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HU 250: Supernatural Horror in American Literature and Film

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Project Proposal and Annotated Bibliography

The Politics of Fear: The Role of Horror in Political Campaigns and Media

The horror genre has always wielded a significant influence on our social and cultural attitudes towards fear, terror, and the unknown. In recent times, however, horror has increasingly been used as a political tool, with filmmakers and media creators leveraging the genre to offer commentaries on contemporary political issues. In this paper, I aim to explore the intricate relationship between horror and politics, specifically focusing on the effectiveness of employing fear to sway voters and spread agendas in various media outlets. Moreover, I will examine the psychological and biological factors that contribute to innate fear response to of humans to elements of horror.

My thesis contends that the horror genre is being increasingly utilized to develop a sense of fear and uncertainty in society for political gain and will argue for its effectiveness in the face of psychology of fear, human biology and evolutionary predispositions that shape societal response to horror. However, I am still debating whether to include a moral commentary on such practices. I intend to first provide a biological explanation on how the brain creates a feeling of fear and how it developed through tribalism in early human populations. Later, I would like to explain how early horror movies, such as “Invasion of the Body Snatchers”, utilized those evolutionary predispositions to gain popular support and present the ways modern politicians and media outlets leverage elements of horror to sway voters and further certain agendas.

Annotated Bibliography

1. Mainwaring, Daniel, et al. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. Republic Entertainment, 1998.

Invasion of the Body Snatchers tells the story of a small town that is gradually taken over by alien pods that grow into exact duplicates of the townspeople. As the duplicates become more widespread, the remaining human inhabitants become increasingly paranoid and desperate to avoid being replaced. The movie has been interpreted as an allegory for the fear and suspicion of communists allegedly dwelling in society in secret that was prevalent in the United States during the Cold War.

This source can be used to provide a historical example of how horror movies were used to spread government propaganda and to create a sense of fear and uncertainty in the population. The movie was released at a time when many Americans were afraid of the threat of communism, which allowed the government to capitalize on that fear and gain popular support. The film's success can be attributed in part to human predispositions to fear and mistrust the unfamiliar, as well as to the way it used the prevailing political climate to create a sense of urgency and anxiety. By exploring the ways in which *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* was able to use horror to influence public opinion, this source can help to support the thesis that horror is an effective tool for political manipulation.

2. Scott, Ridley, director. *Alien*. 20th Century Fox, 1979.

Alien is a science-fiction horror thriller about isolation, survival, and the fear of the unknown. The plot revolves around the crew of the Nostromo commercial space tug, who receive a distress signal from a nearby planet and investigate it. On the planet, they come into a dangerous extraterrestrial entity that infiltrates the Nostromo and begins hunting down the crew members one

by one.

Alien could be used in my paper as an example of how the unknown triggers biological responses to fear, such as suspicion of others and anxiety, which is similar to what happened in the *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. This fear response is rooted in human biology, as our brains have evolved to be hyper-vigilant towards potential threats. *Alien* also illustrates the psychological effects of fear, which can lead to distrust and aggression towards others. I intend to use this movie as a supporting source in my biological explanation of the process of fear and how it manifests in human reactions and choices.

3. Hobfoll, Stevan E. *Tribalism: The Evolutionary Origins of Fear Politics*. 1st ed. 2018.

This book investigates how fear influences social and political behavior and how individuals have evolved to respond to external risks using evolutionary psychology and anthropology. According to the author, humans have a natural predisposition to create groups based on shared identity and to perceive outsiders as a threat. Throughout history, politicians and other leaders have used this evolutionary inclination to instill fear and create a sense of "us versus. them." Hobfoll uses a wide range of research, including primatological studies, to argue that tribalism is a fundamental part of human nature.

This source can be used to provide a theoretical framework for understanding the ways in which horror is able to influence political behavior. The book can also be used to provide evidence for the effectiveness of fear-based politics, as it suggests that these tactics are grounded in deep-seated biological and psychological processes that are difficult to overcome.

4. Debiec, Jacek, and Joseph LeDoux. "Fear and the Brain." *Social Research*, vol. 71, no. 4, 2004, pp. 807–18.

This article provides a detailed explanation of how the brain processes fear, leveraging neuroscience research to explore the biological mechanisms underlying the experience of fear. The authors discuss the amygdala, a small structure in the brain, which a central role in the processing of fear, and how it can be influenced by external factors such as context and memory. The authors also discuss the ways in which the experience of fear can be modified through therapeutic interventions.

This source can be used as a support to *Alien* and to provide a scientific explanation of how horror genre is able to induce fear in viewers based on the biological mechanisms involved. The authors are able to show how horror is able to stimulate our primal instincts that pertain to avoiding the unfamiliar and "fight-or-flight" reactions. The article can also be used to provide evidence for the effectiveness of fear-based politics, as it suggests that the experience of fear can promote certain involuntary behaviors in targeted groups of people.

5. Takacs, Stacy. "Monsters, Monsters Everywhere: Spooky TV and the Politics of Fear in Post-9/11 America." *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2009, pp. 1–20.

This article looks at how science fiction and horror television programs influenced American politics in the years following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The author contends that these programs act as a type of political commentary by appealing to people's worries and fears regarding terrorism and the larger geopolitical environment. Takacs argues that these programs can be utilized to understand how people are thinking about and reacting to current political events since they serve as a reflection of the cultural atmosphere. This source offers insightful information on how horror is employed in contemporary media to influence political beliefs.