



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

*W. Scott Poole*

Download now

Read Online →

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

*W. Scott Poole*

**Monsters in America: Our Historical Obsession with the Hideous and the Haunting** W. Scott Poole 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.

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

Date : Published October 15th 2011 by Baylor University Press (first published April 25th 2011)

ISBN : 9781602583146

Author : W. Scott Poole

Format : Hardcover 277 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, History, Horror, Sociology, Fantasy, Paranormal

 [Download Monsters in America: Our Historical Obsession with the ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Monsters in America: Our Historical Obsession with th ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online Monsters in America: Our Historical Obsession with the Hideous and the Haunting W. Scott Poole**

---

## From Reader Review Monsters in America: Our Historical Obsession with the Hideous and the Haunting for online ebook

### Dan says

If you view everything that has happened in the last ten thousand years as an atrocity committed by (American) White Anglo-Saxon Protestant men against the wide-eyed, helpless, innocent (and rather stupid) non-male/non-white world in a concerted race (or gender where convenient) war and stolidly ignore all contrary evidence, the world is full of monsters.

Unfortunately for W. Scott Poole, this view of history only really flies for kids and dull-witted adults.

---

### Patrick Sprunger says

I've had a question for a long time. When social conservatives oppose something, like - say - *gay marriage*, it is often on the premise that expanding liberty will somehow take something away from those currently entitled to those liberties. There isn't a clear explanation behind the complaint that *the traditional institution of marriage will collapse if we allow people of the same sex to marry*, but the "argument" persists.

The answer, of course, is that social issues - ranging from the culture wars to the bill of rights - are seldom zero sum affairs. Expanding marriage will not destroy marriage any more than expanding the voting franchise (to include women, poor people, teenagers, and non-whites) ended the republic. The resistance to such expansion is likewise identical. To characterize it as fear or xenophobia is to simplify it. It is better characterized as jealousy.

But jealousy, in many ways, comes across as more petty than fear, so the actual underlyers get convoluted in their perception. Since we're talking about something that's basically emotional, psychology - more than political science - comes into play. So where am I going with this? More specifically, how has W. Scott Poole helped me answer this question?

Two thirds of the way through *Monsters In America*, Poole talks about Vietnam prisoners of war returning to an America that has dramatically changed since their own dramatic departure. Comparing the experience to Rip Van Winkle's, the young men in question left an America that was still fundamentally fifties-ish in its holographic absorption of consumerism, conservatism, and the status quo and returned to find *Brown v. Board of Education* enforced, *Roe v. Wade* in the works, and a slate of equivalent social transformations roiling and burning and growling and reveling at every angle of American life. The white political patriarch - long held as the conservator of the republic - had not only lost market share (as women, minorities, and youth made gains in the political/economic franchise), but literally lost a physical war against a supposedly "backwards" enemy (a banana republic on one hand, the "inferior" communist system on the other). The challenge to the accepted wisdom of the preceding 200 years must have been enormous.

The psychological fallout of the confrontation with such catastrophic hubris continues to wreak aftershocks today. The 70s saw race riots, the Southern exodus from the Democratic party, women's control of both their domestic environment and their own bodies, gay culture, youth culture, and the threat of mutually assured destruction - and there was nothing the demagogues could do about it. To those empowered by some of these changes, life was improving. The ones who were satisfied with the status quo (or jealous of its powers) faced confusion (even rage). Without a clear way to enunciate their apprehension, diverse manifestations emerged.

The religious right sprang out of Goldwater conservatism.

---

This isn't ostensibly what W. Scott Poole was supposed to be telling us about in *Monsters in America*. But it is. He contextualizes this, and many other, points by collating it with the way the psycho sprang from the creature feature. The creature (created by an atomic accident or international communism) stood in for cold war apprehension. The psycho came to personify some people's dread over the changing social landscape - more specifically the loss of patriarchal control over the family. As women and children gained more autonomy within the family unit, the fear was that the ensuing dysfunction would literally produce psychos - or monsters.

If this sounds suspiciously like Howard Zinn or Noam Chomsky dipping their toes into film criticism, it is. But it's also pretty amazing. We've always known there was something bigger about the film and literary monster than the immediate, visceral thrill it delivers. W. Scott Poole does a masterful job of collating many of those layers of meaning with the American historical narrative. He skips around a lot and doesn't attempt a comprehensive, linear history. Had he done so, *Monsters in America* might have been tedious - counter-intuitive treatment of a subject designed to titillate. No, Poole strikes the perfect tone and holds up a frank mirror to America through the lens of our nightmare creatures. I would recommend this to just about everyone.

---

### **Terri says**

This is an amazing book. The author explores American History and how people's fears and reactions to changes in society both affected and were affected by monsters in print and film.

---

### **Kristin Norton says**

I want to start out by saying that I absolutely love the notion behind this book. I am fiercely passionate about two things: History and Monsters. For me, there are intertwined. I love ghost stories and folklore because they reveal an aspect of history and popular thinking in an entertaining way. I was thrilled to find a book that went with that mindset.

It is hard to express what I feel upon reading this book. I wanted to like it so badly that I tried several times to read it over the course of the last two years. This was my last attempt and was successful only because I was bound and determined that the money that I spent on it would not have been a waste.

I will not say that I feel that this book wasted my time. Poole shared interesting information on different historical events and, ultimately, achieved the goal of educating me in this subject. However, Poole's writing style makes it difficult to reach these nuggets of information. The book reads like the essay of a college junior. He reaches half formed conclusions and fails to adequately prove to me that this subject matters or has any validity whatsoever. There were times that I was not certain what point he was making or the conclusions to which he wanted me to come.

Ultimately, this book was a chore for me to read. This is sad because I love this subject.

---

### **Andrew Bishop says**

An excellent history of the American obsession with monsters, Poole analyzes our religious and nationalist

beliefs to see how we have dealt with the Other in our long, horrifying existence as a nation. Everything from Communists, feminists, and foreigners to Candyman, Dracula, and The Exorcist are examined for the social attitudes to evil that they illuminate (and that we may believe, consciously or subconsciously). This isn't a book for the squeamish as Poole details how a horror film like Candyman is based in fact to a great deal. It's not a salacious book, either. Sex and violence are the recurring themes of the book, but Poole always provides context for why they recur so often. What becomes disturbingly apparent is that most of America's hatred of the Other is based in Christian religious belief. If you will, a shining city on a hill built on the bodies of natives, blacks, women, and anyone else we don't like very much. Poole stays far away from polemic and sticks to the facts. However, his interpretations and implications are nothing less than threatening to whatever status quo our authorities would prefer us to maintain. I think that what makes the book riveting is that despite the particular social factors and grisly historical events, the book is about the Other in media. "Why are we scared of this person?" is always a question behind each chapter and Poole is careful to never reduce it purely to matters of sociology or psychology while still using those tools of analysis. He's never less than canny on the pop culture angle: Dracula and Frankenstein are almost everywhere in the book, his insights into the fear of zombies are sharp, the comparison of Patrick Bateman and Dexter Morgan is inspired, and the analysis of fifties icons like Vampira and the Addams family are very good. At the very end, Poole implies that for what has gone before, it could very well get worse. Bloodshed and hatred are universals in human nature and Poole's book is a very unsettling history of its American manifestation. Poole's bibliography is an additional treat as it includes many excellent books for further reading or study - "1973 Nervous Breakdown: Watergate, Warhol, and the Birth of Post-Sixties America" and "Sacred Terror: Religion and Horror on the Silver Screen" were two titles that jumped out at me - that's so full that one could even write their own treatment on the subject. This is an important book that I'd recommend very highly.

---

### **Peacegal says**

This well-written and thought provoking book examines what scares us and what monsters in popular entertainment have to say about our fears and values in society.

I learned quite a few random facts--such as I didn't know that "Twilight" was written by a Mormon and championed by some cultural conservatives because it apparently preaches abstinence and traditional gender roles. I knew it was a vampire teen drama, but not much more than that, because I couldn't care less about vampire teen dramas. This revelation put a weird new spin on the series's explosive popularity for me at least.

---

### **Jamie Z. says**

I loved this book. I feel like the author did a great job at deconstructing America's social issues and how they connect to the monsters/fears/entertainment of the time. I highly recommend this for fans of the horror genre and anthropology.

---

### **Jorge Villarruel says**

A lot of people gave it poor reviews, maybe because they didn't like what the author plainly demonstrated, that the real monsters in America are the Americans, mainly the white Americans.

---

## **Katherine Bishop says**

This book is quite well researched, makes a few interesting connections, and is very accessible. If you're looking for an introductory book to the subject, it's a great resource. However, at times the overt political messages can be more aggressive than effective, the book frequently covers more breadth than depth, and I was left without a clear sense of how monsters in America (US, presumably, rather than hemispheric) differed from those in international nightmares--or how the globalization of monster culture influenced American culture. In the end, though, I could easily see assigning parts of this book to undergraduates.

---

## **Sherry says**

Through the two and a half weeks I took with this book, I have been citing it in conversation. I found it informative, fascinating, thought-provoking and well-written. Whether your interest is literature, American history, popular culture, race and ethnicity, women's studies, or religion, you would be happy reading this book.

---

## **Dean says**

I have read Mr. Poole's work before, so I knew I was in for a treat and I was right. "Monsters in America" is a work that touches on the many facets of Horror in America. It is not just about film and fiction, but the cultural events that mirrored the works on the screen and in our nightmares.

Lovecraft, Elvira, Vampira, The Scooby Gang, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Edgar Allen Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorn, UFO's all make guest appearances.

This book was thoroughly enjoyable, and I will, of course, own it.

---

## **Rachel says**

The book made a few strong points, but ultimately it was a mediocre read. Its cohesive, cursory, and has a smattering of typos. It felt more like I was reading a college midterm (not even open book), and less like strong literary criticism. I feel like three stars is generous for a book that did not bring me any new insights, but it was neither especially good nor especially bad.

---

## **Mankey says**

I hated this book. It was just way too "all over the place" for me. In some ways, this felt more like a book about racism and sexism on celluloid and in politics than a book about "Monsters." I wasn't ready for the overtly sociological approach of the book, and was expecting a history, as alluded to in the title of the book. I had trouble finding a consistent narrative in a book that talked about sea monsters, Bigfoot, Universal Movie Monsters, Freak-shows, and several other topics, and never spending enough time on any of them to feel like I was more informed after reading.

---

I was also troubled by the political tone of the book. I'm about as liberal as they come, but the Right bashing just went on and on. The political bias was just so obvious that it left me annoyed at points.

One last thought, in a book with the word "haunting" in the title, you'd think there would be at least a few pages spent on America's fascination with Spiritualism (spirit communication) in the 19th Century. Spiritualists were a very large segment of society back then, to totally ignore this fascinating, and ghostly, period absolutely baffled me.

---

### **Angela says**

Excellent examination of horror movies evolution through the years and also how societal happenings influence the movies at the time they are made. Good references in the book that I looked up to further read about horror movies and their importance to our sociological perspective.

---

### **Allie says**

damn good primer on monsters in America. wish it felt more "american"- some of the trends were too broad, and I wish there'd been more emphasis on early America (e.g. the bell witch, the roanaoke colony, etc.) but on the whole, an engaging and thought provoking read

---