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Monsters in America: Our Historical Obsession with the Hideous and the Haunting

W. Scott Poole

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Salem witches, frontier wilderness beasts, freak show oddities, alien invasions, Freddie Krueger. From our colonial past to the present, the monster in all its various forms has been a staple of American culture. A masterful survey of our grim and often disturbing past, *Monsters in America* uniquely brings together history and culture studies to expose the dark obsessions that have helped create our national identity.

Monsters are not just fears of the individual psyche, historian Scott Poole explains, but are concoctions of the public imagination, reactions to cultural influences, social change, and historical events. Conflicting anxieties about race, class, gender, sexuality, religious beliefs, science, and politics manifest as haunting beings among the populace. From Victorian-era mad scientists to modern-day serial killers new monsters appear as American society evolves, paralleling fluctuating challenges to the cultural status quo. Consulting newspaper accounts, archival materials, personal papers, comic books, films, and oral histories, Poole adroitly illustrates how the creation of the monstrous "other" not only reflects society's fears but shapes actual historical behavior and becomes a cultural reminder of inhuman acts.

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