



The Battle for Christmas

Stephen Nissenbaum

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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.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

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