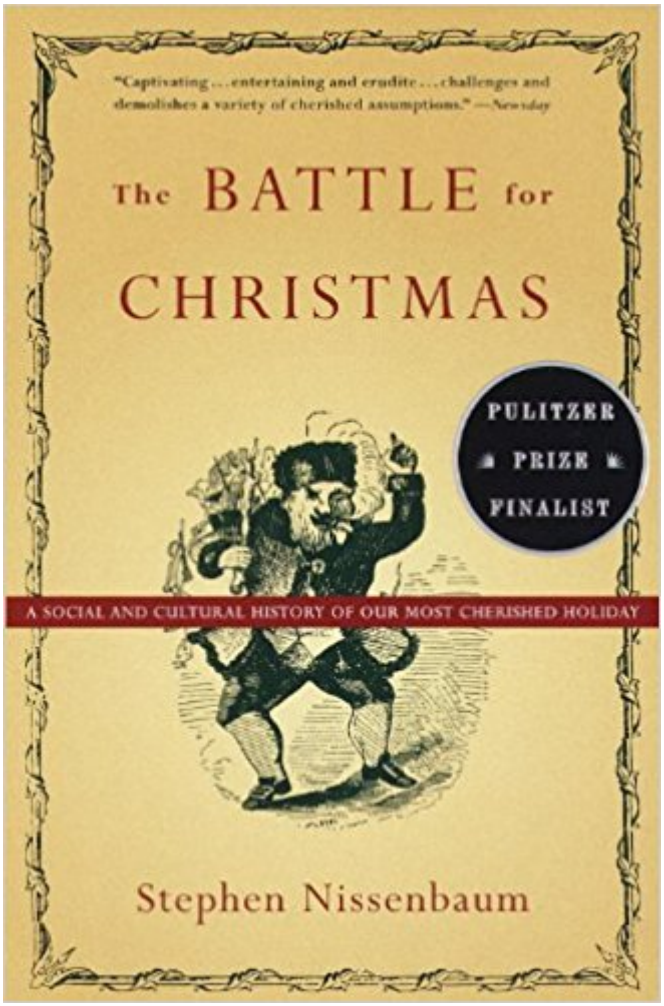
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The Battle For Christmas: A Social And Cultural History Of Our Most Cherished Holiday



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Synopsis

Anyone who laments the excesses of Christmas might consider the Puritans of colonial Massachusetts: they simply outlawed the holiday. The Puritans had their reasons, since Christmas was once an occasion for drunkenness and riot, when poor "wassailersÃ Â Ã Â extorted food and drink from the well-to-do. In this intriguing and innovative work of social history, Stephen Nissenbaum rediscovers Christmas's carnival origins and shows how it was transformed, during the nineteenth century, into a festival of domesticity and consumerism.Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Drawing on a wealth of period documents and illustrations, Nissenbaum charts the invention of our current Yuletide traditions, from St. Nicholas to the Christmas tree and, perhaps most radically, the practice of giving gifts to children. Bursting with detail, filled with subversive readings of such seasonal classics as "A Visit from St. NicholasÃ Â Ã Â and A Christmas Carol, The Battle for Christmas captures the glorious strangeness of the past even as it helps us better understand our present.Ã Â Ã Â

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Customer Reviews

This scholarly analysis of our modern celebration of Christmas pulls together a thoroughly convincing case for the widely accepted notion that it is a 19th-century creation, indeed a deliberate reformation and taming of a holiday with wilder pagan origins. Christmas was set at December 25 in the fourth century, not for any biblical link with Christ's birth, but because the church hoped to annex and Christianize the existing midwinter pagan feast. This latter was based on the seasonal

agricultural plenty, with the year's food supply newly in store, and nothing to do in the fields. It was a time of drinking and debauchery from the Roman Saturnalia to the English Mummers. The Victorians hijacked the holiday, and Victorian writers helped turn it into a feast of safe domesticity and a cacophonous chime of retail cash registers. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Christmas in America hasn't always been the benevolent, family-centered holiday we idealize. The Puritans of the Massachusetts Bay Colony so feared the day's association with pagan winter solstice revels, replete with public drunkenness, licentiousness and violence, that they banned Christmas celebrations. In this ever-surprising work, Nissenbaum (Sex, Diet, and Debility in Jacksonian America), a professor of history at the University of Massachusetts, conducts a vivid historical tour of the holiday's social evolution. Nissenbaum maintains that not until the 1820s in New York City, among the mercantile Episcopalian Knickerbockers, was Christmas as we know it celebrated. Before Washington Irving and Clement Clarke Moore ("A Visit from St. Nicholas") popularized the genteel version, he explains, the holiday was more of a raucous festival and included demands for tribute from the wealthy by roaming bands of lower-class extortionists. Peppering his insights with analysis of period literature, art and journalism, Nissenbaum constructs his theory. Taming Christmas, he contends, was a way to contain the chaos of social dislocation in a developing consumer-capitalist culture. Later, under the influence of Unitarian writers, the Christmas season became a living object lesson in familial stability and charity, centering on the ideals of bourgeois childhood. From colonial New England, through 18th- and 19th-century New York's and Philadelphia's urban Yuletide contributions, to Christmas traditions in the antebellum South, Nissenbaum's excursion is fascinating, and will startle even those who thought they knew all there was to know about Christmas. Illustrations. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Quite excellent and entertaining book on the history of our Christmas customs. Eye opener and puts things in perspective. It was a gift and I have purchased at least two as gifts.

Wonderful book.Until I read this text, I had the misconception that the struggles between the Christmas Holiday and the Secular were rather recent. Was I suprised to find that these battles have been going on for centuries.Mr. Nissenbaum has done phenomenol research into the various issues/struggles concerning the Christmas Holiday. Illustrations are well-chosen, and the extensive

use of footnotes and documentation really show off his work.In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, drinking, riots, and wild merry-making helped define the holiday, which is the main reason Puritans and others opposed the holiday. But by the 1820's, a class transformation had begun which would see Christmas become more family friendly and evolve into what we have today.Nissenbaum goes into the darker aspects of Christmas as well. How slave-owners in the American South used Christmas to keep everyone in "festive" spirits is brought to light, and the pursuit of profit had its influence as well.The book goes into more material than what I have briefly mentioned here. And it's well worth anyone's time.I don't agree with all of Mr. Nissenbaum's conclusions myself, but I was suprised when I heard there were big debates about keeping stores open on Christmas (back in the 1820's) even than.The More Times Change . . . .JThreeWilliston ND

Have you ever considered the mad Christmas rush and then read the Christian Bible stories in the Gospels. How did we get from Bethlehem to Black Friday? This book gives an interesting overview of the transition from a Evangelical Protestant view of no Christmas Celebration in colonial times, where Christmas was only celebrated in Christian circles by Roman Catholics and Episcopalians to what happens now. The rise of commercial Christmas filled the void left by the Protestant Churches. It also highlights the important role that the Unitarian Church played in the development of the North American family Christmas.The book is well worth the read for a slice of an often unreported history. What is wonderful is that it is written by a Jewish author so we don't get a lot of cultural-religious baggage. As a Christian Minister, I find this refreshing!

I used to read "A Christmas Carol" every year as a tradition and now I have added this to my annual read list. This book gives the history of Christmas and explains how many of the traditions that we consider to be timeless and carried over to the US from "the old country" were carefully crafted and introduced a mere 100-150 years ago by wealth businessmen in New York who wanted to transform the raucous street fair that was Christmas (more like Mardi Gras) into a more peaceful time to focus on family and children ... throw in Thomas Nast and the advertising industry and you have the birth of the modern Christmas season that is so often the rant of the day on Fox News during this time of year.According to Professor Nissenbaum the Christmas that we love to hate today was born out of the ideas of a small group of men in New York City and London as a way of transforming Christmas from a rowdy working class street festival to what it has become. Further, Christmas wasn't much practiced at all in the United States until the late 19th century and was outright banned in many of the early colonies.This look at how Christmas has changed and evolved is essential reading if you

want to have a conversation with someone who rants and raves about their perceptions of people who don't celebrate Christmas the way that they want you to celebrate it. Understanding the history of this seminal holiday in the United States helps to understand how it has become what it is and how, above all else, Christmas is a commercial holiday that hasn't had much to do with religion for a long time. My advice to those who want to hit people over the head with the religious nature of Christmas ... celebrate it without the spending spree that was artificially tacked onto the holiday by the men that are described in this book.

Great content and very interesting, but it reads almost like a history text book. This will be a multi-season read.

Great book! Really opened my eyes about the history of Christmas.

People often say that it is sad that Christmas is more about Santa Claus than Christianity. This book, however, shows that Christmas as we know it has always been about Santa and that before Santa Christmas was so horrible that Christians preferred not to celebrate it at all. Amazingly our Christmas tradition is based on the "Night Before Christmas" poem first published in a New York newspaper in 1823 and this tradition had taken its current form with all of its commercialism by 1830. Nissenbaum is to be commended for digging out this history and showing what the problems with Christmas were over a number of centuries and especially in the colonia American period and how the author of the poem altered and shaped other sources, particularly contributions by Washinton Irving, to alter social behavior around this holiday. The book also discusses the coming of the Christmas tree, the place of Dickens in our Christmas myths, and the role of the Christmas tradition in Black history. The book may need to be revised, however, since there seems to be some controversy about who the author of "The Night Before Christmas" really was. Other more recent books now seem to be available on this piece of history, but this book is the original research on the subject.

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