

The commercial side to the true meaning of christmas

[Life](#)



The True Meaning of Christmas

Bags. Boxes. Wrapping paper. Ribbons. Lines. Sales. Deals. Traffic. Stress. Anger. Yup, it's Christmas time again. What started as a Christian holiday to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, has developed into a more-secular celebration, observed across religions boundaries. As the holiday has shifted, it's definitely been turned over to commercial interests. Whether you're okay with it or not, there's no argument that it's happening.

As much as we'd like to think that one day long ago Christmas was purely a religious holiday here in the United States, that's far from the truth. As we developed a unique culture here, Christmas developed along with it. Our own version of the once-Christian holiday has been infused with pre-Christian, Pagan traditions. Over the years, money has played a larger and larger role in the way we celebrate. Although gift giving has long been a tradition of Christmas, it hasn't always been the industry it is today. During the 1800s, F. W. Woolworth began to capitalize on the holiday. Woolworth had already built a unique business model, so he decided to apply it to Christmas. He filled his stores with cheaply made German Christmas ornaments. Many stores followed Woolworth's lead, filling their shelves with tinsel, toys, candleholders, candles, candies, garlands, and wooden ornaments (Restad). People bought the cheap goods which now surrounded them and gave them out as gifts. This blew a small-scale tradition into the commercial empire we know and love today.

The Pew Research Center did a series of surveys to gauge how Americans feel about the commercialization of Christmas. 52% are bothered by it, with

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26% very bothered (Pew). A huge source of this frustration is the Christmas creep. The term Christmas creep was coined in the mid-1980s for the marketing phenomenon that the Christmas marketing season keeps getting earlier and earlier. In Canada, Christmas advertisements commonly start a bit before Halloween. We have it a little better here in the United States, but Christmas advertisements still start well before Black Friday, the official start of the Christmas shopping season (Economics of Christmas). Lately, Black Friday has become an even bigger event. While Black Friday has been a bustling shopping day since 1932, it really picked up traction in the media in the late 80s. By 2003, it became the busiest shopping day of the year, a record it holds to this day. Recently, Black Friday has seen a few dips, as the Christmas shopping season drifts earlier and online shopping becomes more popular (Black Friday).

As the commercialization of Christmas continues and progresses, a few movements have sprouted up to fight back. “Buy Nothing Christmas” and “Buy Nothing Day” are both focused on ending the commercial aspects of Christmas. Buy Nothing Christmas was started by a group of Canadian Mennonites with the goal of getting people to spend as little as possible. Similarly, Buy Nothing Day was started in 1993 and takes place the same day as Black Friday. Because Black Friday is the center of Christmas commercialization, the idea is to take it out and drag the rest down with it. They clearly haven’t caught on as much as their founders would’ve hoped, however part of that is the media’s fault. The group organizing Buy Nothing Day tried to purchase advertising time, but all major television networks denied, except for CNN.

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As Lucy van Pelt put it, “ Look, Charlie, let’s face it. We all know that Christmas is a big commercial racket. It’s run by a big eastern syndicate, you know.” It’s hard to disagree with her point, as the Christmas season comes earlier every year and becomes more focused on money. While it’s false to believe that Christmas was once a pure, noncommercial holiday here in the United States, it’s not false to recognize that the winter’s biggest holiday has largely been taken over by business interests.