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Dangerous Spirits: The Windigo in Myth and History

Shawn Smallman

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In the traditional Algonquian world, the windigo is the spirit of selfishness, which can transform a person into a murderous cannibal. Native peoples over a vast stretch of North America—from Virginia in the south to Labrador in the north, from Nova Scotia in the east to Minnesota in the west—believed in the windigo, not only as a myth told in the darkness of winter, but also as a real danger.

Drawing on oral narratives, fur traders' journals, trial records, missionary accounts, and anthropologists’ field notes, this book is a revealing glimpse into indigenous beliefs, cross-cultural communication, and embryonic colonial relationships. It also ponders the recent resurgence of the windigo in popular culture and its changing meaning in a modern context.

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