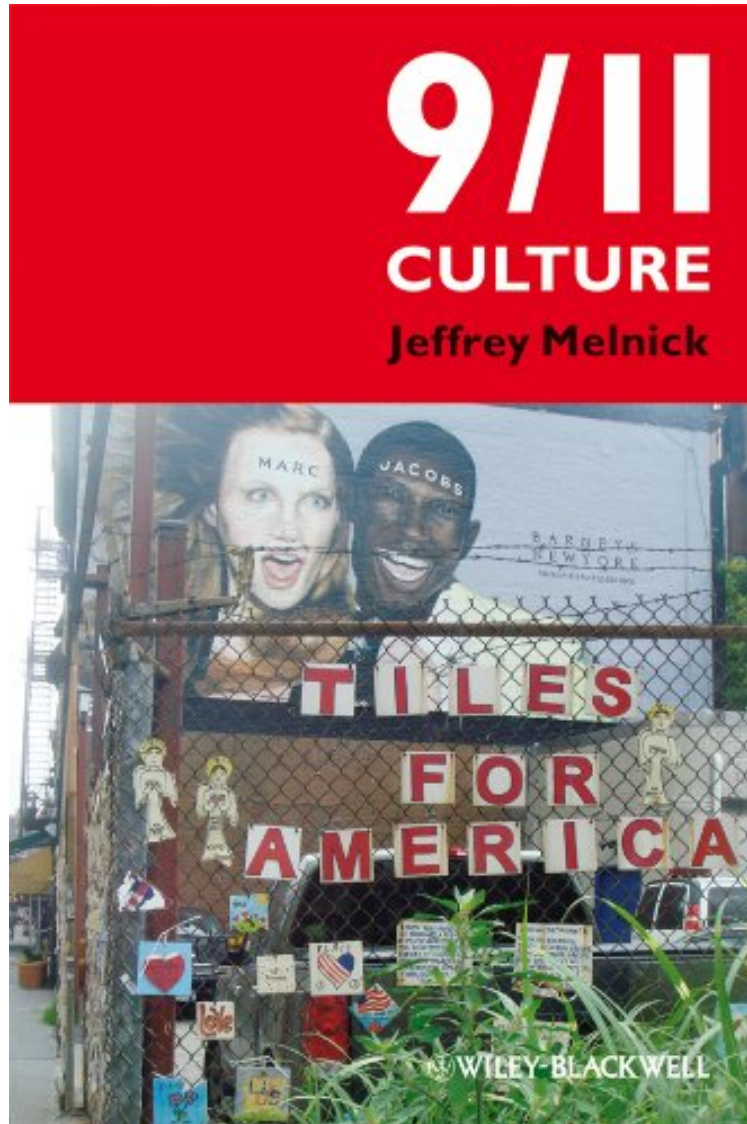


9/11 Culture

Jeffrey Melnick

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Jeffrey Melnick : 9/11 Culture before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised 9/11 Culture:

4 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Disney, rap music and more: tracing 9/11's impact on our shared cultureBy Lora Templeton[November 2014 note: Below is a review of this book I wrote in 2010 and posted on the Living Social bookshelf via a Facebook app. Living Social pulled the plug on their review site and many of my book and album reviews vanished with it. Transferring files from an old computer, I discovered that I had saved a draft version of this one review. Also, for complete honesty, I am still employed in the Professional Development division of the company that published this book. It was on the receptionist's shelf in our Boston office and she kindly

gave me the copy.] "Why do they hate us?" was a question constantly asked in the days following Sept 11, 2001. This book does not attempt any answer, but instead explores the cultural constructions and deconstructions at work by the various constituencies as we defined who safely belonged within the boundaries of "us" and who did not. As author Jeffrey Melnick, Associate Professor of American Studies at Babson College, demonstrates, the question itself was fluid. In addition to a general American public asking for a reason behind the horrific attacks of the day; Melnick's analysis of our cultural response argues that the outlawed lesbian protagonists in *V for Vendetta* as they flee from a neo-fascist regime in Britain were asking the same question from another perspective. Or closer to home, that it was already being asked for many years by the Brooklyn rappers and their neighborhoods who noted that their more common perceptions of the World Trade Center and the New York Police Department was how the one often worked very hard at keeping them out of the other. The slim volume of analysis and overview that Melnick has assembled offers a selective study of television, film, music, literature and fine arts as well as the more folk-cultural modes of urban legend, blog post essays and rumor. (It is a Wiley-Blackwell title, and by way of disclosure I am employed by Wiley's other division in Professional and Trade.) It is drawn from the syllabus and ongoing coursework of Melnick's class on 9/11 in American culture, launched in Winter 2004. Intended to help other cultural studies professors frame studies of their own, it still accessible to the thoughtful reader interested in understanding the many ways 9/11 culture continues to be a part of our lives and how it has developed symbol sets still at play in our media. Some of Melnick's choices for analysis are recognizably important: Springsteen's *Rising*; the clip-art comic strip *Get Your War On*; Don DeLillo's novel *The Falling Man* among others and he is not shy to highlight their shortcomings as major works. Other choices were unexpected. I did not reckon, for instance, that Disney's *Chicken Little*, could be read as a 9/11 text. Some of his assertions of cultural tropes surprised me, such as the statement that gently drifting office paper slowly descending emerged as a visual metaphor for the destruction, by alluding to but not showing the enormity of the other things also falling from the Towers. I would argue that his masterful chapter on how the Hollywood-organized Telethon of September 21 nearly predated the Bush Administration in its war-cry rhetoric could be matched by an equally skilled analysis of the broadcast of the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade and its attendant commercials a month and a half later. (And although it is clear Melnick has opinions on our world — who doesn't? — I was surprised to find that his writing convinced me to not hold the "Go Shopping" argument against the Bush administration any longer. In retrospect, it was important to maintain a sense of confidence and community and consumer involvement is as good of way as another. There are far more important criticisms to make of the Bush years.) But it is the folk and urban cultural response — all of that not mediated by corporate purposes or in the case of the famed Clear Channel banned song list that which was a dialogue between the people and the company; each wrestling for control of the outcome — that Melnick's book truly excels at recording. Many forgotten moments of those first few months came back (I remember a colleague showing me the extremely disturbing Microsoft Word/Wingding trick, for instance, and I heard the "employees who stayed home with foreknowledge" rumor in a San Francisco context.) and Melnick provides quick strokes of cultural history to link these with other times of national crises. I would only quibble at a few of his statements. Progressive political website Moveon.org predates 9/11 and the name is a request to Congress to censure the President and "move on" not a post 9/11 exhortation as he suggests. The term Web 2.0 which Melnick asserts is "inextricably linked" with 9/11, appeared first in 2004, but I take his point that discussion boards, blogs and forums were available for grief, missing person searching, anger, discussion and memorial. I also note that the culture of a "portrait" or the snapshot icon of a person, especially as it formed a community on a wall as in the many ad hoc memorials, does seem to be echoed now in all of our online avatars and our the Facebook wall of friends. The only element missing from this perspective of Melnick's analysis might be included in a subsequent volume that studies the iconography of the street shrines and the proliferation of grief-industry and patriotic kitsch that sprung up around Ground Zero. Melnick concludes with an appendix providing lists of movies, songs and key works as well as a Note to Teachers. He does suggest that the work here is far from finished and — indeed history has made a few twists and turns since publication — but he also suggests that we need to replace the narcissistically-focused "Why do they hate us?" with the more challenging but ultimately significant question of "Why do we hate?"

0 of 10 people found the following review helpful. :D By C. Cuthbert

Another required book for college. What more to say than you like some books and you don't like other books...it's just the way it is.

9/11 Culture serves as a timely and accessible introduction to the complexities of American culture in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. Gives balanced examinations of a broad catalogue of artifacts from film, music, photography, literary fiction, and other popular arts Investigates the ways that 9/11 has exerted a shaping force on a wide range of practices, from the politics of femininity to the poetics of redemption Includes pedagogical material to assist understanding and

teaching, including film and discographies, and a useful teachers' preface