Night of the Living Dead Dissects the News: Race, the 1967 Riots, and "Dead Neighbors"

Abstract

George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* began filming in June and July of 1967, the same months riots were occurring in 164 cities as African Americans en masse expressed their anger against police brutality. The film challenges the veracity of news coverage of the riots, and America's subsequently violent response, by depicting the news's creation in the field and studio, and its reception in the living room, as well as showing film viewers important events that the news will fail to cover. This critique permeates the film's satirized newscasts, as well as the film's narrative and anti-racist message.

Keywords

Television Studies; Horror Films; Race; Media Studies; News; George Romero

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Figure 1. A white female driver in Detroit prominently displays a pistol during the 1967 riots, in footage from *Detroit Riot* (1967, Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan, RG 91-320, https://vimeo.com/5337314).

In June and July of 1967 the evening news was filled with apocalyptic scenes of burning American cities as National Guardsmen with machine guns stood on street corners and tanks rolled down the streets of Detroit. Riots were reported in 164 mostly northern cities, as African Americans expressed their anger against police brutality and a larger culture of racialized suppression, primarily through arson and looting.[1] Referring to black rioters as "terrorists," a *New York Times* article describes police and National Guard spraying machine gun fire at buildings thought to hold snipers.[2] NBC reported that US forces were ready to fight "[t]he battle

to gain control over Detroit's rioters."[3] Such prejudicial coverage fomented white Americans' fears of a race war, and they responded with overt threats of violence. In Newark and Detroit, white vigilantes drove through neighborhoods prominently displaying rebel flags, machetes, and automatic weapons.[4] Mike Kalush, a news photographer for Detroit's WXYZ-TV, captured footage of a white woman driving with a pistol prominently draped over her steering wheel (see Figure 1). "I was scared to death," he later revealed, "I thought she'd shoot me. She didn't even hardly look at me. She looked like [she] was in a trance. She was terrified."[5] At the same time as racialized violence threatened to overtake America, a group of young filmmakers had just begun living and filming in a dilapidated farm house in rural Pennsylvania, and what's more, had cast an African American, Duane Jones, as the film's lead Ben. What we now know as George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* was begun during a period of extreme racial upheaval and state sanctioned violence against African Americans, the effects of which remain present in the film's satirical newscasts and anti-racist narrative.

In this article, I address *Night of the Living Dead*'s response to two interconnected issues— America's violent and racist response to the 1967 riots and television's problematic coverage of the events. I first discuss how news coverage of the riots presented African Americans as a marauding force with no clear goals but violence, much like the film's newscasts present the ghouls. I next address how *Night of the Living Dead*'s newscasts display a canny awareness of how television works, both as a technological apparatus and as an ideological medium. Finally, I show how these intertwined issues of race and television play out in the film's conception, production, and release, as well as over the course of the film, particularly in the two sequences depicting the survivors watching the news and in the movie's pessimistic conclusion.

As I show, these newscasts are key for understanding the film's anti-racist message and related criticism of television news.

Night of the Living Dead has been considered through lenses as diverse as gender, theology and the rhetoric surrounding death.[6] While television has not been a particular focus, there have been numerous considerations of the film's explorations of media. Vivian Sobchack describes the film as presenting media as "negatively, even fatally, influential" since "the public is totally credulous and trusting while the media is electronic, apathetic, and finally immune to private experience."[7] Steven Shaviro describes Romero's ghouls within Delueuzian terms as almost "quintessential media images, since they are vacuous, mimetic replications of the human beings they once were."[8] Allan Cameron argues that zombie films, including *Night of the Living Dead,* explore the fraught relationship between living bodies and media by interconnecting the media's imperfect ability to capture, transmit, and reproduce moments of chance and contingency with the physical, social and hermeneutical disorder zombies prompt.[9]

Race has also been a common lens for considering the film, and Noël Carroll describes Romero's larger trilogy as "explicitly anti-racist."[10] Robin Wood responds to Ben's race by pointing out that "it is not true that his color is arbitrary and without meaning: Romero uses it to signify his difference from the other characters, to set him apart from their norms."[11] Although he doesn't connect the film to the 1967 riots, Stephen Harper claims that the film "clearly and insistently engages with its contemporary social and political milieu," and that "[t]he film's immediate social context further suggests its racial significance."[12] Scholars such as Brigid Cherry have described the film as responding to, and reconfiguring, America's racist past of lynch mobs and the Ku Klux Klan, but as this article shows, *Night of the Living Dead* is

addressing the contemporary racist portrayals of African Americans by the news during the "Long, Hot Summer of 1967."[13]

Though scholars have mentioned the newscasts within *Night of the Living Dead*, the film's engagement with the news has remained substantially underexplored. In the documentary *Birth of the Living Dead*, film scholar Sam Pollard describes the diegetic newscasts of armed vigilantes and police as, "in sync with the kind of newscasts that I was seeing, my generation was seeing on television. . . It made me think of the stuff I would see on the television and stuff of the Newark riots, of Watts."[14] For the film's audience, as well as the survivors, television is the primary source of information about the catastrophe as a national event. Appearing within a television's boxy frame are scenes that emulate news footage of the 1967 riots, including combative government officials evading reporters' questions, an armed police posse, and a swaggering sheriff describing his plan to contain the offending horde. *Night of the Living Dead* complicates this type of coverage by depicting the circuit of the news's construction and reception *within* the film, but it also juxtaposes this examination with events that will not be covered by the news, most notably Ben's death and immolation at the hands of a paramilitary posse. Ultimately, the film reveals that what the news fails to show are the experiences of the very same population the news constructed as dangerous: African-American men.

***Night of the Living Dead* and Race**. *Night of the Living Dead* depicts the experiences of a group of survivors, all white save one, who hide in a rural farmhouse from the menace of shambling dead neighbors with a desire to consume living flesh. An early shot overlaps "Directed by George A. Romero" with an American flag, making explicit Romero's desire that the film be read as a parable of America. As the film begins, siblings Barbara and Johnny (Judith O'Dea and

Russell Streiner) arrive at a cemetery to lay a wreath on their father's grave. The siblings are interrupted by a ghoul who attacks Johnny, while Barbara escapes. She arrives at a remote farmhouse where a group of people attempt to survive the ghouls. These survivors include Ben, a capable African-American man; Harry and Helen Cooper, a bickering middle-class couple, along with their bitten daughter Karen; and Tom and Judy, a teenage working-class couple. Through a series of errors and mishaps, Ben alone survives the night, only to be shot in the morning by a posse of white men led by the local sheriff. Ben's death makes reading the film as a response the racially-charged climate of the late 1960s virtually inescapable. Beginning with a shot of an American flag, the film ends with a shot of Ben's body being burned on a pyre, presenting the film's broader message that America is in danger of destroying itself through racialized violence. *Night of the Living Dead*'s interest in the relationships between race, violence, and the news was influenced by preceding televised representations of African Americans. As Sasha Torres persuasively argues, television's handling of race from 1955 to 1965 was crucial in articulating an emerging black political agency that challenged tropes of black inferiority and helped give rise to a national sense of black pride and self worth.[15] However, many African Americans in the urban north felt that the civil rights movement, with its emphasis on southern oppression, had overlooked their concerns. Discussing the causes of the 1967 riots, Ron Scott writes, "We did not feel the civil rights movement had a particular focus on the issues that we faced. In Detroit that was the police."[16] On August 12, 1965 the police arrest of a black motorist sparked the Watts Riot, which resulted in thirty-four deaths, and $35 million in property damage.[17] The media's sensationalist reporting helped fuel the riot, and as Thomas Hrach points out, the Watts Riot was "the first riot in which the media coverage became part of the story. While the news media were never directly blamed for the Watts riots, they were clearly culpable."[18] The news, which had

been central to the articulation of a positive model of black agency, began to shift toward negative coverage that depicted African Americans as dangerous, rather than a community with real grievances. The summer of 1967, though, dwarfed the Watts riot, both in number of those involved and in the magnitude of the media's coverage.

The "Long Hot Summer of 1967" began on June 11 with rioting in Tampa after police shot an unarmed African-American teen in the back.[19] The next day riots began in Cincinnati after police arrested an African-American man for demonstrating. Ultimately 700 National Guardsmen were called in, one person was killed, and 404 people were arrested.[20] In response to national issues of police brutality, and fueled in part by news coverage, riots spread across the urban eastern third of the nation. In Newark authorities fired more than 12,000 rounds, twenty-six people died, and 1,465 people were arrested. [21] In Detroit the National Guard *alone* fired over 155,000 rounds, killing forty-three people, and 7,231 people were arrested.[22] Ten times as many African Americans were arrested in Detroit as whites.[23] Similar incidents occurred across America in large cities like Atlanta, Buffalo, and Milwaukee, as well as small towns like West Palm Beach, Florida after local police attempted to arrest two African-American men at a bar. Ultimately forty-five people were arrested and a lumberyard burned down.[24]

While television largely depicted the rioters as dangerous threats, their underlying motivations were largely ignored. Interviews with 500 prisoners arrested during the Detroit riots found that the most common cause of rioting was police brutality, and prisoners referred to specific occasions of beatings and physical violence.[25] The responses of the police and National Guard to the riots were also particularly brutal. The Detroit police executed three unarmed African-American men at the Algiers Motel, killed people for looting groceries, and shot fleeing unarmed African Americans in the back.[26] Similarly, a news article on the Newark riots reports

that "[a] lull in the shooting had lasted until early afternoon when the looter was killed instantly by a shotgun blast. The police said he had taken a case of beer from a liquor store and was running across the street with it." [27]

Rather than addressing the underlying causes of the rioting, the news defaulted to an us vs. them narrative that construed America more broadly as being at war with urban African Americans. An ABC reporter embedded with the National Guard commented that "[t]his is a battle zone. These are troops. It's like war with one difference—the enemy was captured and he'll have his day in court."[28] Reporters often drew parallels with the Vietnam War, and in her recollection of the 1967 riots, Dr. Melba Joyce Boyd writes of watching television, when

> Suddenly, we were watching imagery of the Vietnam War juxtaposed with similar scenes of conflict on 12th Street, which became even more bizarre when President Lyndon Johnson sent federal troops and tanks to Detroit and the two settings merged within the surreal world of television.[29]

Dr. Boyd's description is a telling example of how the news's conflation of the riots with the Vietnam War also meant many American television viewers understood the riots in similarly martial terms.

One contentious debate about *Night of the Living Dead* is the degree to which (if at all) the film is responding to Vietnam. Sumiko Higashi, for instance, claims that the Vietnam war, while unmentioned within the film, remains as an "absent presence."[30] Similarly, Jamie Russell argues that "Vietnam lurks in every frame of Romero's film."[31] I think we should read Romero's evocation of the Vietnam War as prescient since the film spoke to a nation increasingly disillusioned with the war. In 1967, however, television coverage primarily emphasized the inevitability of an American victory in Vietnam, and it wasn't until the Tet Offensive in February

of 1968 that conversations surrounding Vietnam began to shift.[32] It is more precise to claim that Romero was drawing on, and criticizing, a discourse that had *already* conjoined an American crisis with the Vietnam war—the news's presentation of the 1967 riots. Much as reporters defaulted to a language of warfare, the news anchor in *Night of the Living Dead* declares that "[a]ll law enforcement agencies, and the military, have been ordered to search out and destroy the marauding ghouls." Here, much as during the 1967 riots, police and military have joined forces, and as Ben Hervey points out, the phrase "search and destroy," was often used in news coverage of Vietnam.[33] Perhaps even more interesting is the term "marauding," with its implications of plundering and the violent acquisition of property.[34] While the film's ghouls appear completely uninterested in material possessions, the term "marauding" evokes the news's coverage of, and news viewers' fear of, widespread looting during the riots. We find in this sentence evocations of the news's conjoining of Vietnam with the 1967 riots, and it is in this mediated manner, filtered first through the news, and then satirized in the film's own representations of the news, that Vietnam functions as a presence in *Night of the Living Dead.*

The film challenges the news media's racialized us vs. them discourse by emphasizing that the undead cannibals are not a foreign threat, but rather members of the same community as the survivors. Romero describes the ghouls as dead neighbors, claiming that "I never thought of them as zombies . . . People started to write about *Night of the Living Dead* and called them zombies. I said, 'Wow, maybe they are.' To me, they were dead neighbors."[35] Rather than settling into any simple narrative about racialized violence in America, considering the ghouls as dead neighbors prompts viewers to consider what turned these neighbors into such a threatening force. The film's criticism of American racism is subtle; by showing the experiences of an armed African-American protagonist attempting to survive both the white ghouls and the white survivor

Harry, and ultimately being killed by a white posse, the film inverts the news's vilification of African Americans. Additionally, Ben's death leads viewers to conclude that the anger expressed in the riots was a justified response to systemic violence and police oppression. While space radiation is supplied as one contested cause of the ghouls in the film, within the broader context of the 1967 riots the film functions as an indictment of problematic news reporting practices that align with state-sanctioned racialized repression.

I suspect in part that Romero's reticence to describe the ghouls as zombies is a challenge to earlier films that overtly trafficked in zombies as racist tropes. *White Zombie* (1932), for instance, features a white man saving a white woman from Afro-Caribbean zombies, and subsequent films such as *Ouanga* (1935), *King of the Zombies* (1941), and *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943) continued these racist narratives. In *The Transatlantic Zombie: Slavery, Rebellion, and Living Death*, Sarah Julie Lauro connects these films to ways that the transatlantic slave trade continues to haunt America's social imaginary.[36] Describing zombies as embodying a form of "living death," Lauro argues that zombies dramatize a racialized form of (non)existence stuck between enslavement and rebellion, life and death, though never fully belonging to either category.[37] Discussing the zombie myth more broadly, Lauro writes that "one might say that rather than resurrection, which is equated with complete liberation, the incarnation of living death in the zombie represents revolutions that have not completely succeeded."[38] This description of zombies as the remainders of failed revolutions situated between enslavement and rebellion, life and death, sounds much like the news's dehumanization of the rioters, even as the riots were ongoing. While Lauro acknowledges that *Night of the Living Dead* contains "palpable subtexts of both slavery and revolution,"[39] she criticizes the film as an Americanization of the Haitian zombie myth, but I would argue that Romero realized that the news was depicting rioters

in terms similar to zombies and sought to satirize and critique this racist coverage in *Night of the Living Dead.*

***Night of the Living Dead* and the News.** Historically the scenes in *Night of the Living Dead* that focus on television have been viewed as mere exposition, but these scenes are important for understanding the film's handling of race. The film proceeds by cleverly mobilizing the differences between audiences' viewing expectations for television and film, particularly horror films. During scenes that involve televised newscasts, *Night of the Living Dead* utilizes televisual modes of presentation, though elsewhere the film employs highly cinematic modes of representation. Juxtaposing these differing visual styles develops the film's criticism of television news, as well as the film's anti-racist message. What's more, the film strategically utilizes concepts later identified within television studies, as well as addresses television's problematic relationship with race

The film's criticism of television is assisted by being shot on older, and cheaper, film stock. The film was shot in monochrome, which was cheaper than color film, and had the effect of making the film feel more like the news. In 1968, 94.6% of American homes had a TV, three quarters of which were black and white sets.[40] To audiences in 1968 the onscreen actions would have visually evoked newscasts, particularly since, while the news was primarily viewed (though not shot) in black and white, films were overwhelmingly released in color. This televisual feel was also strengthened by *Night of the Living Dead* being filmed in the older Academy ratio of 1.37 width to 1 height, a format that looks much closer to television's ratio of 1.33 to 1 than to other films of the time. Threatened by the rising popularity of television, in the mid-1950s

Hollywood moved away from the boxy Academy ratio to wider screen formats such as CinemaScope, with its rectangular ratio of up to 2.66 to 1, as a means of luring audiences out of their living room with the promise of greater widescreen spectacles.[41] Thus, while movies in the late 1960s were largely shown in widescreen and in color, *Night of the Living Dead* cleverly turns budgetary restrictions into an opportunity to evoke and satirize television news.

In its onscreen newscasts, *Night of the Living Dead* emulates the news by utilizing fewer cuts and presenting objects in a flattened two-dimensional style. Overall the film utilizes a high number of cuts (nearly 1,100), and so many angled shots that Hervey describes the film's editing and camera angles as imparting "a schizophrenic style."[42] Scenes that focus on the television, however, have very few cuts— three in the first newscast and eight in the second. This lack of cuts lends to the newscasts a feeling of immediacy, as if events are supplied unmediated to the viewer. Additionally, while cinema utilizes angled shots to depict objects from diverse angles, newscasts present objects in a straight-on fashion, since the news places more emphasis on informing audiences than representing objects in space.[43] In response to *Night of the Living Dead*'s highly cinematic style, which is even more pronounced in scenes surrounding the newscasts, this stable televisual style makes what is shown feel dependable. In *Gospel of the Living Dead*, Kim Paffenroth describes the film's shots of the television as

> [belying] a false sense of stability and security. While the people are shot at disorienting and frightening angles, the television set and the newscasts on it are always shown in perfect symmetry and evenness, implying their solidity and trustworthiness, even while every piece of information and advice spewing out of the television turns out to be fatally in error.[44]

Perhaps like much of the film's audience, the survivors believe that the news presents trustworthy information, however these authentic looking newscasts turn out to have disastrous consequences.

As a horror film, *Night of the Living Dead* is primed to critique television, since television and horror films perform different social functions— television produces and naturalizes social order, while horror films disrupt social order. Journalism scholar Daniel Hallin describes television news as supplying "'packages for consciousness'—frameworks for interpreting and cues for reacting to social and political reality."[45] On the other hand, Robin Wood argues that horror films are popular because they allow for the expression of desires society represses.[46] Fueled by their explorations of taboos, horror films imagine alternatives beyond societal norms. The film engages with these dichotomies of reinforcing and disrupting social order through its juxtaposition of newscasts and cinematic horrors.

Much of television's strength as ideological medium derives from the viewer's feeling that what they are watching is being simultaneously recorded, transmitted, and received in the living room. In her influential 1983 article "The Concept of Live Television: Ontology as Ideology," Jane Feuer identifies this feeling of simultaneity as television's ontology of "liveness," since television equates being "live" with being "real," as if television supplies reality unmediated.[47] This feeling of liveness is primarily found in the news, but is co-opted and expropriated by television more broadly.[48] As can be seen in the 1967 riots, the ability to be simultaneously filmed and received *can* affect reality, since viewers were able to witness the riots on the small screen and join in. We also encounter television's liveness in *Night of the Living Dead* via the frantic activity that fills the television station background. Telephones are ringing, a woman is energetically typing, and people bustle around. For the film's viewer there is

the additional realization that though these broadcasts look real, they are fictional, implying that the news's liveness can be constructed for the benefit of viewers, undermining the news's equation of being "live" with being "real."

Responding to the terrifying events that surrounds them, the survivors look to television as a source of guidance, but what they encounter is not the usual daily programming but newscasting that emphasizes its persistent coverage. Midway through describing how victims have been partially devoured, the news anchor is handed a sheet of paper and declares to the viewer, "I think we have some late word, just arriving, and we interrupt to bring this to you." The news anchor uses the language of direct address, as if news anchor and viewer, unified by their shock, have an immediate shared connection. "Its hard for us here to believe what we are reporting to you," he declares, "but it does seem to be a fact." Words like "us," "we," and "you" emphasize the alleged authenticity and immediacy of this newscast. Through their emphasis of ongoing coverage during an emergency, and the usage of direct address, these newscasts depict what Mary Ann Doane would identify in "Information, Crisis, Catastrophe" as television's fraught relationship with catastrophe.[49] Doane argues that catastrophe represents the news's limits because catastrophe reasserts a focus on death that society, and by extension television, seeks to suppress.[50] Simultaneously, this persistent coverage and language of direct address strengthens television's feeling of liveness, and in turn its sense of representing reality.[51] Catastrophe represents both television's utter limit of signification, as well as when it feels most real. In satirizing news coverage of the 1967 riots, *Night of the Living Dead* highlights this particularly persuasive form of newscasting, and the survivors *are* persuaded by the news, even to the point that Barbara conflates the news with escape (discussed below).

While television prompts a feeling of liveness, cinema presents events viewers perceive as having already occurred, events that can be absorbed, but never altered. The cinema viewer cannot affect the actions onscreen, and Stanley Cavell describes the movie viewer's helplessness as "mechanically assured," writing that "I [the viewer] am present not at something happening, which I must confirm, but at something that has happened, which I absorb (like a memory)."[52] The film plays with this feeling of memory throughout, for instance in the lingering shock after each survivor dies, a feeling that reaches a crescendo with Ben's death. Overall, the film utilizes differences between the viewer's experiences of cinema and television to critique the news, since film viewers are shown traumatic events that challenge the news's claims of representing reality.

Background and Preproduction of *Night of the Living Dead.* As his films show, Romero was consistently interested in, and critical of, the media as an ideological medium. In an interview Romero describes media behavior as "atrocious" because "the media has a tendency to exacerbate situations."[53] He was also concerned with viewers' tendency to uncritically accept the news's narratives.[54] Though radio is present in the first half of the film, it is supplanted by the television, and I suspect it is because of television's ability to manipulate viewers that it receives greater scrutiny. For instance, Romero casts himself in *Night of the Living Dead* as news reporter Don Quinn, who tries to get answers out of an evasive group of government representatives. In the opening scenes of *Dawn of the Dead* (1979), Romero (sitting next to his wife Christine) appears as a director at a news studio's control panel. "Who the hell is on camera 2, a blind man?" he yells amidst the station's panicked disarray, implying that behind the news camera one might actually find a blind directing intelligence.[55]

Romero's interest in, and knowledge of, television can be traced back to 1962 when Romero, having recently graduated with a Bachelor's in Theater and Design from the Carnegie Institute of Technology, opened the production studio Latent Image in South Pittsburgh with Russell Streiner and John Russo.[56] As Romero explains, "We were the first company that was doing film-form commercials, and for a long time, we were the only game in town. That's where I got the technical side of my experience."[57] Over the next ten years Latent Image made industrial films and commercials for local and network television stations, including commercials for beer, detergent, and politicians (including Richard Nixon).[58]

Having struggled to make movies for years, in January 1967 Romero and his partners at Latent Image, as well as six other friends, each invested $600 as seed money, and Image Ten, Inc. was formed with the goal of making a horror film (initial working title: *Monster Flick*).[59] Filming took place from June to December of 1967, with about thirty actual days of production, since Romero and crew had to frequently return to Pittsburgh to, as Romero puts it, "do a pickle commercial or something, which was distressing."[60] Investors were also familiar with the local television and film industry, for instance the bickering couple of Harry and Helen Cooper, played by Karl Hardman and Marilyn Eastman, were president and vice president of a company that made industrial films. In addition to acting in the film, selecting the music, recording live sound effects, and doing makeup and wardrobe, the news studio in the film was Hardman's, and the murderous girl in the basement was his daughter.[61] Far from implying an amateurism, that the film is so well crafted displays the technical proficiency members of Image Ten had with the tools and practices of filmmaking, skills derived from years of crafting television commercials and industrial films.

Night of the Living Dead was mostly filmed in sequence, and Romero had only half-scripted it when filming began. John Russo, who shares screenwriting credit with Romero, finished the script while shooting was ongoing.[62] The script's initially partial completion allowed everyone involved, as well as the ongoing riots and their aftermath, to have a greater influence on the film. In response to an interviewer's claim that *Night of the Living Dead* was a film of its time, Romero responds "Oh sure. That was in our minds the whole time. That's where it all came from. I mean the sixties is King and Kennedy and all that anger. That was always in our thinking."[63] While Romero and his cocreators were responding to the anger of the time, both Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy were assassinated *after* the film had been completed and before it was picked up for distribution.[64] Rather, the anger he alludes to was expressed in the 1967 riots. We can find support for this interpretation in the differences between the original script and the filmed version regarding where the dead are coming back to life. In the original script a news report notes that the unrest that began in the "Midwestern section of the country is indeed spread across the nation, and is in fact world-wide."[65] In the film, however, the news anchor declares that "The wave of murder which is sweeping the eastern third of the nation is being committed by creatures who feast upon the flesh of their victims." Notably, this "wave of murder," rather than being a global phenomenon, directly overlaps with actual riot locations.

The casting of Duane Jones as Ben also had a significant effect on the film, and Jones's input helped develop the film's anti-racist message. By 1967 Jones was already an accomplished actor, and during shooting of the film he was pursuing a master's degree in Communications at NYU. Jones went on to head Antioch College's Literature Department, and serve as executive director of the Black Theater Alliance, among many other achievements.[66] Originally written as a truck driver, Jones not only upgraded the character's dialogue, he also brought a gravitas and

depth that challenges the brutish stereotypes cinema too often presents of African-American men. Jones states in an interview that "It never occurred to me that I was hired *because* I was black. But it did occur to me that because I was black it would give a different historic element to the film."[67] Race is never explicitly mentioned within the film; however, to quote Romero, "because the character is played by an African American, you almost don't notice anything else. We didn't realize that. Duane did. Duane was aware of it, and he was concerned about it."[68] Jones's awareness of the film's racial implications can be felt in his portrayal of Ben, but also in the film's broader anti-racist subtext. For instance, the film's ending, in which Ben is killed by the white paramilitary posse, was Jones's idea. As Jones describes it, "The couple of endings that were alternately being discussed would have read wrong racially. . . . I convinced George that the black community would rather see me dead than saved, after all that had gone on, in a corny and symbolically confusing way."[69] Jones's argument that the black community would find Ben's survival symbolically confusing speaks to film's knowing engagement with the intertwined issues of racialized oppression and police violence that fueled the riots.

After nine months of shooting and five months of post-production, on April 4, 1968, *Night of the Living Dead* was completed. In December 1968 Manhattan theater chain Continental Distributing, the distribution arm of Walter Reade, began showing the film at grindhouses and drive-ins. Reviews were mixed, though it performed well; however, it wasn't until the film's re-release alongside the racially charged *Slaves* (1969) that *Night of the Living Dead* began to gain in popularity, and in 1970 the film was screened at the New York Museum of Modern Art, along with a Q and A by Romero.[70] Due to Continental failing to include a copyright declaration in the film's final title card, the film entered the public domain, and subsequent midnight screenings and campus showings have helped popularize the film.[71] In 1999 the Library of Congress

deemed the film "culturally, historically or aesthetically significant," and selected it for preservation in the National Film Registry.[72]

The first news report in *Night of the Living Dead.* The newscasts in *Night of the Living Dead* are crucial for understanding the film's critique of the 1967 riots, since the film emulates actual news coverage of the riots, though with white ghouls replacing villainized African Americans. The two diegetic news broadcasts, and the scenes that bracket them, are also key for understanding the largely unspoken racial antagonism between Ben and Harry Cooper, the pessimistic anti-racist climax of the film, and the film's criticism of news coverage of the riots. Furthermore, while the first newscast introduces the questionable palliative of a hegemonic social order, the second newscast makes explicit how this social order has historically depended upon the violent suppression of African Americans by drawing connections between the civil rights movement and the more recent riots.

Figure 2. Ben turns on the television, with rifle in the foreground, in *Night of the Living Dead* (1968).

The first newscast occurs 55 minutes into the film, at the beginning of the third of the film's four acts. Gathered together in a dead woman's living room, the survivors embody a diverse range of American culture (and American television viewers), from working class Tom and Judy, the white collar Coopers, the ingénue Barbara, to Ben, about which little is known beyond his race. The television first appears as Ben carries it into the living room with a rifle balanced upon it, a visual pairing that returns throughout the film (see Figure 2). As Ben fiddles at getting the TV setup, Harry, fuming at Ben's leadership, points his finger at Barbara, sitting

dazed on the couch, and declares “You better watch this and try to understand what’s going on!” The film cuts to a shot of Ben looking up from plugging in the television, and back to Harry, who declares “I don’t want anyone’s life on my hands!” Ben takes umbrage and tells Harry that if he’s going to be upstairs he takes orders from Ben, and that includes leaving Barbara alone. Harry’s declarations here make a mockery of many television news viewers; not only does he demonstrate his conviction that the news will supply an explanation for something as bizarre as the dead coming to life, but what’s more, that this explanation will absolve him from any responsibility for the living. Perhaps Harry’s belief in the absolving power of television comes from having his own perspectives validated by the overwhelmingly white male representatives on the television (everyone shown on the television screen are white men, except for a white female typist in the news studio background), but Ben’s anger functions as a challenge to Harry’s biases

Figure 3. In *Night of the Living Dead*'s apocalyptic living room, the television, placed before a boarded-up window, takes center stage (1968).

Notably, in this living room the television is placed before, and figuratively replaces, the windows (see Figure 3). Immediately before this scene, Harry declares "Man, they talk about these windows. I can't see a damn thing! There could be fifteen million of those things out there, that's how much good these windows are," though this interest in the windows dissipates as the television arrives. A similar series of events occur the second time the television is turned on. Peering through the boarded-up windows, Ben and Harry watch the monsters outside, before Ben turns on the television, and again the survivors gather around the television. This repeated

relationship between boarded-up windows and television extends, and complicates, the "television as windows to the world" comparison. As Lynn Spigel has shown, television and windows have had a complex association—television is often compared to windows; however while windows blur the distinction between indoors and outdoors, television constructs the home as a private space by delivering the public world into the living room.[73] An important effect of television's mediation between these public and private realms is that television comes to construct how we imagine community. In 1967 the news was dominated by white men, much as it is in the film, however both the riots and the ghouls disrupt such hegemonic narratives. While Harry believes that the news will provide insight into the situation and absolve him of responsibility, over the course of the film, viewers witness the multiple failures of the news and the ways that it delivers to the survivors a false and doomed sense of social order. While in this parable of America the boarded-up windows bolster the feeling of the living room as a private space, this distinction, and the sense of social order that comes along with it, will be overturned by film's end. Not only will the barriers be destroyed, but Ben's death by a bullet shot through a window will reveal how the all-white, all-male narrative of social order that the television delivers depends upon the violent erasure of black lives.

As the television comes into focus, we, as well as the survivors, encounter the anchorman, played by actual news anchor Charles Craig (who wrote his own copy), declaring. "Initial reports, incredible as they may seem, are not the result of mass hysteria."[74] This phrasing of "mass hysteria" echoes the radio's earlier cautions about "ordinary looking people" who were actually "assassins" and "murder happy characters." Such evocative discourse mirrors actual descriptions of rioters. For instance, Governor Hughes of New Jersey described the riots as "a

criminal insurrection by people who say they hate the white man but who really hate America."[75] The film replicates such language of denunciation throughout its newscasts.

The anchorman goes on to provide advice that will ultimately have disastrous consequences for the survivors, announcing that,

> When this emergency first began, radio and television was advising people to stay inside behind locked doors for safety. Well that situation has now changed. We're able to report a definite course of action for you. Civil defense machinery has been organized to provide rescue stations with food, shelter, medical treatment, and protection by armed National Guardsmen.

As with the 1967 riots, viewers encounter an American disaster in which armed National Guardsmen are identified as offering protection, though as their actions during the riots proved, it is worth questioning their protection. Pursuing this "definite course of action," the survivors decide to refuel a truck and escape to the nearest rescue station in Willard. Harry argues against leaving the house, pointing out that they are outnumbered and have a sick child; however, the other characters follow the news anchor's advice. The survivors' plans go awry, and Judy and Tom are immolated while trying to gas up the truck.

This newscast identifies itself as a national, as opposed to local, newscast, since the news anchor instructs viewers to "Stay tuned for broadcasting stations in your local area for this list of rescue stations." Locations near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania are immediately displayed on the bottom of the screen. This list of rescue stations superimposed upon a national news broadcast displays how, despite *appearing* live, this newscast has been prerecorded and supplied to the local news station, which then superimposed the names of local rescue stations over the national news anchor's delivery. As viewers we can see how this newscast is quite mediated, and has

been edited before being broadcast. We also encounter here how, much as news coverage of the 1967 riots interconnected diverse local instances into a larger national crisis, the news is able to unify the local and national into one hegemonic social order.

In addition to providing information that turns out to have disastrous consequences, the newscast also includes a prerecorded walking interview with scientists and a military general who have just left a meeting with the president. Viewers are able to clearly discern that this section is prerecorded since the interview is filmed during the day, but it is night at the house, a temporal disjunction that displays how the news interweaves live and recorded segments. The interview is filmed in Washington D.C., with the Capitol Building visible in the background, as newsman Don Quinn, played by Romero himself, attempts to get answers.[76] One of the scientists claims that there is "a definite connection" between an irradiated Venus probe destroyed by NASA, and the dead rising. The general disagrees with the scientists, and Don Quinn asks the general, "In other words, it's the military's viewpoint that the radiation is not the cause of the mutation?" to which the general replies, "I can't speak for the entire military at this time gentlemen. I must disagree with these gentlemen presently, until we, uh, until this is irrefutably proved." The authority of the talking heads is undermined by these competing claims, and the surly general exudes an air of combativeness. This prerecorded news segment displays a government in disarray, and the evasiveness of these figures undermines any comforting belief in the government, or the government's response to the ongoing catastrophe.

This prerecorded segment bears a striking resemblance to news reports during the summer of 1967 as talking heads struggled to offer explanations for the riots. In one interview Cyrus Vance, special assistant to Defense Secretary Robert McNamara and President Johnson's representative in Detroit, consistently evades reporter's questions, and brusquely walks off

before the reporters are finished: “Where will the meeting be held?” “I don’t know.” “What circumstances will it take to send the troops in to Detroit?” “Well, we’ll have to wait and see what happens.” “Are there some general lines or criteria you’ll be considering?” “I’m not prepared to say at this point.”[77] Again, much as within the film, we encounter a government representative who is unwilling to provide definite answers, or to clarify the government’s response to the ongoing crisis.

The news broadcast next cuts back to the studio where the anchorman discusses the declaration of martial law (much as occurred in Newark, and elsewhere in 1967) and interviews Dr. Grimes, a specialist in physiological research. Dr. Grimes describes a cadaver with its limbs amputated coming back to life (though why he has a cadaver with its limbs cut off is never addressed), before recommending viewers to cremate dead bodies before they return to life. He advises, “The bereaved will have to forgo the dubious comforts that a funeral service will give. They’re just dead flesh, and dangerous.” We can see in Dr. Grimes’s proclamation how existing social mores are being challenged, but he also ascribes to these dead neighbors a sense of agency that emphasizes their liminal status between life and death.

The second news report in *Night of the Living Dead.* While the first newscast supplies the questionable palliative of a hegemonic social order, a comfort that is quickly challenged with Tom and Judy’s immolation, the second newscast visually remixes news coverage of the recent riots with news coverage of the civil rights movement to show how this social order remains dependent upon the violent suppression of African Americans. Occurring seventeen minutes before the end of the film, the second newscast is introduced as Helen comes up from the

basement, rubs her temples, and asks, “Isn’t it three o’clock yet? There’s supposed to be another broadcast at three o’clock.” “Ten minutes,” Harry notes, to which a dazed Barbara replies, “Oh, only ten more minutes. We don’t have very long to wait. We can leave. Well, we better leave soon. It’s ten minutes to three.” Here the survivors rely on the news and its sense of liveness for comfort to such a degree that Barbara conflates the news with escape.

Figure 4. The posse in *Night of the Living Dead* (1968).

Mid-action from looking out a barricaded window, Ben bends down with rifle in hand and turns on the TV, and again the television is shot straight on. The anchorman returns, and

after describing how the radiation continues to rise, he introduces the next prerecorded segment, declaring that, “Our news cameras have just returned from covering such a search and destroy operation against the ghouls, this one conducted by Sheriff Conan McClelland in Butler County, Pennsylvania. So now let’s go to that film report.” Over images of rural white men with guns, the anchorman’s voice explains that “All law enforcement agencies, and the military, have been organized to search out and destroy the marauding ghouls” (see Figure 4). As noted, the phrase “search and destroy” echoes its usage in reporting on Vietnam; however, the term “marauding” means this crisis sounds like news coverage of the 1967 riots.

Figure 5. This scene displays the type of newscasts Americans were witnessing in 1967. Note that the white man at right is not wearing a police uniform, yet has a pistol tucked into his waistband, in *Civil Disturbance* (1967, Courtesy of the State Archives of Florida).

By 1968, audiences were primed by the news to associate scenes of police activity with racial discord. As the *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, popularly called the Kerner Report, notes,

> As the summer of 1967 progressed, we think Americans often began to associate more or less neutral sights and sounds (like a squad car with flashing red lights, a burning building, a suspect in police custody) with racial disorders, so that the appearance of any particular item, itself hardly inflammatory, set off a whole sequence of association with riot events.[78]

The commission, tasked by President Johnson with discovering the causes of the riots, was particularly critical of "the relatively high frequency with which television showed and described law enforcement agents, police, National Guardsmen, and army troops performing control functions," which meant television viewers had a skewed understanding of the riots (see Figure 5).[79] *Night of the Living Dread* draws on this conditioned response, but its inclusion of armed rural men also invokes earlier white challenges to Southern desegregation.[80] Romero makes this connection explicit in an interview when, while discussing the posse scenes, he declares, "I wanted that stuff to look [like] newsreels, everything from the race riots in the South to police coming out with dogs. I wanted it to look like all-American crisis footage."[81] In other words, we find in these posse scenes a remixing of diverse American histories of racial oppression, including white resistance to desegregation and more recent responses to the riots. This effect is

further emphasized by the film's use of actual uniformed policemen, and many of the posse members were off-duty police with their own weapons.[82]

News reporter Bill Cardille, a Pittsburgh news reporter who also hosted the late night horror program *Chiller Theatre*, next appears onscreen interviewing Sheriff Conan McClelland.[83] McClelland bears a striking resemblance to Birmingham, Alabama's Commissioner of Public Safety, Eugene "Bull" Connor, best known for ordering the police to use dogs and fire hoses against civil rights activists during his suppression of the May 1963 demonstrations led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Not only are the names Conan McClelland and "Bull" Connor similar, but the fictional sheriff also wears a short-brimmed straw hat that looks almost exactly like the straw hat "Bull" Connor famously wore.[84] In the interview Cardille asks, "Chief, do you think we'll be able to defeat these things," to which the sheriff responds, "Well, we killed 19 of them today right in this area. Those last three we caught trying to claw their way into an abandoned shed. They must have thought somebody was in there. There wasn't though." By describing the ghouls as "them," the sheriff displays an us vs. them mentality, but it is his description of the final three ghouls that is particularly disturbing, since the sheriff fails to consider the possibility that the ghouls were attempting to hide, or that they might have any alternative motives at all. This sort of one-dimensional thinking echoes the police's construction of rioters and civil rights activists in reductive, dehumanized, terms, as well as helping to explain the sheriff's subsequent failure to distinguish between a black man with a gun and a ghoul.

***Night of the Living Dead* moves beyond the television screen.** Soon after Cardille signs off, the power in the house cuts out and the television and the lights go dark. Without the television to hold the survivors' attention they increasingly turn on each other. The television, despite its

questionable advice, had supplied the survivors with a feeling of order against the chaos of the undead. Isolated from the social order television helps to maintain, Harry begins scheming to get Ben's rifle, and the unspoken racial tension between them comes to a head. In scenes shot from a dizzying array of cinematic angles, Ben, while bolstering a window's fortifications, drops the rifle, which Harry grabs and points at Ben. They fight and Ben shoots Harry, who stumbles into the basement and dies, only to be eaten by his now ghoul daughter. Helen goes to the basement and is killed by her daughter, while Barbara is pulled outside by her ghoul brother. Only Ben survives, retreating to the basement and shooting the resurrected Coopers in the head.

In Ben's shooting of Harry, we encounter a black man shooting a white man, enacting in microcosm the fear of a racial uprising that gripped the nation in 1967. Yet, Ben's shooting of Harry also feels justified since Harry had just threatened Ben with the rifle. This exchange complicates news coverage of the riots that, rather than acknowledging that rioters had real grievances, falsely claimed that "militant blacks" had fomented the discord. As Casandra Ulbrich points out in her discussion of the media's framing of the riots,

> "Negroes" were often described as the aggressors. Whether they were portrayed as rioters, looters, or snipers, one thing that was presented as fact was that most were black. Whites were often described as the victims of the uprising, with black aggression being focused on white business owners as the main target. One particular group emerged as an opportune scapegoat: the "militant blacks."[85]

Ben's shooting of Harry challenges this narrative—Ben doesn't look like a militant; rather he appears to be defending his life. While the news presented whites as victims of black aggression, *Night of the Living Dead* subverts this narrative by showing Ben being menaced by Harry's threats of violence to such a degree that Ben's killing of Harry feels justified.

The film shows the house being overrun with ghouls before cutting to calm exterior shots of the house and the sun rising, with the sounds of birds in the background. The long night is over and the film becomes more free-floating as armed posse members cross a field with a helicopter overhead. Police dogs are shown exiting police vehicles, again invoking "Bull" Connor's violent response to the 1963 Birmingham protests. There is, though, a sort of calm lyricism, as if we have moved beyond the claustrophobic confines of the house. The armed forces we learned about on the news have arrived and perhaps rescue is at hand for Ben.

Figure 6. Cameraman Steve, Bill Cardille, and Sheriff Conan McClelland, shown from below, rather than the straight on style of news reporting, in *Night of the Living Dead* (1968).

The film next cuts to the location of Cardille's earlier televised interview with Sheriff McClelland, though now in a representational film style with low angled shots that emphasize with equal attention Cardille and the sheriff, along with Cardille's cameraman Steve (see Figure 6). Order seems to have been restored as the sheriff informs Cardille: "We should be wrapped here in about three or four more hours, and we'll probably get into Willard then. I guess you can go over there and meet the National Guard." Much like during the riots, the newscasts within the film will emphasize the perspectives of the police and National Guard. After the sheriff walks off, cameraman Steve tells Cardille, "I'm going to check in with the office and see what's happening," to which Cardille replies, looking heroically into the distance, "Alright Steve. Tell them that we're going to stay with it and everything appears to be under control." Representatives of both the police and news media claim that the danger is over and that social order has returned, a claim Ben's subsequent death will challenge.

Cameraman Steve has thus far remained unseen by film's audience, since the view from Steve's camera was shown earlier on the news. Here cameraman and camera are displayed to the film's audience, making visible the previously hidden tools of the news's creation. This mise-en-scène also constructs an important visual comparison between the camera on the cameraman's shoulder on the left and the rifle on the sheriff's shoulder on the right. The idea of a camera as being similar to a gun has long been commented upon.[86] Regarding the television camera, Stanley Cavell writes that "in live television, what is present to us while it is happening is not the world, but an event standing out from the world. Its point is not to reveal, but to cover (as with a

gun), to keep something on view."[87] Here Cavell points out that the news camera presents a very limited range of what's happening, much like a gun's ability to cover a limited range of events, keeping something on view, and perhaps violently so.

This visual metaphor of news camera and gun extends and completes the film's earlier visual pairings of television and gun. When Ben first carries the television into the living room he is balancing a rifle upon it, and the rifle is visually prominent both times Ben turns on the television (see Figure 3).[88] *Night of the Living Dead* constructs a complex visual metaphor that interconnects news camera, rifle, and television, implying that thanks to television's feeling of liveness, the camera's ability to cover a scene "as with a gun" is extended from scene to television viewer. By first visually pairing living room television and rifle, and then extending this relationship to include the camera, the film suggests that the news, in its circuit from production to consumption, can be as dangerous as a rifle, the very thing that kills Ben. Film viewers are invited to interconnect these visual pairings, and by extension come to understand the news as dangerous.

The film presents various scenes of the posse slaughtering ghouls, and Ben, hearing the shooting, leaves the basement and enters the house. In a scene that evokes the figure of the black sniper, Ben is framed by a destroyed window with his rifle held up. Hearing a noise in the house, a posse member aims his rifle, while the sheriff advises him to "hit him in the head, right between the eyes." The sheriff's instructions to shoot "right between the eyes" complicates the death that follows, since if the posse member can aim "right between the eyes," then presumably he sees much the same scene that film viewers do: a black man holding a rifle. Thus far, the ghouls have displayed only the most rudimentary of tool usage, and none have been shown holding a gun.

The posse member fires and the film cuts to Ben falling on the floor. "Good shot!" the sheriff exclaims, and turning to the posse declares, "Okay he's dead. Let's go get him. That's another one for the fire." The earlier sense of having escaped the danger of the ghouls is overturned, replaced with a feeling of outrage. If, as Cardille declared, "everything appears to be under control," then this control is not safety but unwarranted, state sanctioned, violence. Despite the audience's identification with Ben as the film's protagonist, we encounter the police shooting an African-American man, and an armed one at that. It is within this disjunction between viewers' expectations for Ben and the death we see onscreen that the film's critique of America's response to the 1967 riots is strongest, since it juxtaposes the film's narrative against the culturally dominant narrative of dangerous African-American men. Furthermore, as cinema viewers we understand these events as meaningful in ways that will not make it onto the news, since the diegetic news crew will interview the National Guard next.

To represent the aftermath of Ben's death, the film transitions from cinematic representation to a freeze-frame style that emphasizes viewers' feelings of helplessness as the camera pans over grainy photographs of posse members with meathooks dragging Ben's body to a wood pile and setting him, and other carcasses, on fire. As Caetlin Benson-Allott points out in her discussion of this scene, "the stills wrench the spectator from her established place in the cinematic apparatus to awaken her to the movie's political allegory."[89] By transitioning from a cinematic mode of representation to still images, the film questions its own ability to depict Ben's dead body and the violences done to it.[90] Much as the film has challenged the news's claims of representing "reality," we see here a similar sort of self-aware caution about cinema itself. As these final scenes prove, cinema cannot solve or absolve the news's failures. Rather, viewers must think critically about the information they are shown, since if the film's last scene

of the bonfire is any indication, American's continued pursuit of an us vs. them mentality, particularly regarding race, may end in conflagration.

Conclusion. As I have shown, the newscasts in *Night of the Living Dead* are important for understanding the film's criticisms of news's coverage of the 1967 riots. The familiarity of Image Ten members with television, as well as the film being shot in black and white, meant *Night of the Living Dead* was able to look much like newscasts of the riots. Furthermore, the film displays a canny awareness of television's power as an ideological medium, including television's sense of liveness. Ultimately, the film satirizes the news, while also showing what news coverage of the 1967 riots failed to show—the experiences of African Americans. Ben's outrageous death at the hands of the posse inverts news coverage of the riots by revealing a state sanctioned violence much like that which fueled, and was present throughout, the 1967 riots. The film was finished in an America gripped by fear, and after the riots gun sales shot up in Detroit, and FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover established the Cointelpro-Black Hate program to disrupt the actions of Black nationalists.[91] *Night of the Living Dead* subverts these fears of a potential race war to fears of being overrun by ghouls, and in this subversion unpacks how America's fears have been constructed and dispersed by the news.

Fifty years later Romero's message remains a powerful testament to the dangers of bias in the news. That critical discussions of *Night of the Living Dead* have failed to attend to the riots' influence for so long reveals our own tendencies as scholars to hew too closely to the dominant historical narrative. Revisiting and reconsidering how current events find their way into films offers new models for recontextualizing films and their relations to the social realities they respond to, or in the case of horror films, seek to overturn. Today Romeo's caution is as

relevant as ever—we must consider who is constructing the narratives we interpret as real, and consider what remains unrepresented.

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[17] Thomas J. Hrach, *The Riot Report and the News: How the Kerner Commission Changed Media Coverage of Black America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016), 11-12. See also, Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America.* New York: Scribner, 2008: 3-19.

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[49] Mary Ann Doane, "Information, Crisis, Catastrophe," 251-264. Doane distinguishes between catastrophe, which is caused by natural events, and crisis, which is caused by people. I've chosen to refer to the ghouls as a catastrophe, since their resurrection is caused by space radiation, and the riots as a crisis.

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[66] David L. Moody, *The Complexity and Progression of Black Representation in Film and Television* (New York: Lexington Books, 2016), 41.

[67] Tim Ferrante, “A Farewell to Duane Jones,” *Fangoria*, 80 (February 1989), 15-16, https://issuu.com/fangoriafans/docs/fangoria__080__i__madman_. Original emphasis.

[68] Mandalit Del Barco, "George Romero, Creator of 'Night of the Living Dead,' Dies at 77," *NPR.* https://www.npr.org/2017/07/17/537754596/george-romero-creator-of-night-of-the-living-dead-dies-at-77.

[69] Ferrante, "A Farewell to Duane Jones," 16.

[70] Hervey, *Night of the Living Dead,* 15-17; Hoberman and Rosenbaum, *Midnight Movies*, 125.

[71] Hervey*, Night of the Living Dead,* 14.

[72] "Complete National Film Registry Listing," Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/programs/national-film-preservation-board/film-registry/complete-national-film-registry-listing/.

[73] Lynn Spigel. "The Home Theater," in *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal In Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 99-135; See also, Lynn Spigel, "The Suburban Home Companion: Television and the Neighborhood Ideal in Postwar America," in *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 31-59.

[74] Hervey, *Night of the Living Dead*, 73.

[75] Bigart, "Newark Riot Deaths at 21."

[76] Hervey, *Night of the Living Dead,* 75.

[77] WXYZ TV-7 documentary *Detroit Riot*.

[78] Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, "The News Media and the Disorders," *Channeling Blackness: Studies on Television and Race in America*, ed. Darnell M. Hunt, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 27.

[79] Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, 30.

[80] For more on this, see Sasha Torres's *Black, White, and in Color* and Allison Graham's *Framing the South: Hollywood, Television, and Race During the Civil Rights Struggle* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

[81] George Romero, interview with Tim Robey, "George A Romero: Why I Don't like The Walking Dead." *The Telegraph*, November 8, 2013, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/10436738/George-A-Romero-Why-I-dont-like-The-Walking-Dead.html.

[82] George Romero, Alex Ben Block. "Filming *Night of the Living Dead*: An Interview with Director George Romero," orig. 1972, in *George A. Romero: Interviews*, 13.

[83] Cardille signs off at the end of his segment using his actual name. As Romero explains, "He would talk about us on the air a lot, and I think he had a lot to do with our ability to ultimately raise money and finish the movie. Simply because he would talk about us to his audience. It gave us that extra bit of credibility. Plus he came out and was in the film—and brought the news guys from the station and some valuable props that we couldn't afford!" George Romero, Paul Gagne, "George Romero on Directing *Day of the Dead*," orig. 1985, in *George A. Romero: Interviews,* 103.

[84] William Nunnelley. *Bull Connor* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1991), 153.

[85] Casandra E. Ulbrich, "The Shift in Media Framing," in *Detroit 1967: Origins, Impacts, Legacies*, 283.

[86] Susan Sontag draws parallels between camera and gun, and while her focus is on still photography, her analysis is foundational for subsequent discussions of the film camera. Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Picador, 1977), 14-15. Donna Haraway also discusses the film camera and gun as having an ambiguous relationship wrapped up with manhood and

domination. Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 43.

[87] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 26.

[88] The second time Ben turns the television on the rifle is in his left hand.

[89] Caetlin Benson-Allott, *Killer Tapes and Shattered Screens: Video Spectatorship From VHS to File Sharing* (University of California Press, 2013), 35.

[90] Benson-Allott, 36. Similarly, Amy Rust notes that, "freeze-frames imply standing outside conventional experience, violently wrenched from dominant forms. They… hold the body—material, diegetic, and spectatorial—rapt in a state of lingering excitation." *Passionate Detachments: Technologies of Vision and Violence in American Cinema, 1967-1974* (SUNY Press, 2017), 86.

[91] William Winkel, "In the Uprising's Wake: Reaction in the White Community," in *Detroit 1967: Origins, Impacts, Legacies*, 266; McLaughlin, *The Long Hot Summer of 1967*, 155.