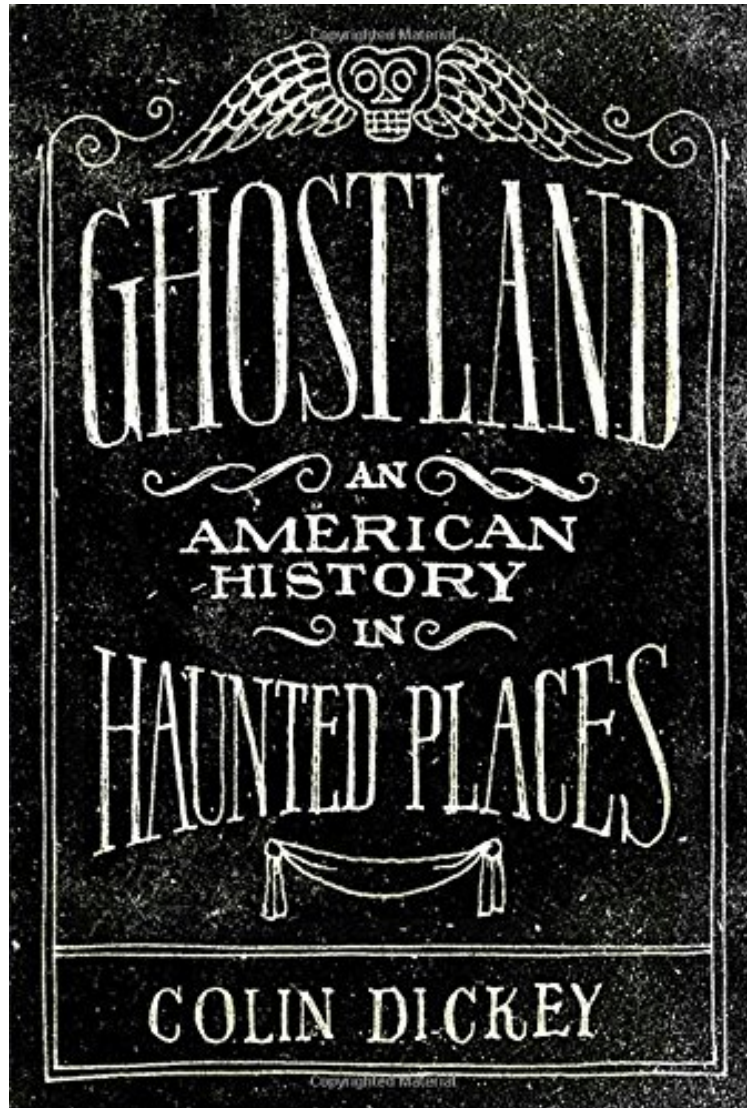


[Read free ebook] Ghostland: An American History in Haunted Places

Ghostland: An American History in Haunted Places

Colin Dickey

DOC | *audiobook | ebooks | Download PDF | ePub



 Download

 Read Online

#31204 in Books Ingramcontent 2016-10-04 2016-10-04Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 9.30 x 1.06 x 6.44l, 1.25 #File Name: 1101980192336 pagesGhostland An American History in Haunted Places | File size: 42.Mb

Colin Dickey : Ghostland: An American History in Haunted Places before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Ghostland: An American History in Haunted Places:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. I found this book to be dull, uninspired and boringBy DebbieI found this book to be dull, uninspired and boring. I read a reviewer who wrote the he doesn't think Dickey believes in ghosts and I came away with the same impression. He could have easily titled it "Debunking Myths of Haunted Places in America". If Mr. Dickey is sincere in wanting to experience and explore ghosts, he should start by staying away from

tourist traps. Waste of time and money. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Great read
By Gabby2010
Interesting reading about different places that could or could not be haunted. I almost want to plan a road trip to visit some of these places
0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Four Stars
By Sara Cole
I like how he gets into the history of ghost stories and tells the history behind the story.

One of NPR's Great Reads of 2016
A lively assemblage and smart analysis of dozens of haunting stories absorbing[and] intellectually intriguing.
The New York Times Book Review
An intellectual feast for fans of offbeat history, *Ghostland* takes readers on a road trip through some of the country's most infamously haunted places and deep into the dark side of our history.
Colin Dickey is on the trail of America's ghosts. Crammed into old houses and hotels, abandoned prisons and empty hospitals, the spirits that linger continue to capture our collective imagination, but why? His own fascination piqued by a house hunt in Los Angeles that revealed derelict foreclosures and "zombie homes," Dickey embarks on a journey across the continental United States to decode and unpack the American history repressed in our most famous haunted places. Some have established reputations as "the most haunted mansion in America," or "the most haunted prison"; others, like the haunted Indian burial grounds in West Virginia, evoke memories from the past our collective nation tries to forget. With boundless curiosity, Dickey conjures the dead by focusing on questions of the living: how do we, the living, deal with stories about ghosts, and how do we inhabit and move through spaces that have been deemed, for whatever reason, haunted? Paying attention not only to the true facts behind a ghost story, but also to the ways in which changes to those facts are made and why those changes are made, Dickey paints a version of American history left out of the textbooks, one of things left undone, crimes left unsolved. Spellbinding, scary, and wickedly insightful, *Ghostland* discovers the past we're most afraid to speak of aloud in the bright light of day is the same past that tends to linger in the ghost stories we whisper in the dark.

A Shelf Awareness Best Book of the Year
The spectral map Dickey creates is as broad and packed as his book's title implies . . . *Ghostland* amounts to a lively assemblage and smart analysis of dozens of haunting stories, some better known than others. In each chapter, Dickey spins riveting tales and then carefully unwinds these narratives, exposing the materials and motivations of their construction . . . The most fascinating moments in *Ghostland* are Dickey's etymological musings and his many turns down unusual paths of American history . . . All of these are absorbing . . . With *Ghostland*, Dickey achieves a capacious geographical synthesis that is both intellectually intriguing and politically instructive.
The New York Times Book Review
For a relatively young nation, America is overrun with spirits. Mr. Dickey visits with Salem's witches, spectral lights at a Nevada brothel and the eccentric widow who designed the sprawling, never-finished Winchester Mystery House [to] suggest that by analyzing them we can learn a great deal about ourselves.
The Wall Street Journal
The good news: Nothing's really haunted except by the spirits we imagine for ourselves. The bad news: We'll make anything haunted. The great news: There's *Ghostland*.
Colin Dickey gets to the heart of the matter over and over, skirting any tourist-trap sensationalism in favor of historical context that touches on the longing and tragedy underneath ghost stories. It's a tour of America's haunted places that takes an insightful look at how ghost stories are made, how ghosts and historical visibility are so tightly intertwined, and why we keep looking for the dead.
NPR, a best book of the year pick
Dickey neatly dissects not just the historical, but the visual and atmospheric elements that evoke a haunting . . . As he wends his way through the landmarks and their histories, Dickey thoroughly and convincingly explores the many underpinnings of ghost stories and hauntings as manifestations of our collective guilt, anxieties, obsessions and historical losses; and as practical schemes for money-making, land acquisition, or controlling groups of people.
Huffington Post
Engrossing . . . Dickey's book is not so much about spooks and goblins, but about tales of them that we tell, and why. Its purpose isn't to scare, but to intrigue and on that level, it may well keep you up late.
Seattle Times
Capacious . . . Dickey's omnivorous curiosity lands on everything from the fraught legacy of slavery to the role of Spiritualism in women's suffrage to 19th-century innovations in efficient horse stable design to the origins of the Ku Klux Klan to critiques of ruin porn in modern-day Detroit . . . Dickey is always good company, an ideal companion to take along on a ghost tour: skeptical but prone to goosebumps, with an affinity for odd, morbid historical details.
The Los Angeles Times
A stunning work of architectural theory and a spell-binding collection of true-crime tales and historical drama.
The Atlantic's CityLab
Dickey is one of the sharpest and most erudite writers around, and his new book makes for a perfect Halloween read.
Men's Journal
Colin Dickey's essays explore facets of the world that we might overlook, take readers to uncharted spaces, and delve into bizarre corners of history.
Vol 1. Brooklyn
Dickey takes an erudite tour of haunted America and tells us repeatedly that the meaning of ghost stories lies not in what they claim about the occult but in what they inadvertently say about the anxieties and prejudices of the teller and the larger society . . . His analytical and reportorial talents are evident . . . Part of the special delight of *GHOSTLAND* is its many informed asides, revealing Dickey's long hours of spading up obscure facts and quotes . . . a bravura performance of storytelling, in an elegant prose style throughout that does not sacrifice intelligence for readability.
Los Angeles Times
Colin Dickey is a mad genius, and reading one of his books is as close to a look at his brilliant brain as we will get without use of a bone saw.
BookRiot
You wouldn't expect to read about brothels, human psychology, Victorian architecture, even a suburban Toys R Us, and come out the other side

with an entirely different understanding and appreciation for ghosts. But Colin Dickey's writing is just that good. *Ghostland* is strange and un-settling in the best possible way. Caitlin Doughty, New York Times bestselling author of *Smoke Gets in Your Eyes* Always fascinating, sometimes horrifying. *GHOSTLAND* is a remarkable portrait of the ways that the walking dead or our beliefs in them wander through, and shape, American history. Deborah Blum, author of *The Poisoners Handbook* Spine-tingling... A truly creepy travelogue that's a must-have for Halloween. BookPage Come for the ghosts, stay for the history. Booklist Dickey pops sensationalist bubbles by observing the underlying racism, sexism, and classism associated with many hauntings long-told tales. By exposing historical inaccuracies and sociological calumny, the work treats readers to a better understanding of the socioeconomic and political milieu in which these myths gained acceptance, ultimately providing a richer, more nuanced narrative. Sophisticated readers with gothic sensibilities who enjoy literary histories, social commentary, and authoritative travelogs will find this a worthy title. Library Journal About the Author Colin Dickey grew up in San Jose, California, a few miles from the Winchester Mystery House, the most haunted house in America. As a writer, speaker, and academic, he has made a career out of collecting unusual objects and hidden histories all over the country. He's a regular contributor to the *LA Times* and *Lapham's Quarterly*, and is the co-editor (with Joanna Ebenstein) of *The Morbid Anatomy Anthology*. He is also a member of the Order of the Good Death, a collective of artists, writers, and death industry professionals interested in improving the Western world's relationship with mortality. With a PhD in comparative literature from the University of Southern California, he is an associate professor of creative writing at National University. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

1933, a summers day in Manhattans Lower East Side. There are children playing outside on East Fourth Street; it is August, and they are wild, they are shouting and running through the street, trying to gather up the last of the season before the fall sets in. There is nothing unusual about any of this. Then the door swings open at 29 East Fourth Street, and an old woman emerges on to the stoop overlooking the street, waving her arms wildly and shouting to the children to be quiet. The children, as well as the adults on the street, all recognize her: Gertrude Tredwell, whos lived in the house for over ninety years, born there only a few years after her father purchased it in 1935. She is enraged; she tells them they are being far too noisy, they must calm down. The children quiet, turning towards the high staircase that leads to Gertrudes front door, looking up with fear at the old woman who, satisfied, returns indoors and shuts the door. Theres nothing unusual about any of this except that Gertrude Tredwell has been dead now for several weeks. It is not the last time Gertrude Tredwell will be seen at the house on East Fourth Street. In the months after her death, the house falls into the hands of a distant cousin; since by then most of the old merchant houses of lower Manhattan were gone, he decides to preserve the house as a museum, first opening it in 1936. Open to the public, over the years there are dozens of sightings of odd and inexplicable things happening in the house. In the early 1980s tourists come across the house and ring the bell. A woman in period costume tells them politely that the museum is closed for the day, and could they please come back at another time. Later, when they call the house to get the hours, they are told that the museum was in fact open when they came by, and that, furthermore, none of the staff ever dresses in period costume. Gertrude has also been seen inside the house, sometimes humming, sometimes playing the piano always appearing as a frail, petite woman in period costume. Nor is she alone. A visitor to the house in the summer of 1995 claimed that while upstairs she had a lengthy conversation with an older gentleman in a tattered suit and a heavy wool jacket smelling of mothballs, who talked to her of what the house was like to live in. After listening to him for a few minutes, she turned her back on him for a moment, and when she looked back, he was gone. Later she identified the man shed seen from photographs: Samuel Lenox Tredwell, Gertrudes brother, whod died in 1917.

Ghost stories like these mean more than we are usually prepared to admit. If you want to understand a place, ignore the boastful monuments and landmarks, and go straight to the haunted houses. Look for the darkened graveyards, the derelict hotels, the emptied and decaying old hospitals. Wait past midnight, and see what appears. Tune out the patriotic speeches and sanctioned narratives, and listen instead for the bumps in the night. You wont need an electronic device to capture the voices of the dead; a patient ear and an open mind will do. Once you start looking, youll find them everywhere. We tell ourselves stories in order to live, Joan Didion once wrote, and that is just as true of ghost stories: we tell stories of the dead as a way of making sense of the living. More than just simple urban legends and campfire tales, ghost stories reveal the contours of our anxieties, the nature of our collective fears and desires, the things we cant talk about in any other way. The past were most afraid to speak of aloud in the bright light of day is the same past that tends to linger in the ghost stories we whisper in the dark. Ghost stories are as old as human civilization, appearing in the earliest written epics and throughout the ancient world. In one of his letters the Roman writer Pliny the Younger describes a house haunted by a ghost "in the form of an old man, of extremely emaciated and squalid appearance, with a long beard and disheveled hair, rattling the chains on his feet and hands." The house remained vacant until the philosopher Athenodorus rented it; his first night he waited up for the ghost, writing in his study, until the apparition appeared. Athenodorus, according to Pliny, was not in a hurry, and when confronted by the ghost made a sign with his hand that he should wait a little, and threw his eyes again upon his papers. Eventually the philosopher allowed the ghost to lead him outside of the house into the yard, where he vanished. The next morning, Athenodorus dug up the spot where the ghost had disappeared, and found the remains of a skeleton in chains that had been long neglected. He gave the corpse a proper burial, and the haunting

ceased. Ghosts bridge the past to the present; they speak across the seemingly insurmountable barriers of death and time, connecting us to what we thought was lost. They give us hope for a life beyond death, and because of this help us to cope with loss and grief. Their presence is the promise that we don't have to say goodbye to our loved ones right away, and as with Athendorous haunting what was left undone in one's life might yet be finished by one's ghost. Perhaps this is why, even without centuries-old castles or ruined abbeys, the United States is as ghost-haunted as anywhere else in the world perhaps even more so. You'll find ghosts in the stately plantations of the South, in the wilds of the plains states, in the ornate hotels of California, in the wooden colonials in the Northeast. They roam the streets of rustbelt cities like Detroit and Buffalo, and they haunt the gothic cities of the South. You'll find them in abandoned mining towns, and in the bustling metropolis of New York City. Forty-five percent of Americans say they believe in ghosts, and almost a third say they've witnessed them firsthand. Though this belief lies outside the ways we normally explain the world contradicting science and complicating religion it's a difficult belief to shake. That we continue believing in ghosts despite our rational minds skepticism suggests that in these stories lies something crucial to the way we understand the world around us. We cannot look away, because we know something important is there.*

The Merchants House Museum in lower Manhattan has stood by itself against the din and rush of the city; it has stood for one hundred and eighty years and might stand for that many more. Within, walls continue upright, bricks meet neatly, wood floors give gently under foot, and spirits gather. The house was bought by Seabury Tredwell in 1835 when he retired. Owner of a large hardware firm, he had eight children altogether, the last of whom, Gertrude, was born there in 1840 when Tredwell was sixty. Gertrude never married; she had one suitor, but her father disapproved of his Catholicism. And so she lived out her life in the house on 4th Street, her siblings dying one by one until only she remained. Over time, she focused her energies on keeping the house exactly as Seabury intended it, maintaining its nineteenth century charm until she died, at the age of ninety-three, in 1933. A distant cousin acquired the house, and since by then most of the old merchant houses of lower Manhattan were gone, he decided to preserve Tredwell's home, first opening it to the public as a museum in 1936. The ghosts, they say, came quickly thereafter. The Merchants House is a prime example of a grand old American haunted house. Its exterior is stately, refined, with a touch of frayed elegance. Its front door welcomes, even as it seems to be hiding something. Inside, the floors creak without warning, without any sense of someone there. The old wood is thick with the humidity, as if the walls and floors still breathe. It stands as the oldest brownstone in New York with its furniture still intact. All around it are gleaming glass and steel towers of the modern age, bustling with life still living. It is easy to feel as though you're stepping back in time as you walk in the steps of those long gone. And it's easy, in such a well-worn house, to feel that something is not quite right: an invisible presence, a trace of something that doesn't belong. Through the years guests have reported feeling cold spots, or seeing strange, wispy streaks of light, some of which have been captured on film. Paranormal researchers have conducted EVP (Electronic Voice Phenomena) sessions in the house, turning on a tape recorder and asking questions to an empty room, playing back the tape later in hopes the ghosts will have answered back. Several EVPs from the house have recorded bits of faint, muddled noise that some claim are voices speaking from the beyond. But these events alone are easy for a skeptic to brush aside, and discount. A paranormal event without a story is tenuous, fragile. What makes it real, at least in a sense, is the story, the tale that grounds the event. That sense of the uncanny, of something not-quite-right, of things ever-so-slightly off, cries out for an explanation, and often we turn to ghosts. Just as an oyster turns a speck of dirt into a pearl, the ghost story doesn't make the feeling disappear, but can transform it into something more stable, less unsettling. Long before the word haunting became associated with ghosts, it meant simply to frequent, in the way teenage kids haunt a park or drunks haunt a bar. A house like the Merchants House Museum is haunted, then, by use and by habitude, by grooves worn into the floors and walls as though you could map out the daily patterns of the people who'd lived here by analyzing these signs of wear. The ghosts at the Merchant House emerge not only out of the uncanny feeling we get from creaking wood and antiquated architecture, but also from the stories about its one-time inhabitants that are told and retold over the years and embellished where necessary to heighten the drama. Tales of Gertrude emphasize that she never married, that after her father disapproved of her only suitor, and that she promised him she'd stay single and live in his home. The spinster who honored her father's wishes even after his death, Gertrude seems tragic, bordering on the pathological. Even before her death, she haunted this house as an emotionally stunted recluse, unable to let go of her attachment to her father. Samuel Tredwell, by contrast, is described as a black sheep, someone who never amounted to much and was disinherited by the family. This is a tad unfair; Samuel followed in his father's footsteps as a merchant, specializing in china and crockery, though he was not the success his father had been. He was indeed written out of Seabury's final will, mainly due to debts he'd incurred in the wake of the Civil War (Seabury instead left a trust in Samuel's daughter's name). But the legends of the Merchant House exaggerate the tensions and family drama, relying on melodramatic caricatures. The sight of Samuel's ghost is far more exciting and menacing, after all, if he's come back from the grave to claim his rightful inheritance. A spinster, and one who seemed to resist time in a place as restless as New York City, Gertrude Tredwell embodies a set of ideas and anxieties about women, domesticity, and modernity. Likewise, in the ghost of threadbare Samuel Tredwell we have a story of disinheritance and filial failure that reflects how we as a culture treat men who don't live up to certain concepts of masculinity. Add to this the overbearing portrait of Seabury himself, and what the Merchants House offers

is an uncanny portrait of the American family, one that frustrates our basic assumptions about how a father and his children should act. Instead of, or perhaps in addition to, the supernatural, old buildings are haunted by their memories: memories of those who once inhabited them, and the memories we bring to them. We're conditioned, after all, to conflate memory and physical space. At the same time that Pliny was writing his tale of Athenodorus's haunted house, Cicero and Quintilian were developing a technique for remembering great quantities of information known as a memory palace. Rather than direct memorization, one imagines a house and places different parts of a speech in different rooms: the first point in one's speech is placed in the entryway to the home, the second point in the first room, and so on. To remember the speech, the orator simply has to walk through the house in her or his mind, picking up each aspect of the speech as she or he moves through the building. The technique suggests the degree to which memory is spatial, or at least primed to work spatially: our brains are hardwired to think in terms of place, and to associate psychic value or meaning to the places we inhabit. Just as imaginary houses may be used to remember things, real physical houses may have their own memories or at least memories we project on them. A haunted house is a memory palace made real: a physical space that retains memories that might otherwise be forgotten, or which might remain only in fragments. Under the invisible weight of these memories, the habits of those who once haunted these places, we feel the shudder of the ghost.

*Ghosts, Thomas W. Laqueur writes, are "a representation of the unrepresentable: the dead who were somewhere." In a world where nearly every moment of our lives is photographed, recorded, and documented, the gaps in the past still beckon us. Searching for ghosts can be an attempt to reconstruct what is lost. By sifting through time for stories that have been misplaced or forgotten, we listen to the voices that call out to be remembered. Our ghost stories center on unfinished endings, broken relationships, things left unexplained. They offer an alternative kind of history, foregrounding those precisely what might otherwise be ignored. Ghost stories are a way of talking about things we were not otherwise allowed to discuss: a forbidden history we thought bricked up safely in the walls. They cover up over the gaps and in the process help us assuage our anxieties, providing a rationale after the fact. Just as Gertrude Tredwell's life has informed the ghost stories that now circulate around her, so too does the legend of her ghost make meaning out of her life. Those aspects of a life that are discontinuous, fragmented, or unexpected, are made whole through the ghost story.

In her study of the ghost stories of the Hudson Valley in New York, Judith Richardson describes how one ghost in particular has changed shape through the decades to suit different needs of different eras. For over two centuries, residents in the village of Leeds, New York, have reported seeing a spectral apparition of a ghostly horse riding down the main road, dragging behind it a young woman. The story, in its most basic form, has to do with a cruel master who wickedly killed a young servant girl as punishment for some minor transgression. When she was invoked by writer Miriam Coles Harris in her 1862 novel *The Sutherlands*, the ghostly victim is a slave of African and Native American descent; Coles Harris used her as a parable in the vein of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, castigating not only the institution of slavery but Northern whites for their complicity. In 1896, the same ghost appears in Charles M. Skinner's *Myths and Legends of Our Own Land*, but now she is a white European immigrant, reflecting Skinner's interest in class differences and labor warfare. Contemporary retellings of the story, though, lack these politically charged details; in a 2002 book containing the Leeds legend, her ethnic heritage is unmentioned and the class divide is downplayed. Her master is indeed cruel and callous, but he's portrayed nowadays as a singular figure of evil rather than a representative of a corrupt ruling class. Paying attention to the way ghost stories change through the years and why those changes are made can tell us a great deal about how we face our fears and our anxieties. Even when these stories have a basis in fact and history, there's often significant embellishment and fabrication before they catch on in our imagination, and teasing out these alterations is key to understanding how these ghosts shape our relationship to the past.

We like our view of this country as a unified, cohesive whole based on progress, a perpetual refinement of values, and an arc of history bending towards justice but the prevalence of ghosts suggests otherwise. The ghosts who haunt our woods, our cemeteries, our houses and our cities appear at moments of anxiety, and point to instability in our national and local identities. A ghost story is what Freud called the return of the repressed, when that something we'd rather forget returns in another form such as the now-famous Freudian slip (what he himself called a *parapraxis*), revealing what we've hidden deep in our subconscious. Our country's ghost stories are themselves the dreams (or nightmares) of a nation, the Freudian slips of whole communities: uncomfortable and unbidden expressions of things we'd assumed were long past and no longer important. If American history is taught to schoolchildren as a series of great, striding benchmarks, the history of America's ghost stories is one of crimes left unsolved or transgressions we now feel guilty about. They offer explanations for the seemingly inexplicable, address injustices after the fact, and give expression to our unstated desires and fears. They can also, just as easily, mold reality to our preconceived notions, and cover over a messy reality in favor of well-worn clichés and urban legends. Ours is a forward-looking country that can have trouble sometimes reckoning with the past and the actions of our ancestors, and the spirit world has become yet another arena in which the shameful chapters in America's history including slavery, and the genocide of the American Indians are addressed and re-litigated. Uncomfortable truths, buried secrets, disputed accounts: ghost stories arise out of the shadowlands, a response to the ambiguous and the poorly understood.

*I spent several years traveling the country, listening for ghosts. There was no shortage of stories to choose from: there is not a city, town, or village in this country that isn't crammed with spirits. I started with places that were renowned for their

ghosts, places that had caught on in the popular imagination, whose legends seemed particularly resonant. I looked for ghosts whose stories spoke to some larger facet of American consciousness while still being rooted in a specific building. In some cases it wasn't always clear to me at first why I was drawn to a particular place. Sometimes simply being in a strange building spending the night in a haunted hotel, for example, was enough to leave me with a feeling that I wanted to know more. Much of this book involves not just listening to ghost stories, but listening also to architecture—how a building can feel alive and unsettling due to its age, or a quirk in its construction. Any building whose construction is a little bit off, as often as not, has spirits swirling about it. The language of ghosts, it seems, has become an important (if abstract) way of how we talk about architecture and place. Cities and historic sites across the United States clamor to have the most ghosts per cubic inch, the most frenetic paranormal activity, so they can earn the label most haunted. Any major city in this country offers some kind of ghost tour where you can hunt for cold spots or EMF vibrations, or otherwise record proof of the supernatural. The phenomenon has come to be known as dark tourism, a vibrant industry in its own right. Ghost tours are popular with tourists, explains geographer Glenn Gentry, because they "allow access to dissonant knowledge, dirty laundry, back stage." They are the celebrity gossip of history, the salacious underbelly of the past, and were drawn to them because the standard history often obscures as much as it reveals. In a quest to find that history of our country forgotten and ignored, I've interviewed ghost hunters and psychics, local historians and preservationists. I've read academic treatises and cheesy guidebooks, compared the legends to the historical record, trying to unearth the genealogy of these specific ghosts, and how we came to love telling these specific stories. What makes a place haunted? When is a creaking floorboard more than just a creaking floorboard? And what is behind the ghost stories that we tell? A spinster locked in a decaying mansion, a slave on a plantation whose soul won't rest—what are they trying to say to us from beyond the grave? The answers aren't contained to houses but cower in hotels and prisons, bridges and graveyards. Though houses are more likely to be haunted than any other place, other kinds of buildings have their own stories to tell. This book moves from the private space of the home to progressively more public spaces—from houses to businesses to civic spaces, and finally to whole cities. What secrets do towns harbor? Why do ghosts linger when buildings empty of living people? Examining our country's local ghost stories—where they came from, how they've evolved, how they're recounted—may tell us a great deal about things we thought were long settled and in the past.