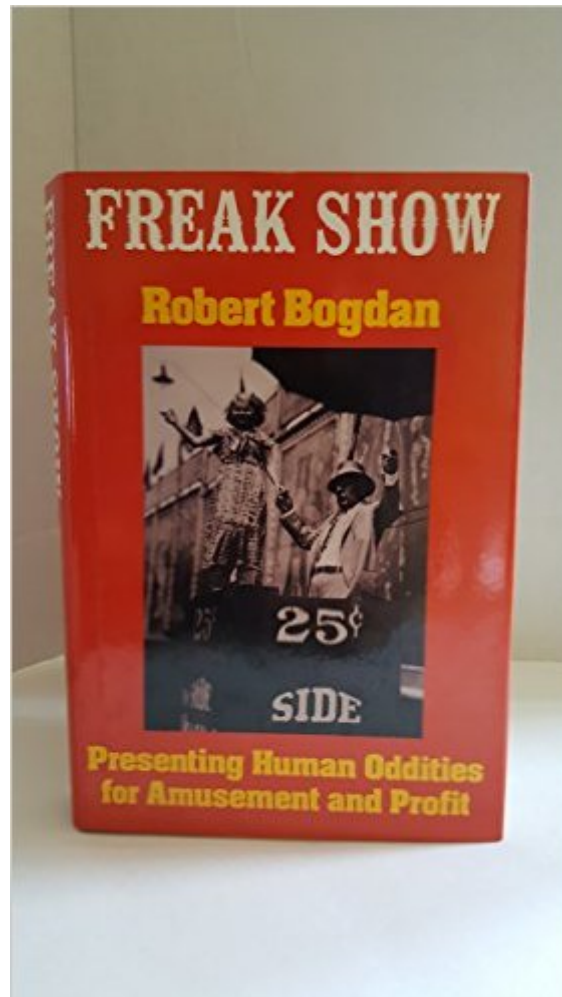


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Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities For Amusement And Profit



Synopsis

From 1840 until 1940, freak shows by the hundreds crisscrossed the United States, from the smallest towns to the largest cities, exhibiting their casts of dwarfs, giants, Siamese twins, bearded ladies, savages, snake charmers, fire eaters, and other oddities. By today's standards such displays would be considered cruel and exploitative—the pornography of disability. Yet for one hundred years the freak show was widely accepted as one of America's most popular forms of entertainment. Robert Bogdan's fascinating social history brings to life the world of the freak show and explores the culture that nurtured and, later, abandoned it. In uncovering this neglected chapter of show business, he describes in detail the flimflam artistry behind the shows, the promoters and the audiences, and the gradual evolution of public opinion from awe to embarrassment. Freaks were not born, Bogdan reveals; they were manufactured by the amusement world, usually with the active participation of the freaks themselves. Many of the "human curiosities" found fame and fortune, becoming the celebrities of their time, until the ascent of professional medicine transformed them from marvels into pathological specimens. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

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Customer Reviews

One does not need to be a fan of the circuses or amusements along those lines to be intrigued by Robert Bogdan's examination of freak shows. In "Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit," Bogdan traces the roots and heyday of freak shows with alacrity, intelligence, and respect. This thoroughly researched work is filled with pictures and artifacts (some rather gruesome in their subject) that furthers Bogdan's examination of freak show history. Beginning

in the mid-1800s to around 1940, freak shows were a staple of amusement in the United States. At a time when strange creatures and humans from foreign countries were unknown to those in other countries it was easy to startle and entertain with these fascinating exhibits. Who now can imagine what it would be like to live in a world where a giraffe was an unknown, fascinatingly strange creature. It is so common to us today that at times it is hard to conceive how people could be taken in by some of the fabricated freaks (or gaffs as they were known as). The lack of scientific and medical knowledge allowed freak shows to prosper, especially those that featured people we now know as mentally handicapped, because their conditions were unidentified at the time. True, real oddities existed - the super-tall or super-small, the armless or legless wonders, the Siamese twins - but freak shows also cast their lot in created freaks - fake "savages" from foreign lands, "wild" children, island cannibals, and tattooed marvels in a day and age when tattooing was not common, but rather a sure sign of savage heathens. Bogdan covers the real as well as the fake, those who made themselves freaks and those who were forced to be labeled as freaks.

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