

Infantilize Adults, and Swallow Citizens Whole (2007). He is a Distinguished Senior Fellow at Demos: A Network for Ideas and Action, and President of CivWorld at Demos. This editorial was posted on *The Huffington Post* on November 26, 2007.

CONNECTING TO THE TOPIC

Black Friday is the name given to the day after Thanksgiving where it is recognized as kicking off the holiday shopping season. While it is not an official holiday, many people take this day off and devote it to shopping, making it one of the most profitable retail days of the year. Many stores open their doors very early (some as early as 5 AM) and hold "early-bird specials," featuring discounts on merchandise that can range from video game consoles to cashmere sweaters. Such great buys can lead to store stampedes when shop doors open. The name originally reflected the huge traffic jams that often developed on that day, but its contemporary meaning is now connected to the concept of "being in the black" (making a profit). The dark phrasing may hold another meaning for some consumers, who are disgusted by the long lines, the mad grabs for merchandise, and the hoarding of popular items for resale online.

WORDS IN CONTEXT

- solidarity** (2) a union of among members of a group who share similar views or interests (n.)
mantra (6) a repeated word or phrase that holds mystical properties (n.)
anomaly (10) a deviation from what is normal or expected (n.)
incarnate (10) given a human form, personified (adj.)
compliant (10) submissive, willing to go along with (adj.)
instigate (10) to stir up, urge on (v.)

On this blue Monday following Black Friday, can anyone remember Thursday?

Thanksgiving, once America's holiday of gratitude and family **solidarity**, has become the staging area for Christmas shopping. It is no longer just the day after Thanksgiving—Black Friday (as in "in the black, or profitable")—that is devoted to consumerism, but Thanksgiving itself, on which more and more stores are now staying open for pre-Black Friday sales. Call it gray Thursday.

America's retail industry, now indistinguishable from its marketing industry, sees in every blank space a billboard, in every suburban meadow, a mall, in every screen—big or small—a banner ad. And in every

"non-working" holiday, a time for more shopping. The Thanksgiving weekend comprises four non-working days: that's ninety-six hours available for non-stop shopping. Ditto for Halloween, Ramadan, Christmas, and some of the "holy days" are now all shopoholy days.

And whose fault is that?

I had a half-dozen calls from radio and TV stations over this long shopping weekend asking me to talk about why consumers are so hungry to shop, why housewives were camping out at 3 AM Friday morning to get into the 4 AM opening of mega-stores like Target. The assumption of all reporters who called was that Black Friday was a demand-side phenomenon—moms deciding there wasn't enough time in the day for all the shopping they wanted to do, dads insisting that stores stay open on Thanksgiving and open again at midnight on Black Friday cause they just couldn't get enough of those bargains, kids leaping from bed at midnight as if they'd spotted Peter Pan in the window and shouting, "Let's go shopping!"

But the point seems to be, the retail industry is just saying—after all, that is its mantra—we're just giving people what they want.

Well, not quite: Americans like to shop, but they also like to pray, to play, to talk, make art, make love, take walks, and spend time *munching* time with loved ones. They like to shop but not 24/7. The shopping mania we see on Black Friday, and throughout the year, is a supply-side phenomenon: the result of corporations "pushing," not consumers pulling.

That's why marketing and advertising are capitalism's main industries today, why they expend a quarter of a trillion every year to get us to "want" all the stuff they sell. It's why they target children and encourage shopaholism (a serious problem for more than 20 million Americans who regularly go shopping without a particular purchase in mind).

Where capitalism once produced goods and services to meet real needs and wants, today it produces needs and wants to sell all the goods, and if not, it must sell to stay in business. Real needs (clean water in the third world) go wanting, while manufactured needs (bottled water) are pushed on first-world consumers who can get free clean water from the tap.

Black Friday is no **anomaly**; it is consumer capitalism **incarnate**. To get a **compliant** response by polite retailers to consumer demand, it is part of a massive world-wide campaign to **instigate** and sustain consumer demand beyond any reasonable definition of need or want. To satisfy shareholders, not citizens.

Hyper-consumerism is actually consuming us (sub-prime mortgage anyone?). It's time we understand that Black Friday is not something we do, it's something being done to us. And comprehend that, left to the