

The Sinners Reader: Black Horror, Black Religion(s), and Contemporary Popular Culture

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Updated Call for Papers—5/1/2025

“The South don’t forget. Neither do the dead.”

Ryan Coogler’s *Sinners* (2025) is more than a film—it’s a reckoning. Capturing the attention of scholars and fans alike, it has stirred up a plethora of conversations across all social media platforms. *Sinners* is a film that explores the robust and complex history of Black American culture through a unique genre—vampiric horror—marking it as a radical entry into the Black Horror canon. *Sinners* presents an evolution of our current surge of Black Horror films that not only troubles what should be perceived as terrifying but also delves into the complexities of Black American culture through its exploration of the Jim Crow South, Black spiritualities and religious practices, and complicated truths about life after enslavement. *Sinners* presents a vision of the Black South that examines the pain and terrorizing trauma of racialized enslavement while highlighting the ways Black joy and notions of freedom can be made and found even in the darkest of places.

This film demands critical engagement from across the disciplines—Black Studies, Horror Studies, Religious Studies, Film and Media Studies, Folklore, Musicology, Queer Studies, and beyond. In response to this bold cultural work, we invite proposals for *Sinners Reader*, a curated interdisciplinary volume that uses the film as a critical and creative touchstone to delve deep into entanglements of Black horror, religion, and religiosity, Southern gothic aesthetics, and myriad contemporary popular culture legacies. To explore what Coogler’s cinematic vision both reveals and refuses.

We seek scholarly essays, creative-critical reflections, and popular cultural analyses from academics, creatives, and/or cultural producers that speak directly to Coogler’s film and/or engage its broader themes, including—but not limited to—the following themes and provocations:

- How does *Sinners* rework or expand Black Horror as a genre, method, and aesthetic mode?
- How does the film reckon with the horror genre?
- In what ways does the film participate in or critique the gothic traditions of the American South?
- How are folklore, conjure, and the supernatural employed to imagine Black histories and futures?

- What roles do religion, religiosity, spirituality, and faith play in the world of Sinners? How does the film engage Black Christian, Hoodoo, syncretic, or ancestral traditions?
- How does the film visualize and sonify Black pain and Black joy through music, particularly the blues? How might we read the score, soundtrack, and musical atmospheres as theological or hauntological texts?
- How do vampirism and other revenant figures (haints, ghosts, ancestors) operate as metaphors for historical memory, trauma, and survival?
- How does Sinners trouble gender, sexuality, and sensuality through its narrative, characters, and aesthetics? What might a Black queer reading of the film reveal about monstrosity, kinship, and desire?
- How do we think about Black Monstrosity and criminality through the cinematic worlds?
- How does the film converse with or critique Black Feminist, Black Queer, and Womanist thought? How do its visions of liberation complicate the moral binaries of salvation and damnation?
- In what ways does Sinners engage with the violence(s) of enslavement, reconstruction, and Jim Crow through speculative or horror-driven frameworks?
- How might Sinners function as a site for Black speculative theology or theo-horror-poetics?

We are particularly interested in work that explores:

- **Black Horror**
- Vampire and Monster Theory/Studies
- Irish Horror
- Black Folkloric Horror
- The sacred as spell: Hoodoo as survival, resistance, and revenge
- Rootworkers, conjurers, and matrilineal power structures
- Haunting as ancestral justice
- Queer Notions of time
- Afrofuturism and/or Afropessimism
- Southern Black folklore, conjure, and oral traditions
- Black Religion(s) and Religiosity: Yoruba, Christianity, Hoodoo, Conjure
- Theological and Religious Readings of Sinners
- Black gothic aesthetics and visual culture—Ethnogothic, New Black Gothic, Southern Gothic
- Blues Music, Gospel, & Hip Hop, and their interconnections and inspiration in Sinners
- Non-Western Film Structure
- Historical Analysis of Sinners
- Chicago and Jim Crow Era migratory patterns
- Disability and Sinners

- World War I and its resonance in the film
- The Business Side of Music and Film/Cinema
- The Undead, Vampire, Revenant, and other diasporic monsters
- Irish folklore and its echoes in Southern and Black diasporic horror
- Mississippi Delta Chinese and its echoes in Southern and Black Diasporic horror
- Ritual, possession, and the haunted body
- Black feminist and queer hauntologies
- Theologies of blood, baptism, and transformation
- Horror as social critique and political imagination

Please note this project has been proposed to Ohio State University Press and is awaiting review. This update reflects feedback from the publisher. Submissions: An abstract (200-300 words) is due July 1, 2025, because we want to give the opportunity for contributors to sit with the film as ideas unfold. If the abstract is accepted, the complete paper (3,000–5,000 words) is due October 4, 2025. We are also open to including creative works. Please include your full name, institutional affiliation, title, and email address (not included in the 200-300 text limit) at the beginning of your abstract. Submissions and queries should be sent to DeAnna Daniels (ddaniels1@arizona.edu) and Nicole Huff (huffnico@msu.edu).

Possible Formats

- Scholarly essays (3,000–5,000 words)
 - Creative nonfiction / personal essays
 - Short fiction, sermons, monologues
 - Interviews with artists, spiritual practitioners, and culture workers
- Audio or music-related contributions (annotated playlists, sonic analysis)