



STATE OF THE NATION

by: David Jackson Ambrose
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STATE OF THE NATION is an African American neo-horror story that follows the day to day experiences of three young friends as they navigate through a society that does not see them, at best, or, at worst; sees them as degenerate bodies deserving extermination. It does not have the tropes that define traditional horror stories. African Americans have a different experience with horror than their Caucasian counterparts. For people of color, horror is an everyday presence. It is not fear of the unknown. It is fear of the known. For African Americans to function in a modern, post-racist society, they must submerge this fear of the known, and continue to function with the knowledge that their lives have been in continuous jeopardy for over four hundred years.

The Atlanta Child Murders of the late '70s, early '80s serves as the undefined monster that acts as a micro, macro, and psychic aggressor, functioning in a way that inhibits and prescribes behavior. The murders loom in the background of the story, serving as an albatross that hovers over the lives of three friends coming of age during a moment in American history that in many ways mirrors the present, as police violence perpetuated against black youth continues to generate press.

STATE OF THE NATION highlights the fact that missing black bodies were not an anomaly. It was the media attention of those particular bodies that was the anomaly, as black bodies were being defaced, defiled, and extinguished all over the country during that time. The Atlanta Child Murders were a continuation of neo-lynching, a replication of an age-old American tradition; reminding black youth that they are expendable.

STATE OF THE NATION links elements of the Tuskegee Experiment of the 1940's to the ever-present vulnerability of the black body. And it makes use of the era in which the story is told, the cusp of the 1980's, to hint at the beginning of the AIDS crisis, which began on the tail end of the Atlanta Child Murders. When AIDS first garnered press, many people from black communities were certain that it was a lab created occurrence designed to eliminate certain groups. This has been viewed as misinformed and an uneducated opinion. The story considers the question: If HIV had been a creation of science, or even if it has not, if it is a 'virus' that is eradicating undesirable segments of the population, is it not possible that it will be allowed to continue its' course, in the interests of science, biology, modern warfare, medicine, just as the sharecroppers of the Tuskegee Experiment were allowed to suffer the ravages of syphilis in the interest of modern medicine?

The societal milieu where these youth exist serves as a microcosm within a larger societal construct. They exist in a vacuum where there is very little adult interaction, as hard-working parents in an effort to provide a stable home for their families are often in absentia. The author's intentions were to create a subliminal homage to Charles M. Schultz' Peanuts characters, where the parents most times exist in the shadows, more as vague forms with indistinct dialogue, going 'wa wa wa.'

STATE OF THE NATION shows the influence of pop culture prior to the advent of social media. Pop culture serves not as a world that shuts these characters out because they are different, but sort of glamorizes difference. So in a way, it is something that is attainable to them because it gives them an example of what they can attempt to emulate in

order to obscure the things that make them different. The imagery of classic movies and fashion magazines act as tertiary parents, soothing when they are upset, telling them stories when they are bored, entertaining them when they are lonely, teaching them how to speak properly, and demonstrating how to give the witty one-liner.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Jackson Ambrose spent his childhood dumpster diving for coverless paperback novels behind independent bookstores in West Chester, PA. He alternately immersed himself in the fictitious worlds of William Faulkner, John Steinbeck, Jacqueline Susann and Harold Robbins between stints of tadpole hunting and stealing fans off the trucks of the old Lasko factory.

He then progressed to adolescence writing comic books that featured his younger sister and brother, in order to keep them entertained while their mother worked as an accountant for Sperry Univac. During his teenage years as a student he wrote serial novels, whose chapters were circulated in the homerooms of Upper Merion High School. He also sketched abstract fashion illustrations that his psychology teacher analyzed as having been created by an individual with extreme body dysmorphia – who did not wish to see the world as it truly exists.

As a member of the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, David earned his B.A. in Africana Studies from the University of Pennsylvania, an M.A. in Writing Studies from St. Joseph's University, and received his M.F.A. in Creative Writing from Temple University. He has presented at the National Conference for Teachers of English, "Engaging the Marginalized Student," and has received honorable mention for his exploration of race and social work for the 2016 AWP: Intro Journals Project entitled, "There's A Nigger in the House." His short story, "Juxtapose," was published in the 2014 edition of the *Nota Bene* publication.

Keep up with David on social media on Instagram: @Davidjrhd, Twitter: @DJacksonambrose, and on the web at www.davidjacksonambrose.com.
