

# **Goths Around the World**

**Magazine Feature**

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**Read More from Melissa J. Lytton**

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## Main Article

### Goths Around the World: African American Goths

When we put the call out for ethnic minority and global goths to interview, African Americans were the largest demographic to respond, and we heard you loud and clear. So for part one of what will be an ongoing series on different types of goths around the world, I interviewed three black goth readers about their experiences in the community.

#### “Afro Goth or just Goth?”

The number one descriptor black goths used when emailing me was “Afro Goth”, but there was little consensus of what exactly the term meant. Model and fashion designer Eden Lost takes the broad view. “I see Afro Goth as an umbrella term to unite those of us who happen to be goth, or into another alternative scene, and black. There is such a ridiculous assumption that being black means you like a certain style of music, dress a certain way, and speak in a certain way. It’s important for us to define ourselves in our own terms.”

Lary Love Dolley, an emerging horror scriptwriter and actor, clarifies the origins of the term further, adding that it’s “a cheeky nod to the popular social network Afro Punk.” Afro Punk (<http://www.afropunk.com/>) provides a space for black fans who love punk, indie, hardcore, and other alternative musical styles, and has spawned its own music festival. Punk and goth culture have always had some overlap, so it’s not hard to see the influence.

To others, the term is less meaningful. Vincent Alexander, a former bouncer for the 90s goth club The Crystal, says it conjures images of “a goth with a very big bushy hairdo.” He doesn’t see his race as having much influence on the type of goth he is. “Being Black/Puerto Rican is WHAT I am. It is the heritage I was born into, and I am proud of that. Being a Goth is WHO I am. It is the culture I have chosen to embrace for almost 30 years.” He lists Victorian goth, Pagan goth, and gothic metalhead as many of the types of goth he’s identified with over the years.

Even many who do embrace the term “Afro Goth” don’t really see it as their main label. Eden says she identifies with industrial, metal, and nerdy, among others. Lary claims the title of “deep-fried rivethead.” All three agree that being goth is about exploring the darker side of yourself and life; the particular sub-genre of goth seemed far less important.

#### “White People Music”

This isn’t to say that race doesn’t influence their experiences as goths at all. Eden recalls awkward reactions from people of all types. “Growing up, I got a lot of criticism from other blacks for being into ‘white people music’ and therefore not embracing my blackness. I was accused of wanting to be white. White non-goths tend to do a lot of staring because my appearance challenges their preconceived notions of what a black person should be like.”

Moving to Europe with her boyfriend didn’t change much either. “I feel most and least welcome at Wave Gotik Treffen in Leipzig, Germany. Common sense says that goths would be the most

understanding and welcoming, however, that isn't always the case. Nazi cosplayers and the fact that I'm one of few goths of color at an overwhelmingly white-attended festival is a little intimidating. Once you also take into account the recent resurgence of nationalism in various parts of Europe, you wonder if the dirty looks are pretention or not."

Vincent has luckily had better experiences, largely due to where he lives. "You can walk into a bar and see a clown, a waiter, a vampire, a guy covered head-to-toe in silver paint, and a 6-foot-tall drag queen all sitting at a table quaffing down beers and the locals will think, 'Oh, it must be Tuesday'. New Orleans is a city that has always had colorful characters, so a black goth is really nothing out of the ordinary." He even finds his uniqueness beneficial in some situations. "Cops never seem to hassle me the way they may do other dark-skinned people. I really just don't fit the racial profiling."

#### "Reality vs. Media"

Even without day-to-day struggles, there's the issue of invisibility. Lary says the worst experience she's had in the goth scene is "hardly seeing anyone that looks like me in mainstream goth media." She says that other goths treat her as "goth, not a 'black goth' per se," but that within gothic media, "non-white goths are barely acknowledged."

Eden echoed these sentiments. She says the goth community on-the-ground has been very inclusive. "Coming from Los Angeles, there are lots of goths from different ethnicities and I have goth friends that are Latino, Asian, white, and black. I love that! White goths are mostly kind and treat me the same as anyone else. There are of course the few with the bad attitude, but I have had overwhelmingly positive experiences." But when asked about black goths in the media, she replied, "I rarely see depictions of goths of color."

Vincent is more direct. "I scrolled down Gothic Beauty Magazine's own Facebook page (all the way to January 2010) and the only dark-skinned person I saw was a picture of me that I posted on it on September 17th 2014, on the post asking for ethnic goths to send this magazine their stories to be featured for this very article. Picture after picture of magazine covers, and I am literally the only dark-skinned person on that page in the last five years at least." As for those he has seen in the media? "The first 'black/ethnic goths' I ever saw in a movie were Tin Tin (Laurence Mason) and Myca (Bai Ling) from the movie *The Crow*. And look how they ended up in that movie."

#### "Moving Forward"

Lary is trying to change this herself. She puts out an impressive variety of black gothic media. Blood of Ganja (<http://bloodofganja.wordpress.com/>) is a blog dedicated to black women in horror, and her AfroGoth tumblr (<http://afrogoth.tumblr.com/>) documents black goths in general. She writes flash fiction, does photo shoots, and has two upcoming films, *Ectoplasm* (airing on American Horrors) and *Invoke* (screening in the U.K.) "People are hungry for new perspectives, in the horror genre as well as alternative modeling," she says. "And that is just what I offer."

But putting out more black gothic media is only one part of solving the invisibility problem. "We need to challenge the idea that pale skin is the epitome of goth," says Eden. "We need to let go of assumptions about race being an indicator of a person's taste."

The hope is to influence larger gothic media to reflect the real diversity of its readers. “The so-called ‘goth media’ needs to show more of us,” Vincent says. “We are out there. We are one of you. We love the same bands you do. Dress the same way you do. We are really no different from any other goth. We just want to be accepted for who we are.”

And to his fellow non-white goths, he adds, “You are not alone. You are just as Goth, and just as beautiful, as any other goth.”

*Go to [www.gothicbeauty.com](http://www.gothicbeauty.com) to read the full interviews with Eden, Vincent, and Lary, including discussions on how Hurricane Katrina changed the New Orleans goth community, and what it’s like to be a corporate goth.*

*You can also find Eden on the web at <http://www.eden-lost.com/> and Lary at <http://larylovedolley.webs.com/>.*

## Sidebar

### Black Gothic Media

#### To Watch:

- Night of the Living Dead – The original 1968 version starred Duane Jones as Ben, a controversial casting decision in the 60s.
- Blacula – The 1972 movie that kicked-off the sub-genre of blaxploitation-horror films.
- Vampire in Brooklyn – An unlikely horror/comedy flick from 1995 starring Eddie Murphy and Angela Basset. People tend to either love it or hate it.
- I Am Legend – The third film adaptation of the novel of the same name stars Will Smith, whereas the first two adaptations starred white leads. It’s worth watching all three (The Last Man on Earth from 1964, The Omega Man from 1971, and I Am Legend from 2007) to see the differences in how the leads and the vampire/zombie creatures are handled.

#### To Read:

- Brown Girl in the Ring – A gritty magical realism novel filled with seers, spirits, and the ails of being a young single mother. The debut novel of now-established novelist Nalo Hopkinson. (1998)
- The Vampire Huntress Legend Series – An urban Buffy-esque vampire hunter novel series, 12 books long. Written by the late Leslie Esdaile Banks, under the pen name L.A. Banks. (2003-2009)
- Fledgling – A vampire novel with a protagonist who looks like a child but, despite her amnesia, knows she’s something more. The last novel written by the late science fiction writer Octavia E. Butler. (2005)
- Devil’s Wake – A zombie novel with teenage protagonists trying to survive after the fall of humankind. Written by wife-and-husband team Tananarive Due and Steven Barnes. (2012)

Recommended by Eden Lost:

- “Black Girl Nerds and Graveyard Shift Sisters are both excellent blogs. They have introduced me to new comics and TV shows. There’s also lots of great social commentary.”  
(<http://blackgirlnerds.com/> & <http://www.graveyardshiftsisters.com/>)

Recommended by Lary Love Dolley:

- “I’ll take AfroGoth for \$1,000 Alex.” (<http://afrogoth.tumblr.com/>)

Recommended by Vincent Alexander:

- “Google, Facebook, and YouTube. It's the only way I can learn about others just like me. Not only in America, but from around the world. If it wasn't for YouTube, I would have never discovered Goth bands like Armitis from Indonesia, Nota Profana from Venezuela, Almora from Turkey, Silent Resentment from China or Anabantha from Mexico.”