

# Zombies, Werewolves, and Vampires, Oh My!: The History of Horror in Comics

Cristobella Durette, Dr. Max J. Rayneard , Honors College



## Background

Following the second World War, America’s war against the Axis powers came to a close both on battlefields and on the superhero-emblazoned pages of wartime comic books. Pioneered by Entertaining Comics (EC Comics), the horror genre emerged from the ashes of a comic book industry in which star-spangled superheroes had no more fascist villains to defeat. The reconstruction of America’s postwar national identity under McCarthyism fueled public fear that horror comics promoted corruption and delinquency in the country’s youth, leading to federal regulation and the end of EC Comics.

**Research Question:** How do 1950s horror comics speak to efforts at reshaping American national identity in the wake of World War II? How does the comic book form, with its visual and verbal elements, suggest America’s search for postwar identity?

## Methodology

Against the backdrop of the ascent and decline of superhero comics, three horror series published by EC Comics were analyzed. *Tales from the Crypt*, *Haunt of Fear*, and *Vault of Terror* were examined for their depiction of monsters. All comics were published between 1950 and 1955. Secondary sources were used to speak to changing reader and creator demographics in the rise of the horror genre.

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## Results

Horror comics depict realities marred by monsters, murderers and mad scientists. This reflects American anxieties surrounding corruption, moral degradation, and scientific advancement. The physical grotesqueness of monsters serve as a clear visual reference to a sense of moral and social degradation. Public fear that horror comics promoted corruption and delinquency in the country’s youth resulted in self-regulation of horror comics, but did not halt the development of the genre.

## Conclusion

- The prevalence of monsters in post-World War II comics can be seen as a cynical response to the American idealism that sustained the war effort, which was then seen as an illusory, restrictive social force
- Monsters, specifically zombies and the undead, in 1950s horror comics demonstrate American anxiety surrounding technology and the destructive capability of nuclear weapons.

## References

- *My Favorite Thing is Monsters*- Emil Ferris
- *Tales from the Crypt*- EC Comics
- *Haunt of Fear*- EC Comics
- *Vault of Horror*- EC Comics

