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# Queering Lafayette: Adapting and Subverting the Black Sissy in *True Blood* (HBO: 2008-2014, Charlaine Harris, 2001-2002)

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## Abstract

In Charlaine Harris's *Southern Vampire Mysteries* series of novels, the character of Lafayette, a black short-order cook at Merlotte's Bar & Grill, presented as a stereotypically effeminate, delicate sissy who ends up being beaten and strangled to death by two older white men. From the start, Lafayette's race and queerness are conflated in the text, giving an overall impression of vulnerability and of potential (and, in the end, actual) victimhood.

Nelsan Ellis, the Chicago-born actor who portrays Lafayette in the HBO adaptation, takes the character in a different direction, coding his queerness as strength and completely abandoning the sissy trope that permeates the novels. His popularity was such that, while he is killed off in Book 2 of the novel series, the character survives all seven seasons of the HBO show.

This talk will examine how *True Blood* explores questions of queerness and race through the adaptation process in Obama's America, and what might remain of these questions today.

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