



## **The Terror Dream: Fear and Fantasy in Post-9/11 America**

*Susan Faludi*

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**The Terror Dream: Fear and Fantasy in Post-9/11 America Susan Faludi**  
**From the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and bestselling author of *Backlash*--an unflinching dissection of the mind of America after 9/11**

In this most original examination of America's post-9/11 culture, Susan Faludi shines a light on the country's psychological response to the attacks on that terrible day. Turning her acute observational powers on the media, popular culture, and political life, Faludi unearths a barely acknowledged but bedrock societal drama shot through with baffling contradictions. Why, she asks, did our culture respond to an assault against American global dominance with a frenzied summons to restore "traditional" manhood, marriage, and maternity? Why did we react as if the hijackers had targeted not a commercial and military edifice but the family home and nursery? Why did an attack fueled by hatred of Western emancipation lead us to a regressive fixation on Doris Day womanhood and John Wayne masculinity, with trembling "security moms," swaggering presidential gunslingers, and the "rescue" of a female soldier cast as a "helpless little girl"?

The answer, Faludi finds, lies in a historical anomaly unique to the American experience: the nation that in recent memory has been least vulnerable to domestic attack was forged in traumatizing assaults by nonwhite "barbarians" on town and village. That humiliation lies concealed under a myth of cowboy bluster and feminine frailty, which is reanimated whenever threat and shame looms.

Brilliant and important, *The Terror Dream* shows what 9/11 revealed about us--and offers the opportunity to look at ourselves anew.

## **The Terror Dream: Fear and Fantasy in Post-9/11 America Details**

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## From Reader Review The Terror Dream: Fear and Fantasy in Post-9/11 America for online ebook

### Tulara says

Still reading

I wondered why I felt so out-of-time-and-place after 9/11 - it just wasn't the planes ramming into the buildings or the past catching up with us - it's the absence of women in the reporting aspect. Media and politicians turned the tragedy as being given the divine right to push us all back to when men-were-manly defending their poor defenseless women who stayed at home with the kidlets. Contrived to push back the idea that actual real women walked out of the buildings on their own and several women rescue workers died in the attempt to pull people to safety - we were assaulted with visions of men being heroes (when no one really knew what happened on the plane that went down in Pa). I learned that female attendants were boiling water to throw at the hijackers - never heard that mentioned before. Heroes were concocted and kept alive throughout the year that followed - media sought out and filmed widows who delivered babies after 9/11 - we didn't hear about any widowers - we didn't get to really know the columnists and women's groups who were crucified for bringing up the holes in the theories of why this all happened. Susan Faludi researched and documents what I've suspected all along - Why did this tragedy provide a hysterical move to restructure society into the "traditional" manhood, marriage and maternity template? (paraphrased from her words) If this description of Bush being "supermanned" doesn't get your blood boiling, I don't know what would: "Newsweek said, pointing, for lack of better evidence, to the president's exercise regimen. Bush was "in the best shape of his life, Howard Fineman wrote, "a fighting machine who has dropped 15 pounds and cut his time in the mile to seven minutes...Drumming a pen on the conference table, he hummed with focused energy. There's a term for it in horse racing. When a thoroughbred is at peak condition and twitching with excitement to run, he is 'on the muscle.' This was Bush last week."

Of course this is the same guy who when learning that the planes went into the buildings, continued reading to a group of school kids - he did nothing, but get on a plane and fly away - and stayed away for quite awhile. More later.

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### Krysten says

True to form, I could not finish this book. I got really close. But. I just can't finish nonfiction books, no matter how interested I am in the subject matter. It's as embarrassing as it is chronic.

I liked and agreed with Faludi's book in spirit, though I did disagree with a few of its pieces of evidence. My pickiness notwithstanding, this is a thoroughly researched, chillingly believable, and prescient book. I implore other feminists, or those "I'm not a feminist but..." types to read it. Post-9/11 media representations of women have ranged from "hooray feminism is dead y'all" to "get back to the kitchen" to "...women? what are those?" and you might think, oh but that's just the media, and that's just how it's always been, but Faludi deconstructs this phenomenon in such a way that you see that yes, America's big terrorist attack was seen as a "feminizing" moment, that "she/America" needed protection - by men. And from men. And now we celebrate men. This book was written in 2007 and predicted the current return to "traditional" gender roles - we celebrate mustaches and beards by having contests and Movember (women are allowed to participate with fake facial hair), men drink microbrews and eat lots and lots of bacon - tv characters like Ron Swanson are a throwback to an earlier era, no? I never thought that the current interest in homemade food, nesting, Pinterest-type homemaking blogs and the like, might have come about partly as a result of 9/11, but Faludi

even five years ago presented a strong case for it.

Anyway, I liked this book, and it bothered me enough that I decided not to finish it. Sometimes I just don't want to think about these things. It's gross, I know. Maybe one of my super smart friends should read it and tell me more about it. And DO something about it. Thank you and goodnight.

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### **Jan says**

Susan Faludi's meticulous documentation of the post 9/11 mythos and its impact upon the roles of women and feminism. Fascinating stuff, especially the early American captivity narratives that chronicle how women captured by Indians usually survived and often fought back or negotiated their way out of captivity. Those narratives were later changed by men to re-cast women as helpless virginal victims of the dark Native American villains. Jump forward in time to Jessica Lynch and the media fable that surrounded her capture and rescue. Sound familiar?

Faludi is a great writer and has a keen eye for that sort of media bullshit. Her main premise in this book is that the prevailing American primal myth of the strong male protecting the helpless female--as exemplified in the film *The Searcher*--has become such a part of our culture that it influences our response to terrorist attacks. When Bin Laden attacked this country, America's instinctive cultural response was to rally around those we perceived to be strong male leaders/cowboys (Bush and his minions) and circle the wagons. Part of the fall-out from that circling of the wagons was a drive to return to what we thought were traditional (read "safe") conservative values. Guess I don't have to spell out what that meant for women, do I? Back to hearth and home, ladies! And have some babies while you're at it. Soccer moms, unite.

This instinctive cultural response may just get Rudy Giuliani elected next year. God help us.

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### **Sara says**

En mycket intressant beskrivning av hur konservativa krafter drog nytta av den rädsla och osäkerhet som uppstod hos det amerikanska folket efter 9/11. Attentatet framställdes i media som ett angrepp mot familjen. Kvinnorna målades ut som hjälplösa offer och männen tilldelades hjälterollen. Detta trots att majoriteten av de som dog faktiskt var män. Media hyllade hemmafrun och de kvinnor som insett att de hjälpte landet bäst genom att lämna arbetsplatserna åt männen.

Faludi kopplar den snedvridna analysen av 9/11 som ett resultat av "feminiserade män" till den skam som män upplevde när indianer tillfångatog deras fruar och döttrar. Den största skammen var att inte kunna försvara sin familj och därmed sitt eget herravälde, denna arvsskam spökade fortfarande efter 9/11 och den naturliga reaktionen på hotet blev därmed att bygga upp bilden av den okrossbara manliga hjälten och den undergivna kvinnan som troget står vid hans sida.

Faludi ger åtskilliga exempel på hur personers handlingar framställts på vitt skilda sätt beroende på vilket kön de tillhör. Kvinnan som räddat sig själv framställs som ett offer(hon blev förmodligen våldtagen - den värsta tänkbara kränkningen), mannen som just inte gjort någonting alls framställs som hjälten som räddat den svaga kvinnan. Och jag blir tokig av att läsa om det, men det är fascinerande hur ett händelseförlopp kan förvrängas till oigenkännlighet för att passa in i en viss världsbild.

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## Greg Brown says

An astonishingly informative and intelligent and relentless book, albeit one that really changes gears about two-thirds through. The book starts by dissecting the shift in post-9/11 discourse as the media—unable to track down Bin Laden, explain how or why it happened, or find any emotional closure—reverted back to a traditional narrative of women being in danger and men charging in to save them and sacrifice themselves. This doesn't *sound* all that dangerous, until Faludi goes into incredible and horrific detail about the ways media narratives shifted and bowdlerized themselves to fit this narrative and exalt older ideas of masculinity while reducing females.

We'd expect this kind of behavior from some of the media figures like Mark Steyn and *The New York Post*. And others, like Christopher Hitchens (and, unmentioned in the book, Orson Scott Card and Dan Simmons), were sort of pushed over the edge into a neoconservative lunacy by having to mentally grapple with the attack. But you wouldn't expect this kind of talk from *Newsweek* editor Jonathan Alter, in charge of a magazine whose purpose is largely to be as boring as possible. Yet he did go there, and quite a few other mainstream commentators did too.

This trend didn't just end with the invasion of Afghanistan and other cathartic measures, continuing up to and through the 2004 presidential election. Faludi even devotes a whole chapter to the story of Jessica Lynch, a damsel-in-distress myth largely concocted up by this asshole but eagerly lapped up and perpetuated by a compliant media. As someone who was 15 when the September 11th attacks happened, this first section of the book was frustrating beyond belief as I confronted my own inability—albeit in high school—to see through these narratives as they were built. And it drives me crazy that they continue to this day (listening to this audio).

The last third of the book almost feels bolted on at first: a historical accounting of how the damsel-in-distress myth became entangled with American identity during the wars with Native Americans. Some of the earliest American works of literature were captivity narratives, the stories of people captured by Native Americans who eventually—through escape, ransom, or armed attack—were able to rejoin their original societies. But while the earliest featured earnest accounts of female ingenuity, they gradually turned into virginal women unable to cope with their vicious captors, only able to hold on long enough for their heroic men to ride in and rescue them. Even real-life captivity narratives that didn't fit this trend were often fictionalized a few years later with few changes outside of diminishing the role of women and changing the names around slightly. Faludi also traces how this narrative slowly metastasized throughout larger and larger circles of American culture, first in the Salem Witch Trials—which she convincingly recasts as a means to terrify independent women—and later in the postbellum south's captivity stories that substituted black men for the original's indian savages.

This last section is different in both sweep and method from the first two-thirds, and doesn't have the sense of urgency and necessity as a critique of our own times. It leads me to believe that this book was originally written differently, with the historical stuff preceding the media criticism. I imagine Faludi (or her editor) rearranged the book to grip the reader faster—or emphasize the present-day narrative to sell more copies. Either way, I think this book would be much more effective reading the last third before everything else, as it seems to lead up to and contextualize Faludi's far more devastating fact-gathering on the present day. My fiancee is even about to read through the book for the first time in that fashion, and will report back whether it really seems to cohere in that sense.

Either way, this is a fantastic book that deserves to be read by everyone, whether you're truly interested in the sociological and historical aspects of this narrative or simply interested in being a good person who is thoughtful about what you say..

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### **Terry says**

WOW. This book was AMAZING. I'm SO glad I read it. The first part of the book is terrific. The second part of the book took a while to get going, but once it did---whoo. What a ride. This book just made me happy to be alive, because it made me THINK. I haven't read a book in a long time that made me nod and make comments out loud or make me say "Huh!" in a surprised tone. The leaps and connections she makes are challenging and...I can't say enough good things about this book. As I said, it's like having a conversation with a really smart friend.

I would have given this book five stars, but I do have one minor quibble. The first half of the book runs almost 200 pages, and is mainly about September 11th and the immediate aftermath. The second half of the book runs just about 90 pages, but covers over three hundred years. Once she gets going, she rushes over the history so quickly I really wish this section of the book was its own separate, fully realized book. Unfortunately, the first thirty pages of the second half are, erm...I don't want to say tedious, but, I couldn't see where she was going. I couldn't quite see the connection between 9/11 and King Phillip's War (I know-what?). Then she links the "captivity narratives" of women kidnapped by Native Americans to the persecution of women/witches in Salem and then she takes on the myth of Daniel Boone and suddenly it's the 1950s. All of this history is wrapped up, or tied to, men's fear of appearing helpless and their desire to rewrite history so that women are frail and pure and men are, uh, manly. I'm not doing it justice. Just read it.

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### **Jessica says**

I could go on for days about this book! Once again, Faludi has meticulously researched a subject and given a million and one reasons for her conclusions. A reader may or may not agree with her point of view, but no one can ever accuse her of not being able to back-up her argument!

The first part of the book focused on 9/11 and how the media immediately went into overdrive to cast women - in general and specific to the attack - as victims (even though the actual victims of the attack were male by a 3 to 1 margin). We as a society are completely unaware of how things are "spun" for us by the media - to the point that female journalists weren't "allowed" to report on 9/11, and women's op-ed pieces weren't published to nearly the degree that men's were. And it goes on and on - every other page I found myself saying "wow."

The second half of the book was "slower," but of great interest to me because it focused on the historical "terrorism" of/by Native Americans - especially in New England (and Mass and RI specifically, which is where I am from and currently live).

Faludi tells of Colonial women kidnapped by Native Americans - often because the men couldn't prevent it - and how they sometimes saved themselves. But their stories were "edited" to make the women helpless victims eventually "saved" by men - a story told and retold throughout history - and resurrected after 9/11.

The book is a fascinating look at how we haven't moved beyond our woman-as-victim mentality, and how it has kept us from responding to the 9/11 tragedy in a truly meaningful way.

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## **Elevate Difference says**

Many people are rightfully weary of discussing and analyzing 9/11. While it could be labeled insensitivity, it more likely has to do with a stifled national discourse, repugnant media spin, and a lack of in-depth processing. For the past several years, we've all been hibernating, trying to escape the aftermath of the terrorist attacks rather than actively deconstruct their meaning. The myth of American national security was shattered in 2001, and our belief that we—both as a nation and as individuals—could protect ourselves has evaporated.

Instead of productively handling this mass psychosis or treating the 9/11 terror attacks like another criminal act, its meaning has been buried under patriotic language, hyper-masculine war costumes, and false reports of our collective return to domesticity. In the face of our personal terrors, the media created a different account of our collective experience, marked by disturbing gender binaries and renewed focus on dismantling feminist achievement. Rather than following what should have been a thorough plan to prosecute the terrorists responsible, the news media pounced on feminism, blaming radical women for the attacks as supposed champions of the “soft” values that made the U.S. a vulnerable target.

The collective inability to make meaning of 9/11, to give the story a voice, is what Susan Faludi attempts to name in *The Terror Dream*. Mainstream media interpretations—from films like *United 93* and Oliver Stone’s *World Trade Center* to television shows like *Rescue Me* and the off-Broadway play *The Guys*—have only served to regurgitate the timeline, replay the events of that day, celebrate the men—and only the men—who served their city and country. No major productions have attempted to dig deeper into what it has meant for American diplomacy, hero myths, or gender.

While the U.S. government temporarily showed an interest in “freeing” the veiled women in the Middle East, American women—specifically female fire fighters and policewomen—might as well have been wearing veils for all the attention they were given in the media. Female writers who called for a collective healing, for deconstruction, for a larger discussion about religion, terror, and diplomacy were silenced. Ignored or publicly belittled before being deemed irrelevant, some of the greatest women in modern journalism, social justice, and literature were thrown under the bus. Katha Pollit, Susan Sontag, Barbara Kingsolver, and Arundhati Roy were among the many once-prominent female commentators that quickly became the media’s proverbial whipping boys. Of course if they had been boys, they would have likely been handed a comic book, asked to show up on Fox News as a talking head, and told to fight like a man. Faludi devotes an entire chapter of *The Terror Dream* to the story of Jessica Lynch, a U.S. soldier in Iraq who made headlines when the story of her “rescue” was spun into yet another tale of the brave men saving a defenseless women (nevermind the implicit racism that the white soldiers saved Lynch from the Arab savages).

Explaining 9/11 to ourselves is perhaps even trickier when the Bush administration couldn’t explain it either. Faludi points out that President Bush’s reaction that the attacks were “unimaginable” could explain his painful blundering and his inability to act with dignified transparency and reasoned authority. Trauma can cause extreme reactions, and many went into hiding, waiting for the nightmare to end. No one was able to rouse us to collectively meet our horror head on, to question what it meant so that we could move forward, because we had a president more focused on cowboy-themed catchphrases than leadership.

Faludi is perhaps the only person who could have written this book. Her thorough understanding of the way in which American culture, gender relations, and politics fuse together makes her one of the greatest living feminist journalists. She is able to tease out truths where the rest of us are still left scratching our heads. While other brilliant female journalists, like Naomi Klein, have dismantled terrorism myths to point to a hidden agenda—in Klein's case, a disaster capitalist dismantling and rebirth of Iraq and Afghanistan, coupled with U.S. profits from the reconstruction plans—it has been difficult to name what has happened to the American psyche and specific gender ideals and relations. Deconstructing comic-book style firefighter hero myths, the return of the cowboy narrative, the Bush administration's brief flirtation with Muslim women's rights, and the almost complete vanishing of female voices of dissent (and reason) in the media in the aftermath of 9/11, Faludi explains the global inability to make sense of the media's response to the trade center attacks, as well as our own inability to understand our personal reactions.

Review by Brittany Shoot

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### **Matthew says**

I'm only a few chapters in, but once again I'm awed by the perceptive and analytical focus that Faludi shines on her topics. If you haven't read *Stiffed* or *Backlash*, shame on you! If you have, you'll appreciate and love this book. A tough read that involves finally truly looking at what the aftermath of 9/11 really has been.

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### **Karen says**

As always, I really enjoy reading a Susan Faludi book. It's a marvel to behold the breadth and diversity of sources that she finds to support her assertions. It's always a scholarly rather than an outraged approach to the topic at hand (although still biased—but I can handle biased), and however relentlessly the author pushes examples into your face she never tells you what to think about the situation. You come to your own conclusions. Such a relief after reading that Maureen Dowd book, which was twittery and disorganized and limited in scope—even if her conclusion might have been exactly the same (which I don't know, because I didn't finish).

There are three things I basically want to say about this book:

1. I thought the first half was excellent, from the representations of male and female roles in the popular and serious press, immediately after the attacks on the World Trade Center in NYC. I thought the bit about the female firefighters was TEH BEST EVR until I read the chapter on Jessica Lynch, a female soldier who had been injured and then brought to an Iraqi hospital, and then taken out of it in an organized rescue event. If what Jessica Lynch as reported by Susan Faludi is saying is true, then I can't even imagine how the spin and lies got as far as they did. If you read only one chapter from the book, read that one. It's even better than the one that discusses the hunter and mountain man imagery that shrouded the presidential race of 2004.
2. I thought the second part of the book was even more interesting, although I am still not convinced that it exactly fits. It tackled the subject of the captivity narrative, a literary genre that originated in the United States way back when, starting with tales from women who had been abducted by native Americans and returned to tell the tale (or, in many cases, had to be dragged back kicking and screaming). Faludi presents this tradition as the foundation for the current portrayals of women needing rescuing and men being judged

on their failure to and success for protecting and saving them. It really is interesting to see how culture affects politics, even across the course of centuries. Or how politics struggle to find legitimacy in cultural representations, even if reality does not reflect the stories a nation tells about its people.

(This is an aside, but the Salem Witch Trials were also presented against the background of the captivity narrative. The author refers to a book (?) by Carol Karlsen called "The Devil in the Shape of a Woman," which examines the role gender played. Perhaps obvious now [20 years after Karlsen wrote] is that the bulk of the accused and the executed were successful, important, or independent women who lived outside strict social control. What I didn't realize was that the bulk of the accusers were young girls who had been orphaned and traumatized during Indian raids, forced to witness dreadful things perpetrated against people they knew and loved.)

3. I'm not sure how the two parts hold together, at least not beneath the title "The Terror Dream." The title comes from the 18th and 19th century examples of capture and rescue, specifically of a male from a novel--The Searcher? I can't remember--waking up from the terror dream that has numbed him throughout his life so that he can act to save a girl. You can see how Faludi tried to insert this phrase into other parts of the books, but it is awkward at the beginning and only really makes sense when you see it in context almost at the end. I don't disagree that the events following 9/11 are absolutely pertinent to the captivity/rescue tradition established in the second part of the book, but they don't connect well as presented. I have a feeling she set out to write a book about Post-9/11 America (note the subtitle) and it morphed, but after her proposal had been accepted by the publisher and she had cashed the advance check. I discovered quite by accident that the paperback release of this book in September will have a different subtitle: Misogyny and Myth in an Insecure America. That won't really fit the book either (although "myth" is better than "fantasy") but it at least draws attention away from the World Trade Center (although the cover art will include it) and maybe will make the book seem more cohesive. Maybe there have been major rewrites, too, but I couldn't judge that from the cover.

So the two parts of the book are individually cohesive and very interesting, and they do relate significantly to each other, but my complaint is that they seem like they were forced to fit a title. That is my complaint about the book.

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### **peaseblossom says**

This is a really difficult book to read: not dense, but a bit traumatic. The first half of the book is chock full of 9-11 memorabilia, most of which you might rather forget. The second half is less car-crash mesmerizing, and a bit random, but her main argument, that we should have spent our post 9-11 time discussing reality instead of rehashing mythology, is solid.

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### **Meg says**

I'm not even halfway through and I'm already sick from it. Faludi doesn't need to do much convincing, all she's doing is presenting the evidence from media sources and her thesis falls into place. I'm either literally burning with rage--I'm serious, my cheeks turn red and my heart starts pounding--or I'm close to tears at how widespread criticism of and viciousness against outspoken (or not) females and feminists was following 9/11. I have a lot further to go in this book, and I'm going to force myself to finish it even if it gives me a

heart attack. Which it might.

I just finished this--it took me a while once I finished the first section. The second section was interesting, especially the few pages about 17th C witch-hunting, but slow-going. Great book--scary book. The only problem I had with it was her unnecessary bash of Nicholas Kristof of the New York Times. She equated his reports about sex-slave trafficking with the nation's post-9/11 need to save and protect its little ladies. I read this guy's editorials and I'd have to disagree. Kristof has brought a lot of needed attention to sex-slave trafficking, yes, but also a slew of other problems in Asia, Africa, and all over the world, problems that affect women, men, and children, primarily related to reproductive issues. When he tried to save two young Cambodian prostitutes, I really doubt he was trying to be their manly savior in response to 9/11. Probably he was just trying to save two child prostitutes. I don't know why Faludi threw him in there; it was a real stretch. There were a few other instances in the book when she'd cite a media example that I wasn't familiar with and it seemed like a stretch to me, but I wasn't willing to look into it any further and just assumed it was a throw-away example.

But there were an awful lot more examples that were completely valid, that either I was familiar with or that I looked into more, and these were not stretches at all. Scary stuff! Some of the most involved reading I've had in a few months.

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### **Victoria says**

I am in the middle of this book. I am reminded of the pernicious many headed hydra of misogyny and how it is inextricable with war. I am also reminded of how much Susan Faludi rocks, and how I wish she would bring more than just her clear and analytic style to the page, but wish more for her to bring her seeking and resistant voice to the page as well, to offer alternatives that feel more grounded.

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### **Matt says**

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, were a direct physical threat to thousands of American citizens. For the couple hundred million other people not directly involved, it was a supremely resonant emotional event. It meant skipping work or school to spend hours in front of a television. It meant a crash course in Islam and Israel and al-Qaeda. It meant, if you were of a certain age, experiencing the first national ass-kicking in your life. (Having been born after Vietnam, I had lived in an America that knew only victory: the Cold War, the Gulf War, the Dream Team, etc.)

A nation is a collection of people, and all those people have emotions. Taken collectively, those emotions create a national mood, expressed by its citizens (with an advantage given to those citizens who express themselves loudly and often).

Susan Faludi's *The Terror Dream* is about America's emotional response to September 11th. A Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, Faludi is best known for feminist works such as *Backlash*. Here, she uses that feminist perspective to survey and critique the cultural responses to 9/11. Her conclusions are...well, they certainly get your attention. Whether you believe them or not is an entirely different matter.

*The Terror Dream* takes its title from a passage in Alan Le May's 1954 novel, *The Searchers* (which was

later made into the justly famous film of the same name, directed by John Ford and starring John Wayne). The novel (and the film) focus on one man's search for a niece kidnapped by Comanche Indians. Set against the backdrop of racial and sexual defilement, the driving mystery of *The Searchers* is not whether the man (named Amos in the book, and Ethan in the movie) will find his niece; rather, it is what he will do once he finds her. Will he take her back to civilization? Or will he put a merciful bullet through her head?

There are a lot of themes swirling around *The Searchers*, chief among them the notion of "civilization," which is embodied – with some irony – in a man willing to blow the head off his beloved niece. Faludi, however, chooses to focus on a perceived undercurrent stemming from the act of kidnapping itself. In her telling, the kidnapped girl, Debbie, stands for a certain view of American womanhood calling out for protection. Meanwhile, Amos/Ethan, seemingly conceived as an avatar of civilization on the wild frontier, becomes the emasculated American male, losing his manhood by dint of the fact he can't care for his womenfolk.

Faludi's conceptualization of *The Searchers* is important, because the woman-victim and the emasculated-male are at the heart of *The Terror Dream* and its provocative, ultimately unproven assertion that the cultural and political backlash following 9/11 dealt a staggering blow to feminism.

The first half of Faludi's book is squarely focused on the responses to 9/11 by politicians and the media. I found a lot to fault with this book (exaggerations; cherry-picking; blatantly ignoring contradictory evidence), but I loved this section. Maybe it doesn't prove a damn thing, but it certainly opens a time capsule on a period of time that is quickly receding into a hazy bad dream.

I was thousands of miles away from New York City and Washington when they were attacked, but even though the immediate worlds around me had not changed, the very air seemed different. The impossible had happened (both buildings? Both!?), so anything seemed possible. When journalists and pundits said that everything was going to change, you tended to believe them. You heard people saying that irony was dead. You heard people saying that big, violent action movies were dead. You heard people saying that the era of partisan politics was over.

All these assertions were panic-driven, shortsighted, and desperately wrong, yet in the months and years following 9/11, certain manifestations did crop up, and Faludi dutifully highlights them. Her conclusion is that America's post-9/11 culture issued a summons for traditional gender roles: manly men and motherly women. Instead of lionizing white collar metrosexuals, we turned our adoring gaze on blue collar workingmen, those firefighters and construction workers who wore flannel shirts on their days off, and grew beards so thick that birds nested within them. (I particularly remember this trend, because I had just started dabbling as a hipster. I was troubled to learn that the hipsters day had already passed).

Faludi draws from all over the place to prove up this point. Some of this is quite funny. For instance, she reminds us of a *New York Times* report of a surge of heretofore career-driven women dropping their high-paying law jobs to marry and procreate. (Faludi forgets that the *New York Times* Style section has always been, and will always be, wrong). This story was just one of many reporting a false trend towards nesting, with the women leaving the workforce to have kids, while their husbands ventured into the wilds to hunt boar or something.

Faludi also discusses the glorification of firemen and military heroes at the expense of "soft males." Again, some of this is funny, especially in hindsight. For instance, you have Camille Paglia simpering about the "dreamily masculine faces of the firefighters" and stating how glad she was that they were "not on Prozac or questioning their gender."

Some of this glorification, however, wasn't so funny. Rather, it was insidious and insulting and historically inaccurate.

The best example of this is how the media created a hierarchy of the dead at Ground Zero in New York. The firefighters and cops were the heroes who rushed in to save people. Everyone else was a victim. No one will ever question the guts of the firemen and police officers on 9/11. However, it is just as clear that the people who escaped the Twin Towers were not saved by the firefighters or the police or the Port Authority. They saved themselves. These white collar bankers and investment managers, these "soft males" (the casualties were mostly male, by a 3:1 margin), walked themselves down dozens of flights of stairs, helping fellow coworkers as they went. These survivors were a lot of things, but they don't deserve to be caricatured as helpless victims who needed a macho fireman to tell them to get the hell out. (This reality is eloquently made in Jim Dwyer's incredible and incisive *102 Minutes*, which makes clear that the rescue operations, while well-meaning, were ad-hoc, confused, and needlessly dangerous).

Faludi argues that the division of labor between hero and victim at Ground Zero was part and parcel of America's emerging daddy issues. The poster-girl for this new paradigm was Private Jessica Lynch, captured when her convoy was ambushed in Nasiriyah. The Lynch story was framed, packaged, and sold to a credulous American public as a familiar narrative: brave American (male) soldiers save a young, helpless (female) captive from vile savages (Iraqis). Throw in period press accounts that Lynch was sexually assaulted, and you have *The Searchers* all over again. Of course, as we all found out in later years, this story was entirely false. There was never any rescue, as such; indeed, the Iraqis taking care of Lynch had nearly fallen over backwards to give her back.

As a nation, we naturally felt scared and vulnerable during these unprecedented times (at least unprecedented in our lifetimes). Thus, we loved it when George Bush cleared brush at his ranch, and said he'd capture Bin Laden dead or alive. And we adored tough-talking Donald Rumsfeld who, for a short, hysterical period of our history, was deemed "sexy." And we didn't put up much resistance when, in our grief and anger, we lashed out at Iraq, which had nothing to do with the event that made us so sad and angry in the first place.

A world in which Donald Rumsfeld is a pinup is clearly a new and dangerous world. But alas, Faludi argues that our national response has deep-seeded historical antecedents. Specifically, she contends that our modern response to 9/11 stemmed from our violent frontier past, in which Indians attacked our domestic institutions and imprisoned women and children. The examination of this past, specifically the captivity narratives of the 17th and 18th centuries, comprises the second half of *The Terror Dream*.

Faludi's thesis, in this section, is that the inability of our menfolk to prevent Indian raids led to the creation of a counter-myth of stalwart frontiersmen, cavalrymen, and cowboys protecting fainthearted damsels from distress. (Think Amos/Ethan Edwards rescuing Debbie in *The Searchers*, or the real life Daniel Boone saving his daughter, Jemima, from the Shawnee).

The problem with this section is that it delves into the same stories and captivity narratives covered ably by Richard Slotkin in *Regeneration Through Violence*. Indeed, the second half of *The Terror Dream* felt like warmed-over Slotkin, with a slight distortion of focus. Slotkin argued that our national myth was forged by men and women struggling in a new, unfamiliar, and deadly environment. In this context, the captivity narratives provided redemptive arcs that encouraged people to keep faith in the face of great danger and difficulty. Faludi reduces Slotkin's argument to mere emasculation, which seems a gross simplification.

If the second half of *The Terror Dream* works at all, it does so anecdotally. While she never convincingly proves her thesis, she does engage the reader in clearly written, always-engaging conversations about female

experiences on the early frontier. Oddly, while she focuses on how frontier history diminished men, she fails to emphasize how it empowered women. After all, most of the captivity narratives were written by women (men were usually killed, rather than captured). Though often shaped by the hand of man (or more precisely, the hand of Cotton Mather), these were fundamentally the experiences of women, and allowed females to venture into the male domain of authorship.

The problem with *The Terror Dream* isn't that it has a provocative thesis; instead, it's that it's so intent on proving it. Taken as a thought experiment – something that makes you reconsider the accepted narrative, that gets you questioning news stories and commercials and the poses of politicians – this is a great read.

On the other hand, accepting her conclusions, as Faludi clearly expects you to do, is more problematic. The main reason is that you can't prove the genesis of emotions. Any attempts to do so is going to lead you to pick and choose your evidence, rely on non-representative samples, draw faulty connections, and generally overstate your case.

For instance, in citing Jessica Lynch as an example of pre-feminist retrograde propaganda, Faludi ignores the equally viable argument that it was patriotic propaganda, pure and simple. The Bush Administration was trying to sell a war, and Jessica Lynch was a good story. This was not a one-time or gender specific occurrence, as we all (eventually) discovered when the lies and cover-ups of Pat Tillman's death were finally revealed.

I don't buy what Faludi is selling. But I still liked this book a lot. I read it in 2008 and, if nothing else, it is a snapshot of an incredible, infuriating, frustrating time. *The Terror Dream* is a time machine that takes you back to a period where irony had disappeared, Rumsfeld was hot, you weren't sure you could laugh, and you couldn't utter the word "French" in public.

Strange days, and worth remembering, if only to remind us of the danger of snap judgments and false prophecies.

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## **Steve says**

Ask yourself this: When London and Madrid suffered terrorist attacks, why didn't they react the same way the United States did?

The answer lies in our nation's particular history, and the bloody settling of the frontier that left its imprint on our collective psyche and resulted in myth-making that persists to this day.

Susan Faludi is a thorough writer, and her intricately-documented style that she showed in her earlier book "Backlash," is evident in her most recent work.

Fascinating stuff, and the epilogue should be required reading for every American.

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## Izzy says

A little depressing. Faludi doing what she really does best, which is be a second-wave feminist focusing on what the third wave has forgotten about - gains women made and are now losing in jobs as firefighters, or just anything besides widows and teacher. It is a bit disjointed, as is all her work because she struggles to put in so much information. It always bothers me when critics try to imply that she's poorly researched. Um, no. She does put more anecdotal evidence in than I would expect of an academic, but she always also includes more than enough evidence from primary sources. I mean, I understand when someone says 'yeah, you quoted that guy's blog - he's clearly a dick.' But what makes her work resonate is when you remember the guy in the next cubicle being a dick in the same way. Certainly, there are cases where anecdotal evidence is an anomaly, but it doesn't ring true when speaking of Faludi's work.

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## Simone says

Let it be known, Susan Faludi can mother-fucking write. I happen to think this book works best if read after her also amazing *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* which showcases the crisis of American Masculinity that's also on display in the "Terror Dream." But I think it could also be read on its own.

She begins the book by carefully documenting the response to 9/11 on several fronts, but specifically gendered. The silencing of female voices, discussing the tragedy in terms of "the end of feminism" or blaming feminism for the attacks themselves, the valorizing of certain male voices, the invocation of John Wayne and Daniel Boone, the dismissal of any women who attempted to counter their own narratives, and finally the 'rescue' of Jessica Lynch. Many of the events she describes here I remembered, but it's been awhile, so this point by point reconstruction of the period directly following the attack is useful.

In one of my favorite bits, Faludi documents how mass media sources claimed that one response to the attack would be women (especially those who had not had children previously) would now be having desperate sex for children in the days following 9/11. They were so convinced that this would be the female response, they predicted a "baby boomlet" nine months after the attacks. They then camped out at hospital waiting rooms waiting for the births to come, and they never did. Because they had made it up, or based it on the response of one or two women, and then expected their own pontificating it to be true.

After setting up all of the responses, Faludi then moves into her larger point - *"The heroic ideal of the knight in shining armor and his damsel in distress is, of course, common to all cultures. But the monomyth assumes a particular shape and plays a particular role in American life. After all, the British didn't invoke Lancelot or invent a Guinevere to weather the trauma of the terrorist bombing of London's mass transit in 2005. Nor did the Spanish reenact the chivalric romance of Amadis and Oriana after the 2004 Madrid train attack. America's wilderness history has given that hoary ideal a complexion and prominence it enjoys nowhere else. At pivotal moments in our cultural life extending back to the Puritans - moments when America was faced with a core crisis - we restored our faith in our own invincibility through fables of female peril and the rescue of 'just one girl.' Jessica Lynch had a legion of historical sisters."*

We create a whole culture based on male strength and female weakness that provides the need for 'female' rescue, especially from rape, which will shore up male strength. Naturally, Faludi documents the falsity and ridiculousness of this whole enterprise. If you're still reading my rambling at this point, you should probably

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just read the book. Or read "Stiffed." Seriously.

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### **kot says**

READ THIS BOOK. What Faludi brings to light will shock and nauseate you. And in case you weren't already embarrassed enough by this outlandish Hollywood production of a country, this book will reveal just how reliant the U.S. is on the propagation of a patriarchal, racist myth...and how deeply rooted that reliance is.

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### **Julie Fiandt says**

My review from thinkgirl.net:

Faludi's book has stirred controversy with its thesis: traditional gender roles have been pushed by the media and government post-September 11th in order to maintain our sense of national strength. In the introduction she indicates that this is only one facet of our response to the event. Ultimately, many of Faludi's arguments are common, though she is the first to filter them so consistently through a gendered lens: tragedies bring out people's fears and, therefore, conservatism, and people will use a tragedy to promote their own agendas.

She gives many examples of conservative media reports dismissing feminism as now unimportant (and, many would argue, other social justice struggles and domestic issues. Of course, liberals, in many ways, would soon use Hurricane Katrina to argue their own agendas.) She draws attention to the media's fascination with stories of fathers lost and widowed stay-at-home moms, though 25% of those who died that day were women. Faludi unearths interesting examples, present and past, of bogus captivity narratives used to promote a narrow and supposedly patriotic agenda: from the Jessica Lynch rescued woman story to the Daniel Boone macho man story.

At the end of the book, she attempts a sweeping look at America's early history, including the genocide of American Indians, and the Salem witch hunts. She argues that manipulated stories have consistently modeled "appropriate" gendered responses to American challenges. Faludi's book is a fascinating read for feminists and liberals. --Review by Julie Fiandt

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### **Bill Kerwin says**

Faludi's thesis is that America, wounded by 9/11, refused to look at reality and instead retreated into the archetypal American terror dream in which all men are super-manly and all women are weak vessels who must be protected. Faludi traces the development of this "terror dream"--the core narrative of which is the rescue of the innocent white woman from her dark-skinned libidinous captors--from its origins in the settlement of the eastern frontier in the 17th and 18th century to the "rescue" of Iraq war prisoner Jessica Lynch.

I enjoyed this book and learned from it, but I don't think it was a complete success. Half of it is a rather scholarly exploration of historical captive narratives and the other half is a witty and pointed account of the manner in which the media and other voices distorted the actual facts of 9/11 into a comforting heroic narrative. I liked this part of the book best, and found its sections on Flight 93, the NYC firemen and the 9/11 widows to be particularly informative. But I don't think the structure of the book really ties these two parts together very well.

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