subtexts—we will be condemned to a psychic hell of disremembered rememberings as we perpetually engage in vain rhetorical strivings where no one knows how “to fly.” But more chilling is the realization that if we do not reach back, we will have no one to tell our stories to or left to hear them.

Notes

1. James Van Der Zee (1886–1983) is best known for his portraits of black New Yorkers during the Harlem Renaissance. His portraits of the dead, however, have solidified his place in African American folk culture. Writer Toni Morrison states that Van Der Zee’s work in *The Harlem Book of the Dead* (1978) helped to shape her character Beloved. Along those same lines, African American writer Charles Chesnutt (1858–1932) made African American hoodoo beliefs and practices available to the reading public in his collection *The Conjure Woman and other Conjure Tales* ([1899] 1993). Chesnutt’s tales of reincarnation and retribution helped revitalize the culture of folklore in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and both Chesnutt and Van Der Zee’s artistic works suggest that African Americans have long used death to investigate social injustice and cultural immorality in the past and present. This folk culture of death is what Cundieff engages with in *Tales*. The significance of this approach is brilliantly displayed in Karla Holloway’s *Passed On: African American Mourning Stories* (2002) and Sharon Holland’s *Raising the Dead: Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity* (2000), where Holland suggests that staying black and dying may be twins of the same lived experience in America.
2. His name resonates with two known Klansmen whose prominence in political circles has always caused alarm—David Duke, the former Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1970s (who also ran a hotly contested race for the Louisiana House of Representatives in 1989), and Tom Metzger, grand wizard of the California Ku Klux Klan and leader of the White Aryan Resistance. Metzger’s organization took a major hit in the mid-1980s when Morris Dees, a prominent Jewish attorney, sued and won millions of dollars in a wrongful death suit lodged against Metzger’s group for the lynching death of a sixteen-year-old African American teen.
3. Simms’s folk-character persona also includes his memorable role of Linc Hayes in the cult television series *The Mod Squad* (ABC, 1968–73), which was

a permanent fixture in the late 1960s and early '70s. The show stressed the notion of achieving justice "by any means necessary"—that is, through non-conventional means.

4. Moorehouse's name suggests Morehouse University—an institution that grooms strong black male leaders; his middle name, Ezekiel, reflects his prophet status in the hood—a valley of "dry bones."

Filmography

Bones (2001). 96 min. Ernest R. Dickerson
Candyman (1992). 99 min. Bernard Rose
I Know What You Did Last Summer (1997). 100 min. Jim Gillespie
The Mod Squad (1968–1973). ABC
Scream (1996). 111 min. Wes Craven
Tales from the Crypt (1989–1996). HBO
Tales from the Hood (1995). 98 min. Rusty Cundieff
Urban Legend (1998). 99 min. Jamie Blanks

Works Cited

- Aggrey, James. 1971. The parable of the eagle. In *Tales and stories for black folks*, ed. Toni Cade Bambara, 135. Garden City, New York: Zenith Books.
- Alexander, Elizabeth. 1994. "Can you be BLACK and look at this": Reading the Rodney King video(s). *Public Culture* 7: 77–95.
- All God's chillen had wings. 2004. In *The Norton anthology of African American literature*, ed. Nellie McKay and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., 132–34. 2nd ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Ammons, Elizabeth, and Annette White-Parks, eds. 1994. *Tricksterism in turn-of-the-century American literature: A multicultural perspective*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.
- Chesnutt, Charles Waddell. [1899] 1993. *The conjure woman and other conjure tales*. Ed. Richard H. Brodhead. Repr., Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. [1908] 1989. *The souls of black folk*. Repr., New York: Bantam Books.
- Ellison, Ralph. 1964. *Shadow and act*. New York: Random House.
 ———. *Invisible man*. [1947] 1994. Repr. New York: Vintage Books.
- Fulmer, Jacqueline. 2002. "Men ain't all"—A reworking of masculinity in *Tales from the hood* or Grandma meets the zombie. *Journal of American Folklore* 115: 422–42.
- Guerrero, Ed. 1994. *Framing blackness*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Gunning, Sandra. 1996. *Race, rape, and lynching: The red record of American literature, 1890–1912*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Holland, Sharon. 2000. *Raising the dead: Readings of death and (black) subjectivity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Holloway, Karla. 2002. *Passed on: African American mourning stories*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

- Jameson, Fredric. 1981. *The political unconscious: Narrative as a socially symbolic act*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Koven, Mikel J. 2003. The terror tale: Urban legends and the slasher film. *Scope: An on-line journal of film studies*, April. Institute of Film Studies, University of Nottingham. <http://www.scope.nottingham.ac.uk/> (accessed July 12, 2005).
- McKay, Nellie. 1983. An interview with Toni Morrison. *Contemporary Literature* 24 (4): 413–29.
- Oliver, Kelly. 2001. *Witnessing: Beyond recognition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- O’Meally, Robert G. 2004. Introduction to *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, ed. Nellie McKay and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., 3–8.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. 2000. Definition of the fantastic. In *The horror reader*, ed. Ken Gelder, 14–19. London: Routledge.
- Van Der Zee, James. 1978. *The Harlem book of the dead*. Ed. Camille Billops. New York: Morgan & Morgan, Inc.
- West, Cornel. 1993. *Race matters*. New York: Vintage Books.