
Policing Resource Extraction and Human Rights in *The Land of the Dead*

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The humor, bravery, and rude strength, as well as the vices of the frontier in its worst aspect, have left traces on American character, language, and literature, not soon to be effaced.

– Frederick Jackson Turner



Fig. 1 Water is life?

From their African origins as captured souls, through the Caribbean connections to slave labor, to modernist reanimated cannibals, zombies have always represented subjugation, by being under the control of a master, or driven only by appetite instead of volition (Rushton and Moreman 1-4). Labels of servility, violence, intemperance, and cannibalism have been used to debase Indigenous populations since Columbus, reflecting the oppositional definition of civilization versus savagism present in Europe well before the Renaissance (Berkhofer 71-72). Zombies are likewise “old-fashioned savages, descending immediately into cannibalism and

irrational, uncontrollable violence” (Paffenroth 11-12). They require violent management at every point of contact and interaction. Throughout George A. Romero’s zombie films, there are frontiers, and echoes of Old Western movies. Therefore, Romero’s zombies can only be fully comprehended in relation to European traditions of primitivism, slavery, and colonialism, making them a fitting subject for Indigenous criticism.

While the Frontier Thesis of 1893, unilineal evolutionism, and “race science” may have fallen out of fashion within academic circles, their motivational powers are still found in pop culture artifacts such as films and video games. “Race” as theory arises in response to the Other, and need not depend upon a difference in skin color to locate and seemingly explain the imagined inferiority of that Other (Ahrendt 192). Racialized politics invokes the mechanisms of murder, or at least the policing of access to life, liberty, and property—including, of course, land and resources—as enacted by dominant forces laboring to control the ontological and experiential limits of life itself through racism (Foucault 1990, 137).

The Land of the Dead presents Romero’s most developed critique of inequality through



Fig. 1 They built that wall

zombie film. It moves beyond the indictment of greed and consumerism evident in 1978’s *Dawn of the Dead* to present us with a view of how capitalist hierarchy reproduced itself in the wake of—and, as we shall see, as supported by—zombies as a globalized presence surrounding a frontier outpost. *The Land of the Dead* presents a somewhat critical picture of the colony, but never escapes the romanticism of the

frontier and the dream of *terra nullius*. Zombies remain relegated to being the Other against which the living Self—presumed to be humanity itself—is oppositionally defined. Thus, we can analyze the film through the lens of Frederick Jackson Turner’s Frontier Thesis, especially with Turner’s reliance on social evolutionism.

In 1893, three years after the official closing of the American frontier, Turner argued that the uniquely American national character evolved along the frontier as it moved across the continent between spreading civilization and receding wilderness (Turner 18). The frontier is the site wherein the binary oppositions between savage and civilized play out, and Turner claimed that so long as the frontier kept moving, America reaped the benefits of an ongoing project of social renewal through self-actualization and accelerated evolution (Turner 1). Man's struggle against the wilderness demanded strength and adaptability, and for Turner (and many others, including President Roosevelt) the frontier experience came to be regarded as a rite of passage into manhood and the source of innovation (Deloria 101). Within this story, there was little place for philosophy, for education, for aristocracy, nor for established central authority (Turner 18). The rule of law could be easily abandoned, in favor of ad-hoc social responses guided more by expediency than precedence—inevitably producing states of siege and exception (Mbembé 16). The American notion of liberty itself came to encompass all these values on the frontier, through struggle against wilderness and increased distance from what Turner called the European mindset (Jensen 309).

Historians and other academics have not been kind to the Frontier Thesis (Block 40-41). Despite this disavowal, I will show how its focus on rugged individualism and personal struggle for a presumed common good has folded itself quite securely into the popular imagination, here represented by themes in *The Land of the Dead*. Jack Forbes wrote, "Properly, a 'frontier' is one force opposed to another" (Forbes 210). These forces are populated on all sides. Relegating one side to a state of "wilderness" or abstract primitivity robs "the savages" not only of human volition, but of belongingness to lands deemed "wild" (Klein 187). Zombie films often depend upon the climactic failure of maintaining exclusive frontiers between the living and the dead, so attention to zombies as necessary—if usually unwitting—agents partaking in intergroup conflict with the living may reveal a frontier story that refuses to celebrate one side to the exclusive detriment of the Other. Ultimately, *The Land of the Dead* fails as an Indigenous allegory because even the zombies become settlers. However, the theme may be stated as "the only good civilization is a dead one," and that gives it an appeal unimaginable to early fans of the Frontier Thesis.

According to this hypothesis, the frontier became the driving force of democratic unity, notably in response to the presence of Indians (Turner 8). For Turner, frontier survival depends

upon strategic atavism. Frontier heroes selectively abandon certain trappings of civilization, such as class hierarchy and especially the rejection of interpersonal violence as social control. In fact, violence personally inflicted against the Savage, both as embodied by the “Indian” Other as well as the “uncultivated” landscape, is here celebrated as the means to both establish civilization at the edges of savagism, as well as the best method to prove oneself worthy of survival and settlement around and beyond the frontier. But most of all, the frontier was important “from that day to this, as a military training school, keeping alive the power of resistance” (Turner 8). For Turner, America—and Americanness—was forged through the violent domination of a wilderness and its savages. While Romero’s *The Land of the Dead* seems to critique hierarchy and class domination within the living human populations, zombies remain relegated to the savage slot and denied any rootedness to place or role in the post-apocalyptic social order (Trouillot 7-28).

The opening credits present a quick description of how living humans have organized themselves since the zombie outbreak. Snippets of audio from news reports play under the titles and jarring visual flashes intended to invoke horror. Intermixed with this history are expressions of anxiety over the nature of the zombies themselves, not only the physical threat they pose, but the existential threat they present. “So long as we’re alive, they ain’t never gonna run out of food. The day they do, it’ll mean only one thing: we’re all dead,” one voiceover intones. A different voice worries of what it would mean, and what might happen “If these creatures ever develop the power to think, to reason, even in the most primitive way,” giving us the most salient points from which to consider the anxieties over zombies. The exposition ends noting how living humans have gathered themselves into fortified urban areas and are now “raiding small, rural towns for supplies, like outlaws.” Indeed, zombies have become incorporated into the political economy of living humans despite—and to some extent because of—their Otherness.

The raiders are led by Riley (Simon Baker), the protagonist who intends for this to be his last run before retiring to the wilderness beyond the frontier. Riley built *Dead Reckoning*, an armored and heavily armed vehicle designed to protect the resource extractors. They bring their supplies to the city, where the oppressive class structure is made obvious. The center of the city is dominated by Fiddler’s Green, an exclusive condominium catering to the desires of the pre-apocalypse upper-class. The name is reminiscent of “The Cavalrymen’s Poem” from the 19th

Century, which describes an afterlife earned by good soldiers who would rather commit suicide than be scalped by hostiles (Cavalry Outpost Publications). The last stanza of the poem is:

And so when man and horse go down
Beneath a saber keen,
Or in a roaring charge of fierce melee
You stop a bullet clean,
And the hostiles come to get your scalp,
Just empty your canteen,
And put your pistol to your head
And go to Fiddlers' Green.

The cost to live in this version of Fiddler's Green is exorbitant, and maintenance of the cash economy within the city demands subservience to its owner, a character fittingly named Kaufmann ("Merchant," in German, played by Dennis Hopper). The building is highly secure, protecting not only the residents but also the sanctity of the upscale shops and services that cater to the rich. Surrounding the building are slums inhabited by people who are unable to afford such luxury, but are granted a level of protection from the zombies so long as they contribute most of their labor to the city. Again, the setting mirrors representations of Hollywood Westerns wherein the citizens need rescue from a local despot. Kaufmann has monopolized and perverted the force and rule of law to serve the interests of his own class—even as they, too, are paying him to protect their interests. Kaufmann ventriloquizes George W. Bush and Donald Rumsfeld in parody of War on Terror rhetoric, and his character invites comparison to corrupt emperors, even by the name of his enclave reminding us of Nero who mythically "fiddled while Rome burned" (Russell, 189). Outside the militarized barriers of the city lies the wilderness, occupied by zombies, from which Kaufmann must extract goods and materials to keep his economy going. The film is silent on how it derives its electricity and petroleum products (which even the zombies have), as well as its water. We later learn that Kaufmann is at the center of every market around the city, no matter its legitimacy. "If you can drink it, shoot it up, fuck it, gamble on it," Slack (Asia Argento) says, "it belongs to him."

The film opens with a view of Uniontown, which looks like many other small towns except it is populated by zombies. We are shown decrepit picket fences that were once white, a small church, an early gas station, and a small gazebo at the center of a town park. Throughout,

there are zombies representing a wide cross-section of people, but here firmly embedded in the romanticized nostalgia for small town American life (Jameson 279). There is a young heterosexual couple walking together, sometimes even holding hands. There are people walking up to the church. There is a cheerleader, a butcher, and other familiar roles signified. The gazebo is occupied by the remains of a Dixieland jazz ensemble; each musician still tries to make music even though their instruments and their bodies have fallen into disrepair.

The zombies in Uniontown have attained a semblance of order. However, as pointed out by the living humans, zombie identity seems limited to remembrance of the past. They can only try to be what they once were, and that leaves them in a state of timelessness. It is the same sort of timelessness that has been ascribed to Indigenous populations through imposition of the ethnographic present (Fabian 81). Anthropologists and other outside observers may represent cultural activities as occurring in the present tense, but such representations tend to foreclose upon Indigenous futures by implying that any change or deviation from authoritarian ethnographies can only represent a loss of cultural authenticity.

Big Daddy (Eugene Clark) was the owner, and remains the operator, of the gas station. He notices the living humans, and calls the attention of his fellow zombies towards the interlopers. The judgment of their behavior as witnessed by the raiding humans, Riley (Simon Baker) and the rookie Mike (Shawn Roberts), is important here. The zombies are real here, and stand in physical threat against resource extraction; they are barriers to profit. Mike categorically denies zombies any sense of self-determined subjectivity, and labels the outward appearance of humanity as mere imitation. Thus, the denial isn't itself absolute, which only heightens the tension within the film.

Mike: They're trying to be us.

Riley: No, they used to be us. Learning how to be us again.

There are two observations of the zombie Other happening here, and the ambiguities at stake in the relationship between the living and the zombies are clear in both. Riley's line relegates the distinction between the living and the zombies as a historical shift: something happened to impose the change. The change itself may be less a supernatural anomaly than a simple step backwards along the presumed universal line of human progress, but for Riley the zombies are more of a threat because of their growing resemblance to the living. Mike, on the other hand, characterizes their behavior as “pretending to be alive.” Detractors often accuse Indigenous

peoples of “pretending to be Indian,” or of not being “Indian enough,” as a tactic to avoid consideration of Indigenous rights. Further, when it comes to Indigenous peoples, any change is often taken as evidence of a loss of authenticity (Berkhofer 28-29). “Vanishing Race” discourses are full of such justifications, rationalizing erasure or outright extinction of “primitive” others in the name of social progress while simultaneously denying Indigenous authenticity through monopolization of the terms for recognizing authenticity at all (Said 2). The creation and maintenance of ontological and rhetorical structures to deny recognition and acknowledgement of Indigenous presence is a central tactic of colonial domination (Vizenor 4-5). Both men display a similar disavowal of zombies having a right to exist, though Riley does move beyond treatment of zombies as mere barriers to extractive capitalism, if only after they have manifest the savage destiny laid out by Turner as the objects of developmentally transformative frontier violence.

The greatest fear in zombie films is usually not of the zombies themselves, but of becoming a zombie. In *The Land of the Dead*, the evolutionist reading of zombies is complicated by implying the change from living human to zombie can go both ways. Riley adds the possibility that, somehow, the zombies will become less and less distinguishable from the living. The blurring of the boundary between the living and the zombies is unacceptable for society to continue functioning (Foucault 2003, 61). Mike says, “No way. Some germ or some devil got those things up and walking, but there's a big difference between us and them. They're dead.” Since the “big difference” may not be that big, the distinction must be violently enforced. Enforcement shows how the relationship between the living and the zombies informs how the living see and know themselves, simultaneously rationalizing and demonstrating their dominant position even as they express their fear of losing that position.

This is the core anxiety of the film, common throughout Romero’s zombie movies. The first hints of this anxiety were expressed along Freudian lines, especially through the concept of the uncanny as the return of the repressed (Freud “The Uncanny”). Zombies, according to this analysis, represent suppressed primitive desires taking over civilization; zombies are the Id devouring the Superego. With *The Land of the Dead*, however, we see a move beyond considerations of uncanny



Fig. 2 Return of the repressed

effects as matters of individual psychology and more into socially constructed hierarchies such as race, class, and gender—and the management of different rights packages along these lines. The ability to cleanly demarcate the living from the zombies justifies the treatment of the zombies by the living, which is a treatment in many ways parallel to the treatment of Indigenous peoples—here, as barriers to resource extraction. Rather than bothering to understand the lives of the zombies as a form of life different from that of the living, it is simpler to deny that the zombies have any life at all. No matter how pluralistic or relativistic society is, the distinction that establishes hierarchical dominance of the living over the zombies must be upheld, so that the violence and exploitation waged against the zombies by the living can go on without interruption. Mike identifies traditional objects of fear as possible sources of zombies: evil, and infection. He must portray the cause to be absolutely bad, because moral ambiguity would cast doubt upon how the living humans have justified their own place of superiority over the zombies. The debate between Riley and Mike encapsulates Bhabha’s “Of Mimicry and Man,” where Mike favors the ambivalence of mimicry as signaling an insurmountable difference between zombies and the living, while Riley sees how their mimicry reveals how human society has become an empty shell, the veneer of civilization is merely class politics, rife with mindless, pointless consumption driven by greed. While zombie anthropophagy may be repulsive, at least it isn’t motivated by envy, nor is it a central feature to their social organization.

Riley amplifies the anxiety when he asks, “Isn’t that what we’re doing, pretending to be alive?” Riley is a cultural critic, questioning the old categorical system through which matters of happiness, success, modernity, and progress were defined in the pre-zombie world that we, the audience, are presumed to live in (Vizenor xvii-viii). He echoes many of the primitivist urges that have plagued modernity since at least the 16th Century, when artists and other thinkers questioned the taken-for-granted values of modern life (Berkhofer 72, 75). Coinciding with colonialism and imperialism, as driven by market expansion, resource extraction, and increased socioeconomic inequality around the Industrial Revolution, cultural critics worried that the price paid in human lives, indentured servitude, and “pristine” wilderness might be too high (Barkan and Bush 3).

In Riley’s case, we come to see that his primitivist critique is merely escapism. In an impassioned street speech, Mulligan (Bruce McFee), expresses his class envy as he attempts to incite a revolution:

Mulligan: How long are you going to let Kaufman push you around? You like shining his shoes, pressing his pants? He didn't build that place. He just took it over. Kept the best for himself, and left us with a slum to live in. But if there's enough of us, if all of you would join up, we could make this a fit place to live in.

Riley does not share Mulligan's faith in the city or its people. "You're worried about being locked out," meaning excluded from upward class mobility. "I see that," he continues, gesturing to the fences surrounding the city, "I can't help but think we're all locked in. I'm looking for a world where there's no fences." Later, he makes it clear that he rejects more than fences. He wants to find a place without people—colonialism's myth of *terra nullius*—in which to live his life free from domination of authoritarian class structures. We are told, and shown, that zombies are everywhere, so it remains unclear how Riley plans to deal with them. Obviously, he does not plan to deal with them as "people," despite his earlier expressions of sympathy and recognition. His escapism can only reinforce evolutionary hierarchy, since he only wants to step backwards to a simpler structure where the final definitions of liberty and territorial domination are up to him, and him alone. This is to be his last raid before retiring to the wilderness.

Riley is not the only raider looking to retire. Cholo (John Leguizamo) has been saving up to buy a place in Fiddler's Green. Kaufmann denies Cholo's request by noting that "There's a very long waiting list" to get in.

Kaufmann: This is an extremely desirable location. Space is very limited.

Cholo: You mean restricted, don't you?

Kaufmann: I do have a board of directors, and I have a membership committee.

They have to approve.

In retaliation, Cholo threatens to fire missiles at Fiddler's Green unless Kaufmann pays him \$5M. Cholo and his rebels leave Mouse (Maxwell McCabe-Lokos), alone, to watch the drop point. "Stay real," he says to Mouse as they depart.

The implication of Cholo's comment to Mouse is that zombies are not real. Obviously, this is not a denial of the existence of zombies, nor is it a distinction between presence and absence, since even when absent the fear inspired by zombies remains. Rather, the distinction is between degrees of consideration. This flippant comment reveals some serious ontological questions, not only surrounding the differential distribution of rights and recognition between the living and the zombies, but within the ranks of the living as well (Foucault 1995, 222-223).

Zombies, though they exist in *The Land of the Dead*, do not have the right to exist; this echoes discourses of westward expansion along the American frontier, or the continued disregard of Indigenous rights and Indigenous peoples who stand in the way of resource extraction. What makes zombies less real is their lack of recognition as real, a tautology that shows how important the politics of recognition are to rights discourses. Being usually nonverbal, zombies do not advocate for themselves or their rights. Their motivations and goals can only be surmised from their behaviors, which are represented as antithetical to a social order shared with the living (though, it must be said, they treat each other just fine). These prejudices are exonerated by the categorical denial of zombies possessing life at all, despite meeting many of the qualifications of life that we may remember from Biology 101: motion, reproduction, adaptation, consumption, and response to stimuli. Zombies are less real because there is no role for them. It is not that they fall short on a list of traits for inclusion, it is more that the living would rather not consider including zombies at all. Recognizing a connection, or even comparison, with zombies causes anxiety. Zombies, therefore, must be destroyed without hesitation or remorse, and preferably in large numbers at a time (Mbembé 34). As Mike comments during the opening raid, “I thought this was going to be a battle. It’s a fucking massacre.”

This is the very definition of *Homo sacer*, or the human person absented from life and associated rights, a being that can be killed but cannot be murdered because murder requires recognition of the victim’s humanity (Agamben 47). Several parallels with the political marginalization of Indigenous peoples through the ontologies associated with colonialism follow: Their claims to life are not “real”; they are delegitimized by imposed aesthetics and politics (Vizenor 3). Further, the colonizing state attempts to monopolize the power to determine not only Indigenous authenticity through legal definitions of “Indian,” but Indigenous reality itself through the swarming of



Fig. 3 Smash the system

disciplinary institutions, such as boarding schools, proletarianization, economic development, medical evangelism, resource management, and redefinition of kinship. When imagining a totalizing system of colonial domination, it is impossible to imagine Indigenous peoples having any claims to bodily or social integrity, rights, resources, or lands. Similarly, zombies are denied recognition of all such claims to life, liberty, and property.

The raiders ride into Uniontown under the American flag. The first kill we see is a female zombie being impaled through the forehead by a motorcyclist using an American flag as a jousting pole. The camera focuses heavily on the finial, an American Bald Eagle, just before it penetrates her skull. Patriotic emblems not only excuse but also carry violence against the zombies, while more spectacular patriotic displays are used to render the zombies powerless against their exploitation by the living. Fireworks—even if the meaning of the display is lost on them—mesmerize the zombies while the living do whatever they will. Fireworks reappear at key moments as Romero plays with the irony of patriotism as associated with liberty by showing us that patriotic displays may distract us as an audience from our own



Fig. 4 Getting the point

oppression under a class system, as well as distract us from considering how we viewers are participating in the oppression of others. By riding under the American flag, the egregious violence enacted by the raiders is justified by a presumed common good, even as that presumed good is exclusive and hierarchical, and waged at the cost of lives, lands, and resources.

Class anxieties, however, are not exclusive to the lower class. In a deleted scene (included in the “Unrated Director’s Cut” version), Cholo intervenes when a resident of Fiddler’s Green hangs himself in his family’s condo. His wife is distraught, and his son tries to take him down. Cholo warns against this action, because the father is about to turn into a zombie. The son is bitten, and Cholo dispatches the zombie father by smashing in his skull with a bronze sculpture.

By this time in the post-zombie world, everyone knows how people become zombies. *Dawn of the Dead* and *Day of the Dead* both feature scenes where a character makes the choice presented in the Cavalrymen’s Poem, either shooting himself in the head, or asking another character to do it on their behalf. *Day of the Dead* adds another layer to this by presenting a character who commits suicide by zombie horde, thereby letting the horde in to the bunker and making it into an act of murder-suicide. In *Land*, the father must have known that death by hanging would not prevent him from turning into a zombie, so calling this an act of suicide is imprecise. The father’s act may be the “radical act of self-initiation” described by Clark, in answer to the question “Is it better to be Undead, happy, and free, or alive, miserable, and repressed?” (209).

His son being bitten connects this rite of passage to fears of “going native” in Western films depicting frontier families (Huhndorf). The anxieties are gendered, with fears surrounding daughters and wives being captured and raped, alongside fears that the sons will willingly run off to join the tribe. Here, the father’s rite of passage is also the son’s. The son willingly goes to the hanging father, knowing that his father will not remain dead and, further, will soon become a threatening presence. Even in the classist and racist enclave of Fiddler’s Green, becoming Other is viewed as a potential pathway towards personal liberation.

In another trope from Western films, viewers are treated with a jailhouse scene in which the characters provide exposition. Slack had been sentenced to death against two competing zombies in a cage-match fueled by bloodlust and gambling in the ghetto surrounding Fiddler’s Green. Riley and his trusty, sharpshooting sidekick Charlie (Robert Joy), rescued her, and while they are jailed together, we learn that Slack was being punished for supporting Mulligan’s attempt to organize labor in resistance to Kaufmann’s oppression. Slack is a trained soldier forced into prostitution—she is the hooker with a heart of gold. Charlie notes that the situation is unfair, but that “every place is the same,” indicating his resignation to his own oppression as a lower-class person with a disability. Riley adds, “Places with people. I’m going to find a place where there’s no people.” Riley’s dream reflects the colonizer’s dream of discovery, despite his stance against imperialism as represented by Kaufmann. In short, Riley is unable to imagine an alternative to success and liberty outside of modernist categorical structures, either as remembered in the past or as reconstructed in the post-zombie world. His is a repeat performance of the same mythic rugged individualism that characterized the frontier hero in imaginations of

The Old West of cinema (and the equally imaginative Frontier Thesis of Frederick Jackson Turner).

Beyond the analogy of the crime boss in charge of an isolated town along a fictionalized Western frontier, *The Land of the Dead* criticizes the obvious realities of frontier domination. As Mbembé states, “the colony represents the site where sovereignty consists fundamentally in the exercise of a power outside the law (*ab legibus solutus*) and where ‘peace’ is more likely to take



Fig. 5 Sticking it to the Man

on the face of a ‘war without end’” (23).

This occurs along a frontier between the colonizer and the colonized, and all the oppositional definitions (and moral value judgments) that entails. The colonial definition and management of space, land, and, on balance, various packages of rights are usually bent to privilege the colonizer. All peoples are oppressed to varying degrees under Kaufmann, and all the city residents are complicit to varying degrees in

oppressing others. At the very least, every city resident is participating in the oppression of zombies through dependence on resource extraction beyond the frontier. Colonization is a discursive project, and “ultimately, tantamount to the production of boundaries and hierarchies, zones and enclaves; the subversion of existing property arrangements; the classification of people according to different categories; resource extraction; and, finally, the manufacturing of a large reservoir of cultural imaginaries” (Mbembé 26). *The Land of the Dead* is just such a cultural imaginary. Even if critical of dominant culture, most imaginaries cannot break from foundational colonial ambivalence, or undermine white supremacy, as entrenched in the production—and analysis—of cultural representations (King and Leonard 355). *The Land of the Dead* demonstrates the need to include Indigenous criticism into analyses of zombie films, even and especially if embodied Indigenous presence is absented.

Kaufmann’s abject criminality is justified and rationalized through the colonial structure of the city. His class position is evidenced by and emergent from his domination of the city. The

living exist in relationship to Kaufmann—he is the sovereign, in a Foucauldian sense. On one hand, the living are motivated by envy and self-interest that play into racialized privilege, made most obvious in Kaufmann’s denial of Cholo’s desire to live in Fiddler’s Green. On the other hand, the living are motivated by fear of the zombies—fear of the Other, and of *becoming* the excluded Other—and acquiesce to their own oppression in exchange for a sense of security. This need for security, and the need to maintain profit within the system itself, demands further criminality and violence. The resources extracted from outside the fences of the city are not all for the “good” of the people, and bootlegging contraband accompanies the de facto “gray market” Kaufmann has built up to bolster his domination. As he explains to one of his Board of Directors:

It was my ingenuity that took an old world and made it into something new. I put up the fences to make it safe. I hired the soldiers and paid for their training. I kept the people off the streets by giving them games and vices which cost me money. But I spend it because the responsibility is mine. Now, do you understand the meaning of the word responsibility?

Twice, during the inevitable zombie attack on the city, Kaufmann asserts, “You have no right!” These words—backed with financial, structural, and of course militarized power—mark Kaufmann’s attempt to monopolize the power to define rights within a self-serving social hierarchy, and the privilege marked by this discourse is the only form of capital that trickles down to the underclass of living humans. The living most often define zombies as an utterly negated Other, or can only recognize their similarities to zombies with great existential (and usually violently expressed) anxiety. In either case, even if zombies become sympathetic characters, the characters (and viewers) are always bound to the



Fig. 6 "You have no right!"

role of domination over zombies. For the living to go on living, zombies must be fully isolated, fully controlled, or fully exterminated. This is the same genocidal logic of colonialism (Foucault 1990, 137).

As Big Daddy leads his zombie horde into an uncertain future, as Fiddler's Green burns, and as Riley and his ragtag bunch of outlaws celebrate their own independence day, it finally becomes obvious that the zombies blur the line between colonized and colonizer. Their revolution is driven by class struggle, and not based on connection to place. Their revolution may have been led by an African American gas station attendant, but the horde is a hagiographic take on 50s Americana, and almost totally white. Whatever recognition Riley affords to them is as settlers, or at least severely limited by settler terms (Coulthard). When Pretty Boy takes the joystick to aim Dead Reckoning's cannons at the zombies, Riley stops her by saying, "No, they're just looking for a place to go. Same as us." Even as Riley grants Big Daddy and his comrades the right to exist, there is a denial of their right to place. They are rendered rootless, with Riley seemingly extending allowance of their mimicry of the living by rhetorically constructing the zombies as just a subclass of settlers, a minority that may be tolerated so long as they find a place out of Riley's way. Zombies are often interpreted as the ultimate Other, but in this case they are not Indigenous or even "Indian," despite the title of the land seeming to belong to the dead, and despite the fact that they actually scalp someone during the final assault on Fiddler's Green. But it is this erasure and replacement that makes applying Indigenous and critical social theory to this film even more revealing, and earlier analyses of Romero's zombie works as subversive ring more than a bit hollow.

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