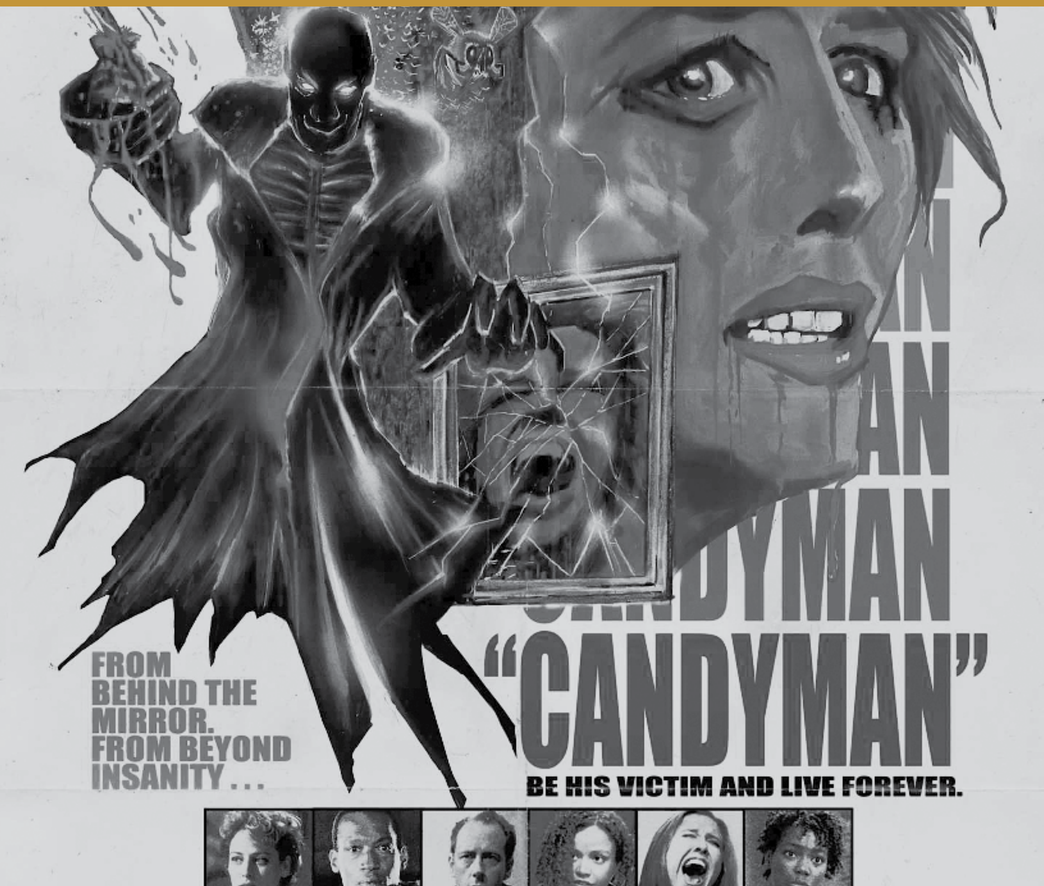
# A Ghost in the Projects






## *Candyman* and the Boundaries of Racialized Fear in Chicago

ANGELA IRENE THEODOROPOULOS, AB'16

*Horror is the removal of masks.*

—*Robert Bloch, author of* Psycho

*These stories are modern, oral folklore. They are the unselfconscious reflection of the fears of urban society.*

—*Trevor, Helen's husband, in* Candyman

### Introduction

Boogeymen, hauntings, taboos, and transgressions: the language of horror unveils nightmares from the hidden recesses of the mind and speaks them into being. The writer Stephen King contends that fear and anxiety find productive outlet in the horror genre: "The ritual outletting of these emotions seems to bring things back to a more stable and constructive state again" (1982, 13). The power of the horrors we "make up" is their ability to "help us cope with the real ones" that exist in our society (King 1982, 13). Tracing roots as deep as the Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh* and Homer's *Odyssey*, horror stories existed long before the emergence of the Western Gothic novel whose prominent early works include Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), generally

considered the first horror novel, and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* (1818) (Dixon 2010, 1; Kawin 2012, 3). The horror genre has continued to proliferate in novels, short stories, oral folklore, urban legends, comics, video games, and television shows. Horror films, since the "inception of the medium" (Dixon 2010, 3), have continued to embody contemporary American fears (Muir 2011, 3). However, many critics overlook horror films and regard them as "garbage" or "nonsense" (Schwarz 2004). This critical neglect has enabled some horror movies to be particularly subversive, with uncensored and more imaginative material (Schwarz 2004).

Concerning the medium of film, "the master of suspense" Alfred Hitchcock notes that cinema is reminiscent of the short story: both are typically experienced in a single sitting and derive their emotional impact from the careful construction of the director or author (1963, 34). Cinema's greatest strength derives from the thoughtful assemblage of visuals, sounds, and references, which, in the director's hands, can become something greater than the reality of its parts, imbued with meaning in and of itself (Sipos 2010, 29). As Hitchcock explained: "Pure cinema is pieces of film assembled. Any individual piece is nothing. But a combination of them creates an idea" (1963, 5). Mise-en-scène—the amalgamation of elements (lighting, set design, costumes, props, sounds, space, staging, acting, makeup, and color choices) captured in the camera's frame—forms what the audience understands about a film, the symbolism that can be inferred, and the overall impact of the experience (Sipos 2010, 31–32). Because the camera can take many vantage points, there is an aesthetic value assigned to the frames chosen, creating "a visual perspective that 'comments' on the images inside its borders, and conveys an emotional impact" (Sipos 2010, 71). The horror genre must encompass the techniques of other types of film, plus has the unique task of assembling its parts to frighten viewers. The best horror films capture "our cultural anxieties...our collective fears," conveying an allegorical message that awakens viewers (Philips 2005, 3–5).

American horror films of the 1990s shifted toward "naturalism or 'realism'" and a new interest in contemporary cultural issues (Muir 2011, 9). Previously, most horror films took place in a "could-be anywhere," rather than a "somewhere" location (Briefel and Ngai 1996, 76). Bernard Rose's 1992 film, *Candyman*, takes place in Chicago in the African American housing project of Cabrini-Green Homes. It explores issues of race and urban space when external fear of public-housing projects and internal chaos abounded. Cabrini-Green in the late 1980s and early 1990s was in decline (Heathcott 2012, 371). Reagan-era cuts to the Chicago Housing Authority's budget led to the structural decay of buildings and individual units (Venkatesh 2000, 112–13). The CHA misspent funds (Popkin et al. 2000, 13) and delayed building repairs in order to address gang problems (Venkatesh 2000, 130–13). The area became dangerous for all and fatal for some residents (Popkin et al. 2000, 2). Residents faced racial and socioeconomic segregation from the rest of Chicago. The poorest of the poor, they were concentrated in neighborhoods with limited community resources (Pattillo 2007, 181–83), experienced disproportionate joblessness in the wake of deindustrialization (Wilson ([1987] 2012, 135), and suffered from the absence of social programming, few recreational outlets, limited educational opportunities, and economic instability—all of which created a "social void" that was filled by gangs (Popkin et al. 2000, 2; Venkatesh 2000, 118–19). The city's murder rate tripled between 1965 and 1992, peaking in 1993 and 1994 (Cook and Laub 2002, 2) at more than double what it is today (Stults 2010, 244–47). Victims were predominately black and Hispanic boys and young men (Cook and Laub 2002, 2) in areas of concentrated disadvantage (Stults 2010, 250). Public and government leaders became convinced that only the destruction of Cabrini-Green and other public-housing projects would stop the violence (Petty 2013, 221; Venkatesh 2000, 268).

*Candyman* depicts Cabrini-Green at this historical moment. It participates in contemporary urban and national discussions about housing projects and subverts audience fears of racial and socioeconomic difference by blaming the decline of public housing on outside forces, and not

the residents. Turbulent urban race relations existed throughout the nation at the time of the film's release, with the Rodney King race riots in Los Angeles occurring on the same day as *Candyman*'s test-release date (Schwarz 2004). The typical horror film in the 1990s was set in a white middle-class suburb and did not portray racial dynamics (Briefel and Ngai 1996, 76; Scrappers Film Group, 2015). Black actors were minor characters, typically killed first. The main purpose of the rare major black characters was to sacrifice their life in order to serve a white protagonist's plot development (Coleman 2011, 11–12). Only a few mainstream horror films used black actors in roles of central importance or addressed race and prejudice, such as in *The People Under the Stairs* (Craven 1991) and *Night of the Living Dead* (Romero 1968). Black monsters were mostly confined to blaxploitation films, campy all-black parodies of classic horror films, such as *Blacula* (Crain 1972), or were tools of racist propaganda, such as *The Birth of a Nation* (Griffith 1915). Bernard Rose's *Candyman* was unorthodox. It pushed boundaries by replacing the white-inhabited haunted house with a black housing project haunted by a compelling and emotionally complex black monster, the Candyman.[1]

The story of *Candyman* begins with Helen Lyle (Virginia Madsen), a white University of Illinois at Chicago graduate student of urban legends. She gathers the origin of a myth about a black murderer named Candyman from local students. They tell the story of a promiscuous, suburban, white teenager who recites "Candyman" five times into a mirror on a dare; the hook-handed monster guts her and kidnaps the child she is babysitting.[2] Helen then learns about the murder of Ruthie Jean, who

1. *Candyman* has two sequels, the acceptable though unremarkable *Candyman 2: Farewell to the Flesh* (Condon 1995) and the largely disowned *Candyman 3: Day of the Dead* (Meyer 1999). I will not address these works at length. Bernard Rose only directed the original film, making it the best indicator of his vision for the franchise.

2. Clive Barker, the writer of the short story on which *Candyman* is based, found the idea for the hook-handed man in *The Vanishing Hitchhiker* (Brunvand 1981), a pivotal book of urban legends (Schwarz 2004). Barker's short story derives from



was killed in her Cabrini-Green apartment by a hook-wielding murderer. The police did not come in time to save her or solve the case, leading residents to attribute the killing to the Candyman. Helen's senior colleague suggests that the Candyman legend stems from the murder of a real black man in the 1890s, who was lynched by a white mob for fathering a child with a white woman. Helen and her best friend Bernadette (Kasi Lemmons), a middle-class black graduate student, meet various residents of Cabrini-Green, including Anne-Marie (Vanessa Williams), a hardworking new mother who was Ruthie Jean's neighbor. Despite Bernadette's warning, Helen returns to Cabrini-Green alone in search of more information on the legend and is knocked unconscious by a gang leader, also named Candyman, a reference to his dealing "candy" or drugs. Believing she has found Ruthie Jean's killer, Helen is surprised by the phantom Candyman (Tony Todd). He has return to contradict the doubts she has raised about his legend. He then goes on a murderous rampage to prove his existence. He kills Anne-Marie's dog, kidnaps Anne-Marie's newborn child, Anthony, and kills Bernadette. Helen is found unconscious near the murder and is institutionalized.

Although Rose raises the possibility that Helen may be a delusional killer, the viewers learn that Candyman is the real culprit after he kills a psychiatrist at the mental institution while Helen is restrained. Helen escapes and returns to Cabrini-Green with the hope of saving Anne-Marie's kidnapped baby. In his lair, Candyman tells Helen that she is his reincarnated long-lost lover and Anthony is their reincarnated child. Candyman attempts to claim them both by trapping them in a community bonfire. Fighting back, Helen emerges from the bonfire and returns

"The Hook," a legend from the late 1950s about a killer who uses a hook to force a parked teen couple to avoid or stop having sex (Brunvand 1981, 48–51). Rose adds the incantation into a mirror of Candyman's name from the urban legend of Bloody Mary, Queen Mary I, in which repeating the murderous queen's name in the mirror summons her behind you (Angel 2015, 254). As a child in the Chicago suburbs in the 1990s, I heard that she would appear "breathing down your neck," just like the Candyman.

the baby to Anne-Marie, before succumbing to her burns. The Cabrini-Green community attend Helen's funeral, placing the Candyman's hook in her grave, as if to recognize his presence. In the final scene, Helen's adulterous husband Trevor (Xander Berkeley) calls her name in the mirror, and the ghostly Helen returns with the Candyman's hook to murder him. During the credits, a graffiti portrait in Candyman's former Cabrini-Green lair depicts Helen as a martyr in the bonfire.

The film's plot is adapted from Clive Barker's 1986 short story, "The Forbidden." Rose shifts the focus from British class concerns (Cherry 2007, 230–31) to American issues of race and urban unease. The short story takes place in the Spector Street Estate (Barker 1999, 77), a slum in an unnamed city (Cherry 2007, 55) that was based on Liverpool (Schwarz 2004). Rose remained faithful to some of the story's details—the protagonist's drinking, her climatic death in a community bonfire—and chose an equivalent "wrong" part of town—Cabrini-Green (Barker 1999, 90, 111, 123; Rose 1992). Both locations are depicted as rundown, foul-smelling, claustrophobic, dark, and avoided by outsiders (Barker 1999, 81; Rose 1992), and both story and film depict a middle-class protagonist who enters as an outsider but grows closer to the community through her pursuit of the Candyman and ultimate death (Barker 1999, 116, 123; Rose 1992). Where Barker uses the horror genre to show that transgressing the class divide in England is "forbidden," Rose uses dialogue and visual boundaries to reveal forbidden racial divides in American society that prevent racial mobility throughout the city.

Scholars have criticized the ending of *Candyman* for glorifying white womanhood (Briefel and Ngai 1996, 88–90; Coleman 2011, 189–191; Halberstam 1995, 5; Thompson 2007, 80). Helen appropriates the Candyman's power to solve a minor marital problem and becomes a venerated martyr to the black community at the expense of the historically more significance story of Candyman's life and death. Replacing Candyman's portrait with Helen's suggests that the plight of black men in the 1890s is interchangeable with that of white women in the 1990s, as long as both suffer a gruesome death. However, an alternate reading becomes



evident if we consider the film's many layers. Candyman's love for a white woman is a deliberate choice of the director. Rose repurposes the loaded cinematic imagery of the black boogeyman attacking the white damsel, such as in *The Birth of a Nation* (Griffith 1915), in order to implicate the racism and social boundaries that historically perpetuated fears around black men, the rape of white women, and miscegenation (Schwarz 2004). The objective of this paper is to demonstrate how *Candyman* strives to explore urban racial division as well as the historical continuation of racism in Chicago.

Focusing on *Candyman*'s strengths, I examine Rose's manipulation of two key tropes of the horror genre, the haunted house and the ghost, to explore issues of racial tension. Rose also nuances horror tropes about women, including domestic unrest, hysteria, and the "final girl"—in which the female lead embodies elements of both the feminine and the masculine and survives long enough to confront the killer (Clover 1987, 201, 204, 221).[3] In the limited scope of this paper, I will examine what the unprecedented portrayal of the Candyman as a refined black phantom and the reimagining of Cabrini-Green as a Gothic haunted house disclose about systemic racism and urban racial spatial anxieties in Chicago. Through his examination of haunted—or, socially "forbidden" spaces—Rose prompts viewers to confront the constructed historical divisions of Chicago along racial lines and their devastating effects on the residents of Cabrini-Green, who happen to fall into the haunted space. Rose creates empathy and compassion for the residents, highlighting their perseverance in spite of the isolation, vulnerability, and violence of Cabrini-Green. By showing Candyman's romantic and tragic qualities, the movie takes an unprecedentedly serious and respectful attitude toward a black character. Murdered in the 1890s over fears of miscegenation

3. For Helen as an empowering women, see "Imperfect Geometry: Identity and Culture in Clive Barker's 'The Forbidden' and Bernard Rose's *Candyman*" (Cherry 2007, 48–66); for the "final girl," see "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film" (Clover 1987, 187–228).

and haunting Helen in response to his lost love, Candyman's monstrous form is the embodiment of racial transgression. His return to haunt Cabrini-Green symbolizes the continuation of racism and its legacy in the present day. However, rather than reproduce the racist idea that crossing racial boundaries is immoral, Candyman's poignant past and his elegant courtship of Helen speak to the fundamental injustice of these racial dynamics. Through the mobilization of the horror tropes of the haunted house and the monster, *Candyman* participates in a dialogue about the history and continuation of systemic racism in America, drawing critical attention to the isolation and decline of public housing in the late twentieth century and fostering empathy for these social and structural issues across racial lines.

## The Haunted Housing Project

### Urban Dread: Space and Racialized Boundaries in *Candyman*

To expose Chicago's social boundaries, Bernard Rose employs a motif of spatial haunting and dread even before the haunted Cabrini-Green appears on the screen. *Candyman* opens with a steady aerial shot of Congress Parkway, moving westward from Chicago's downtown (Fig. 1). The helicopter-mounted camera traces Chicago's arterial system as the roadways, flowing with cars, meet and separate. Major landmarks, such as the Chicago River, are peripheral in the shot, which increases the viewer's attention when an important landmark does appear in the center of the roadway sequence: the Circle Interchange. A junction of the Eisenhower, Dan Ryan, and Kennedy expressways, this interchange from overhead resembles the heart of the city with the roadway veins and arteries converging and diverging. Rose's choice evokes the history of major roadways in Chicago, which were constructed to form racial boundaries (Heathcott 2012, 368; Wilson 2011, 22), a fact that Bernadette mentions later in the film. In particular, the sequence shows part of the Dan Ryan, a fourteen-lane highway, constructed in 1961 alongside the Robert Taylor Homes, which separated black and ethnic white neighborhoods on the city's South Side (Hirsch 1983, 263; Petty 2013, 20).

This urban roadway system creates unease in the viewer, similar to other opening roadway scenes in classic horror films, with which Rose would likely have been familiar. The road in *Night of the Living Dead* (Romero 1968) leads a couple to the cemetery where the dead come back to life, and the road in *The Stepfather* (Ruben 1987) leads to the house of a serial killer. The closest introduction to *Candyman* is *The Shining*'s (Kubrick 1980) lengthy overhead shot of a remote roadway with eerie background music, which generates a sense of isolation and foreshadows the father's cabin fever and murderous hallucinations. Nicola Mann suggests that the roads in *Candyman* convey not only tension, but diseased with "overly clogged bodily arteries" (2012, 283).[4] Rose allows us to peer within the arterial structure of the city with a sense of fear and anticipation of what secrets hide inside and outside of the city's boundaries.

The layering of the title credits mimics the roadways and intensify our focus on divisions and exchanges within the city. The initial credit to Bernard Rose enters the right side of the screen, in-line with the traffic that heads from east to west. Then, the film's title descends from the top of the screen and exits at the bottom, in jarring perpendicular contrast to the first credit. This sets an intersecting grid pattern for the following credits. Philip Glass's music, especially the church-like pipe organ,



4. Mann's observation about the use of space in the opening credits is inaccurate and ineffective. Mann contends that the sequence's "full six minutes" forces us to meditate on Chicago's inner city and acts as "a rallying cry for a reanalysis of this space" (2012, 284); the length of the sequence is actually less than three minutes. She argues that the camera "takes us on a journey from the Kennedy Expressway, to the 'Red' and 'White' buildings of the Cabrini-Green housing project in the city's Near North Side, and onwards to the high-rise condominiums of the glittering Gold Coast," suggesting a tension between the two areas (2012, 283); the camera follows Congress Parkway, capturing neither Cabrini-Green nor the Gold Coast.

intensifies from the first credit to the second, which lends the word "CANDYMAN" a terrific and even supernatural weight as it breaks into the boundary of the screen. Forced to meditate on these limited images and sounds without the presence of a human character for the initial minutes of the film, the viewer develops a feeling of anxiety over the boundaries and intersections of the city.

The camera follows Congress Parkway under the old main post office, and an enraged black male voice yells, "I don't give a damn why you're still here!" Perhaps sampled from a speech,[5] the voice does not belong to Tony Todd or any of the other featured character. Although this enigmatic voice might belong to a Cabrini-Green resident or even some specific Chicagoan, a more helpful reading suggests that this voice introduces the theme of tension over spatial division and belonging, the space of "here." The harsh divisions of the roadway, this statement of resistance or dissatisfaction with the structural spaces that enforce racial prejudice within Chicago, and Glass's haunting music encourage the viewer to consider Chicago's extreme racial and economic segregation with a sense of foreboding.

Nevertheless, why use roads to signify this division, and why Congress Parkway, which is south of the story's location of terror, Cabrini-Green? The roadway scene ends when the camera reaches Halsted, a north-south street, just beyond the Circle Interchange. The interchange is slightly northeast of the University of Illinois at Chicago and is the source of the university's original name, the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle. Congress Parkway serves as a boundary between the academic, predominately white middle-class students of UIC, like Helen, and the disadvantaged black community of Cabrini-Green. Richard J. Daley, mayor of Chicago from 1955 to 1976, used the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 to build expressway boundaries between black and white neighborhoods, which increased segregation in Chicago (Heathcott 2012, 368; Petty 2013, 20; Wilson 2011, 22). The aerial camera shot reinforces this sense of social distance, isolation, and division. Some critics have also aptly suggested that the camera's perspective is Candyman's, stalking Helen from afar (Nicholls and Buckingham, 2012).

5. Incredibly, no research on *Candyman* acknowledges this utterance. I have been unable to locate the phrase in a speech, text, or other film.



The roadway scene cuts to a scene of a busy hive of bees, crawling on top of one another, and Candyman's voice is heard over their buzzing, promising to "shed innocent blood." The camera zooms into the densely layered bees, penetrates to the interior of their hive, and emerges on the skyline filled with buzzing, agitated bees. The image of the dark mass of bees swarming the John Hancock Center and the rest of the Gold Coast is particularly ominous. The biblical proportions of this plague and the bees' blackness overtaking the white-coded affluent lakefront is part of a common racial image in American horror films. Black creatures attacking vulnerable whites (particularly beautiful white damsels) include *King Kong* (Cooper and Schoedsack 1933), the *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (Arnold 1954), and *The Birds* (Hitchcock 1963). More contemporary examples include the black blob that attacks the flesh of an attractive white college girl in *Creepshow 2: The Raft* (Gornick 1987) and the hoard of black spiders descending on the vulnerable white woman in the bathtub in *Arachnophobia* (Marshall 1990). The clearest stand-in for racial fears is the black rat Ben in *Willard* (Mann 1971), who, in contrast to the intelligent good-hearted white rat Socrates, leads a murderous uprising of dark rats.[6]

The bees dissipate, the black villain says, "I, came, for you," and the skyline dissolves into a close-up of Helen's face (Fig. 2), blending the Gold Coast with her whiteness. Yet, the question remains: for whom has Candyman come? Is the "you" Helen or the viewer? Alternatively, maybe "you" is Chicago. In this way, the film opens up possibilities of unease and urban fears surrounding race for the characters, for us, and for the city itself and the boundaries it creates.

6. The *Willard* remake (Morgan 2003) further emphasizes this racial coding by making Ben an African rat.

This racialized fear not only plagues the city's exterior geography but also invades the characters' private spaces. Helen informs Bernadette that the city built her luxury Lincoln Village condominium as a housing project, just like Cabrini-Green. Helen beckons Bernadette to a window:

**Helen**: Now take a look at this. Once it [Lincoln Village] was finished the city realized there was no barrier between here and the Gold Coast.

**Bernadette**: Unlike over there [in Cabrini-Green] where they have the highway and the El train[7] to keep the ghetto cut off.

**Helen**: Exactly. So they made some alterations. They covered the cinder block in plaster and they sold the lot off as condos.

**Bernadette**: How much did you pay for this place?

**Helen**: Don't ask. (Leads Bernadette to bathroom.) Now, wait'll you see this. Here's the proof. (Removes the bathroom mirror.) The killer, or killers [of Ruthie Jean], we don't know which, smashed their way through the back of this cabinet. See, there's no wall there. It's only a medicine chest separating us from the other apartment.

Helen speculates on the murder of Ruthie Jean by comparing her apartment to Cabrini-Green: "The spectral housing project Helen imagines concealed within her own building posits Cabrini-Green as a Gothic house-within-a-house; cinder blocks hidden under a layer of white plaster" (Briefel and Ngai 1996, 80). In this reading Helen exemplifies gentrification. She disregards the economic difference between her

7. The train did act as a barrier between Cabrini-Green and the Gold Coast, but not the expressway. On the South Side, the Dan Ryan expressway was a barrier between the Robert Taylor Homes and ethnic white neighborhoods, such as Bridgeport.



apartment and Cabrini-Green (Briefel and Ngai 1996, 81) and uses her research project to explore and dominate the area, reminiscent of the private market take over of Cabrini-Green (Bezalel 2014).[8] Rose's intention may have simply been to acknowledge the city's racist boundaries (Schwarz 2004) and make a reference to the real Ruthie Jean, Ruth McCoy.[9] The 911 dispatcher did not believe McCoy's story that her attackers entered the apartment through the bathroom medicine cabinet, and the police failed to investigate the scene thoroughly (Bogira 1987). In acknowledging the flaws of public-housing construction this scene of Helen's discovery challenges assumptions circulated about Cabrini-Green and its history; by connecting Helen's apartment to Cabrini-Green apartment, the film questions the constructed otherness of Cabrini-Green and its residents.

## The Site of Haunting: The History of Cabrini-Green

Created and funded through the New Deal Housing Act of 1937, the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) constructed public housing as temporary housing for soldiers returning from World War II and working-class

8. Chicago History Museum historian Paul Durica suggests that Helen's apartment is a fictionalized Carl Sandburg Village, an urban renewal project that displaced a Puerto Rican community on Clark Street and led to white gentrification ("Cabrini-Green" on the DVD version of *Candyman*).

9. In 1987 Ruth Mae ("Ruthie") McCoy was killed in the Grace Abbott Homes on the West Side when two burglars entered her apartment through her medicine cabinet (Bogira 1987; Bogira 2014; Myles 1987). Steve Bogira's *Chicago Reader* article, "Cause of Death: What Killed Ruthie Mae McCoy: A Bullet in the Chest, or Life in the Projects?" (1990), is nearly identical to the article that Helen reads: "Cause of Death, What Killed Ruthie Jean? Life in the Projects."

two-parent families (Petty 2013, 19, 31, 212).[10] From the late 1930s until the early 1960s Chicago's public housing "by almost any criteria that once could be used to measure a functional community" was successful, in terms of lack of crime, support from community organizations, management and screening techniques, and the quality of housing (Venkatesh 2000, 268–69). National leaders and the public saw CHA as "a model of efficiency and good management" (Popkin et al. 2000, 12). Black Chicagoans initially greeted Cabrini-Green, a CHA project on Chicago's Near North Side that was intended to "forge a kind of 'urban renewal'" (Muir 2011, 222), positively. Early residents found public housing a considerable improvement over deteriorating overpriced South Side tenements (Petty 2013, 18–19, 31). This situation changed with the Housing Act of 1949, which developed public housing near city centers but at the same time encouraged "white flight" to the suburbs by providing mortgages to whites (Freidrichs 2011; Hunt 2009, 101, 107).

CHA's early public housing followed the federal policy of the Neighborhood Composition Rule, which required developments to reflect the current patterns of resident composition in their areas (Petty 2013, 19). As construction continued, *Gautreaux v. Chicago Housing Authority* (1969) ruled that intentionally placing housing projects in black neighborhoods preserved "urban racial residential segregation patterns" and violated the Fourteenth Amendment (Pattillo 2007, 181). City planners also strategically placed new public houses, such as Cabrini-Green's tower blocks, to "provide a buffer" to affluent white areas (Heathcott 2012, 368). The Brooke Amendment (1969)[11] and deindustrialization in

10. This essay can only sketch the history of Cabrini-Green. For the forces surrounding the creation, decline, and destruction of Cabrini-Green, see *Reclaiming the Inner City: Chicago's Near North Revitalization Confronts Cabrini-Green* (Marciniak 1986).

11. In an attempt to expand public housing's reach to the poorest families (Popkin et al. 2000, 14) the Brooke Amendment indexed public housing rent to family income with a cap of 25 percent (later 30 percent); previously rent was based on maintenance costs (Petty 2013, 31).



the 1970s caused middle- and working-class black families to leave the housing projects as their rent increased and jobs dwindled, which left only the poorest of the poor behind (Popkin et al. 2000, 14–15; Wilson ([1987] 2012, 136). The black population became "hyper-segregated" in terms of "evenness, clustering, exposure, centralization, and concentration" (Massey and Denton 1989, 373, 377). By the 1970s Cabrini-Green was poorer and more overcrowded, with fifteen thousand people in 3,607 units at its peak (Muir 2011, 222). Sociologists argue that the pervasive segregation of housing projects and their mainly black residents concentrated poverty and reduced their political bargaining power (Pattillo 2007, 182–83).

From the 1970s through the 1980s and early 1990s, the federal government, state, and city decreased the CHA's budget (Petty 2013, 20). CHA's rents also dropped as it housed an increasingly poorer population (Popkin et al. 2000, 14). Particularly harmful was the Reagan administration's decrease in federal funding by 87 percent in 1987 "at a time when America's urban poor had become a jobless population for whom subsidized public housing was a last defense against homelessness and abject poverty" (Venkatesh 2000, 112–13). CHA managerial incompetence contributed to the decline of the buildings: the authority claimed a deficit of $33.5 million in 1982 despite failing to use $50 million earmarked for repairs (Popkin et al. 2000, 13). The Department of Housing and Urban Development forced CHA Chairman Charles Swibel, "a crony of Mayor Richard J. Daley," to resign for "ample evidence of malfeasance" during his nineteen-year tenure (Popkin et al. 2000, 13). The misuse of funds continued. Chairman Vincent Lane reassigned excessive amounts CHA funds to gang-related crime control in the late 1980s and deferred necessary building maintenance (Petty 2013, 20; Venkatesh 2000, 130–31).

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s the quality of life for public-housing residents deteriorated on all fronts: ranging from rodent and insect infestations to broken elevators and clogged incinerators to social collapse from failing public schools, vandalism, crack cocaine, gangs, guns, murder, and sexual violence (Cook and Laub 2002, 3, 21; Freidrichs 2011; Hunt

2009, 146; Kirby 2015; Muir 2011, 222; Petty 2013, 20; Popkin et al. 2000, 1; Robinson 1997, 130; Stults 2010, 250). Facing external barriers to the social mobility of jobs and education, some residents joined gangs voluntarily as the best prospect for gaining respect, economic advancement, and social stability (Venkatesh 2000, 164). Others cited external "economic hardships that households suffered in the 1980s: joblessness, poor to nonexistence recreational and educational opportunities, and general social unrest" as their reasons for neglecting or vandalizing their own community (Venkatesh 2000, 118–19). Overwhelmed by drugs and gangs, the once close-knit communities' internal policing mechanisms began to crumble (Petty 2013, 37), and police, maintenance workers, and vital city services such as ambulances and cabs avoided public housing (Freidrichs 2011; Kotlowitz 1991, 23; Petty 2013, 39, 119). Outsiders became increasingly unwelcome even in times of need, and residents recall that alienation bred a deep-seated rage that was often manifested in misdirected ways (Freidrichs 2011).[12] Residents during the worst periods of decline often feared they would not survive the violence or internalized their degraded and stigmatized status as second-class citizens (Jones and Newman 1997, 36, 39, 95, 199–200). In the decades leading up to *Candyman*, the press portrayed Cabrini-Green as violent, forbidding, and even hellish.[13] For urban historian Joseph Heathcott news stories circulated in mythic proportions of "good intentions" that turned into nightmares or of projects "doomed to fail" from their inception (2012, 360). It is against this backdrop of social alienation, physical decay, and media stigmatization that the film portrays Cabrini-Green.

12. *Candyman*'s production crew recalls snipers firing on their van despite the filmmakers paying warring gangs for a cease-fire (Schwarz 2004).

13. "Missing Lad Found Stabbed" (*Chicago Defender*, 1975); "Cabrini-Green Area Thieves Prey on Women Drivers in Daylight" (*Chicago Tribune*, 1982); "The Road to Hell" (*Chicago Tribune,* 1985); "In Chicago: Raising Children in a Battle Zone" (*Time,* 1986); and, in the year of *Candyman*'s release, "A Brief Life in the Killing Zone" (*Time*, 1992).



## Haunted Houses, Haunted Projects

Rose uses the imagery of the Gothic haunted house to convey the stigma and isolation of Cabrini-Green. His embellished and even surreal depictions of the physical buildings and units of Cabrini-Green as filthy, malodorous, and ugly follow the style of grotesque haunted houses, such as *The Haunting of Hill House* (Jackson [1959] 1984, 101) and *The Amityville Horror* (Anson [1977] 2005, 3, 49, 178). This decay renders the familiar as unfamiliar, or "uncanny," and therefore disturbing (Freud [1919] 2003, 148). The constructed marks of haunting break down the normal façade of a structure, revealing the unconscious anxiety surrounding a place. In the late 1980s and 1990s Cabrini-Green did decline (Freidrichs 2011; Kotlowitz 1991, 22, 121; Popkin et al. 2000, 11, 15), but *Candyman*'s set design intentionally heightened feelings of abandonment and unease (Scrappers Film Group 2015) (Fig. 3). The designers' recreations of Cabrini-Green interiors include creepy foreign objects, such as a decaying doll in the bathtub where Ruthie Jean was murdered or a sack of shiny colorfully wrapped candies in Candyman's lair that have razor blades hidden inside them (Schwarz 2004). These effects evoke a tangible sensation of dread, forcing viewers, even those familiar with the projects, to become increasingly unsettled.

It is interesting to compare Rose's construction of a haunted Chicago neighborhood to a contemporary film with a similar setting. The boxing drama *Gladiator* (Herrington 1992) depicts a South Side "slum" filled with people playing basketball, walking outside, and talking, much as Alex Kotlowitz notes in *High Rise Stories: Voices from Chicago Public Housing* about the liveliness of the Henry Horner Homes in the late 1980s (2013, 12). In Rose's vision, Cabrini-Green is a literal ghost town, desolate and nearly lifeless. A small neighborhood boy, who wanders the empty corridors of decaying buildings despite his own admission that it "ain't safe here," conveys the vulnerability of residents, particularly children. In the 1990s public-housing children were often victims of wayward bullets, lead poisoning, and other dangers and would have been a potent

symbol to film viewers of the dangers of Cabrini-Green (Popkin et al. 2000, 2, 6–7).

Rose's haunted housing project can be interpreted as rendering visible the dire alienation of the residents and suggesting the broken promise of projects like Cabrini-Green to provide safe, quality housing (Freidrichs 2011; Heathcott 2012, 360; Hunt 2009, 146). Simultaneously, the film has the potential to perpetuate discrimination toward the Cabrini-Green community. To viewers unfamiliar with the real Cabrini-Green, images of derelict corridors, trash-filled lawns, and ubiquitous, enigmatic graffiti could reinforce prejudicial fears (Vale 2013, 241) and justify tearing down high-rise projects, rather than support their renewal, as residents desired (Bezalel 1999; Schwarz 2004).

More successfully, the film challenges Helen and Bernadette's earlier negative judgments of Cabrini-Green. Bernadette "won't even drive past" Cabrini-Green, and Helen says that children are shot there "every day." Bernadette arrives with an arsenal of weapons (two containers of pepper spray and a Taser), and yet the academic duo is not attacked on this trip. In fact, the residents are equally suspicious of the two women. At worst, Helen and Bernadette endure a few remarks from local kids who assume they are undercover cops.[14]

It is not until Helen returns uninvited to Cabrini-Green to look for the Candyman that the gang leader, also named Candyman, knock her unconscious for " looking for Candyman." After the attack, police tell Helen that she is "lucky to be alive," suggesting that the gang was only giving her to warning. While the gang's rage could be attributed to Helen snooping around their gang territory, one resident, Anne-Marie, tells Helen and Bernadette that they "don't belong here" and are trespassing by "going through people's apartment and things." Helen's interest in the

14. The film crew was aware of the gang presence and the lack of police control in Cabrini-Green. In a controversial move, Rose paid off gangs and hired gang members to *act* as gang members ("Monster Mania," 2014), which placated threats and avoided turf warfare between buildings (Schwarz 2004).



"entire community" of Cabrini-Green is limited to her thesis on urban legends, and she assumes that they all "attribut[e] the daily horrors of their lives to a mythical figure." Expressing no concern for the residents' real and legitimate fears—some killer, human or superhuman, is murdering residents while the police do nothing—Helen enters Cabrini-Green as an outsider who believes she knows the residents better than they know themselves, thus sparking their resentment.

Anne-Marie defies the preconceived notions of Helen and Bernadette. Despite initial hesitation, she allows them into her welcoming home, which is decorated in warm, rich tones, with feminine pink walls, fruit-patterned curtains, and gold wall ornaments. Her character is emblematic of the families that the production crew met during filming (Schwarz 2004). Her organized, polished apartment evokes the interior lives of the community members and portrays the less publicized, daily lives of residents, who despite the buildings' shortcomings, called the projects their genuine home (Petty 2013, 121–22, 172–73).

Anne-Marie confronts the pair about their research: "What you gonna say? That we bad? Hmm? We steal? We gangbang? We all on drugs, right?" The repetition of "we" suggest the harm caused by outsiders who stereotype all Cabrini-Green residents as criminals, and Anne-Marie's aggravated tone suggest a painful familiarity with these accusations. Anne-Marie continues: "We ain't all like them assholes [the loitering teenagers] downstairs, you know? I just wanna raise my child good." Her words echo those of a former resident of Cabrini-Green, Chandra Bell, a mother and hospice caregiver, who felt many residents were trying to live regular lives despite the gang violence and drugs: "Everybody wasn't doing bad. There was also some good people living there that kept their units up. And I was one of them" (Petty 2013, 171).

Anne-Marie, a working mother who provides for her baby boy, contradicts expectations that housing projects facilitate a "welfare state" of lazy, destructive, and "immoral" poor (Freidrichs 2011). A likeable and responsible character, Anne-Marie suggests that Chicago's fear of the projects and its residents is misplaced and damaging. Contrary to

conservative theorists, such as Charles Murray, who suggest that "welfare dependency" incentivizes joblessness and out-of-wedlock births, sociologists have demonstrated that the root cause of poverty was the sharp decline of urban smokestack industries since the 1970s, which disproportionately affected lower-class black laborers and decreased the pool of "'marriageable' (i.e., economically stable) men" (Wilson [1987] 2012, 12, 16–17, 91).

Rose's haunted-house version of Cabrini-Green stands as a metaphor for real fears and antagonism toward public housing, but Rose shifts blame away from residents to the CHA and the police. The film blames the police for failing to protect black residents from the unwanted Overlord gang and their leader, who nicknames himself "Candyman." A young boy tells Helen that the only person who protected a disabled child from violent assault was a local "big tough guy." (It is ambiguous whether the boy's attacker is the Candyman or the gang leader of the same name.) This scene is reminiscent of the real death of Dolores Wilson's son at Cabrini-Green in which the police dismissed community leads and refused to further investigate the killing (Petty 2013, 38).

The lack of justice for the black residents contrasts with the swift action of the police after Helen's attack by gang members. A police officer says they "swept" the high-rises to "flush them all out" and locked down the "whole of Cabrini" to solve her case. This scene evokes the CHA practice of "police busts, sweeps, tactical units, mob action, mass search and seizures, fingerprinting, raids, and other paramilitary techniques" as a method of gang suppression (Venkatesh 2000, 205). While reform efforts by tenants were "met with flat refusals for material and symbolic support" from external organizations (Venkatesh 2000, 202), the CHA's extreme and brutal policing practice violated residents' civil rights (Popkin et al. 2000, 16) and created antagonism between police and residents (Venkatesh 2000, 205).



# The Black Monster

## Cabrini-Green's Ghost and His Monstrous Lair

The embodiment of the haunted space's forbidding boundaries is its ghost, arguably the most potent feature of the haunted house and even the horror genre (King 1982, 50, 259). The character of Candyman who haunts Cabrini-Green after being tortured and murdered is similar to the spirits with traumatic pasts (unpunished crimes, economic hardship, or gender conflicts) who populate the Gothic genre (Bailey 1999, 56, 63–66). Candyman is also similar to the "homicidal maniac" commonly found in slasher films such as *Halloween* (Carpenter 1978), *Friday the 13th* (Cunningham 1980), and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Craven 1984) who punishes white teens' "sexual activity with death" (Thompson 2007, 61).

His ghostly existence depends on the continuation of his urban legend in the minds of the living, thus necessitating the murders around Cabrini-Green, where his remains were scattered. Cabrini-Green follows the haunted-house archetype in which the house must have a history (King 1982, 167) of some atrocity or "unsavory" historical event (Bailey 1999, 56). In films, such as *Pet Cemetery* (Lambert 1989), *Poltergeist* (Hooper 1982), *The Amityville Horror* (Rosenberg 1979), or *The Shining* (Kubrick 1980), and stories, such as *Po' Sandy* (Chesnutt [1888] 1996) or *Beloved* (Morrison 1987), the haunted house links past historical atrocities to their lingering effects on the present day. The house might be built on a defiled tribal burial ground or a site associated with witchcraft, multiple murders, or slavery.

Since at least *Beowulf* the monster's lair marks the most inhospitable, isolated, decayed, or frightening spatial area within the horror genre (Strong 1925). Candyman's lair fulfills these traditional expectations. In a scene entitled "Looking-Glass," Helen, like Alice in *Through the Looking-Glass*, enters his lair through the hole behind Ruthie Jean's mirror. Here the graffiti and the decay are the most startling and extreme—walls contain mysterious and ominous images that tell of Candyman's gruesome

murder. A full-size portrait of the Candyman, with a gaping mouth is the entrance to his lair (Fig. 4), a scene that was taken from the original short story, "The Forbidden" (Barker 1999). Barker describes a "wide mouth" with "vicious teeth" leading to a "throat" passageway and a room beyond—"a belly" (1999, 84). Helen describes the passageway portrait in surreal, dream-like terms as "potent," "illusion," "nightmare," "facsimile," and "heroin fugue" (Barker 1999, 84). Horror director Guillermo del Toro suggests that the image of "the woman entering the mouth of the painting" has "such power" that it becomes "almost totemic," as if there is spiritual power radiating from the image ("The 100 Scariest Movie Moments" [2004] 2013). By emerging through the Candyman's mouth, Helen is "his voice, his next avenue of 'being,'" and her haunting and death will enable his urban legend to continue (Muir 2011, 224). The mouth is also a reference to white oppression of black stories and the transmission of the Candyman's story by word of mouth (Halberstam 1995, 5; Muir 2011, 224). The Candyman "must shed innocent blood" because Helen created doubt around his story, without which he is "nothing." In his particular logic, the true crime is not his murders, but forgetting the historical circumstances of his story.

The speaking black mouth is a challenge to the authority of whiteness, which whites consumers have counteracted by creating the trope of the edible black body (Tompkins 2012, 9). Depicted in everything from advertisements to stories, such images politically subjugate blacks and fetishize black bodies as objects of white pleasure (Tompkins 2012, 8, 9). Despite the destruction of his body by the white mob, Candyman's menacing mouth suggests that he can now claim power over the bodies of others through his own voice and his own brand of destruction. Helen crawling out of his mouth evokes Candyman's orality: he sexualizes her body and exerts power over it.



## The Birth of a Black Ghost: Racism as a Haunting Presence

In the original short story, "The Forbidden," Barker's Candyman is racially undefined but certainly not black; he has supernatural and grotesque yellowish skin, blue lips, and red eyes (1999, 119) and his patchwork rags speak to the British class divide (Cherry 2007, 57). Rose was committed to exploring race in America in the film and had to "argue very strongly" before Barker gave permission to portray Candyman as an African American (Schwarz 2004).

Candyman, as the ghost of a black man, is the corporeal site of racial tension within Cabrini-Green. An educated and esteemed painter in the 1890s, he is the son of a former slave who amassed a small fortune as an inventor.[15] He falls in love with a white woman and they conceived a child, which sparks fears of miscegenation. Candyman is similar to the figure of the "tragic mulatto," a character caught between whiteness and blackness (Bogle 2016, 6). Similar to the biracial father in Kate Chopin's Gothic short story, "Désirée's Baby" ([1893] 2000), Candyman's aristocratic behavior, refinement, and romance cross a forbidden threshold into whiteness and enrage the white community.

Rose links the violent death of Candyman to lynching.[16] The mob cuts off Candyman's hand—a particularly brutal disfiguration of a painter. They lather his body with honey and bees sting him to death. Just as the Candyman's body was burned on a giant pyre, "lynch mobs not only murdered but also sadistically tortured, mutilated, and burned the bodies of black men" on "funeral pyres" (Freedman 2013, 98–99). In the film, the father of Candyman's lover heads the angry mob and

15. Rose based the father's character on an African American inventor. Tony Todd (Candyman) and Kasi Lemmons (Bernadette) stress that films set during Reconstruction focus on the effects of slavery but rarely discuss the rise of talented African Americans ("Filmmaker's Commentary" on the DVD version of *Candyman*).

16. Historically, interracial sex between a white woman and black man constituted rape (Freedman 2013, 89, 91).

reasserts the white patriarchal order by the "symbolic rape" of a black man's body (Freedman 2013, 98). Although the majority of the 4,084 documented lynchings occurring in the South, 341 occurred in eight states outside of the South, including Illinois (Equal Justice Initiative 2017, 44). The film suggests a historic or, at the very least, a symbolic continuity between lynching in the South and contemporary racial fears in the North by having Candyman's ashes scattered on the land that would become Cabrini-Green.

All that remains of the genteel artist is the name Candyman, a reference to his mutilation and murder by honeybees.[17] Rose uses the debasement of Candyman as a symbol of the racialized violence of Reconstruction. By having the Candyman return from the dead to haunt Cabrini-Green, Rose suggests the continued, haunting presence of violence in modern times, perpetuated against blacks (by outsiders and insiders) and the internalization of that fear, violence, and isolation into their communities. Thus, in developing a complex backstory for the Candyman, Rose imbues the monster and his bodily suffering with a history that speaks to America's legacy of racial hatred.

## Sweetly Monstrous: A Romantic Black Phantom

Respected, tragic, and, at key moments, sympathetic, Candyman is classically romantic, with a composed and dignified demeanor. His personality captures the spirit of the man he once was, and his tragic and violent history explains his return. He is unlike earlier black film monsters who terrorized white maidens or sought vengeance against racist whites, such as the "KKK Comeuppance" in *Tales from the Hood* (Cundieff 1995). He is more akin to tragic romantic monsters, such as Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and Gaston Leroux's Phantom of the Opera. Similar to Bram Stoker's Dracula, Candyman can hypnotize women and is obsessed

17. His true name, Daniel Robitaille, is revealed in *Candyman 2: Farewell to the Flesh* (Condon 1995).



with courting woman from beyond the grave (Stoker [1897] 1997, 128–29, 322–28).[18] Author Barker observed about his creation that "there is something perversely sweet about the monstrous" (Schwarz 2004), and part of the Candyman's allure is that he is both monstrous and seductive (Barker 1999, 119, 121). He notes that before *Candyman* the horror genre lacked complex black villains, whose roles were limited to campy monsters (Schwarz 2004), such as *Blacula* (Crain 1972), *Blackenstein: The Black Frankenstein* (Levey 1973), *Dr. Black, Mr. Hyde* (Crain 1976), or Michael Jackson's werewolf in *Thriller* (Landis 1983). Rose specifically gave Candyman a "romantic," "elegant," and "educated" background, and Tony Todd studied fencing and took waltz lessons with Virginia Madsen (Schwarz 2004). For Todd the Candyman represents a new kind of horror monster, a black monster that commands reverence and respect from horror fans and has assumed a spot among other legendary monsters (2015).

Admittedly, Candyman murders innocent and likeable characters, making him in the eyes of some critics an iteration of the black boogeyman, an archetypal cinematic villain (Coleman 2011, 20). Given his lynching at the hands of a white mob, his violence against other blacks is puzzling. Some critics have argued that his black-on-black violence represents an internalization of violence within the black community, given the contemporary context of community violence and gang warfare in Cabrini-Green (Popkin et al. 2000, 4), but the Candyman's killings do cross race, gender, and class boundaries.[19] Finally, in the horror genre the tragic monster is both a villain and the hero, with whom the audience simultaneously empathizes and fears (Schwarz 2004). The monstrous is curious, contradictory, captivating, and even familiar.

Candyman's fine apparel, financial independence, and Gilded Age gentility are a jarring contrast to his decayed and alienated surroundings

18. Bernard Rose hypnotized Virginia Madsen before scenes with Tony Todd (Schwarz 2004), which is also reminiscent of Dracula ("Monster Mania," 2014).

19. Candyman kills Ruthie Jean (black), Bernadette (black, possibly biracial), a psychiatrist (white), Clara (white), and Helen (white).

and to the other housing-project residents. They wear blue-collar work uniforms and practical winter clothes as markers of the daily grind to survive, and the gang members posture in leather jackets, bright puffy coats, and glittery chains to convey toughness and power. Candyman's genteel appearance symbolizes the economic decline of the residents as much as it reflects his personal torment.

The film's critical scene is the Candyman's poignant romance of Helen. Rose establishes the monster as a person whose sorrows and injustices matter, emphasizing that black suffering is potent and significant. Whereas earlier scenes localized racial tensions in the urban landscape, here Rose depicts the effects of racial hatred in the brutalized black body. Helen enters Candyman's lair with the intention of killing him for kidnapping Anne-Marie's baby. She finds him gently sleeping, a distinctly mortal activity that conveys his vulnerability. She does not scream. He wakes and hypnotizes her, they waltz, and the camera twirls around them while they embrace, suggesting a "romantic fantasy" of Candyman's lost love (Thompson 2007, 75). The romantic fantasy turns tragic as Helen see Candyman's mutilated hand, covered by a grotesque hook, its phallic form suggestive of white fears of black men as "hypersexualized" (Schwarz 2004). Beneath his fine clothes the Candyman reveals to Helen his bloody and decayed ribcage, swarming with bees, where his heart should be (Fig. 5). Helen faints, and the Candyman grimaces with anguish, looking upwards in utter suffering (Fig. 6). A monster with depth of emotion, the Candyman is terrifying yet also decidedly human.

## Mending the Broken Black Family

When Helen is committed to the mental institution for the suspected murder of Bernadette and the kidnapping of the Anne-Marie's baby from Cabrini-Green, there is a brief shot of Candyman hovering over the baby. Initially menacing, the viewer is concerned that he will kill the child with his hook. Instead, Candyman comforts the child, giving



him one of his fingers to suckle. He may be feeding the baby honey from his bees, which would add to the nurturing humanity of this scene (Nicholls and Buckingham 2012).

Later Candyman attempts to reassemble the family stolen from him at his death by murdering Helen and the baby in the community bonfire. In fathering a biracial child, Candyman defied the racial order of his times. He defiantly attempts to reclaim power over the white mob that had tried to steal his social freedom and his family. Despite his horrific homicidal resolve, the film's dramatic emphasis is on Candyman and his loss.

The idea of the black male reasserting himself as the head of the household is particularly important given the social history of Cabrini-Green family life. By the 1960s many Chicago public-housing projects had a nearly 3:1 ratio of children to adults, and in 1965 Cabrini-Green had a 2.09:1 ratio. Citywide the ratio in the same period, 1:2, was reversed. (Hunt 2009, 148). Daniel Moynihan, assistant secretary of labor in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, argued in a seminal text, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, that poor urban black families are matriarchal and disproportionately headed by single mothers, which is "a crushing burden on the Negro male" (1965, 29). He concluded that the broken family structure—a destructive legacy of slavery —was "at the heart of the deterioration of the fabric of Negro society" (Moynihan 1965, 5–14, 30–34). Although the "Moynihan Report" shared similarities with critiques of institutionalized racism by Kenneth Bancroft Clark and Mamie Phipps Clark, E. Franklin Frazier, and Bayard Rustin (Patterson 2010, 49; Wilson ([1987] 2012, 20–21), many scholars and leaders faulted the report for bias against black women (Wilson [1987] 2012, 20–21, 149) and for the "assumed pathologies of black poverty," which helped to stigmatize housing projects further (Greenbaum 2015, 69).

Similar to the argument of the Moynihan Report, institutional racism is the cause of Candyman's fractured family. But where the report looked to Johnson's war on poverty for a solution, the Candyman's solution is radical and gruesome. He will first destroy the broken family structure

in a ritual burning and eliminate the city's segregation of whites and blacks in a idealized family reunion in the afterlife. In this powerful and desperate climax, Candyman's attempt to reclaim his family underscores both his tragedy and that of Cabrini-Green's.

Today, Candyman remains an empowering black male figure in cinema (Todd 2015). Over two decades after he inaugurated the role, Tony Todd notes that black fans have "such an immediacy of understanding in their eyes about what Candyman was, what sort of oppression he had to deal with and sometimes how heroic he was to them" (Cox 2006). Todd sees his character as a black man whose "spirit was so strong, that he refused to die," despite the brutalities inflicted upon him (Schwarz 2004). For Todd the monster speaks to "the dissatisfied, the disenfranchised" and offers them hope (French 1995, 42).

## Conclusion

With the intention of "'rebuild[ing] people's souls'" (Petty 2013, 20), Richard M. Daley, mayor from 1989 to 2011, ushered in the dismantling of high-rise public-housing projects. In 1997, after years of delayed maintenance by the Chicago Housing Authority, nineteen thousand units failed inspections and the federal government mandated demolishment within five years. In 2000 the US Department of Housing and Urban Development approved the CHA's 1999 "Plan for Transformation," which promised to replace concentrated public housing with mixed-income properties and a voucher system (Petty 2013, 16, 21). Community groups were alarmed that developers would seize the area for private profit (Petty 2013, 21; Venkatesh 2000, 268).[20] Ultimately thousands experienced "displacement, multiple moves, and homelessness"(Petty 2013, 16). Audrey Petty reflected on Cabrini-Green's demolition and expected something "grandiose and purifying—the dropping of a bomb or, as in *Candyman* […] a giant exorcising bonfire" (2013, 221). Instead, she witnessed the destruction of a home to many, a real place, whose destruction did not hinge on assessing the high-rises' viability, habitability, and potential for transformation but on external political, economic, and social factors (Petty 2013, 221, 268–69).

20. In 1995, when Cabrini-Green was first dismantled, the surrounding two-block radius generated $6 million in residential sales, in 1999; at the start of the CHA's "Plan for Transformation" sales rose to $120 million; between 2000 and 2006 sales approached nearly $1 billion (Petty 2013, 222).



Haunting is the gift *Candyman* imparts. During the finale the monstrous ghost attempts to lure Helen and the baby into the bonfire: "We shall die together in front of their very eyes and give them something to be haunted by." The film's depictions of spatial divisions in Chicago and a tragic black phantom haunts viewers with a rousing and emotional portrayal of racial boundaries. The legend of a nineteenth-century monster's haunting Cabrini-Green suggests the continuing impact of racism and the vulnerability of African Americans from the time of Jim Crow laws to the isolation of public-housing projects in the 1990s.

Regrettably *Candyman* did not lead viewers to take concrete action to save Cabrini-Green from the wrecker's ball. The film's exploration of race, history, and urban spatial divisions was overshadowed by a cult interest in Gothic romance, charismatic monsters, and urban legends; and it spawned poorly executed sequels and spinoff movies, such as *Urban Legend* (Blanks 1998; "Monster Mania," 2014). Rose failed to see the full potential of his new use of a sympathetic black monster in an urban setting; in the end he reverted to the familiar—the heroic sacrifice of the white heroine and the glorification of white womanhood.

Jordan Peele's hit, *Get Out* (2017), another horror film about an interracial relationship, better captures the complexity of black lives in America and the continuation of systemic racism through micro-aggressions and outright violence. Peele acknowledges *Candyman*, *Night of the Living Dead* (Romero 1968), and *The People Under the Stairs* (Craven 1991) as forerunners to *Get Out*, because they took a serious approach to a largely absent discussion of race and racism in mainstream American horror films (Colburn 2017; Gross 2017). *Candyman* helped develop a space in horror films for subversive explorations of race, using the horror

tropes of the monster and the haunted house to engage in a dialogue with the history and continuation of systemic racism in America. The eponymous phantom's opening line, "I came for you," is a threat realized by the film's end. The Candyman and his story set out to haunt viewers on a personal level, by raising discontent with urban racial dynamics and the social alienation of the black urban poor. While imperfect in its message about race, *Candyman* reveals the hidden power of horror to inspire social consciousness, to foster empowerment, to build historic awareness, and to generate empathy. *Candyman*, like its monster, comes for you—and continues to haunt long after the credits roll.



# Appendix

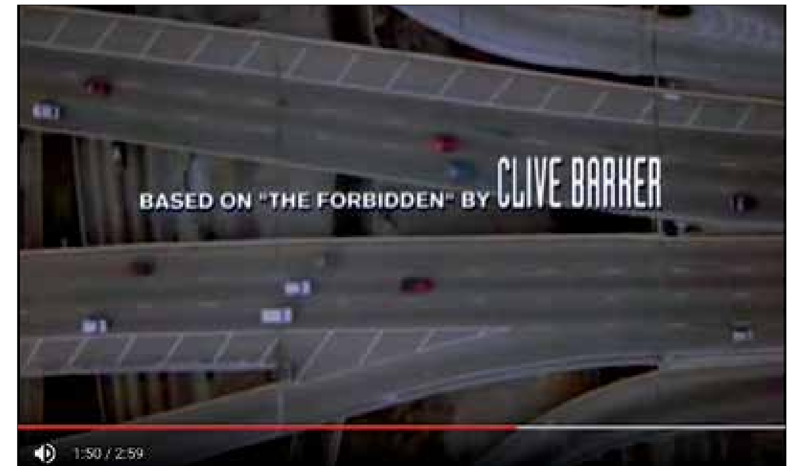



**Figure 1. Opening credit.**

**Figure 2. Introductory sequence.**

Candyman says, "I, came, for you." The image of Chicago's Gold Coast fades to a close-up of Helen's eyes.

**Figure 3. Helen and Bernadette (not in shot) arrive at Cabrini-Green.**

**Figure 4. Helen emerges through the mouth of Candyman.**

**Figure 5. Candyman's chest.**

**Figure 6. Candyman's anguish.**



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