Daywalkin' Night Stalkin' Bloodsuckas
Black Vampires in Contemporary Film

By FRANCES GATEWARD

[1] Vampires seem to have timeless appeal. It would be no stretch to consider them the most pervasive figures of the fantastic in contemporary popular culture. For years they have been a part of our "nutritious" breakfasts (in the form of Count Chocula cereal), avatars and nemesis in the virtual realms of our X Boxes, Sony Playstations, Macs, and PCs (in games such as Dark Stalkers, Dracula Resurrection and Vampire: The Masquerade); and as both the hunters and hunted on television - in television movies, mini-series, daytime soaps, and weekly programming (Salem's Lot, Ultraviolet, Dark Shadows, and Angel respectively). They even live on that thoroughfare where "friendly neighbors meet," on Sesame Street in the form of The Count. We find them in comic books, both independent and mainstream, and in novels for practically every reader.

[2] For adults there are the novels of vampire lore in the style of classic horror, such as Richard Laymon's The Traveling Vampire Show; the eroticized tales by authors Anne Rice and Laurel Hamilton; genre-blending books like the mystery The Winter Man, about a forensic hematologist who is also a vampire, the humor-infused cultural critique Fat White Vampire Blues, and the well-received Undead and Unwed, a sort of "Sex and the City" with a single white fashionista vampire at the center of the narrative. In the young adult category there is the voraciously consumed Vampire Diaries series by L.J. Smith, romantic teen horror tales like Companions in the Night, and the numerous novels based on the Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Angel television shows. Even grade school children are fascinated by creatures of the night, occupying their leisure reading time with The Vampire's Vacation, Vampires Don't Wear Polka Dots, the wonderfully named Cirque du Freak series by Darren Shan, and the musings of popular authors R.L. Stine and Christopher Pike. And of course, we cannot forget the nightmares provided by the Hollywood dream factory.

[3] There are so many vampire films in fact, with so many shared conventions of iconography, theme, and character, that the vampire film has become a genre in itself. And as film studies has illustrated, no genre is stagnant - they are reshaped and re-articulated by cultural circumstance. Scholarly literature has traced the evolution of the vampire figure, relating the blood-sucker's changing construction to shifting cultural anxieties -- questions of the morality of imperialism and fear of reverse colonization (Arata); as metaphor for adolescent sexuality (Evans), sexually transmitted diseases such as AIDS (Dika), capitalism (Latham), and as a text concerned with patriarchy and women's sexuality (Demetrakopoulos). While there has been some work on the vampire concerned with ethnicity and race, for example, examining Stoker's novel as an anti-Semitic text, with Eastern Europe's Jews coming to suck the life blood out of Western Europe (McBride), there has not been much interrogation into the recent phenomenon of the Black vampire - despite their increasing presence in novels such as The Gilda Stories, My Soul to Keep, The Living Blood, and Minion, books centered in the myth, folklore, and history of the African Diaspora, and in the many films in which they are featured: Blacula (William Crain 1972), Ganja and Hess (Bill Gunn 1972), Scream Blacula Scream (Bob Kelljan 1973), Vampire (Clive Donner 1974), Vamp (Richard Wenk 1986), Def by Temptation (James Bond III 1990), Vampire in Brooklyn (Wes Craven 1999), Blade (Stephen Norrington 1998), Blade II (Guillermo del Toro 2002), and Blade: Trinity (David S. Goyer 2004), and Queen of the Damned (Michael Rymer 2002). This list, though quite extensive, does not even include the ensemble films like Wes Craven's Dracula 2000, in which African American actor Omar Epps appears. Members of a particular generation might remember the recurring character played by Morgan Freeman on PBS, Vincent the Vegetable Vampire on The Electric Company, or even be familiar with the claim among some members of the Black community that the animated trademark character Count Chocula was Black!

[4] As demonstrated by the other essays published in this special issue of Genders, the symbolic order of the horror genre has more
adaptations. It is used to invoke the horrors of the source of horror or the mere appropriation of Stoker's Vampirism in [8] (Benshoff, Lipsitz, and Medovoi).

Mamuwalde aka Blacula, to the destructive director, William Crain, and for linking about pimps and drug dealers in stack shoes, distribution businesses. Many films are frequently written or directed by Blacks, financed by Black talent in creative and/or financial control, often assumes incorrectly that is commonly referred to as Blaxploitation. The movie-viewing public does the intersection of race, gender, and constructions of race, addiction, and assimilation that violates conventional Hollywood norms of linear temporality, characterization, and causation. When they commissioned the film, they did so expecting a film in what Jack Crow (James Woods in John Carpenter's Vampires, 1998) denigrates as "cheesy Euro-trash accounts." The Hammer vampire films, which began in 1958 with Dracula (Terence Fisher) and continued with several others including Brides of Dracula (Terrence Fisher 1960), Dracula: Prince of Darkness (Terrence Fisher 1965), Taste the Blood of Dracula (Peter Sasdy 1969), and The Vampire Lovers (Ward Baker 1970) brought a heightened sensuality to horror films, with the use of deeply saturated color, lush sets, and sexually charged characterizations of the Count and his associates, and inspired even more genre play. There was genre mixing, as in the amazing Hammer-Golden Harvest transnational co-production, Legend of the Seven Golden Vampires, (Roy Ward Baker and Chang Cheh) in 1974, which provided "Hammer Horror and Dragon Thrills," to create the first kung fu/horror spectacular. The Seventies saw the wide theatrical release of Bare Breasted Countess aka Female Vampire (Jesus Franco credited as J.P. Johnson 1973), Nosferatu the Vampire by Werner Herzog (1979), the successful Broadway play Dracula adapted into a movie by John Badham (1979), the parody Love at First Bite (Stan Dragoti 1979), Count Yorga (Bob Kellihan 1970) and its sequel, the Omega Man (Boris Sagal 1971), based on Richard Matheson's novel I Legend, George Romero's Martin (1977), Zobben: Hound of Dracula (Albert Band 1978), on television the movie Salem's Lot (Toke Hooper 1979) and the drama series Night Stalker and of course Blacula, Scream Blacula Scream, and Bill Gunn's tour de force, Ganja and Hess (1972), a film with a distribution history as tortured as its characters. (After the original film won the Critics' Choice prize at Cannes and received favorable reviews as an 'art film,' the producers withdrew the film from distribution, claiming the writer/director failed to deliver a commercially viable film. It was re-cut, without Gunn's approval and re-released under the title Blade Couple).

The dismay of the producers of Ganja and Hess, Kelly and Jordan, was caused by Gunn's structuring the film into a complex treatise on race, addiction, and assimilation that violates conventional Hollywood norms of linear temporality, characterization, and causation. When they commissioned the film, they did so expecting a film in the mode of one of American cinema's continually disparaged trends, which is commonly referred to as Blaxploitation. The movie-viewing public often assumes incorrectly that all Black-themed films of the 1970s had Black talent in creative and/or financial control of the films -- very few were written or directed by Blacks, financed and produced by Black production companies, or reached theaters through Black-owned distribution businesses. Many films are frequently misidentified, despite the fact that they are not ultra-low budget, campy violent films about pimps and drug dealers in stack shoes, bell bottoms and furs. Blacula, for example, is particularly unique for having a Black director, William Crain, and for linking the plight of its protagonist, Mamuwalde aka Blacula, to the destructive legacies of the slave trade (Benshoff, Lipsitz, and Medovoi).

Vampirism in Blacula is more than just a premise to provide a source of horror or the mere appropriation of Stoker's novel and its film adaptations. It is used to invoke the horrors of slavery and the
continued oppression of Black Americans. In the opening scene, Mamuwalde and his wife Luva have traveled to Eastern Europe in 1780 to meet with Dracula. They seek his aid because as a count, an aristocrat wielding considerable power, Dracula may hold considerable sway in ending the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Mamuwalde, played by the Shakespearean-trained William Marshall, is presented here as a charming, wise, and noble African leader. The vampire, however, relying on stereotypes of Africa as primitive and uncivilized, reveals himself to be the true primitive. The Count refuses to take Mamuwalde and Luva's petition seriously, making obvious his unwillingness to renounce the access his class, race, and gender affords him over women of color. The film's overt allusions to enslavement are abundant in the opening sequence. Mamuwalde is imprisoned, torn away from his beloved, takes on his "master's" name, and is as Medavoi states "forced to make the Middle Passage in a coffin," traveling across the Atlantic, suffering in confinement.

[9] It is important to note that in the original theatrical trailer for the film, Blacula is referred to not as a monstrosity to fear or a source of horror, but as a Black avenger in contemporary Los Angeles. The film critiques 20th century racial oppression by its depiction of police power, which is used not to protect and serve, but to work as an occupying force, harassing and brutalizing the Black poor with impunity. No doubt some audiences, having experienced such encounters with the police only a few years after the uprisings, as in Watts in 1965, took cathartic pleasure from the climactic scene, where Blacula fights off night-stick wielding and gun-toting uniformed police officers.

[10] Perhaps even more compelling is Mamuwalde's romantic involvement with Tina, a woman who bears a striking resemblance to his long-dead wife Luva. His interest can be read as his attempt to regain his pre-vampiric past. Tina's willingness to be his partner, to become a vampire, is her attempt to recuperate the nobility of African culture, during a period in American culture when the idea of Africa as a mythic homeland was prevalent in both the political and expressive cultures of Black Americans and the Diaspora as a whole.

[11] Blacula's resistance to the power structure represented by the police, his heartfelt expressions of love for a woman of beauty, strength, and vitality, and his tragic realization that he has been forced by a White man to prey on a community of African descent created empathy for the character, making him one of the first filmic vampires to transform the archetype from one of the solitary, bestial predator to that of a more humanized, reluctant victim. This is heightened to even greater effect in the sequel released the following year, 1973: Scream Blacula Scream, the title of which can be interpreted as an acknowledgment of the vampire's continued pain and anguish.

[12] At the start of the sequel, we witness the passing of Mama Loa, a powerful priestess of Voudon who leads the practitioners in her community. As she lies on her sick bed, her followers express concerns of who will become the successor. The group chooses Lisa (Pam Grier), Mama Loa's even-tempered and faithful apprentice over Mama Loa's son Willis. In a sexist rage, decrying the democratic process and ranting about the indignity of a woman taking what rightfully belonged to him, Willis vows revenge. He follows through on his threat by performing a ritual with a set of bones — unknowingly, the bones of Mamuwalde/Blacula. The resurrected vampire, learning of Lisa's knowledge and facile talents with voodoo, seeks her aid in "exorcising this demonic creature that inhabits [his] body" so that he can return home to his people. She is willing to oblige, but their efforts are thwarted, when, at the climax of the ritual, the L.A.P.D. intervenes.

[13] What the vampire seeks so desperately are freedom and a sense of the identity he once possessed, not only for himself, but also for others caught by powers beyond themselves. Just as Willis' resurrection of Blacula speaks to male power out of control, so too does the sex trade. Just before killing two pimps, Blacula lectures, "You made a slave out of your sisters, and you're still slaves imitating your slave masters," possibly the first and only time a cinematic

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vampire has recognized the complex intersection of sexism with both capitalism and racist hegemony!

[14] Another overlooked 70s vampire film that, like Blacula, critiques racism is Clive Donner's Vampira, starring David Niven as the (in)famous Vladimir the Impaler (another name for Dracula), and Teresa Graves, best known for her role as the action heroine Christie Love, as his wife. This light comedy takes full advantage of David Niven's screen persona, presenting a modern-day Dracula, a reader of Playboy (an odd example of product placement), who has opened up his castle to the public, hiring an actor to play a Bela Lugosi-inspired version of himself. His modernity and characterization as a suave, "cultured" distinguished Englishman, is emphasized by the presence of the campy, clichéd, cape-wearing imitation who entertains visitors to his "theme park." Vladimir's rationale for drawing tourists is more than just pecuniary — he needs them for involuntary blood donation, though not for consumption. He seeks an extremely rare blood type, triple O negative, to revive his mate Vampira, who since the 1920s, lies in a coma-like state after having bitten a person with extreme anemia. Four Playboy centerfold models (three White and one Black), along with a male writer for the magazine, travel from London to Transylvania for a photo shoot. The Count drugs them, takes their blood, and proceeds with the transfusion. After the re-awakening procedure is complete, Dracula's beloved is revived, but her skin is noticeably darker, transforming her from White to Black before the viewers' eyes. While Dracula is distressed, Vampira is quite pleased. Upon discovering her darkened skin, she proclaims with awe and wonder, "I'm Black! If only I weren't a vampire I could look at myself [in a mirror]. It is beautiful! Dracula confused, concerned, and not wanting to upset Vampira, can only reply hesitantly, "Yes, Black is beautiful."

[15] The film has literalized the American definition of Blackness - the one drop rule, the hypo-descent definition that renders a person with any known Black ancestry Black, which in the United States, applies to no other race. The fears rendered in public health policies concerning race and blood transfusions throughout U.S. history are realized here, and Dracula spends the rest of the film trying to reverse the racial transformation. Like his namesake in the Stoker novel, Dracula travels from Eastern Europe to England in pursuit of a woman. He takes Vampira to London to find the donor, thinking that perhaps this Blackness can be filtered out. Vampira, unlike other films involving vampirism and tropes of the horror genre, radically differs by presenting the spectacle of racial "Otherness" directly, rather than subverting it. The horror and revulsion is experienced not by the humans in the film, or even by the audience, but by Count Dracula.

[16] While the he is out chasing the playmates, Vampira goes on the town in celebration of her Blackness. When she goes to the movies she chooses a film titled Jack Gunn, a play on Gordon Park's film Shaft (1971). From her experience in the theater, she learns how to speak African American vernacular English, which she uses throughout the rest of the movie, even calling Dracula a "jive turkey" later in the film when he refuses to let her go out. She also spends a lot of time shopping, abandoning her flapper clothing for ensembles audiences would recognize as those befitting characters like Grave's own Christie Love, or Cleopatra Jones and Foxy Brown. The music the vampire couple play in their Hefner-inspired, swinging London pad, during the film's climactic party scene, intended to entice the Playboy playmates to their lair - is of all things, funk!

[17] The film does a brilliant job of playing on our assumptions - for as we follow Dracula in his search for the blood donor, we also expect her to be the young Black model that visited Castle Dracula. As it turns out, the donor is a blonde White woman. The answer to the racial dilemma in the film is not to restore Vampira to Whiteness, but for Dracula to become Black....and he does, after Vampira bites him. The film uses the trope of vampirism to simultaneously critique racism, calling us on our own assumptions, while at the same time addressing the influence of Black popular culture. Black expressive culture in the film has become the dominant popular culture - fashion, language, music, and in cinema. The vampire Count, whom we thought was modern at the opening of the film, is shown to be to be out of step with contemporary society, as highlighted by the film's alternate title Old Dracula. For him to be truly hip, he must not only become Black, which he does, but he must also expropriate Black culture. At the end of the movie we see him and Vampira at the airport, walking toward their Transylvania Airlines flight, both looking "superfly."

A Mighty Epic of Modern Morals!

[16] One the most intriguing Black vampire films ever produced is the 1990 feature Def by Temptation by actor-turned writer, producer,
This film was released by Troma, the production and distribution company of exploitation films. Its most famous, or perhaps infamous, titles being _The Toxic Avenger_ (Michael Herz and Lloyd Kaufman 1985), _Surf Nazis Must Die_ (Peter George 1985) and _Sgt. Kabuki Man NYPD_ (Herz and Kaufman 1991). It is no surprise to find a horror film among Troma's catalogue, as exploitation films use well-established Hollywood genres, often treating the narrative formulas and iconography in what some would describe as a campy and "tastless" manner, highlighting material that would be considered offensive by more mainstream audiences: alternative sexualities, recreational drug use, and of course, an abundance of blood and gore. Because exploitation films are considered a low brow form of entertainment, films like those of Troma are typically regarded with dismissive disdain by both popular critics and the general public, despite their immense popularity. Yet like other denigrated popular culture forms, such as the soap opera and until quite recently, the comic book, these films are important, for they speak to specialized audiences, offering pleasure in forms not provided by more mainstream producers of the culture industry. Often lifted to cult status and watched in ritual contexts, the films may be cheap, raw, and trashy in terms of production value, but they have the potential to directly challenge the dominant ideologies of sexism, white supremacy, homophobia, and capitalism upon which high-brow aesthetics rest.

[19] When _Def by Temptation_ was released in the early 1990s it was a part of a renaissance of Black American filmmaking. Inspired by the growing popularity of rap music and hip hop culture, as well as the commercial success of three films produced well beneath the $40 million average for a Hollywood feature — Spike Lee's _She's Gotta Have It_ (1986), a film budgeted at $175,000 that made over $8 million at the box office; Robert Townsend's _Hollywood Shuffle_ (1987), the $100,000 feature financed by personal credit cards that garnered more than $7 million; and Reginald and Warrington Hudlin's _House Party_ (1990), costing $2.5 million and earning more than $27 million — Hollywood distributors released a spate of Black-directed films in 1991, the first time such a high volume of Black-themed films were released in commercial theaters since the Blaxploitation movement of the 1970s. Perhaps even more significant is the fact that it was also the first time since the Race movies of the silent era that so many Black-themed films were actually written and directed by Black filmmakers.

[20] Bond's vampire film, with cinematography by Ernest Dickerson and featuring actors Bill Nunn, Kadeem Hardison, and an early film role for Samuel L. Jackson, is a dark, moody, and in many ways, provocative film. Like other films of the period, _Def by Temptation_ centers on the coming of age of a young black man in an urban setting, but unlike the "New Jack Cinema" of _Boyz 'n' the Hood_ (1991), _Straight Out of Brooklyn_ (1991) and _Menace II Society_ (1993), set in the economically deprived areas of South Central, Red Hook, and Watts respectively, Bond's film contains none of the common tropes associated with the "hood" movies - blighted city landscapes, narcotics trafficking, and hyper-stylized gang violence. Though all the Black-directed films of this period such as _Daughters of the Dust_ by Julie Dash, Charles Burnett's _To Sleep with Anger_, and _Chameleon Street_ by Wendell B. Harris (all released in 1991) were not analogous to the gangsta tradition, _Def by Temptation_ seems even more of an anomaly, given its title, which makes use of hip hop argot, and the narrative focus, on a young man experiencing life in the big city for the first time. It is no shock that the Troma release contains staple exploitation images of blood and sex, including the relatively rare use of full-frontal male nudity. What is surprising about _Def by Temptation_, different from both the "hood" movies and exploitation horror, is its story, a modern incarnation of an old Race film staple - the "uplift" narrative, commonly found in films made from 1910 through the 1940s.

[21] At the turn of the Twentieth century, Black Americans were increasingly under assault from theorists in the natural and medical sciences who continued to make false claims of White racial biological superiority, and from psychologists and social scientists who deemed Black culture as deviant and pathological (Allen, Gilman). The wide-scale circulation of such ideas resulted in prejudicial social policy, increased systematic structural discrimination, and had a direct impact on the magnitude of racial violence. It is no coincidence that the lynching of Black Americans was at its height during this period, from 1880-1930 (Tohnay and Beck), or that urban centers experiencing the influx of Blacks during the Great Migration would explode in racialized violence, such as during the Red Summer of 1919, when violence incited by Whites erupted in twenty-six cities. Middle and upper-class
Black Americans, in the attempt to assert their humanity and their demands for equality, advocated a positive Black identity. These elites put forth an ideology of self-help and service. Though there was no single definition of uplift agreed upon by those who led the charge, as the theories were varied and frequently contested among the Black intelligentsia, they held in common the aim of anti-racism. It was in this context that early Black filmmakers emerged, producing films that highlighted the benefits of temperance and thrift, the condemnation of gambling, and the promotion of Christian doctrine. In the work of Black filmmakers like Oscar Micheaux, Bill Foster, Richard Maurice, Eloise Gist, and Spencer Williams, no-accounts, gamblers, dope fiends and shiftless characters always get their comeuppance, while those grounded in Christian faith that sought formal education and reflected the "proper" work ethic emerged triumphant. Def by Temptation is, in fact, a Black religious drama in the tradition of Spencer Williams' Blood of Jesus (1941), considered by historian Thomas Cripps to be the most popular Race movie ever produced (130). Both films are centered on a crisis of faith, where an individual is at the crossroads, caught at the intersection where the paths of religious doctrine and free will meet. The temptation to stray from the righteous path is not symbolized as a new pair of high heels, a glamorous evening gown, or that devil music jazz, which entices Martha (Cathryn Caviness) in Williams' Southern folk drama, where her soul goes on a symbolic journey as she lays dying from a gunshot wound.

[22] In Bond's film, Joel, a divinity student from rural North Carolina only months away from completing his education, visits his older brother K in Manhattan. Experiencing a crisis of faith, he seeks his brother's counsel as well as a change of scenery. Despite his grandmother's warning, Joel is quickly lured by the possibility of a fast, decadent lifestyle of clubbing and barhopping in New York, with sin represented as lasciviousness—progressing from promiscuous pre-marital hetero sex, to adultery, and ultimately homosexuality.

[23] The female vampire/demon, aptly named Temptation, seeks only men as her prey, specifically, men she will punish for their debauchery, utilizing suggestive clothing, coy body language, and flirtatious conversation to beguile. Once ensnared the men are led to her bedroom, where the erotic coincides with death. The first victim is a bartender who uses his occupation to meet available women. In the opening scene, he receives a telephone call from one of his former conquests, informing him that she is pregnant. He callously tells her to "get rid of it," suggesting they can have more "fun" after the abortion. He hangs up angrily, annoyed that the call has interrupted his pursuit of the beautiful young woman at the end of the bar, the vampire.

[24] The next man to succumb to Temptation's charms is Norman, aka John, a married man who, pretending he is single, prowls the bar in search of a one-night stand. On the morning after his dalliance with the vampire, Norman wakes to find his back deeply scarred by his claw-like fingernails, and thus, in a state making it difficult to return home. With an air of righteous indignation, he castigates her for marking him with a symbol of his adultery. She lies languorously in bed, amused at Norman's outburst. In an eerie voice several octaves lower than normal, she tells him that she has given him something worse — something for which there is no cure, which we presume is the AIDS virus. As his skin transforms, covered with pustules, Norman refuses to acknowledge his involvement in contracting the disease. Rather he sees himself only as a victim, protesting the unfair consequences of his participation in male privilege. The demise of these sinners is presented in form true to the genre, with the usual low-key lighting, heightened music score, and screams accompanying the sounds of rending flesh. The most disturbing scene in Def by Temptation, however, is the murder of a gay man, who, having committed the gravest crime against nature in terms of conservative Christian doctrine, is subjected to brutal torture in the film's lengthiest death scene.

[25] As in Stoker's novel, and in most vampire films, scenes of feeding are commonly constructed as highly sensual and hyper-sexualized. The same is true in Bond's film. The promise of pleasure offered by the seductive Temptation is realized just at the moment of blood-letting. The gay victim, lured not by attraction, but by the vampire's hypnotic power, experiences pleasure at the hands of Temptation, who penetrates him with an unseen object. It is at the precise moment when he expresses his enjoyment that the object is transformed into a weapon, and his prolonged suffering presented in a montage of violence.

[26] Despite these successes, the man Temptation desires most is Joel. Bedding him would symbolize her greatest triumph, for she would possess the soul of a man of God. Like the ordeal Jesus faced
The climax takes place in Temptation's bedroom, highlighting her bed as the site of moral and spiritual struggle. Because, as we have seen in numerous contemporary vampire films, crucifixes, holy water, and wooden stakes no longer work as an effective weapon against the undead, or in this case against one of Satan's minions, Joel's salvation lies in the reaffirmation of Christian belief and the remembrance of Scripture. Though the film does provide some progressive social critique, for example when K, Joel's economically struggling older brother, is sucked into a television screen as a bust of Ronald Reagan cackles in uproarious laughter. *Def by Temptation* instructs us that the only answer to urban strife and decadence is Jesus.

[27] The film's conservatism is rooted in both the exploitation film's common definitions of sexual difference and in its reliance on the contradictory and problematic liberation ideology of racial uplift. As Studlar notes, "Midnight movies typically crystallize the problem of sexual difference and the s/excess of perversity in a feminine, though not always female figure" (4). Destruction and death are constructed in *Def by Temptation* through gender, with yet another embodiment of the monstrous feminine as a succubus, who, in this case, reveals a voracious, sadistic sexual appetite. The concept of racial uplift in *Def by Temptation* is as problematic as the older, traditional ideologies of racial uplift on which it relies, linking gender, class distinctions, homosexuality, and religious exclusionism to pejorative notions of racial pathology. As Gaines points out in his insightful book *Uplifting the Race*, at issue with the self-help doctrine "was not African Americans quite understandable desire for dignity, security, and social mobility. Rather, the difficulty stemmed from the construction of class differences through racial and cultural hierarchies that had little to do with material conditions of African Americans, and less to do with the discrimination they faced in a racially stratified southern labor market, with the active complicity of the state and opinion-making apparatuses of civil society" (3). *Def by Temptation* informs us that the cause of the public health crisis of AIDS/HIV, familial dissolution, and urban ills are caused by the lack of sexual repression and the loss of religious faith rather than codified social policy that disproportionately affects women, the poor, communities of color, and homosexual and transsexual populations.

The Modern Mulatto

[28] Certainly the reasons for our continual collective cultural fascination with vampires such as Temptation are multiple and complex, but much of it may have to do with the ways in which they embody binary contradictions: young/old, mortal/immortal, dead/undead, masculine/feminine, hetero/homosexual, norm/Other, predator/prey, victim/villain. Just as our own identities are increasingly brought into question by the contemporary social conditions of postmodernism, so too is that of vampires. In an increasing number of horror films, vampires are the central figures in narratives of miscegenation. In Len Wiseman's *Underworld* (2003) for example, a "race" war lasting centuries is launched because of an interracial romance between a lycanthrope and a vampire. The enmity between the two groups is sparked by the execution of the vampire, pregnant with what is referred to in the film as an "abomination," in other words, a dreaded mulatto.

[29] While it might seem odd to apply this concept to that of the vampire, it is apt because of the shifts in vampiric representation. As Brian Aldiss notes, the vampire, "once a country dweller, has come to the city. It lives among the great urban masses and like them, is inclined to take on the mantle of civilization, becoming communal" (ix). Their evolution has bestowed upon them a more human status. Though they still possess preternatural strength and speed, and still shun the light, filmic vampires have lost their mutability, no longer transforming themselves into mist, bats, or wolves. Murder has become an expression of the individual villainous vampire rather than evil of the metaphysical religious dimension - so much so that biology is often the saving grace, rather than Christianity (another reason *Def by Temptation* seems so out of place). Vampires are lonely, guilt-ridden, and victimized figures. They have been so humanized that they have become defined as ethnic groups as in *Blade*, with their
own history, language, religious texts, and political body; or as a race. In Vampire in Brooklyn, vampires are actually defined as an ancient, soon to be non-existent Egyptian race, with Maximillian (Eddie Murphy) as the last-remaining full-blooded (no pun intended) member.

[30] The most interesting mulatto figure is Blade, played by Wesley Snipes. This vampire-slaying character first appeared in the 10th issue of the comic book, Tomb of Dracula in 1973, only two years after the amendments to the Comics Code, a self-regulatory set of rules, functioning much like the Hays Code for the motion picture industry. (In 1954, comic book publishers formed the Comics Magazine Association of American and created a code banning violent horror and true crime comic books to stave off censorship by a U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency and by civic and religious groups. It was amended in 1971.) Published by Marvel Comics, the mainstream company known for humanizing its superheroes and presenting more progressive ideologies, Blade would appear with some regularity in Tomb of Dracula, and in other titles such as Dr. Strange, until he was given his own series Blade, the Vampire Hunter in 1994 and Blade in both 1997 and 2002. Unlike Rita, who chooses to "pass" for human in Vampire in Brooklyn, Blade, in the film of the same name, chooses a human identity over vampire, rejecting assimilation with the dominant race - vampirism serving as a metaphor for Whiteness.

[31] Though we see vampires of various races in the film, the movie racializes vampirism as Whiteness in several ways: As in Blacula, the Black vampire's origin is lined to enslavement and rape. Blade's status as both human and vampire is created through a rape metaphor - his mother was bitten in her ninth month of pregnancy, causing the genetic mutation that would give him all the advantages of vampirism, hence privilege. Vampires are depicted in a Manichean light. Just as Whites were bestowed advanced intelligence and rationality during the Eugenics movement, vampires see themselves as superior, possessing greater strength, speed, and reflexes. Susceptibility to ultraviolet rays is used in the film as another marker of difference. Though African Americans and other peoples of color are vulnerable to over-exposure to the sun, melanin does provide some protection. Blade, unlike the other vampires, who must rely on sunscreen to move about in the daylight, has no such sensitivity. The vampires in the film even use the term "Daywalker" as an epithet - analogous to half-breed throughout the film. We never have any knowledge of Blade's father, but we do find out later in the film that the vampire who bit his mother was Deacon Frost, played by an extremely pale Stephen Dorff. When Blade's mother, who has fully crossed over to the "other side," informs her son that "these are her people now," Frost even goes as far as to speak of the gathering as family reunion, taking his place as patriarch. And his is not the only name associated with Whiteness - we also have the vampire record keeper, the archivist Pearl, a bald bloated symbol of White excess who is as rotund as Jabba the Hut. As in the Blaxploitation films, where Black characters' references to disenfranchisement and racist political and economic control are through the use of the term "the Man," we learn in Blade the vampires "own the police and have their claws in every institutional power structure." If vampirism is seen as a White disease, than it is not surprising to see the cure, discovered by hematologist Karen Jenson associated with Blackness, through an analogy to an affliction developed as a natural defense against malaria, Sickle Cell Anemia, which is most prevalent in the United States in African American communities. And of course, one can not deny the pleasure provided an audience, weary of racialized police brutality, in watching a powerful Black man physically subdue both a redneck vampire and a uniformed White cop who is vampire-servant/wannabe. The film's obsession with racial purity is even recognized by the designations of vampires, such as the more aristocratic council, made up of pure bloods, and the lesser beings who became vampires not by birth but by being turned - analogous to
the levels of Whiteness that places WASPS at the apex, and Jews, the Irish, and Italians at the bottom. Frost's frustration in the film, which leads to his violence and plan for vampire domination, is fueled by a pathology that discerns him as "not white enough."

[32] Blade's crisis of identity in the film is in the vein of tragic mulatto, one of the staple Black stereotypes of classic Hollywood cinema. More often than not a sympathetic character, she (the mulatto figure tended to be a woman) was caught in an identity crisis, in a liminal space between the two races. Light enough to pass for White, she often enjoyed the privileges her skin tone permitted, that is, until she was found out, made Black despite her appearance, because of the one-drop rule. Though films that featured such characters, most notably Pinky (Elia Kazan 1949) and Imitation of Life (John M. Stahl 1934 and Douglas Sirk 1959) presented Blackness as undesirable and even as horror (See Petty), they did on some levels undermine the concept of racial categories based on phenotype — for passing by its very nature contradicts the designations.

[33] Blade's construction as the female archetype inverts not only gender, but much of the ideology symbolized by the tragic mulatto, a figure constructed to warn of the outcome of interracial sexual relations. The typical movie mulatto struggles because she seeks White privilege, despite the high cost of self-exile from the Black community. Blade on the other hand, identifies with the subordinate, denying the heritage that affords a higher place on the Darwinist evolutionary scale (Humans, according to Frost, are not to be negotiated with - they are merely food). As a vampire/human hybrid, he literally embodies the bipolar associations with vampirism, predator/prey and victim/villain to a much higher degree. The compounded construction of Blade as a mulatto parallels the binary social station afforded Black men in contemporary America, as described by Wiegman:

- the African American male is stranded between the competing - and at times overdetermining — logics of race and gender. Denied full admittance to the patriarchal province of the masculine through the social scripting of blackness as innate depravity, and occupying an enhanced status through masculine privilege in relation to black women, the African American male challenges our understanding of cultural identity and (dis)empowerment based on singular notions of inclusion and exclusion (174).

The mulatto may, in some ways, be more descriptive for Black men than for Black women, given the simultaneous attribution of criminality and victimization.

Conclusion

[34] Rosemary Jackson in Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion notes that increasingly, fantasy has come to function as expressive rather than escapist or compensatory. Modern fantasy does not invent supernatural regions, but presents a natural world inverted into something strange, something other. Like vampires themselves, the genre becomes domesticated, humanized, turning from transcendental explorations to transcriptions of the human condition. If as Nina Auerbach states, "every age has the vampire it needs," (145) what need do we have for Black vampires?

[35] Certainly some of the phenomenon can be attributed to the profit driven industry, which, in this era, many would describe as lacking originality — an era when we are inundated with adaptations from television, non-English language films, remakes, films inspired by pop songs and novels, and in the case of Blade, comic books - a medium whose demographic matches that of Hollywood. With profits as the main goal, it makes perfect sense then, to rely on a highly recognized, trademarked figure - one belonging to the same media conglomerate as the studios (Time Warner).

[36] Reliance on genre is another important economic factor. It provides a cross-over appeal for White audiences, while simultaneously allowing access for Black talent. The success of Blade, for example, created a demand for more Black horror films.
Though it resulted in a proliferation of low-budget, problematic films like Blackenstein (William Levey 1973); it also provided the opportunity for Bill Gunn to make Ganja and Hess. Gunn was asked if he had a Black script about vampires. Though he did not, he quickly conceived what is now considered one of the best Black directed films of all-time.

[37] The issue of assimilation is an important one when considering the contemporary vampire figure. He/she is human and not human, as well as inside and outside the culture. Additionally, the victim/predator depiction in contemporary films allows marginalized audiences the fantasy of the empowered that Fanon notes in Wretched of the Earth, while at the same time acknowledging a stigmatized status, as in both Blacula and Blade, resulting from White supremacist ideology.

[38] By racializing the vampire, perhaps what we are seeing is a reinscription of the horror film, with the features functioning as cautionary tales. They depict dystopias where Blacks are drawn unwillingly into a White-dominated world of corruption and evil, and an existence that relies literally on the exploitation of the Other's body. "The monster always represents the disruption of categories, the destruction of boundaries, and the presence of impurities and so we need monsters and we need to recognize and celebrate our own monstrosities." (Halberstam 27)

Works Cited


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Contributor’s Note

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