



The Politics of Consolation: Memory and the Meaning of September 11

Christina Simko

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What meaning can be found in calamity and suffering? This question is in some sense perennial, reverberating through the canons of theology, philosophy, and literature. Today, *The Politics of Consolation* reveals, it is also a significant part of American political leadership. Faced with uncertainty, shock, or despair, Americans frequently look to political leaders for symbolic and existential guidance, for narratives that bring meaning to the confrontation with suffering, loss, and finitude. Politicians, in turn, increasingly recognize consolation as a cultural expectation, and they often work hard to fulfill it.

The events of September 11, 2001 raised these questions of meaning powerfully. How were Americans to make sense of the violence that unfolded on that sunny Tuesday morning? This book examines how political leaders drew upon a long tradition of consolation discourse in their effort to interpret September 11, arguing that the day's events were mediated through memories of past suffering in decisive ways. It then traces how the struggle to define the meaning of September 11 has continued in foreign policy discourse, commemorative ceremonies, and the contentious redevelopment of the World Trade Center site in lower Manhattan.

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