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Karal Ann Marling

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Karal Ann Marling : MERRY CHRISTMAS! before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised MERRY CHRISTMAS!:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A SCHOLARLY STUDY OF THE VISUAL AND MATERIAL CULTURE OF CHRISTMASBy Steven H ProppKaral Ann Marling is professor Art History at the University of Minnesota, and the author of books such as As Seen on TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s, Designing Disney's Theme Parks: The Architecture of Reassurance, George Washington Slept Here: Colonial Revivals and American Culture, 1876-1986, etc.She states in the Preface to this 2000 book, "This book about the visual and material culture of Christmas in America began at a pre-Christmas cut-and-color session with Stan, my hairdresser...

[about the year he saved his money and bought his mother a syrup pitcher that someone else gave to her first]... There has been no shortage of books on Christmas. Historians have been especially active... Admirable books, all of them... But somehow, these books have left out Stan and his mother, and the aspect of Christmas that I wanted to talk about... This book is about pictures and syrup pitchers and all the other things that make Christmas Christmas. It's about images and the feelings they arouse... And it's about grandmothers and mothers..." (Pg. vii-viii, xi) She suggests, "What [Charles] Dickens and [Washington] Irving share, however, is a sense that Christmas has an important historical dimension, whether it be national or personal and familial. The things that are done at Christmas... provide points of entry into a state of happiness and abundance, that transcends the present and stretches back endlessly into the past. Christmas is a special time, a suspension of the workaday order of things... Christmas is very old indeed." (Pg. 129) She notes that in the late 19th century, "splashy, once-a-year dinners were beginning to draw criticism. By laying too much stress on impulsive almsgiving and feeding the poor at Christmas, 'Dickens did more harm than anyone else,' the *Saturday Evening Post* decided. 'A great Christmas dinner, in the minds of many, cancels the charity obligations of the entire year.'" (Pg. 148) She observes that "It is fair to conclude that advertising codified the appearance of the modern American Santa Claus. Around 1900 a few street-corner Santas still wore the robes of the gaunt, European St. Nicholas, and a few Christmas cards... still showed a stern old fellow incapable of the requisite Yankee merriment." (Pg. 213) This is a fascinating, well-illustrated volume, that will be of great interest to all lovers of the Christmas holiday.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Equal parts nostalgia and scholarship, but entertaining from start to finish. By Odysseus I must admit to being rather shocked that two of this book's few reviews are so negative. I adored this book, and found something to savor on almost every page. This is one of those books to curl up with on a quiet evening during the holiday season, and to enjoy during those moments of perfect contentment. Marling's book devotes a chapter to the history of each of various Christmas traditions. For example, the first chapter covers the history of gift wrapping, including the wrapping paper and the bows. The second chapter covers the history of various Christmas decorations: toy villages, Christmas lights, and ornaments. A very fine chapter discusses the history of the Macy's window displays. Another details the evolution of advertising images of Santa Claus. And there are many more. What distinguishes Marling's writing is an undisguised affection for her subject. She is the furthest thing from a pedantic scholar; rather, she wants readers to know and to appreciate how Christmas was enjoyed by previous generations, and how our current traditions came to be. The commercialism of Christmas is often decried; but Marling appreciates the positive aspects of that commercialism. The inevitable truth is that many of the things that bring us joy at Christmastime -- shiny ornaments, enticing packages, department store Santas -- exist because someone is trying to make a buck. But if someone makes the world a happier, more festive place in that effort, isn't that something to be celebrated? The chapter on the Macy's window displays is a classic example; while Marling doesn't gloss over the commercial purpose of these displays, she also conveys the reality that both children and adults walking by found enchantment in them. Our current Christmas remains a blend of seasonal, religious, and commercial elements, and many of the commercial elements help to embed the holiday in the memories of both children and former children. The scent of a tree, the sight of a wreath, the feel of a package shaken curiously before the big day, all of these things have the power to make us children again. Marling gets this. In her postscript about the Christmas cookie tradition, she writes: "I cannot smell a lemon, or see a frosted and decorated cookie in a bakery window, without thinking of Christmas, and home, and the people that I love. . . . without being nine or ten again, in a warm kitchen on a snowy day, standing in a magical shower of powdered sugar that dances in the light." Just as Marling celebrates her own Christmas traditions, she studies and respects the traditions of others who have gone before all of us. In analyzing why this book received some negative reviews below, the only thing I can think of is that it may occupy a place that some readers find awkward: neither a heavy scholarly tome, nor a light fluffy nostalgic picture book. But it's better than either; Marling delves deeply into her subject, combining the lively writing style of a nostalgia book with the substantive content of a history book. It's a delightful combination, and I give it a strong five stars.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. It depends on what you are seeking. By Fahtimah If ever there was a book which treated Christmas as a dry, historical narrative, this is it. Very well written, with insights I had never considered, it is not going to make some people happy because it is so academic. The details and chronology throughout the history of Christmas were fascinating, although she cannot seem to help making personal commentaries. This was especially frequent in Chapter 7 where she lingered far too long with far too many commentaries on the "Black Christmas" experience. While I found the chapter thought provoking, I could have done without all the soap box. If you are truly interested in the history of various Christmas traditions and their evolution, this is the book for you - dry, but detailed. If you are more interested in beautiful pictures and fluff (I have MANY like that) you should probably pass.

It wouldn't be Christmas without the "things." How they came to mean so much, and to play such a prominent role in America's central holiday, is the tale told in this delightful and edifying book. In a style characteristically engaging and erudite, Karal Ann Marling, one of our most trenchant observers of American culture, describes the outsize spectacle that Christmas has become.

From Publishers Weekly Imaginatively researched and strewn with surprising details, this engaging cultural history traces the rise of the consumerism that has become as integral to the celebration of Christmas in the United States as tinsel is to tree trimming. In it, Marling (*As Seen on TV*) examines every ancillary form of buying, from Christmas gift wrap (which didn't exist before decorated boxes appeared in the late 1870s, followed by mass production of brightly printed paper sheets in the 1920s) to the commercialization of winter greenery in the home (which began in the late 19th century). With a keen eye for cultural diversity (her sections on the construction of African-American Christmas festivities and consumer habits are especially illuminating) and a ready sense of irony, she pierces the sentimental myths surrounding this cultural institution. Ranging from articles in the 19th century magazine *Godey's Ladies Book* to a statistical analysis of who buys Christmas wrap and a look at the impact of Bing Crosby's recording of "White Christmas" on holiday celebrations, her study, well timed for the coming holidays, will satisfy academic readers as well as general ones. (Dec. 25; on sale date Oct. 20) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. This book is a thoroughly engaging and eye-opening tale of how a religious celebration came to be secularized and, more important, nationalized in the United States. Discerning in her choice of examples, gymnastic in her leaps from subject to subject, Marling here demonstrates again her fine interdisciplinary skills. Moreover, she does so in a style mercifully free of cant and academic jargon. Marling has filled the Christmas stocking with a winning combination of detail and interpretation, and has made the season merrier for it. (Charles C. Eldredge, author of *Georgia O'Keeffe* and former director of the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution) Karal Ann Marling's books are growing into a formidable history of American everyday life and culture. In *Merry Christmas!* she delves into the history and social significance of Christmas trappings, such as Christmas decorations, Christmas dinner, Christmas presents, and Christmas trees, which most people take for granted, assuming, perhaps, that such apparently timeless things have 'no history.' Marling is at her best when discussing post-Second World War Christmas celebrations: the relatively recent contributions of 'Christmasy' things like Bing Crosby's 'White Christmas,' Elvis Presley's 'Blue Christmas,' and the ubiquitous Christmas TV specials, reminding us that Christmas is a living, evolving celebration, which did not stop with Charles Dickens' 'A Christmas Carol.' (Derham Groves, University of Melbourne, author of *Mail Art*) What makes this book valuable for historians, whether or not they have a special interest in Christmas, is that the analysis of Christmas is unfailingly put into the broad context of social mores that have defined American popular life, most notably the roles of women and children--topics either neglected in historical analysis or segregated from traditional history. Christmas is the biggest of American holidays; and, therefore, to understand its meaning is to understand significant aspects of America's character at home as well as in the marketplace. Marling's analysis of material things is particularly strong because it focuses so rigorously on connotation and significance, thus making the point that material culture is a reflection of prevailing political, social, and spiritual values. (Michael Stern, coauthor of *Roadfood*, *Goodfood* and *Elvis World*) Like an agreeably stuffed literary Christmas stocking, Marling's entertaining history of how Christmas became America's top holiday is generously filled with interesting facts, anecdotes, and period illustrations...Lively and informative...[Marling] describes how Santa became a national icon; the changing attitudes toward giving to the poor; the origin and growth of Christmas cards; and the impact of popular Christmas songs, movies, and television broadcasts...A special holiday treat to be savored while nibbling Christmas cookies and admiring the well-dressed tree. (Kirkus s) Imaginatively researched and strewn with surprising details, this engaging cultural history traces the rise of the consumerism that has become as integral to the celebration of Christmas in the United States as tinsel is to tree trimming...With a keen eye for cultural diversity...and a ready sense of irony, she pierces the sentimental myths surrounding this cultural institution. (Publishers Weekly 2000-10-23) Marling...[is] a keen-eyed critic of American popular culture...Merry Christmas is an inspired idea of the sort that academics seldom have: consider the obvious, because no one else has, and treat it with respect. Marling's chapter topics read like a classic 'What to Do for Christmas' list--the tree, Santa, wrapping paper, shopping, cards and gifts, cookies and decorations. She also throws in movies, music and advertising. Showing the zeal of an archaeologist, Marling has dug through magazines and newspapers, photograph files, shoeboxes full of old cards, records of department-store windows and parades, and every possible kind of ephemera. The result is a collection of unrecorded histories, the visual and material culture of the American Christmas holiday...Combining imagination with solid historical grounding, Marling's analysis is both erudite and delightful...For all her scholarship and research, Marling is still tuned directly into [our] primary needs to right the wrongs of Christmas Past. She understands our national effort to keep trying to get it right next time...Reading her intelligent and entertaining book just might be a way to get through that familiar mixture of joy and dread that hits...when the Santas and the holly berries first appear in our land. (Jeanine Basinger *New York Times Book* 2000-12-03) Marling sets out to define the ways in which we have turned to things to define Christmas. It is not, thank God, an anti-materialist rant...Marling's book is a celebration of plenty, which needn't mean self-satisfied or vulgar. She's an authentic American author--one who loves stuff and puts it lovingly in its place. (Charles Taylor *Newsday* 2000-12-17) Like a parent faced with a holiday toy in 100 pieces and a sheet of instructions in faulty English, Karal Ann Marling, in *Merry Christmas! Celebrating America's Greatest Holiday*, has deconstructed the holiday and reassembled it in interesting and unexpected ways...[It] is a book full of surprises...By cleverly taking apart and analyzing our modern holiday customs, Marling tells us a lot about who we are. (Jarrett Smith *Minneapolis*

Star Tribune 2000-12-17) This book may be the definitive study of secular Christmas traditions in the United States. Though she acknowledges the genuine glow of family and religion in Christian observances, Marling... makes it clear that her story centers on the materialism of Christmas. (Norman Anderson Christian Science Monitor 2000-12-21) Cultural historian Karal Ann Marling traces the history of our modern Christmas in the zestful, often endearingly gabby Merry Christmas! It is, like the holiday itself, a story of American families and business, stuffed like a red stocking with glittery details, vivid episodes, and eccentric side-trips. (Scott Alarik Boston Globe 2000-12-24) Marling deserves credit, and perhaps even a measure of gratitude, for bringing together in one book a vast amount of information about American Christmases past and how they evolved into Christmas as we know it today... Give Marling credit, too, for being unsentimental about the true nature of the American Christmas. By contrast with innumerable others who have complained, over the years, that a pure religious holiday has been 'corrupted' and 'commercialized' by the American marketplace... Marling notes at the outset that 'the American Christmas has always been more secular than sacred.' (Jonathan Yardley Washington Post Book World 2000-12-24) According to Karal Ann Marling, 'Christmas is the universal memory' for contemporary Americans (whether they're Christian or not), an event in which 'virtually everybody has played a part.' By telling the story of Americans' celebration of Christmas, she promises to uncover a surprisingly neglected piece of not only our national past, but our collective wishes and psyche... Marling has a keen eye for offbeat topics, arresting detail and original interpretation... Her goal is to unwrap the hidden meaning of quotidian, but telling, objects and practices to reveal the holiday's deeper significance. (Chris Rasmussen In These Times 2000-12-25) Could there be just a tiny clove of Grinchy garlic in our author's soul? Yes, as there is in yours and mine. Every virtue needs its vice, every Christmas its moody kitchen moments, embarrassment of riches, and stack of disingenuous greeting cards... While Marling is carefully unwrapping the facts of this 'more secular than sacred' holiday in America, she looks up to remind us that there is jaw-dropping delight to be plucked from the package. (Holly Finn Financial Times 2000-12-09) An unexpected trill of a book... Merry Christmas! Celebrating America's Greatest Holiday is jammed with fabulous facts about toy villages, holiday lights, wrapping papers, window whopping, gifts, stocking stuffers, cards and just about every other external something historically associated with Christmas. And maybe all that doesn't suggest a provocative, memorable narrative, but once one cracks Merry Christmas! open and starts to read, one discovers that Marling has turned the trappings of Christmas into a story all their own, shooting the whole thing through with such drama, sizzle and charm that it takes off like fable, like something her readers will find themselves inspired to repeat while stuffing stockings or stoking fires or settling down to Christmas turkeys... Marling's infectious enthusiasm for the stuff of Christmas helps to fill the many hollows of our shallow consumer culture--reasserts the beauty of boxes and trim, stuffing and stuffers, glitter and glass, and gives a lovely, historic glamour to it all. (Beth Kephart Baltimore Sun 2000-12-03) In nine chapters, Marling dissects the holiday, its history, meanings and practices ranging from wrapping paper to the rampant mythology of merrie olde Englyshe celebrations (Victorian, actually), window shopping, The Tree and the enduring allure of a 'White Christmas.' Her postscript is 'A Meditation on Christmas Cookies'... [Merry Christmas!] is lively reading and apt to chase the holiday blues. (Glenn Giffin Denver Post 2000-11-26) [Marling] is an extremely adept cultural critic who dives below the wrapping paper and blinking lights to examine America's central, overwhelming holiday... Viewing Christmas mainly through the media of mass culture, Marling examines engravings, news photos, fiction, and greeting cards and paints a compelling portrait of how Christmas has been presented and shared. She shows that although the holiday is often associated with material gain, often there's genuine goodwill, warmth, and familial tenderness behind the glitzy trappings... No Scrooge herself, the author is usually cheery and loving in her discussions, balancing articulation and intelligence with a wry, casual tone that would make her a wonderful head of the table at any Christmas dinner. (Elizabeth Millard ForeWord Magazine 2000-12-01) For those interested in the evolution of Christmas and its traditions over the past two centuries, Merry Christmas! by Karal Ann Marling is an absolute must. With excruciating attention to detail and impeccable research, this book covers a broad survey of what makes Christmas the 'universal memory.' Yet this is not some academic treatise. It is readable, engrossing and literate--high praise for any book... Marling thematically develops her subject and does it justice... Take a breather, absorb the extent of Marling's treatment and go bake some cookies. (Gerald Toner Louisville Courier-Journal 2000-12-17) Author Karal Ann Marling describes the provenance and significance of the decorated trees and holiday lights, the cards and gifts and wrapping papers, the toy villages and store displays and Macy's holiday parade, Bing Crosby and Santa Claus. Viewing Christmas through engravings and lithographs, magazine fiction, pictorial ads, news photos, cards and movies, Marling describes how the Christmas tree grew out of a much reprinted image of Queen Victoria and her family gathered around a decorated fir; how Santa Claus lost his provincial Dutch character and turned into the holly old soul we know; how Charles Dickens's A Christmas Carol borrowed from Washington Irving's imaginings of what Christmas must have been like in Merrie Olde England; and how the holiday, balancing between the private and public realms, conferred a central and defining role on women. (Earl W. Count Omaha World-Herald) This book is a thoroughly engaging and eye-opening tale of how a religious celebration came to be secularized and, more important, nationalized in the United States. Discerning in her choice of examples, gymnastic in her leaps from subject to subject, Marling here demonstrates again her fine interdisciplinary skills. Moreover, she does so in a style mercifully free of

cant and academic jargon. Marling has filled the Christmas stocking with a winning combination of detail and interpretation, and has made the season merrier for it. (Charles C. Eldredge, author of *Georgia O'Keeffe* and former director of the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution)