



## My Drift

Title: **Clowns**

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Today (4 Oct 2019), as I start researching for this article about clowns, the movie “Joker” is released to movie theaters across the United States. The topic “Clowns” has been on my list of things to write about for some time and I think this is a good time to do it.

I’m interested in finding out why so many people are so afraid of clowns? In fact, a recent poll showed that Americans admit to being more scared of clowns than they are of climate change, terrorism, and even death.

Yes, a walloping 42 percent of people surveyed said they were, in some way, afraid of clowns. People aged between 18 and 29 were the most freaked out, with almost half admitting to at least a minor case of coulrophobia - the technical term for a fear of clowns.

The majority of people surveyed also thought that the government should do more to stop clowns from terrorizing people - and not just on a local or state level. More than one in three people surveyed thought the FBI should take more action against clowns. The survey showed more people were scared of clowns than any other possible fear except for "government corruption".



Here is the survey list of what people in the US fear the most:

Government corruption	61 percent
Clowns	42 percent
Terrorist attack	41 percent
A family member dying	38 percent
Climate change	32 percent
Heights	24 percent
Dying	19 percent

**WHY??** Why are so many people afraid of clowns? Well, we are going to find out the reasons by the end of this article.

Me, I'm not afraid of clowns! Growing up in Utah, the only clowns I saw in person were the rodeo clowns who helped save the bull riders from getting injured or killed by those 1500-pound bulls. I have been to a couple of circuses where the clowns performed humorous acts and entertained the kids. So, I have always believed that clowns were good and funny – not scary and evil.



Clowns working at the Rodeo (above) and Performing at the Circus (below)





## History of Clowns

Clowns have appeared in most cultures throughout history. The earliest documented clowns go back to ancient Egypt, sometime around 2500 to 2400 BCE. Clowns were also around in ancient Greek and Roman societies. These clowns would eventually evolve into the court jesters of medieval Europe, who "would openly mock sex, food, drink, and the monarchy, all while behaving maniacally for a laugh."



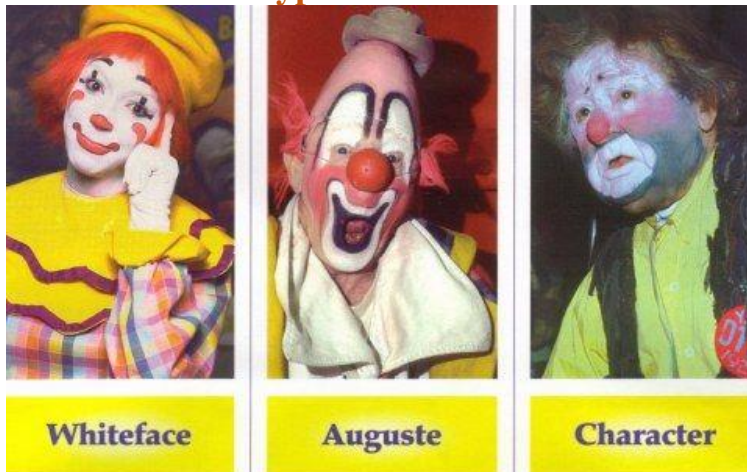
Ancient Clown



Court Jester

Clowns (court jesters) in the Middle Ages paid a pretty steep price if they didn't make the king laugh. A lot of the jesters were mutilated to make them smile all the time. They would have the muscles cut that enabled the mouth to frown. So, throughout history there have always been men (and a few women) who have had the ability to make others laugh. They were not known as clowns, however, since the word "clown" was not used until the 16th Century. By the late 1800s, clowns had become a staple in circuses.

## Types of Clowns



We enjoy their antics, but we may never have noticed that all clowns can be traced back to one of these three clown types: The Whiteface, the Auguste (or Fool), and the Character (or Tramp). Each type has its own history, its own set of clown characteristics, and a typical look.

### **The Whiteface Clown**



The oldest of all clowns, the Whiteface can be traced back through medieval court jesters to the theaters of ancient Greece, where comedic actors frequently painted their features white so they could be better seen.

The Whiteface is the big brother of the clowning world: in charge, a know-it-all, a straight man setting up the situations that other clowns, like the Auguste or the Tramp, turn funny.

The customary features of the Whiteface include a full white face, red-and-white features (often quite beautiful and delicate), a colorful outfit, and a wig. The Whiteface can be further divided into these groups:

**The Classic (European) Whiteface** - The most elegant, majestic and/or beautiful of the Whitefaces.

**The Straight Whiteface** - Similar to the Classic but more colorful and more cheerful.

**The Grotesque Whiteface** - Similar to the Straight Whiteface in color and cheer, but zanier, with exaggerated features and clothes.

**The Mime** - Also an elegant clown, known of course for not speaking but showing emotions through body language and facial expressions.

Famous Whiteface clowns include Frosty Little, Bozo the Clown, and Ronald McDonald.

### **The Auguste (Fool) Clown**



The Auguste (pronounced ah-GOOST) is a mixture of Whiteface and Tramp — not so hapless as the Tramp, but wilder and broader than the Whiteface. He or she is sometimes the Whiteface's helper, almost always the brunt of his jokes, and certain to mess up any assignment.

The classic Auguste appearance is the opposite of the Whiteface, with prominent flesh tones and black-and-white features, a large ball-shaped nose, and extravagant mismatched costumes featuring oversized neckties, very small hats, and extremely wide lapels on the shirt and coat.

Famous Auguste clowns include Cookie, Boo Boo, and Coco the Clown.

### The Character (Tramp) Clown



A uniquely American clown, some believe that the idea of the Tramp originated with the hobos who rode the rails during the Great Depression. The classic Tramp look, a sooty face with white around the eyes and mouth, may refer back to the coal smoke from America's rail yards.

The Tramp is the brunt of every joke, the one whose rear gets kicked, the one whose face gets wet from a squirting flower. The customary features of the Tramp include a flesh-toned face, a beard of stubble, a ruddy nose, tattered suit and hat, and fingerless gloves.

The Tramp can be further divided into three groups, though the basic costume remains the same for each:

**The Classic Tramp** - Forlorn and downtrodden, shuffling through life with a rain cloud over his head.

**The Hobo or Vagabond** - Manners are often elegant and refined; he's happy to be free of society.

**The Bag Lady** - A female version of the Tramp or Hobo.

Tramps have been made famous by such luminaries as Charlie Chaplin, Emmett Kelley, and Red Skelton.

### More Famous “Good” Clowns



Red Skelton  
Freddie the Freeloader



Bozo the Clown



Ronald McDonald



The Three stooges are a good way to describe the clown types: Moe is the boss or the White Face, Larry is the middleman or the Auguste and Curly would be on the bottom rung as The Tramp. Now, let's learn about those bad, creepy, scary, evil clowns.



### A Brief History of Creepy Clowns

The specter of the “creepy clown” has gotten a lot of attention as of late. Beginning in 1986 when Stephen King's horror book (and movie) **IT** came out featuring Pennywise the Clown, creepy real (and fake) clown sightings spread across the US. Then in the fall of 2017, killer clowns came for American audiences in the TV show American Horror Story: Cult.



American Horror Story: Cult Clowns



Stephen King's Horror Film IT  
Pennywise the Clown

Why exactly have creepy clowns become such a huge topic in pop culture? After all, didn't they used to be happy and cheerful? Well, not exactly, according to clown historian Benjamin Radford, author of Bad Clowns. “It's a mistake to ask when clowns went bad,” he says, “because they were never really good.”

The “trickster,” he explains, is one of the oldest and most pervasive archetypes in the world (think Satan in the Bible). The trickster can be both funny and scary, and he (it's usually a “he”) makes it hard for others to tell whether he's lying. Clowns are a type of trickster that have been around for a long time—one of the most recognizable is the harlequin, a clown figure who emerged in Italian commedia dell'arte theatre in the 16th century.

The harlequin was known for their colorful masks and clothing with diamond-shaped patterns, and often served as the comical, amoral servant in plays that toured throughout Europe.



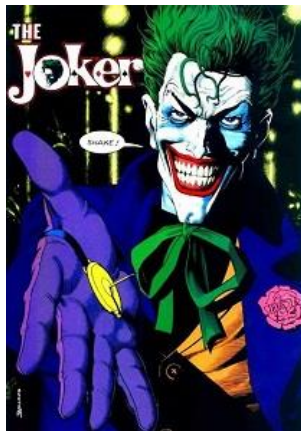


These plays also inspired a clownish puppet named “Punch,” who appeared in British shows starting in the 18th century. The character would later be written into a popular puppet show called “Punch and Judy,” in which Punch cracked jokes, beat his wife, and murdered his child. Punch is a gleeful madcap colorful character, but he’s also this horrific monster. Creepy clowns appeal goes across all age groups, not only to kids, but to teens and adults as well. It’s this strange mix of horror and humor that has always drawn us to clowns.

These bad creepy clowns made it to America, too. In 1924, U.S. audiences met a bitter and vengeful clown in the silent film “He Who Gets Slapped”. A decade and a half later in 1940, a prankster villain named the Joker make his debut in a Batman comic. And even though Emmett Kelly, Jr., one of the most famous American circus clowns in the early 20th century, was no villain, neither was he cheerful. Rather, his “Weary Willie” character was a hobo clown with a painted-on frown.



**He Who Gets Slapped**



**1940 Batman Comics  
The Joker**



**Weary Willie**

But then came a change. In the 1950s and ‘60s, television introduced audiences to a couple of new clowns who were always happy - Ronald McDonald and Bozo the Clown. Ronald McDonald being in commercials spread ‘the happy clown’ across the country. Same thing with Bozo the Clown. There were dozens of Bozos in different regions of the country that were very popular during the era. So, it was really television that helped propel the sort of default happy/good clown into the public’s consciousness.

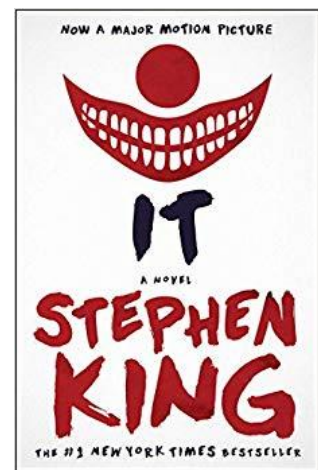


**John Wayne Gacy**  
**Pogo the Clown**

Yet by the late 1970s and early '80s, the American image of the clown was already shifting again, this time toward something more sinister. One of the influences in this shift was the media coverage of John Wayne Gacy, a serial murderer who occasionally dressed as “Pogo the Clown.” Gacy was not a professional clown and he didn’t dress up as Pogo very often to lure children. All of his victims were teenagers and young men. But once in jail, Gacy helped cultivate his image as a killer clown in the media by drawing self-portraits of himself as Pogo.

Then came Stephen King's IT novel and movie about a scary, supernatural clown who lurks around the suburbs and murders children. This was part of a bigger shift toward scary suburban scenarios in the horror films. After the novel came out in 1986, it was adapted into a TV movie starring Tim Curry as Pennywise the Dancing Clown.

Which means that once again, television brought a new clown into people’s living rooms—a threatening, child-harming one—that recent creepy clown panics suggest viewers have not shaken since.



The United States’ current clown panic, too, has echoes of IT’s mystical, murderous villain. This book and movie certainly didn’t invent the evil clown but may have helped make Americans paranoid that one could be lurking outside their doors. Starting in the early 2000s, the Internet became very popular among pretty much all age groups. Social media websites were reporting creepy clown sightings all across the United States and much of the world. Many people became afraid of clowns!

**Now in 2019, we got a new Joker movie (starring Joaquin Phoenix) to deal with!**





### **The Joker movie plot.**

Forever alone in a crowd, failed comedian Arthur Fleck seeks connection as he walks the streets of Gotham City. Arthur wears two masks -- the one he paints for his day job as a clown, and the guise he projects in a futile attempt to feel like he's part of the world around him. Isolated, bullied and disregarded by society, Fleck begins a slow descent into madness as he transforms into the criminal mastermind known as the Joker.

### **The Joker TV, Movie, and Video Games Appearances**

We learned earlier that the Joker first appeared a long time ago in a 1940 DC Batman Comics Book. Since then, he has appeared off and on in movies, on TV, and various video games. Here is a partial list along with the actor playing or providing the voice for the Joker:

#### **TV**

##### **Batman (1966–1968)**

Cesar Romero portrayed the Joker in the 1960s Batman television series. Romero refused to shave his distinctive mustache for the role, so it was partially visible beneath the white face makeup applied. This version of the Joker is based on the character in the 1960s comics, who is more of an elaborate prankster than a psychopathic murderer.



**Cesar Romero as the Joker**

##### **Gotham (2014–2019)**

Gotham is a TV series based on James Gordon's early days as a policeman in Gotham City and Bruce Wayne's path to becoming Batman, as well as the origins of several of Batman's rogues' gallery such as Penguin, Riddler, Catwoman, Scarecrow, Mad Hatter, Bane, Ventriloquist and the Joker.



**The Joker in Gotham**

## Films

### Batman (1966)

Cesar Romero reprised his role in the 1966 film *Batman*, in which the Joker is a member of the United Underworld, alongside fellow Gotham City villains the Penguin, the Riddler and Catwoman.



Jack Nicholson as the Joker

### Batman (1989)

Jack Nicholson played the Joker in Tim Burton's 1989 film *Batman*. The *Newsweek* review of the film stated that the best scenes are due to the surreal black comedy portrayed in the Joker. In 2003, American Film Institute ranked Nicholson's performance #45 on their list of 50 greatest film villains.

### The Dark Knight (2008)

"The Dark Knight" is not a simplistic tale of good and evil. Batman is good, yes, The Joker is evil, yes. But Batman poses a more complex puzzle than usual: The citizens of Gotham City are in an uproar, calling him a vigilante and blaming him for the deaths of policemen and others. And the Joker is more than a villain. He's a demon whose actions are fiendishly designed to pose moral dilemmas for his enemies.



Batman is The Dark Knight who Matches Wits with The Joker

### The Joker (2019)

*Joker* premiered at the 76th Venice International Film Festival on August 31, 2019, where it won the Golden Lion. It was released in the United States on October 4 and is currently the #1 movie in the world. The film polarized critics; while Phoenix's performance was praised, the dark tone, portrayal of mental illness, and handling of violence divided responses.

## Videos

The Joker has appeared in several videos over the years. Here is one of the most popular ones:

**Batman: Arkham** is a series of action-adventure video games based on the DC Comics character Batman. The first game, *Batman: Arkham Asylum* (2009), focuses on Batman trying to prevent the Joker from destroying Gotham City after he takes control of Arkham Asylum, and he is forced to contend with numerous other villains he has incarcerated along the way.



Mark Hamill is the voice of The Joker in most video games and animation films



*Batman: Arkham Asylum* (2009)  
The Joker

So, have you seen the latest movie about The Joker? Do you plan on seeing it? Are you afraid of clowns? Just in case you were wondering how many people the Joker has killed (so far)? 114

So, why are so many people afraid of clowns? I have learned that we should blame it on the Internet and social media.

Halloween is coming in a few days. Can you make a wild guess about what the most popular mask will be this year? It's a runaway win for the scary clown mask! BOO!!



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