

The More You NOLA: Historian sinks his teeth into local ethnography

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"Vampires are drawn to major urban areas. Here, they can hide in plain sight, but in Buffalo, they may get looks," says Browning, concerning the "real vampire" subcultures of New Orleans and Buffalo, New York. (Photo from John Edgar Browning)

Though John Edgar Browning often focuses on macabre topics like zombies, vampires and other "monsters," the historian also excels at uncovering New Orleans' hidden narratives ? whether discovering the lost memoir of a Tulane University dean or bringing a local subculture "out of the coffin."

"I like archival work and hunting things down," says Browning, a Marion L. Brittain Postdoctoral Fellow at the Georgia Institute of Technology. He is an internationally recognized scholar and author of over 12 books exploring horror's cultural impact.

Browning's current project has a lot of bite ? the ethnographic study of New Orleans' "real vampire" community.

At Louisiana State University, Browning began work on his doctoral dissertation, "Redeeming the Un-Dead in American Media and Culture Before 9/11," which delved into the Crescent City's population of self-identifying vampires (individuals claiming to have a medical condition requiring them to consume human or animal blood in order to function normally).

"I originally thought these were kooky people who read one too many Anne Rice novels, but for them it's biological," says Browning.

After transferring to SUNY-Buffalo to complete his doctoral program, Browning combined four years of fieldwork spent within the vampire subcultures of Buffalo, New York, and the French Quarter into a comparative geographic study, which he plans to turn into a book eventually.

The researcher explored community formations, cultural practices and how the subculture communicates.

In 2010, Browning was browsing through a French Quarter used-book store, when an old folder caught his eye. After perusing the contents, he realized the manuscript was the unpublished memoir of John H. Stibbs, who served as Tulane dean of students in the late 1960s (a particularly volatile period of student unrest).

Browning revived Stibbs' lost chronicle of Tulane student life from 1949-75 and published it as [*A Quarter Century of Student Life at Tulane*](#) in 2013.

His upcoming book, [*Zombie Talk: Culture, History, Politics*](#), will be published in December.