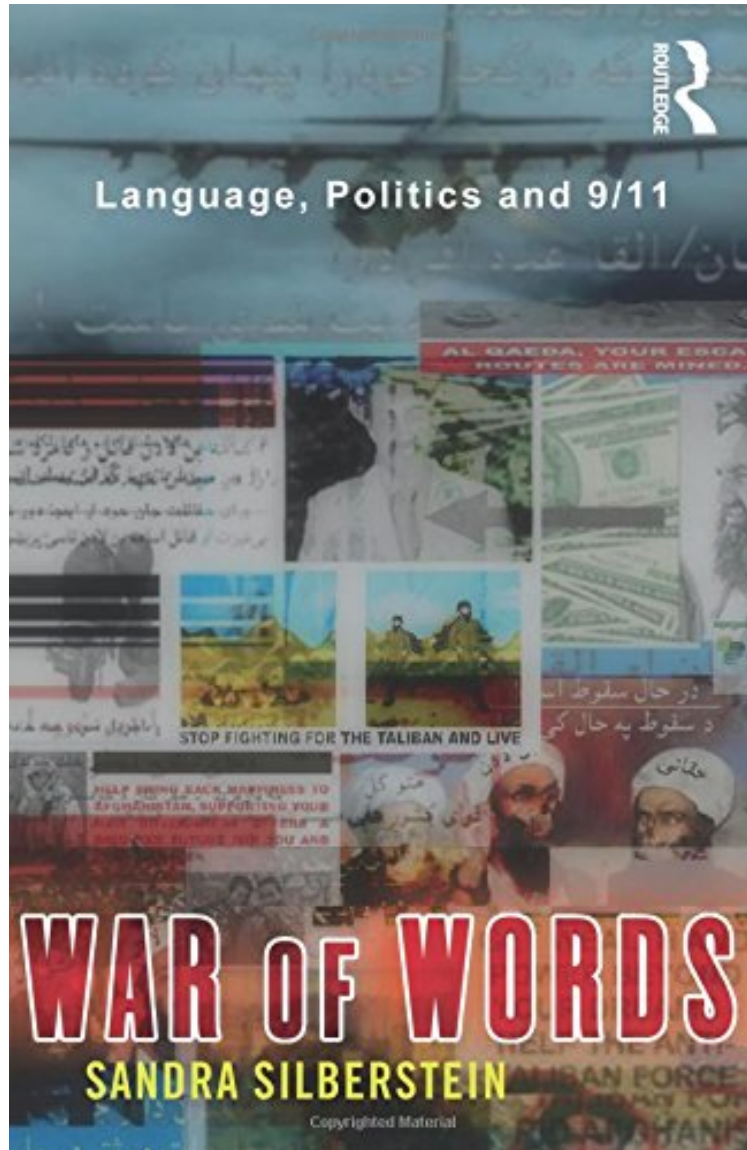


War of Words: Language, Politics and 9/11

Sandra Silberstein

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Sandra Silberstein : War of Words: Language, Politics and 9/11 before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised War of Words: Language, Politics and 9/11:

10 of 15 people found the following review helpful. Rushed and shallow By A. Liebling An applied linguist, Sandra Silberstein looks at how language helped transform America after the events of September 11. Specifically, she examines how Bush's speeches were designed to heal America and prepare it for war; how public service announcements promoted tolerance in an environment of revenge; on the approach the media took in educating the

public on Islam; and how "patriotic" rhetoric attempted to squash dissent. I had many problems with this book, both in execution and content. While the premise itself is promising, Silberstein rarely goes into detail regarding the field of linguistics, or how linguistics really applies to the many phrases she quotes. She shows examples of rhetoric encountered following 9/11, but doesn't tie it into the greater picture of linguistics, sociology and mass psychology. I was expecting a more academic work, but this book - only 140 pages after appendices and notes - seems rushed and shallow. I felt the content was lacking as well as the execution. Given the brevity, she chose only a handful of examples for each of her chapters. It felt as if she were assigning all of the changes in the national identity to one speech, one interview, one advertisement, and one documentary. An in-depth analysis of one CNN man-on-the-street interview is especially excruciating in its pointlessness. After all, who remembers that one exchange, and how much could it have affected America? Or perhaps Silberstein doesn't mean to say that her examples were the prime movers for changes, but just reflections of them. It's very unclear. To Silberstein's credit, it's difficult to pinpoint her political slant, if she has one. Early in the book, she praises Bush for his skill at using correct language to comfort America, but later on she chides the ACTA (Lynn Cheney and Joe Lieberman's McCarthy-esque organization) for their attack on free speech in higher education. But as a linguist, it's strange that she praises Bush's speech, but forgets about his nonverbal language. There were many Americans who were not comforted by his big-eyed, deer-caught-in-headlights look on his face; his slow and stiff demeanor; the delay in addressing the public while being shuttled around to secure locations; and his shaky misnomers (sorry but "We're gonna get these folks" wasn't charmingly folksy, nor did it instill much confidence in his leadership). Many of the chapters could have been expounded upon. "Selling America" had precious little on how the corporate sector used patriotism as a selling point. "From News to Entertainment" lacked just that: how news media fashioned the events of 9/11 into a constant deluge of disturbing images, human interest stories, and editorializing more to keep viewers tuned in and zombified than to convey actual news or offer perspective. And her examples seem to be from a scant number of CNN segments; there is very little about newspaper coverage, the Internet, and the differences in tone and language across media outlets. The most interesting chapter, "The New McCarthyism", is also too narrow on one example (the ACTA). The pigeonholing of liberals and critics of Bush's foreign and domestic policy as traitors and unpatriotic wasn't just found in a report by the ACTA; obviously, a war of words had its battlegrounds in many areas: tv news, Internet, editorials, etc. A book on the "war of words" should have focused mainly on this piece, as it is where the nation's identity had transformed under such strong rhetoric, which in many ways didn't unite the nation, but divided it further. Published in September 2002, probably to coincide with the one-year anniversary of the attacks, War of Words fails to illuminate socio-political changes through linguistics. As well as lacking much insightful analysis, it suffers from fallacy of exclusion, to misuse a linguistics term. More in-depth commentary, more background information on linguistics (and how the field applies to the book), and a broader pool of references to pull examples would have made this a much meatier book. 0 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By Sandy Joslyn Great Shipment and Great Product!!

In a media age, wars are waged not only with bombs and planes but also with video and sound bites. War of Words is an incisive report from the linguistic battlefields, probing the tales told about September 11th to show how Americans created consensus in the face of terror. Capturing the campaigns for America's hearts, minds, wallets and votes, Silberstein traces the key cultural conflicts that surfaced after the attacks and beyond: the attacks on critical intellectuals for their perceived 'blame America first' attitude the symbiotic relationship between terrorists and the media (mis)representations of Al Qaeda and the Taliban used to justify military action the commercialisation of September 11th news as 'entertainment' when covering tragic events. Now featuring a new chapter on the Second Anniversary and Beyond, including: the war in Iraq, the backlash against former 'heroes' and accusations of presidential mendacity. A perceptive and disturbing account, War of Words reveals the role of the media in manufacturing events and illuminates the shifting sands of American collective identity in the post September 11th world.

From Booklist Linguist Silberstein argues persuasively that 9/11 was not just about events but also about the words that shaped our understanding of and response to them. She carefully dissects America's renderings of the terrorist attacks in presidential speeches, media texts, and eyewitness accounts. Before a single bomb was dropped on Afghanistan, words had made an "act of terror" a "war" (this generation's "Pearl Harbor"), turned New York into "America," and rendered dissent "un-American." President Bush, speaking of a nation "under God" pitted against "evildoers," rose to the position of national pastor. Publicity campaigns, Silberstein shows, rhetorically re-created national identity ("I am an American") while conflating "patriotism and consumerism in a dance of political/economic codependence." Silberstein finds altruistic strains in America's post-9/11 discourse, but her study also suggests how times of national crisis make us vulnerable to verbal posturings--our killing is "collateral damage," theirs "mass murder"--and how we suffer a loss of liberties in the name of "fighting for democracy." Philip Herbst Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved "...a compelling analysis of the way language was used in the political construction of the horrifying historical events of September 11th. Silberstein's analysis gives us a fresh look at the juggernaut of

world politics as it is constructed in the linguistic actions of the media, of world leaders, and of the ordinary people who experience world events." - Ron Scollon, Georgetown University "The brief study, *War of Words*, by Sandra Silberstein, an 'applied linguist,' offers shrewd analysis of the language used after September 11. She shrewdly analyzes how the comments by Peter Jennings while broadcasting the service on September 14 at the National Cathedral helped define the event as one of the 'great national occasions.'" - Columbia Journalism "This isn't exactly foreign policy, but close enough. Sandra Silberstein...examines how language has been torqued since the terrorist attacks. The president, formerly the butt of jokes, becomes the commander-in-chief, to give just one example. She concludes that the national tragedy has been manipulated into a consumer opportunity--a charge from which the proliferation of 9/11 books is not exempt." - Vancouver Sun About the Author Sandra Silberstein is a leading name in applied linguistics, and Professor of English at the University of Washington, Seattle. She is widely published, and has written articles on a number of politically sensitive topics, including the OJ Simpson trial, the Gulf War, AIDS and the Inauguration of George Bush.