

Film Feature: HollywoodChicago.com Remembers George A. Romero

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on July 18, 2017 - 7:46am

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CHICAGO – The man that practically invented the modern Zombie film genre had met his own demise. Director George A. Romero passed away on July 16th, 2017, in Los Angeles. He was 77. Romero launched a whole new wave of horror with “Night of the Living Dead” in 1968, and put Pittsburgh (PA) on the film location map.



George A. Romero Shoots a Scene for 'Night of the Living Dead'

Photo credit: Spectra Filmworks

He was born in the Bronx, New York, and graduated from the Carnegie Institute of Technology, which began his Pittsburgh connection. He stayed there afterwards, and formed Image Ten Productions, which shot commercials and (famously) a segment for the broadcast-from-Pittsburgh “Mister Rogers Neighborhood.” On a shoestring budget and using local settings, “Night of the Living Dead” was released in 1968. Directed and co-written (with John Russo) by Romero, it would immediately cause a sensation in the horror genre. After some cult films in the 1970s – “Season of the Witch,” “The Crazies” and “Martin,” Romero would return to the Zombies in the classic “Dawn of the Dead” (1978). His use of the un-dead as commentary on society was his trademark, and he continued the trend through the rest of his career, directing four more “of the Dead” films, including the recent “Diary of the Dead” (2007) and “Survival of the Dead” (2009).

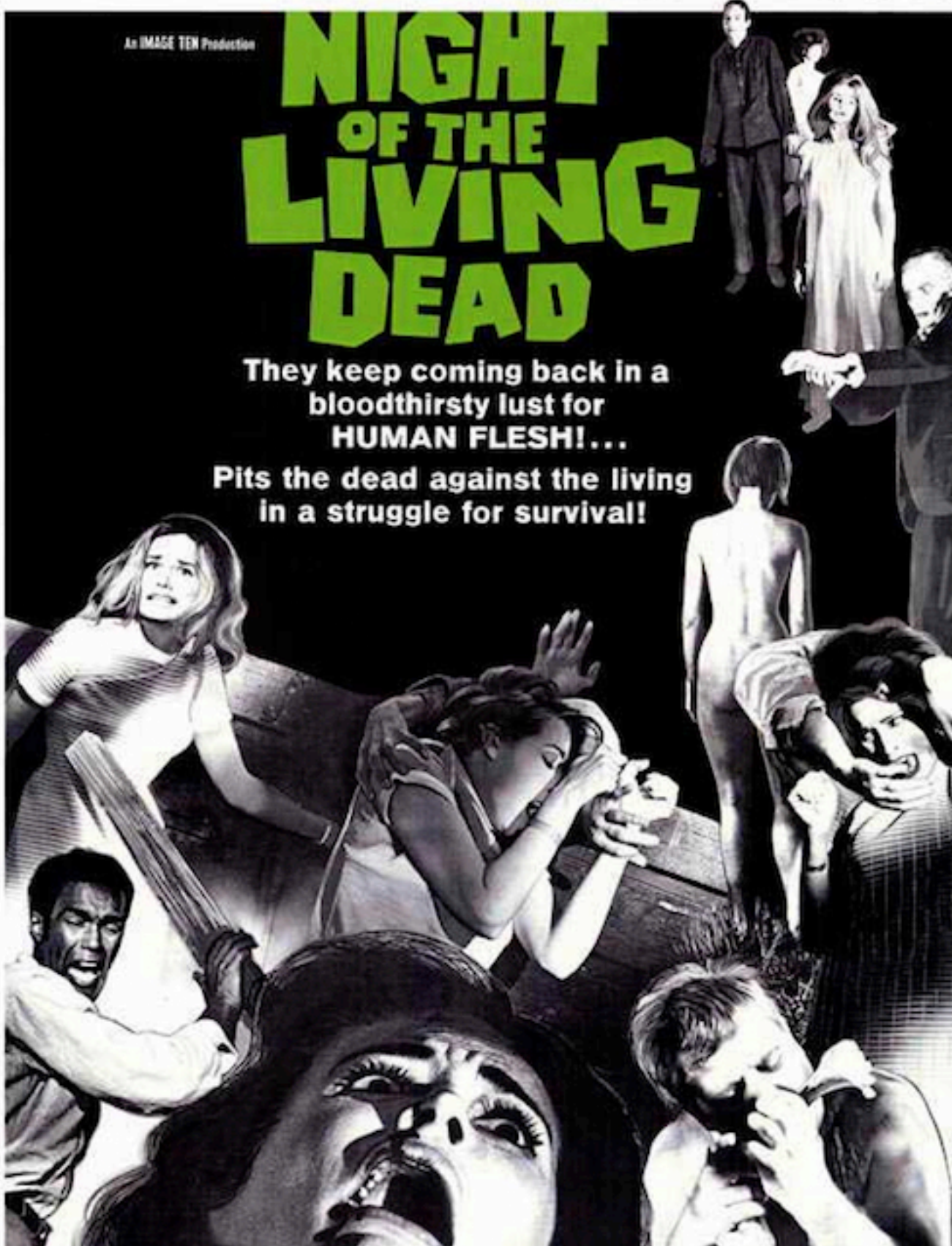
Also notable in his career was “Knightriders” (1981), “Creepshow, “ (1982), “Monkeyshines” (1988) and “Bruiser” (2000). He also lived long enough to see his signature films “Night of the Living Dead,” “Dawn of the Dead” and “The Crazies” remade, and be honored and worshipped by filmmakers Quentin Tarantino and Edgar Wright (who called him his mentor). Romero died of complications from lung cancer, and was listening to the soundtrack of a favorite film “The Quiet Man” when he passed. He is survived by his third wife Suzanne Desrocher, and three children.

Patrick McDonald, Spike Walters and Jon Lennon Espino of HollywoodChicago.com pay tribute to the “The Godfather of the Dead” with the following essays highlighting their favorite George Romero films (all in the Dead series).



NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD (1968) by Jon Lennon Espino

THEY WON'T STAY DEAD!



Night of the Living Dead

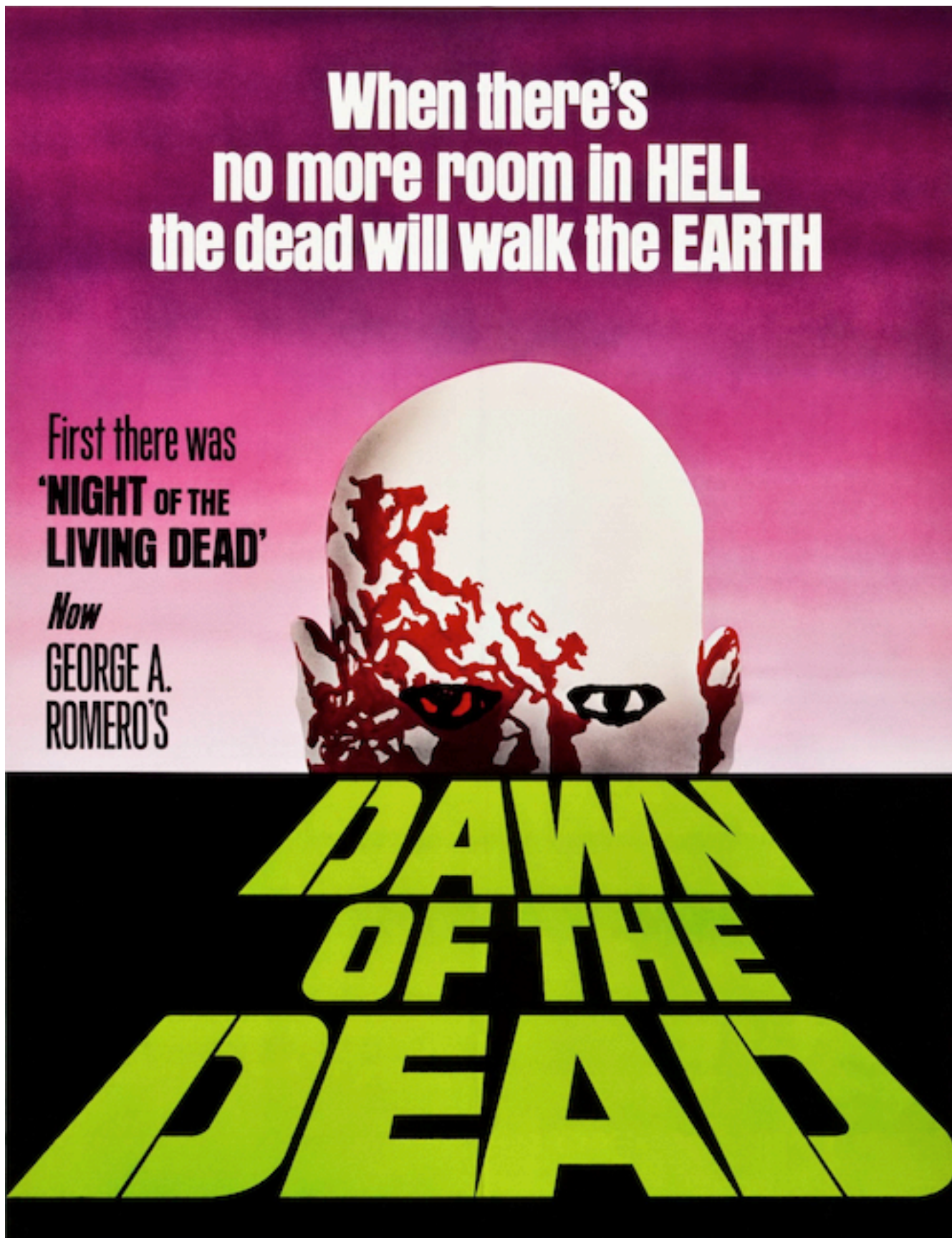
Photo credit: Spectra Filmworks

As a child, I always watched age-inappropriate things. When I was still in the single digits, I was introduced to George A. Romero and the idea of zombies in the same film... “Night of the Living Dead.” As a kid, I was able to enjoy the film, but didn’t fully appreciate it until I was in my teens. Like many people, Romero was their entry into the horror genre and his versatility as a writer and director redeemed the often lackluster genre. “Night of the Living Dead” shines as such a beacon and we see a group of strangers try to survive in house surrounded by zombies, but the real worry should be the monsters (other people) inside. This film would singlehandedly inspire a growing lists of sequels, prequels, spin-offs and even an entire genre that is still in the mainstream media to this day. It is every bit a drama as it is a horror film, providing plenty of social and political commentary to appease the more “serious” moviegoers of the time. This film’s historical significance extends beyond mainstreaming zombies by being one of the first films to cast an African-American person as the hero in a predominantly white cast. These actions serve as proof of George A. Romero’s progressive views both cinematically and socially, and like his undead creations, he will continue to infect and inspire young minds like mine for generations to come.

UNDEAD DELIVERANCE: George A. Romero's greatest talent was creating stories with different creatures or monsters, but mostly using them as a comparison to the human race.



DAWN OF THE DEAD (1978) by Spike Walters



Dawn of the Dead

Photo credit: Anchor Bay Entertainment

While Director George A. Romero unquestionably created the zombie movie with his classic “Night Of The Living Dead,” he arguably reached his pinnacle with the sequel. “Dawn of the Dead” is the Romero Zombie movie I reach for when I want to see a master at work at the top of his game. Romero’s story of the last remnants of civilization taking refuge in a shopping mall – while a zombie apocalypse rages outside – delivered both the tension and the bloody effects young gore hounds expected. But it doubled down on the satire and social themes which elevate this zombie movie beyond its humble horror beginnings and to its own kind of art. Romero’s story is so strong even director Zack Snyder couldn’t ruin it with his remake.

UNDEAD DELIVERANCE: It’s undoubtedly a small detail, but Romero’s scene showing the mindless zombies wandering aimless around a mall, seemingly acting on muscle memory, killed two birds with one stone... it’s a sly commentary on the mindless American consumer culture, and it’s pretty funny just on its own.



DIARY OF THE DEAD (2007) by Patrick McDonald



Diary of the Dead

Photo credit: Dimension Entertainment

I will make a confession... the horror genre is not my favorite. Not because I have the scares, but mostly because so many are a waste of time. But NOT George Romero's films. From the opening classic nightmare of "Night of the Living Dead," to the Midnight Movie Madness of "The Crazies," "Season of the Witch" and "Dawn of the Dead" – which haunted my film going in the 1970s – he always delivered. I encountered his later "Dead" film years later, "Diary of the Dead," and it still resonates today. Basically a post-9/11 commentary – as Romero loved to do throughout his Dead series of films – "Diary" is set in his "universe" of those films without being in the official cycle. A group of film students – from the University of Pittsburgh, natch – are stuck in the woods during a zombie "attack and invasion" (thus the 9/11 reference), and begin a journey towards whatever destiny will emerge from this latest panic. The "survivors" turn out to be as desperate as "the perpetrators," which fairly predicted the last election. This film will haunt you for awhile, which is the best tribute to Romero that there can ever be.

UNDEAD DELIVERANCE: The "survivors" use the "perpetrators" in a way that is stomach turning horror, both visually and psychologically.

Source material for this article is from Wikipedia and IMDB. George A. Romero, 1940-2017



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