

around a young reporter
is one of the undead, a
community of vampires and
this tale of hunger and
exquisite suffering (so
who clearly stands in
Rice followed up the
tales centered on Lestat
soul. The sexy sadistic
monster.⁵
of these two creatures,
the same time, they have
current joint reign as the
Both the zombie and
the history and theology of
the late twentieth century.
the American Christian
each articulate meanings
the Puritan era and are the
modiments of the "resurrec-
come."⁶
monstrous keys to American
these creatures, flesh eating or
appeared as pop culture
the body had become of cen-
dicle of pleasure, of theologi-
all three at once). Anxiety over
concern as evidenced by the
public health campaigns,
ary as an aesthetic renovation
linked with one another in their
almost every other creature
the zombie as currently imag-
ure and/or urban legend. These
creations of American popu-
from European and Caribbean
celebrities. Perhaps more than
America" as commodities for sale
important representations of what

Americans fear, or desire, from the monster at the beginning of a new millennium.⁸

The vampire and zombie are, like all monsters, shaped by their historical context. Historical events of the last third of the twentieth century helped prepare the way for the resurrection of the undead in movies and television. The legacy of the Vietnam War in particular became a silent partner in the birth of modern horror. Many conservatives saw the war as creating what Ronald Reagan later called the "Vietnam syndrome," a profound loss of national confidence. Backlash against feminism would be motivated by the sense, sometimes inarticulate but always present, that American women and other minorities had gained political consciousness in the '60s and '70s while white men had lost a war. Returning veterans came home to a world where the ground had fundamentally shifted. For Americans who had watched the war from their living rooms and mourned the deaths of their children, parents, and spouses at tens of thousands of funerals, the war itself became a kind of undead monster, one that overcame every attempt to keep it in the ground.⁹

Body Bags

The entrance of the United States into a postcolonial conflict in Southeast Asia became a multidecade commitment that killed 58,000 Americans and wounded 153,303 more. An incalculable number of Vietnamese died in the conflict as well, victims of carpet bombing and chemical warfare.¹⁰

This massive loss of life was born of the frustrated efforts of an imperial power trying to squelch an armed peasant revolution. General William Westmoreland, commander of American forces in Vietnam between 1964 and 1968, implemented a strategy of "attrition," or the killing of as many Vietnamese as possible in order to break the peasant revolution's will to fight. The idea of attrition made the creation of a Vietnamese "body count" central to war-winning strategy. This attitude filtered down through the ranks to exert pressure on every officer that commanded a platoon. Former Marine Lieutenant Phillip Caputo remembered that "the pressure on unit commanders to produce enemy corpses was intense." Platoon members took souvenirs of ears, noses, and even scalps to impress their commanders and substantiate claims of a high body count. Some platoons actually padded their kill ratio ("box scores" some called it) by counting small blood traces and at least some unit commanders demanded severed body parts as clear testimony that their troops had performed their duty.¹¹