

MEDIA & RACE

**HE'S YOUR
 MONSTER,
 NOT MINE**

Just as the Rodney King civil-rights trial was winding down and Los Angeles was nervously preparing for who-knew-what, I read two articles in one week about "Monster Kody." The first, in *Esquire*, was an excerpt from the soon-to-be published memoir *Monster: The Autobiography of an L.A. Gang Member*. The second, in the *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, was a prologue to the building media frenzy around Monster, a.k.a. Kody Scott, a 29-year-old African-American former member of South Central's Eight-Tray Gangster Crips who came by his nickname after beating another man so brutally that police called it the work of a monster.

The first article was irritating; the second made me sick. Not since I first saw photos of black men and women with their backs disfigured from slave masters' whips, not since I was first called a nigger by some ignorant white man, not since I saw an image of a dead African-American man swinging by the neck from a tree while white men, women, and children grinned, pointed, and laughed—not since then have I been so convinced that so many white men and women truly hate and wish death upon African-Americans.

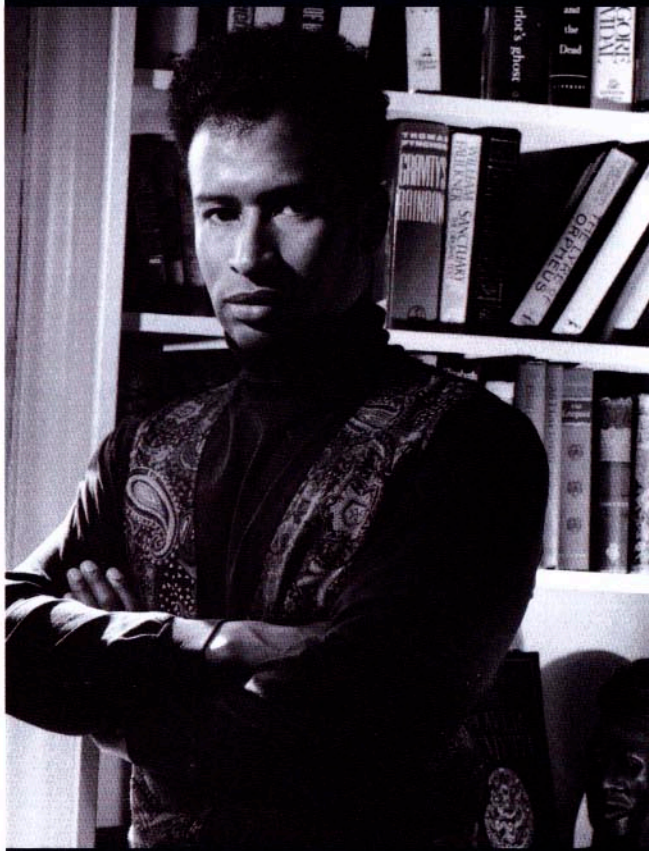
Here are the facts: In his book, Monster admits to murdering African-Americans. Monster further admits to beating men nearly to

death and to robbing and knifing and stealing. Monster Kody now sits in Pelican Bay State Prison, a maximum-security institution that houses the most violent of the violent, serving seven years for robbery. And there his name and legend would have likely stayed had it not been for a white man named William Broyles, Jr. Broyles, a respected journalist and screenwriter, was not the first member of the white elite to become fascinated with this butcher. Léon Bing, a white former fashion model, had previously written about him in *Do or Die*, her 1991 book on black gangs, which reads like Dian Fossey's memoirs—a helpless white woman among large, hairy, dangerous black gorillas of the African forest, who outwits the beasts and earns their trust. (The whole of Bing's book rests subliminally on a "threat of rape" foundation, a truly sick exercise.) But Broyles didn't want to write *about* Monster; he wanted Monster to write. Kody had, as Broyles put it, "native talent"—an interesting choice of words, a variation on Léon Bing's theme, that pegged this Monster as a *talking* gorilla.

Broyles encouraged the Monster not only to write a book but also, as one would with any other oddity, to put itself on display. (For the jacket of his book, Monster appears shirtless, pumped up, gang tattoos bared, holding a semiautomatic weapon—a black, murdering beast.) One wonders if Broyles would have been as encouraging and nurturing had this been an African-American writer who was his social equal. One can only wonder.

Broyles sent a sample of the Monster's writing to his agent, Lynn

BLACK LIKE WHO?
 ONE DELIGHTED DIVA
 SORTING OUT SEATTLE
 THE NEW SEXUAL NO-NO
 CATCALLS AT THE TIMES



A different black experience: Author Gaiter at home

WHISPERS...

What people will be talking about next month:

- ✓ Who should do more time—Stacey Koon or Laurence Powell?
- ✓ The newest political aphorism: “No riot, no Riordan.”
- ✓ How boring the *L.A. Weekly* has become since editor Kit Rachlis decided to try to make it more “respectable.”
- ✓ The rising anxiety levels as the August deadline draws near for those Disney execs who haven’t yet spent their new-project allowances. Dozens of usually powerless middle-level suits at Touchstone, Hollywood, and Disney Pictures were recently given between \$75,000 and \$200,000 each to blow on fresh talent. You’d think playing Pope Leo would be a kick, but this is Disney, and even though the funds were supposed to be “mad money,” some of the guys and gals are not sure just how wild and crazy they’re expected to be.
- ✓ The craze for anything Irish—films, food, rock, rap—that has Westside pubs like Fair City, O’Malley’s, and Molly Malone’s raking in the green.
- ✓ Exactly which slick, high-profile L.A. city magazine it is that Billy’s working for on *Melrose Place*. (And how the heck do you land one of those corner offices?)
- ✓ Three new CDs worth sampling: (1) *Henryk Gorecki’s String Quartets 1 & 2* (Electra Nonesuch). The adventurous ➤

Nesbit of the prestigious New York literary agency Janklow & Nesbit. She, to her credit, was less than impressed. But white Terry McDonell, the editor in chief of *Esquire*, ate it up. So did white Morgan Entrekin of the Atlantic Monthly Press, who called the Monster a “primary voice of the black experience.”

Another fascinating choice of words: To me, this is a white man who thinks that a monster who butchers African-Americans is a major voice for all African-Americans, a white man who thinks of all blacks as less than human, as a murderous sub-species. And here is a white man who has decided to publish a book that will prove this thesis to as many readers as possible.

Once white people like Entrekin made the Monster “hot,” white Lynn Nesbit put her good sense aside and gave the manuscript to one of her junior agents, Lydia Wills, an ambitious—and white—29-year-old. Wills apparently did her job. So much so that, as Mark Gompertz of Avon Books put it, bidding for the publishing rights to the book took on “a circus atmosphere.”

What else? This is the story of a talking gorilla. The selling point was a natural: You know you cringe when you see one walking toward you on the sidewalk. Well, here’s why, and in the Monster’s OWN WORDS. This is what THEY are really like. IN THEIR OWN WORDS.

“The funny thing is,” Broyles told the *Times*, “here’s this guy who I’m encouraging to write in pencil from prison, who I talk to on the pay phone with guys yelling in the background, and he ends up making \$200,000 or more. It’s great.” Remember: Kody Scott beat a man so viciously that the police called it

the work of a monster. Perhaps that is what caused one British publisher to say of Kody, “Getting that close to evil is *very* interesting,” as if he were commenting on the coming fashion season.

Do you believe that only Monsters behind bars can write well? Don’t you believe that others, like Ishmael Reed or Darryl Pinckney, might deserve some of the attention lavished on the incarcerated Monsters? Why do you think they receive so little attention? Why do you think that books by black women that vilify black men, published by white-owned-and-operated publishing houses, are so popular? And who do you think decides what will and will not get published and promoted? It’s obviously been decided that you *will* read the Monster.

Why? There is no conspiracy here, just ignorant, racist minds at work. I am an African-American man, and I have killed no one. My parents worked, educated themselves, and raised their children. I graduated from Harvard. My sisters hold advanced degrees. *This* is the black experience.

Each step of the way, a roadblock or two was put in my parents’ paths, and in mine. We overcame them. *That* is the black experience. Maya Angelou’s voice rings as loudly as did Thurgood Marshall’s. *That* is the voice of the black experience.

Yet a group of white men and women would have you think that Monster Kody speaks for me, for my family, for my African-American friends. Our stories they would find uninteresting, I’m sure.

Early in this century, a Pygmy man was placed in a cage and put on display as a freak in a show. They do it differently now.

—Leonce Gaiter

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