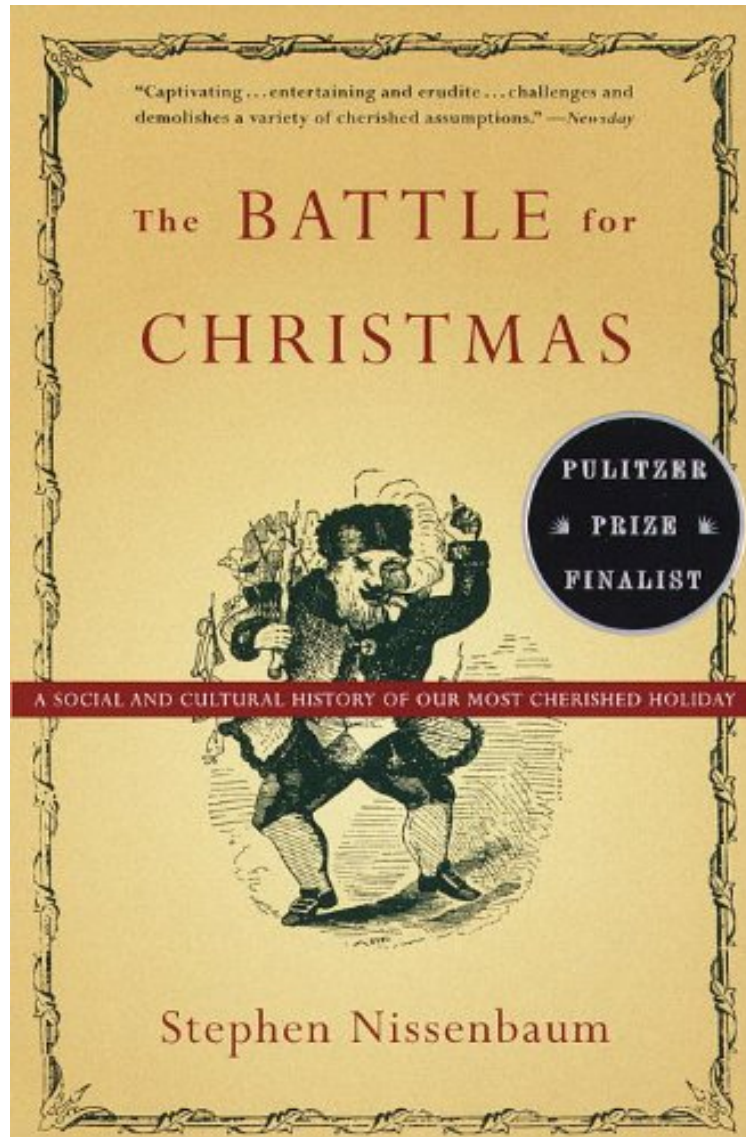


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The Battle for Christmas: A Social and Cultural History of Our Most Cherished Holiday

Stephen Nissenbaum

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#119504 in Books Stephen Nissenbaum 1997-10-28 1997-10-28 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.00 x .80 x 5.20l, .82 #File Name: 0679740384400 pages The Battle for Christmas A Social and Cultural History of Our Most Cherished Holiday | File size: 57.Mb

Stephen Nissenbaum : The Battle for Christmas: A Social and Cultural History of Our Most Cherished Holiday before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Battle for Christmas: A Social and Cultural History of Our Most Cherished Holiday:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Eye opener. By CM Ramirez 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. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. favorite book to read at Christmas. By Christopher 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 wealthy 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. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Great content and very interesting. By Badger Bob Great content and very interesting, but it reads almost like a history text book. This will be a multi-season read.

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 "wassailers" 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. 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. Nicholas" and "A Christmas Carol," *The Battle for Christmas* captures the glorious strangeness of the past even as it helps us better understand our present.

.com 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. From Publishers Weekly 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. From Library Journal Christmas celebrations as we know them today with trees, gift giving, and Santa Claus are a recent phenomenon. Puritans in New England prohibited Christmas celebrations because they inevitably led to drunken brawls. Temperance groups helped to take celebrations from the streets into the homes while encouraging quiet, sober socializing. Merchants promoted this trend toward domestic celebrations and began the

commercialism of Christmas prevalent today. The Christmas tree and Santa Claus were holiday symbols made popular to deal with the rampant materialism of the holiday. Nissenbaum (*Sex, Diet and Debility in Jacksonian America*, 1980) does a thorough job of tracing Christmas in America, emphasizing the recurrent theme of the haves giving to the have-nots. His detailed, unusual history of Christmas in the American social milieu will appeal to academic and large public libraries. Grant A. Fredericksen, Illinois Prairie Dist. P.L., Metamora Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.