

Seven

UNDEAD AMERICANS

Ain't no grave / Gonna hold this body down

—Traditional Gospel hymn

Wish me monsters.

—Buffy in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

They're coming to get you Barbara." George Romero's 1968 *Night of the Living Dead* opens in a cemetery in western Pennsylvania, well marked with flags honoring the recently buried Vietnam dead. A brother and sister, Johnny and Barbara, are visiting their father's grave. Both siblings are uneasy. Johnny did not want to come, and Barbara is clearly still grieving their father's passing. She kneels beside the grave to pray while Johnny, clearly uncomfortable, jokes about a man, perhaps an indigent, lurching toward them. "They're coming to get you Barbara," he says, doing his best Boris Karloff impression.

They were coming to get Barbara, and everyone else. The shambling figure turns out to be a zombie who kills Johnny as Barbara escapes to a nearby farmhouse and becomes catatonic with terror. A young African American man named Ben also occupies the farmhouse as does, we learn soon, a family that has been hiding in the basement. The group, fighting among themselves, also must fight a horde of hungry zombies who surround the small house. Ben learns from a radio he has discovered that