

## Vampires of the New World

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In 1892, Mercy Brown, a 19-year-old girl from Exeter, Rhode Island, died of tuberculosis, a disease then known as consumption. Her mother and sister had died of the same, and her brother, Edwin, was ill. Very concerned, the neighbors feared that one of the recently deceased Brown women could harm Edwin from the grave.

When they opened Mercy Brown's grave, they found that he had blood in his mouth and heart, and they interpreted that as a sign of vampirism (although they did not use that term). So the neighbors burned Mercy's heart and mixed the ashes into a concoction that made Edwin drink; a very common anti-vampiric strategy. That potion was to heal him, but instead, the boy died months later.

And it was not an isolated incident. Michael Bell, folklorist and author of *Food for the Dead*, estimates that there are 60 known examples of anti-vampiric rituals in New England in the 18th and 19th centuries, and several more in other parts of the United States. Those rituals were more common in eastern Connecticut and western Rhode Island, adds Brian Carroll, a history professor at Central Washington University, who is writing a book on the subject.

Carroll believes that anti-vampiric rituals were introduced as medical procedures during the American Revolution by German doctors who worked for the Hessian forces. For this reason, he considers the New England vampires to be derived from the German *Nachzehr*. He explains that, unlike Romanian bloodsucking vampires, New England vampires remained in their graves and harmed the living from afar, with sympathetic (or empathetic magic) magic.

For his part, Bell believes that New England anti-vampiric practices came from many places and that vampires in that region were more akin to Romanian vampires than to *Nachzehr*. He notes that, like the Romanians, New Englanders looked for blood in vital organs, rather than evidence of gnawed shrouds. And that the anti-vampiric remedy of removing the heart, burning it and giving the ashes to the sick person or persons it was also customary in Romania.

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Despite the origin of New England beliefs, their motivation was the same social concerns as elsewhere: fear of the disease and the desire to contain it.

## Legends of New Orleans

Without a doubt, New Orleans is one of the cities that houses the most legends and mysteries in the world. In every corner of the city, particularly in the streets of the French Quarter, an atmosphere of mysticism is breathed, which comes from a deep belief in the supernatural by the inhabitants of the city.

Even today, in the 21st century, the practices and rituals of voodoo and the belief in vampires and life after death is a reality in the life of New Orleans.

## Origins

Before getting to know the main legends of New Orleans, it is important to know a little about its history. Unlike other cities in the United States, New Orleans has a history marked by an encounter of cultures, races and religions.

Initially founded by Franco-Canadians who came sailing on the Mississippi River from the distant Ontario region, it later passed into Spanish hands (the period in which most of the city's architecture was built).

Napoleon Bonaparte then regained the city for French control and a few years later sold it (along with the entire state of Louisiana) to the United States.

But not only did French and Spanish settlers arrive in New Orleans, but little by little they brought slaves, first from Africa and then from the Caribbean islands such as Martinique and Haiti. These last slaves were the ones who brought with them all that magic (for some witchcraft) of voodoo.

If we add to this its geographical location, surrounded by swamps and the Mississippi River, it becomes easier to understand the confluence of beliefs in the mystical and supernatural that surrounds the entire city.

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## New Orleans Vampires

What mythical Transylvania is to Europe, New Orleans is to the American continent. In addition to voodoo and ghosts, vampires are said to inhabit the city of New Orleans, arriving in hiding along with the European ships of the early colonizers.

The aura of mystery that surrounds New Orleans cemeteries may explain part of this belief. Also, the tradition that its inhabitants have of not separating themselves from the bodies of their dead for an instant until their burial, is said to be to guarantee that the deceased do not rise from their graves.

Among the "real" or "historical" reasons on which many believers of New Orleans vampires are based are the mysterious murders of 9 people in 1984, who appeared with their throats destroyed and bloodless on their bodies.

The media (print and digital) have also played a part in raising the myth that there are vampires in New Orleans. The famous vampire genre writer Anne Rice places her famous book "Interview with the Vampire" in this city, just as movies and television series set her vampire stories in New Orleans. (Most recent: True Blood and The Originals)

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## Featured Series:

### True Blood

The vampire stories also introduce us to one of our deepest realities: marginalization, fear of the unknown (and what is more unknown than the other?), which has grown in recent times and will continue coming up with the crisis. And that's what the True Blood series is about. What happens when vampires come out of the closet, when, thanks to the invention of artificial blood, they can show themselves in public, come out of their coffins? Well, as happens with what we fear because we do not know, the deepest fears of society are awakened.

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The subtext goes beyond the typical vampire story. There are allusions to other closer and real problems. "If you are looking for a substitute for the word vampire in this series you can use everything that is different, the misunderstood, the outcast, what you fear." And Ball (winner of an Oscar with the script for American beauty and creator of the series *Two meters underground*) knows what he is talking about. Now vampires have come out of the closet - or rather the coffin - thanks to this new drink that allows them to live without hanging on a human's neck to feed themselves. Charlaine Harris's books - which are already in the ninth volume - also talk about religion, about the similarities between the new religious sects and the pagan cults. Also, the similarity between the uncontrollable impulses of an undead with the hormonal impetus of an adolescent or the need of humans to belong to a group and their rejection of everything different.

"The consumer culture tends to ignore death as part of life," Ball says, "and glorifies that false feeling of eternal youth and constant happiness. For me, death is part of life. The other is a pipe dream." Contrary to *Twilight*, with fangless chaste vampires that shine when given the light, this series speaks of hungry beings, of blood and sex, capable of burning in the light of day with the same fury and desire that they roam in the night. "They are primary creatures, driven by desire and without the constraints of Western culture, where everything is suppression of instincts. This is why people have so many fantasies about vampires," says Moyer.

In other words, the animal impulse of the blood against the "metrosexual culture" that dominates us. "Vampires are quintessential sexual creatures," admits Stephen Moyer, who plays vampire Bill Compton.