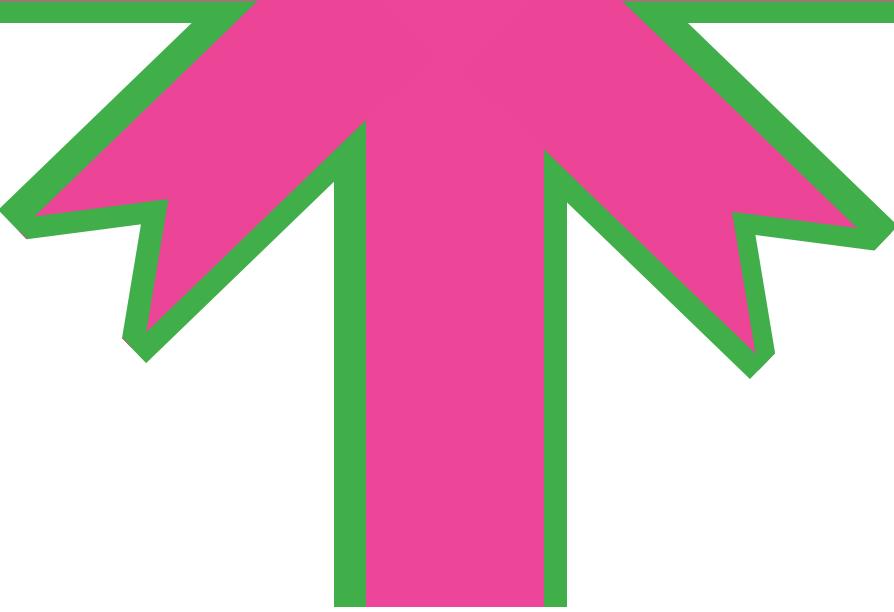


10 Things You Should Know About American Holidays

Amanda Winitzer





Introduction

American holidays are fun but expensive. The media and advertisements have taken over the holiday season. It's no longer about spending time with family and friends it has become just about spending. Each year stores start earlier and earlier. Its no longer Halloween, Thanksgiving, and then Christmas. The stores are stocked as though the three are all in one holiday. You could call it Hallowthanksmas at this point with the way its been compacted together on the shelves. With the stores starting sooner each year so are the consumers. Black friday every retail associates worst nightmare is now starting as early as 5pm on Thanksgiving. The holiday about being greatful is completely taken away by shopping bargain deal madness. The appreciation is gone as people fight in stores over the last items. The stores are no longer safe and become more like an unkown jungle with survival of the fittest. Other holidays following arent that much better. People are still pushed to buy certain things for each holiday. The expectation of celebrations just grow higher and higher each year.

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Halloween

True Meaning

Halloween originally was a celebration called all Hallows' Eve of All Saints' Eve. It was originally intended to be a day of worshiping those that have passed away. Today the holiday has been taken over by mostly candy corporations. It's become all about trick or treating, attending costume parties, decorating, carving pumpkins, lighting bon fires, apple bobbing, and watching horror films. Each year at this time sales increases tremendously for candy companies, party supply stores, and movie theaters.



Money Spent

Halloween is an exciting time for kids and adults to dress up in fantasy costumes, consume an abundance of candy and decorate homes both indoors and outdoors. According to the National Retail Federation, the average person will spend \$66.54 in 2010 as opposed to 2009, where the average person spent \$56.31. The total sales for 2010 was \$5.8 billion. Halloween has become a holiday of consumerism that many vendors plan in advance to beef up their bottom line for the year.

Kids' Costumes

Whether you opt to purchase your kids' chosen costume or make one from scratch, you will be spending money at some retail outlet. Kids are dreaming up what hero or character they want to be for school costume parties and trick or treating. Kids look forward to filling their bags with candy and goodies that are often limited during the year. If you choose to shop online you will find many vendors with special deals

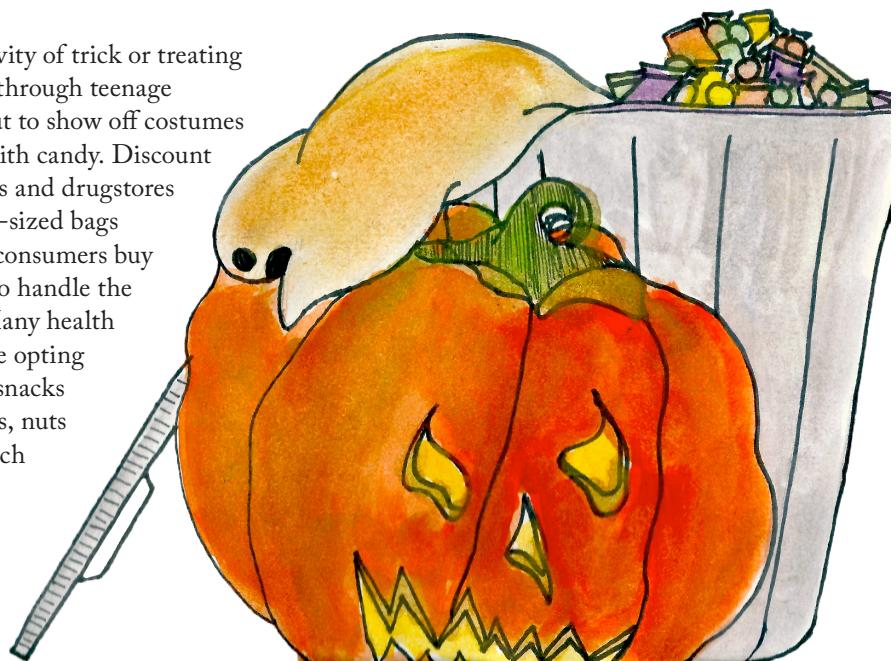


and unusual costumes for your consumption. Fabric stores will be well stocked with fabrics printed in Halloween skeletons, pumpkins, ghosts as well as plain orange and black colored fabrics. Samples of different costume patterns with embellishments will be on display to entice customers. Little kids are not the only ones dressing up in costumes for the holiday. Dressing up for Halloween is popular with both young and older adults. Costume parties have people surfing the Internet and stores to outdo each other with unusual and creative costumes. Some parents like to dress up while taking their kids out to trick or treat. Costume stores have sections for adults to choose from to indulge in their own fantasy characters.



Trick or Treat

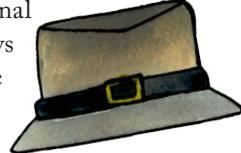
The Halloween activity of trick or treating attracts young kids through teenage years. Kids go all out to show off costumes and fill their bags with candy. Discount stores, grocery stores and drugstores are filled with super-sized bags of candy, and most consumers buy more than enough to handle the onslaught of kids. Many health conscious people are opting for more nutritious snacks such as bags of chips, nuts and trail mixes, which opens up another marketing venue.



Thanksgiving

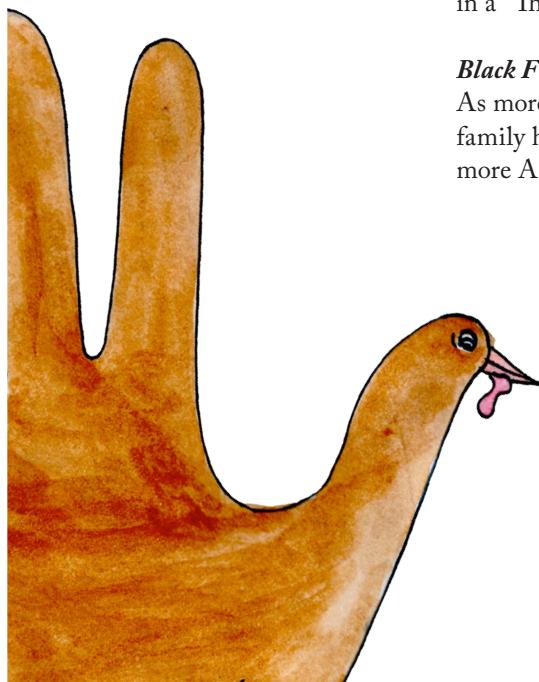
Reason for the Holiday

For many of us, the meaning of Thanksgiving usually includes feasting, four-day weekends, football games, floats, family reunions, or a forerunner to Christmas festivities. The “first Thanksgiving,” however, was neither a feast nor a holiday, but a simple gathering. Following the Mayflower’s arrival at Plymouth Rock on December 11, 1620, the Pilgrims suffered the loss of 46 of their original 102 colonists. With the help of 91 Indians, the remaining Pilgrims survived the bitter winter and yielded a bountiful harvest in 1621. In celebration, a traditional English harvest festival, lasting three days brought the Pilgrims and natives to unite in a “Thanksgiving” observance.



Black Friday

As more and more retail giants open their doors on the family holiday that used to be known as “Thanksgiving,” more Americans are ditching their families for what is now



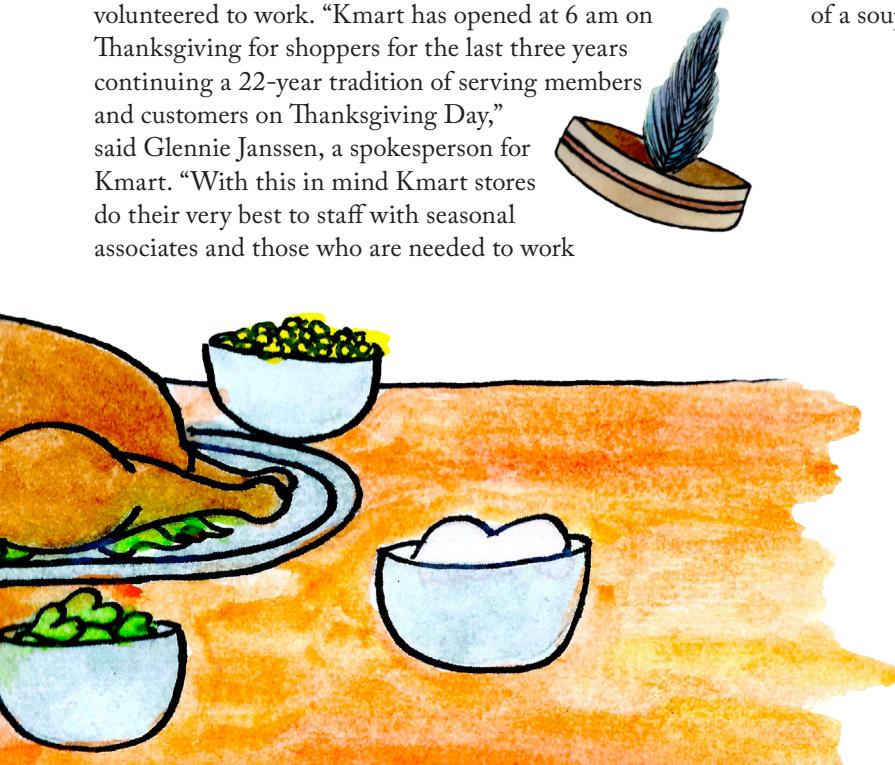
called “Grey Thursday”, or worse, “Thanks For Shopping Day. The number of Americans shopping on Thanksgiving is increasing each year. An eye popping 33 million Americans plan on shopping on Thanksgiving Thursday, according to the National Retail Federation a huge ally of Walmart and other retail giants. A different poll conducted by the research firm Harris Interactive found nearly one in seven rushing through Thanksgiving dinner, skipping it entirely, or even blowing-off relatives, so they could shop. But what these obsessed consumers don’t grasp is the fact that more and more low-paid retail workers are clocking in on Thanksgiving and well into Black Friday, offering these workers no time with family. On Thanksgiving day, Toys “R” Us will open at 5 pm, Best Buy at 6 pm, Target at 8 pm, and Macy’s will now open at 8 pm, breaking a 155-year tradition of not opening on the holiday. Even Burger King will be open. The biggest corporate turkey this year has to be Kmart which is America’s third largest retailer behind



Walmart and Target. Kmart is opening at 6 am on Thanksgiving and staying open 41 straight hours until 11 pm on Black Friday.

Holiday Workers

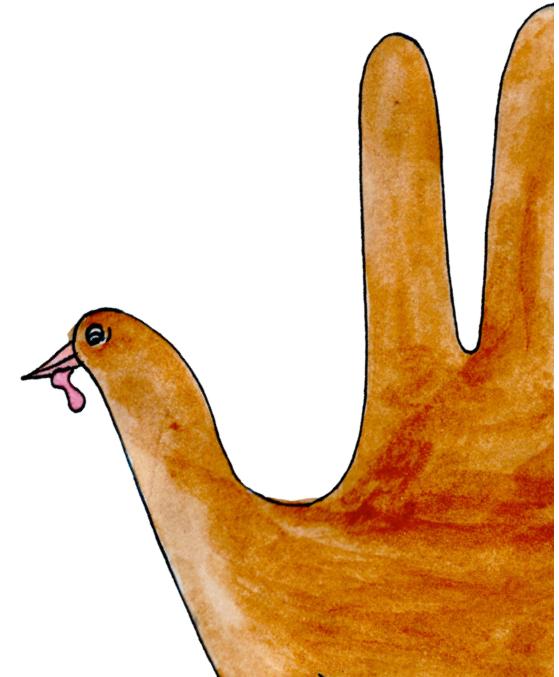
Kmart used to close its doors at 4 pm on Thanksgiving to allow employees several hours to be with family and friends. Kmart told Toward Freedom their decision is defensible because they're staffing stores on Thanksgiving with seasonal temporaries and associates who allegedly volunteered to work. "Kmart has opened at 6 am on Thanksgiving for shoppers for the last three years continuing a 22-year tradition of serving members and customers on Thanksgiving Day," said Glennie Janssen, a spokesperson for Kmart. "With this in mind Kmart stores do their very best to staff with seasonal associates and those who are needed to work



holidays." When asked whether she was working on Thanksgiving, or Kmart's CEO and other corporate staff were working, Janssen refused to respond.

Walmart

Usually the greediest and stingiest corporate turkey of the year is Walmart considering they employ the most in retail and pay them the least. But this year Walmart said it's serving a turkey dinner to 1 million employees on Thanksgiving, which gives new meaning to the concept of a soup kitchen.





Christmas

Then and Now

This holiday started out as a religious celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. Now its all about who gets the best gifts and who has the best decorations. Its a time of charity but also a time of complete chaos. Stores are packed, retail workers overwhelmed, and everyone maxing credit cards into debt. A holiday about spending time with loved ones and enjoying the company of family has friends as become mostly about just spending. the craziness starts earlier each year. You walk through the mall at the end of the summer and hints of

the Christmas season start to appear. Before it would start after Halloween and now the shelves are a mix of Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas at the start of October. The pressure of the holiday season is on. For families that can't afford to keep up with the cost of the holiday can't celebrate it the same way regardless of the fact that its not how it was intended to be celebrated. Retail business take off while everyone else suffers.

Commercialized

Few of us would argue with the complaint that Christmas has become too "commercialized." It has deteriorated into an overheated festival of manic consumption in which the majority of the gifts are purchased by people who cannot really afford them and given to people who do not really need them. Yet we often still feel caught in the expectations associated with this annual ritual. Meanwhile, many retail businesses have become increasingly dependent upon the holiday revenues generated by exactly this kind of dysfunctional consumer behavior.





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The Effects

It makes you start to feel like one hell of a gullible bastard. You begin searching for all those gift receipts. In an essay by Anna Quindlen entitled "Stuff is Not Salvation" she condemns the over commercialization of Christmas. She criticizes parents who buy their kids worthless crap and scorns America's love for cheap shiny pretty things. She says that since times have become financially difficult, people have cutback on useless trifles until they realized all gifts are just useless trifles "Ask people what they'd grab if their house were on fire," Quindlen wrote. "No one ever says it's the tricked-up microwave they got at Wal-Mart." What a stunning observation! And a bit bigoted, too. Something tells me Anna Quindlen grew up middle class, because anyone who has come in contact with poverty would never be so arrogant. When people rant about the petty consumerism of American buyers, they completely ignore what Christmas means to those who struggle.



Can't Afford

When you grow up poor, you gain a different outlook on Christmas. You scoff at people who swipe their cards at Macy's for purchases that could pay December's rent. (But secretly you wish you could do the same.) You cherish what you get and nearly cry when you get what you want. You dream at night of all the things you could buy if you had a hundred bucks, all the worries that could be eliminated with a blank check under the tree. The materialism of Christmas will always be bashed, but for me it's a sign of safety and progress. It's a reminder to help people who haven't found a way out yet. The comfortable sing the praises of living simply and modestly. The truly simple and modest know that barely scraping by sucks.



New Years

A Renewal

New years is all about refreshing life. Making new goals and new starts as another year begins. The day before people get together to drink and celebrate the start of a new year. So much money is spent towards decorations and even more on the alcohol that America consumes as a nation on that night. At midnight everyone counts down and cheer as they ring in the new year. This is also a night of a lot of drinking and driving. Some people start the year with cheer and others are less fortunate. This holiday boost business tremendously for liquor stores and keeps emergency occupations on their toes.



Resolutions

As one year comes to a close, many people like to take a few moments and think about the year ahead. The new year has always been a chance, although somewhat arbitrary, to give yourself a fresh start. It's a second chance. It's an opportunity to recommit yourself to the things that are important to you. Discussions of New Year's resolutions are almost always followed by statistics showing how

people generally fail at keeping the promises they make.

News reporters and authors cite the spike in new gym memberships after the new year and the quick fall-off of gym participation as one example of how people with good intentions don't stick to their plans. Studies show how financial New Years Resolutions fail.

Alcohol

Some holiday predictions are, tragically, very predictable. For example, more people are likely to die in alcohol related traffic crashes during the holidays than at other times of the year. Statistics show that during Christmas and New Year's, two to three times more people die in alcohol-related crashes than during comparable periods the rest of the year. And 40 percent of traffic fatalities during these holidays involve a driver who is alcohol-impaired, compared to 28 percent for the rest of December.

Valentines Day

Candy, Flowers, and More

Another holiday owned by the candy companies is Valentines Day. Couples are expected to spend all this money on each other on this one day of the year. People who aren't in relationships feel bad and left out. Its a loose, loose situation for everyone on this special occasion. Typically gifts range from chocolates and candy and go up to engagement rings. Today is the day of unmet expectations. It's the day for rushing to make your way-too-early dinner reservation, only to be wedged between two tables of loud talkers. Or of trying hard not to hope for surprise flowers because you're not officially boyfriend-girlfriend yet. Or of trying to find a last-minute gift, only to make a desperate run to CVS to buy some crappy little thing.

Money

Most people agree that Valentine's Day is a good, if somewhat random, opportunity to shower loved ones with affection. At the same time, people also seem to resent the holiday's obligatory nature. A survey of 6,400 people by the National Retail Federation found that fewer people are expected to participate in Valentine's Day this year. Those who do take part will drop \$134 on the day's festivities. People in new relationships felt more obligated; and men felt more obligated than women. Shoppers may be spending \$13 billion annually on heart-shaped boxes and flowers, but they're doing so out of duty, not devotion. "Valentine's Day is a way for retailers to get you to spend money in their stores. People get caught up in the B.S. and I should not have to spend extra to show I care, and my girlfriend agrees. But we both still spent plenty!"

Relationships vs. Single

People in new relationships felt more obligated to give gifts than those in established ones, and even couples who were fighting at the time said they'd probably buy something because they knew the other person would. Single people, meanwhile, told Scheibaum that they felt like not enough time had elapsed since the consumerist assault of Christmas to deal with yet another compulsory holiday. "I would like to extend a warm thanks to Hallmark, the official sponsor of Valentine's day, for reminding me that without a significant other, how truly worthless my life is."



Saint Patrick's Day

Everyone's Irish on St. Patrick's Day

One of life's mysteries of being an Expat in America, is the fervent celebration of St. Patrick's Day! On March 17th every year, anyone who has ever been within 500 yards of a pint glass with a Guinness logo on it anoints themselves with Irish heritage and jumps feet first into celebrating their Patron Saint Day. Even though they probably couldn't pinpoint Ireland on the map, and have no idea who Patrick was! Consumerism at its best.



Retail

Retailers are expecting consumers to spend about \$4.1 Billion to celebrate their favorite saints day this year. Money squandered on green attire, Irish themed decorations and party favors, food, and of course the obligatory alcohol. This year, competition to grab consumers dollars is fierce. Not because of the economic downturn, or people donating part of their earnings to aid Japan, but because somebody moved Easter and there's nothing else to celebrate in March.

Green Everywhere

I took the day off work today, and avoided the sea of green attire, dodged the shamrock decorations, and didn't have to wish everyone in a green shirt.

"Happy St. Paddy's Day". Even with a day off, I couldn't dodge the Paddy's Day reminders. I popped into McDonald's for a cup of coffee and was greeted by their advert for a Shamrock "McSlurry" Shake! I'm not anti-Irish or anti-fun. I'm just saving my money.

Irish Luck?

The luck of the Irish is actually bad luck. When they arrived in America, they were very disliked, treated badly, despised and hated. When they had any kind of success most Americans at the time didn't think the Irish were capable of success, so they called it luck. Hence the term "Luck of the Irish".



Holiday History

St. Patrick was born in England. When he was 16-years-old, he was captured by Irish pirates. They brought him to Ireland where he was sold into slavery in Dalriada. His job was to tend sheep. St. Patrick is Ireland's patron saint. He is known for spreading Christianity throughout the country as a missionary during the 5th century. St. Patrick's Day was made an official feast day early in the 17th century. The day commemorates St. Patrick and the arrival of Christianity for Christians in Ireland. However, it has also become a celebration of Irish bloodlines and Irish culture. Legend has it that St. Patrick used the three-leaved shamrock to explain the Holy Trinity to the Irish people.

Green

The color originally associated with St. Patrick was blue. The color green and its association with St. Patrick's Day grew over the years. Green ribbons and shamrocks were worn in celebration of St. Patrick's Day as early as the 17th century. The phrase "the wearing of the green", meaning to wear a shamrock on one's clothing. The day generally involves public parades and festivals, wearing of green attire or shamrocks.



Ireland to America

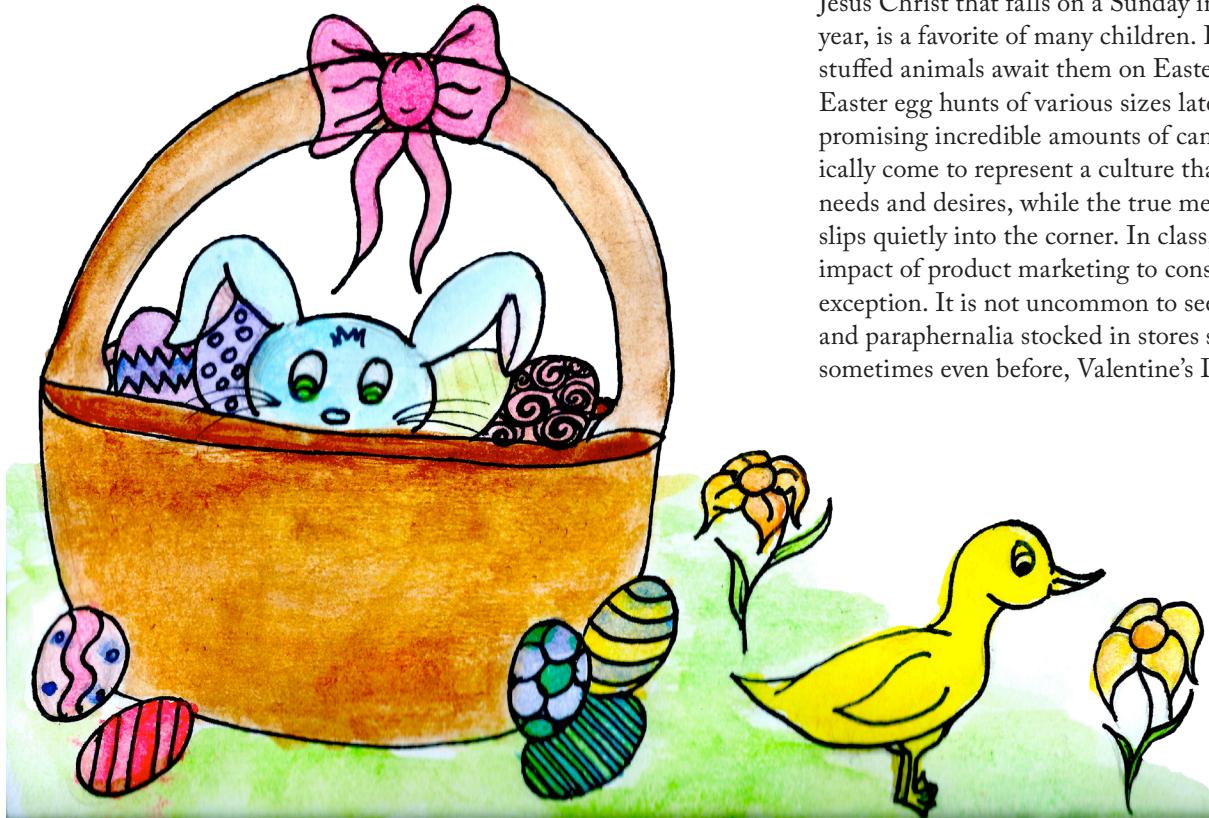
The St. Patrick's celebration has taken on a completely different character in America. The St. Patrick's parade has become part of the United States popular culture and heritage. It has been successfully linked with the Guiness Brand and blends perfectly with established consumerism trends in the United States. Irish and non-Irish celebrate St. Patrick's Day in America. It is one of the biggest days of the year for alcohol consumption in the United States. Drinking green beer has become common tradition. Wearing green colored clothing and items is a must when celebrating St. Patrick's Day.



Easter

Todays Expectations

Easter is originally another religious holiday that has been taken over by the candy companies. Lining the shelves of CVS, Walgreens, and Rite Aid are cute little pre-packaged Easter baskets with Peeps, Cadbury eggs, and chocolate bunnies all over flowing out of them. Depending on the family and traditions theres also Easter egg hunts. Everyone goes out and buy colorful pastel plastic eggs and fill them

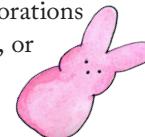


with money or candy. They take the eggs and scatter them in hiding spots in yards or homes. Its a fun scavenger hunt for children on the occasion but really has nothing to do with the resurrection of Jesus Christ.



Meaning

Easter, the Christian celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ that falls on a Sunday in March or April each year, is a favorite of many children. Baskets of candy and stuffed animals await them on Easter morning, followed by Easter egg hunts of various sizes later in the day, usually promising incredible amounts of candy. Easter has symbolically come to represent a culture that thrives on individual needs and desires, while the true meaning of the holiday slips quietly into the corner. In class, we have discussed the impact of product marketing to consumers, and Easter is no exception. It is not uncommon to see Easter decorations and paraphernalia stocked in stores shortly after, or sometimes even before, Valentine's Day passes.



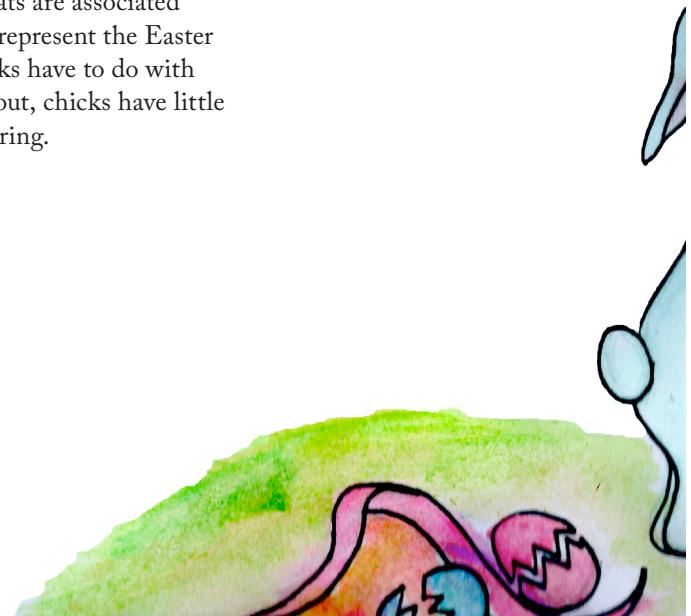
Spend, Spend, Spend!

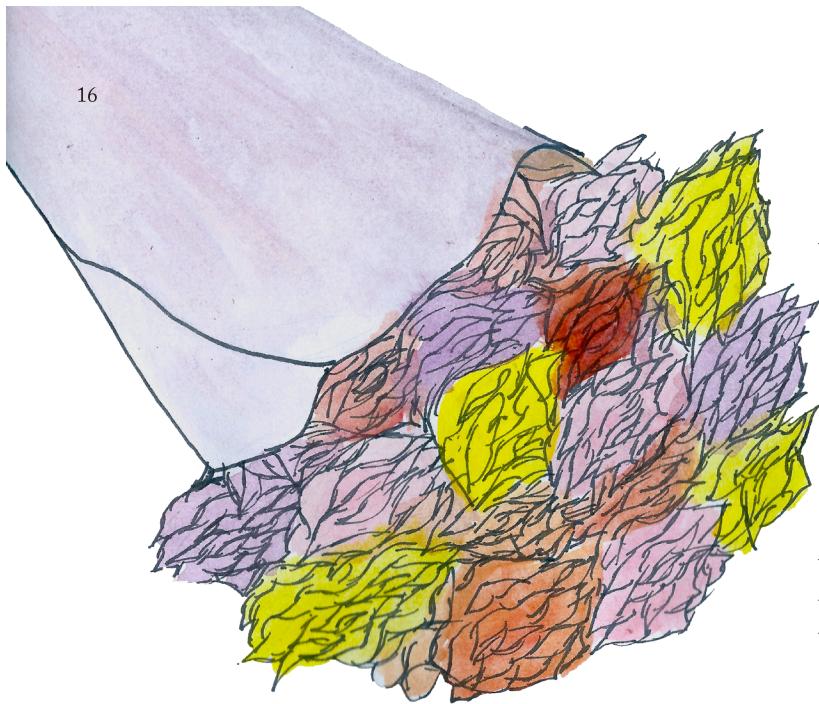
We currently live in a culture fueled by consumerism, and marketers play a major role in creating that culture. Each year, the décor goes a step further to include popular characters from recent movies or television shows, generally targeted to children, playing on the notion that parents will adhere to their children's desires in order to appease them and make the holiday all the more special. This year, I walked through Walmart and saw all of my nieces and nephews favorite Disney shows represented on decorations, Easter baskets, and more, but I saw very little representation of the religious celebration in which the holiday is based off of. While I say this, I do not mean to step on the toes of Americans who wish to celebrate the holiday as an opportunity to spend with loved ones, rather than incorporating the religious aspect. I politely respect the differences of viewpoints; I believe that is fundamentally part of the American way. The concern I see, not only lies in this particular holiday, but in the way we have allowed traditions to be controlled by profits, and the fact it is not challenged, but accepted.



Peeps

Along with Easter comes a barrage of Easter candy, perhaps none as much a pop-culture curiosity as Peeps. In a 2004 Explainer, Rachel Deahl researched Peeps' ties to Easter and our fascination with the confection. The article is printed below. A pagan connection to this Easter confection. A pagan connection to this Easter confection. This Easter Americans will consume an estimated 700 million Marshmallow Peeps. Some will also be consumed by them fanatics maintain. Web sites featuring everything from Peep erotica, dubbed "Peep Smut," to an inventive online movie called "Lord of the Peeps," and each year at least a few newspapers print odes to the candy. But for all the fascination with Peeps, it's never been clear why the sugary treats are associated with Easter. The marshmallow rabbits represent the Easter Bunny, but what do marshmallow chicks have to do with the resurrection of Christ? As it turns out, chicks have little to do with Jesus and a lot to do with spring.





Mother's Day

History

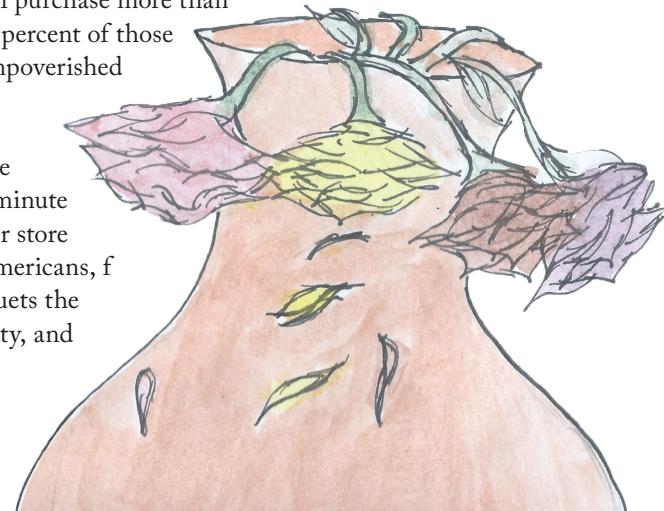
And now here comes Mother's Day. Mother's Day, a national holiday since 1914, when President Woodrow Wilson declared it so, has recently become Mother's Day! It, too, is superlative; it is not to be ignored. The ads started a couple of months ago. Mother's Day is bigger than Christmas and Valentine's Day in some ways, because its the number one for feeling guilty if you don't do something spectacular to honor your mother on this day.

Expectations

Younger children can get away with the classic handmade Mother's Day cards but as you get older the gift expectations become more extensive. Most common and similar to Valentine's Day is the classic flowers and candy, most likely chocolates. Companies like Edible Arrangements and other classic florists are over loaded with delivery orders for the occasion. Once again feeding into the classic American consumerism when it comes to the holidays. Its all well and fine to show appreciation for your mother. You wouldn't be here if it wasn't for her, but rather then wasting money sending flowers that will wilt in a week it would be better to spend quality time together. Focus more on the reason for the holiday rather then feeding into the advertisements thrown at everyone in so many commercials.

Flowers

The National Retail Federation estimates that this Mother's Day weekend, Americans will purchase more than \$2 billion worth of flowers. Almost 80 percent of those flowers come from Colombia, where impoverished mothers like Lorena toil long hours to produce tokens of affection for more fortunate mothers elsewhere. While the provenance of the peonies we buy last minute at gasstations, supermarkets, and corner store bodegas remains a mystery for most Americans, f or the women that produce these bouquets the cut-flower industry is a harrowing reality, and Mother's Day is a cruel joke.



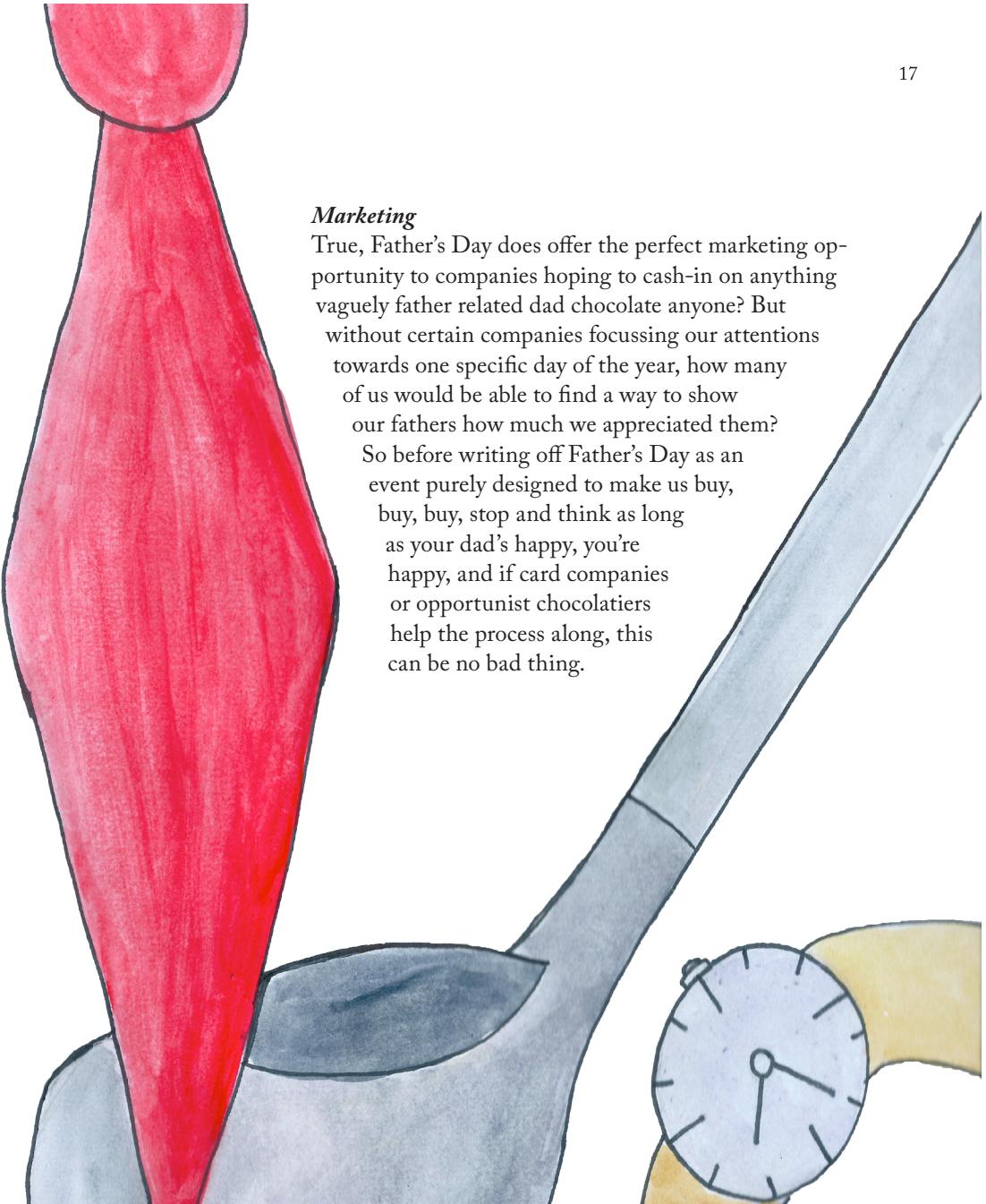
Father's Day

Dad's Day

Following right behind Mother's Day is Father's Day. This holiday isn't much different either. The gifts you get might be more masculine rather than feminine but the thought process behind it is the same. You go out and waste money on gifts that typically or at least from my experience don't really get used. Classics are always the number one dad mugs, a new neck tie, maybe a watch or some golfing equipment. Coincidence or not all of it office based usually to lend to the father being the main financial support system in households. Or at least that was the case for a long time, life today is changing a lot but still those seem to be the classic gifts. Also like mothers day they tend to throw in the need for consumers to buy chocolate for Father's Day because what dad doesn't love sweets too.

Hallmark

So, it's Father's Day on Sunday. Across the nation children, grandchildren and even great-grandchildren will be purchasing their carefully chosen presents and cards. Hallmark reports that Father's Day is the fifth largest card sending holiday across the world. But within the flurry of tie buying and sit-down dinners lies the question; is this day of celebration and admiration for our dazzling daddies, perfect pops and oh-so-wonderful old men simply a marketing opportunity for the card companies and gadget shops?" Is it a 'Hallmark holiday', a fake celebration brought to you courtesy of consumerism?



Marketing

True, Father's Day does offer the perfect marketing opportunity to companies hoping to cash-in on anything vaguely father related dad chocolate anyone? But without certain companies focussing our attentions towards one specific day of the year, how many of us would be able to find a way to show our fathers how much we appreciated them? So before writing off Father's Day as an event purely designed to make us buy, buy, buy, stop and think as long as your dad's happy, you're happy, and if card companies or opportunist chocolatiers help the process along, this can be no bad thing.

Independence Day

Celebrating

Every year it seems like the final American holiday to officially wrap up the season. The weather is nicer everyone is traveling having barbecues and just enjoying the sunshine. The day is celebrated with parades and children's events and at night is followed by sparklers and fireworks. Some people watch the show while others spend crazy amounts of money to put on their own little show of fireworks to celebrate the 4th of July.



Laws and Fireworks

How did America's birthday become synonymous with blowing stuff up? We assume it has something to do with Francis Scott Key or maybe it's just that a lot of people think blowing stuff up is really, really cool. But you probably don't want to spend July 4th in jail, so you may want to learn a little about the hodgepodge of state fireworks laws or just skip the DIY stuff and let someone else burst their bombs. Most fireworks injuries occurred to consumers younger than 20 and resulted in the loss of a limb in many cases." The agency's tips about fireworks safety include: Never allow young children to play with or ignite fireworks. Make sure fireworks are legal in your area before buying or using them. Avoid buying fireworks that come in brown paper packaging, as this can often be a sign that the fireworks were made for professional displays and could pose a danger to consumers. Adults should always supervise fireworks activities. Parents often don't realize that there are many injuries from sparklers to children under five. Sparklers burn at temperatures of about 2,000 degrees hot enough to melt some metals.



Conclusion

American holidays have overtime lost their true meanings. The reasoning behind these celebrations have been taken over by advertising industries. The candy companies getting a huge chunk of the money put into every holiday. Retail in general flourishes best during each one of the events. It's great for the already rich and does help support jobs but also causes the poor to get poorer. Workers in these big companies tend to get hit hard as well. They are forced to work crazy hours for very little pay. Probably working to help afford these holidays, especially Christmas. The pressures of the holiday season have taken much of the joy out of the celebration, especially for struggling adults. Gifts are nice but there are other ways to show people how much you care that don't put you in debt causing more stress in your everyday life.

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