

BLACK FRIDAY

The day after Thanksgiving is known as Black Friday: in 1966, the day was given its present name by a disgruntled Philadelphia policeman. As retail scholar Michael Lisicky has noted, looking back at Black Friday's origins, "The stores were just too crowded; the streets were crowded; the buses and the police were just on overcall and extra duty." Sometimes, violence ensued as well. Due to these troubles, Black Friday scared shoppers away.

Yet in the 1980s, Peter Strawbridge, former owner of the now-defunct Strawbridge & Clothier's department store in Philadelphia, invented a new explanation for the term. He said Black Friday was the day when business profits went into the black.

Regardless of why it is called Black Friday, the day after Thanksgiving has always been a dramatic start to the holiday shopping season. For decades, it was an unwritten rule that Christmas advertising did not start till after Thanksgiving. This unwritten rule caused retailers great distress in 1939, when Thanksgiving arrived relatively late, on November 30. Retailers petitioned President Franklin D. Roosevelt to change the date of Thanksgiving in order to guarantee a longer shopping season. In December of 1941, Congress officially set aside the fourth Thursday in November as Thanksgiving.

Kmart, which once ranked among America's most prominent superstores, has been opening its doors on Thanksgiving since 1991. In so doing, it became the first such retailer to break the threshold and turn Thanksgiving into something other than a day of leisure. By 2009, Walmart, the present-day successor to Kmart's huge share of the market, was also keeping its outlets open on Thanksgiving. If you can't beat them, join them seems to be the attitude of retailers, since the number of retailers open on the holiday has only continued to grow.

And what has been the attitude of consumers? More or less, let the games begin! After all, who wants to wait in line on Black Friday when you can expect good deals and tiny crowds just one day earlier? Apparently, everybody wins.

Not so fast. As noted in one recently-posted editorial, "Retailers that open their doors on Thanksgiving Day in hopes of boosting holiday sales are shifting purchases away from Black Friday, rather than increasing the number of overall transactions." But even if stores, technically, are not doing more business, consumers are encouraged to pace their purchases: some on Thanksgiving, some on Black Friday, no more one-day stampede.

However, there are also arguments that the traditional chaos of Black Friday has simply been redistributed, so that consumers and store employees face new dilemmas. According to Time Magazine, "hundreds of thousands of consumers have

resorted to online petitions and even worker strikes to voice their anger at retailers that decided to open their doors—thereby requiring employees to work—on Thanksgiving.” In New Jersey, State Senator Richard Cody has expressed sympathy for store employees and is trying to get legislation passed that would prohibit stores from opening before 9:00 p.m. on Thanksgiving. He said of store workers, “They are put in a position to either work on Thanksgiving or risk losing their jobs. This [the proposed legislation] would allow them to be with their families and to give thanks, as other families do.” Currently, three states—Maine, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island—have blue laws that restrict stores from opening on Thanksgiving.

Such controversies aside, a commercialized Thanksgiving is firmly embraced by at least one group: millennials. A 2013 survey undertaken by LoyaltyOne showed that 50% of consumers in the 18-24 age bracket say that all-day shopping on Thanksgiving is a great idea. This is significantly higher than the figure for the general population, only 33% of whom endorse all-day Thanksgiving shopping. Conversely, the survey noted that 50% of respondents, of all ages, believe that all-day shopping hours on Thanksgiving Day is a bad idea because it distracts from celebrating Thanksgiving.

The economic benefits to retailers of opening on Thanksgiving Day seem mixed at best, and the psychological benefits appear to be even more uncertain. Are we as a society becoming so commercialized that we can't even take one day off from our beloved malls? Is nothing sacred? Many consumers and retail employees want the Thanksgiving tradition of a family-and-friends day upheld; however, the number of those who want Thanksgiving to be another day of buying and selling is significant. And therefore, commerce on Thanksgiving seems here to stay. We just need to figure out how to keep the turkey moist until after the shopping is done.

THE DAY AFTER

While all movies serve to entertain, some movies—and probably more movies than you'd expect—also strive to educate. There are historical movies that enlighten the public about a particular time period or event, sometimes under the guise of blockbuster entertainment. There are nature documentaries and films of exploration, often narrated by name actors and designed for sweeping IMAX screens. Entertaining, but undoubtedly educational. In 1983, the television movie *The Day After* appeared; its initial purpose, indeed, was to entertain and educate. But this movie also induced fear and, ultimately, change.

I was a young teen in 1983. Like most teenage boys, I found that the subjects that most occupied my mind were sports (mostly baseball) and trying to be cool for my friends (mostly by setting off firecrackers). If the sports teams that I supported were successful, everything else seemed a little better. In addition, if I made it through the day without doing something embarrassing or being the subject of gossip, I was content. If I worked up the nerve to talk to a girl, well, I was ecstatic.

The Day After caught me unaware; it is an intensely, disturbingly political film, but its political content does not fully explain its impact.

On the Sunday night of November 20, 1983, I sat in the living room with my siblings and parents. We were gathered around the television to watch a movie that had been prominently advertised in radio and television commercials, in newspapers, and in magazines including *Time*, *Newsweek*, *U.S. News & World Report*, and *TV Guide*. People across the country were all doing the same. In fact, the movie was viewed by more than 100 million people—including half of the adult population of the United States—which was the largest audience for a made-for-TV movie up to that time.

In *The Day After*, a war breaks out between the two Cold War superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. This occurs because the Soviet Union is trying to gain control of West Germany, rather than keep to its allotted territory in East Germany. The United States does not back down. One thing leads to another, and the United States issues an ultimatum, which the Soviet Union ignores. Fighting breaks out in Germany and global chaos breaks loose. Unable to find a peaceful solution, the two sides exchange nuclear attacks. One of the Soviet targets is Kansas, and the movie focuses primarily on a few citizens who live in Lawrence, Kansas and Kansas City, Missouri. (The broader nuclear disaster itself is depicted in the middle portions of the movie.) With an array of disturbing images, *The Day After* shows what this stretch of the American Heartland would look like after being devastated by a nuclear holocaust.

The public reaction to the movie was nearly as overwhelming as the advertising build-up. The Joint Chiefs of Staff screened the movie and watched it in silence, clearly moved. President Ronald Reagan himself also viewed the movie; in his diary, he said that *The Day After* was, “very effective & left me greatly depressed.”

The emotion I felt after watching the movie was fear. My concerns were no longer simply sports and impressing my friends: I now worried about nuclear war. I worried about the arms race, prayed that the Strategic Defense Initiative (dubbed “Star Wars” by the media) would work, and hoped that the summits between President Reagan and the leader of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, would ease the situation.

All of this was part of a bigger plan. ABC, the network that hosted the broadcast of the movie, expected *The Day After* to leave viewers anxious. To produce this effect, the network set up toll-free lines and mailed out half a million viewers’ guides to help the public cope with the subject matter. Immediately after the movie, ABC ran a live special edition of a news program called *Viewpoint*. The host of the show, Ted Koppel, posed the following questions: “Is the vision we have just seen the future as it will be or may be? Is there still time?” He even invited the Secretary of State, George Schultz, to discuss the topic.

Throughout the nation at large, the same spirit of questioning and rampant debate arose where the topics of nuclear arms policy and the Cold War were concerned. Virtually all who saw the film agreed that nuclear war should be prevented at all costs. Rallies, forums, and candlelight vigils were held to protest nuclear aggression.

And maybe this spirit of unity, too, was part of a bigger plan. The director of the movie, Nicholas Meyer, said that the movie was “the most worthwhile thing I got to do in my life.” His reaction was inspired by a note from President Reagan himself. This message arrived just after a summit between the two superpowers in Reykjavik, Iceland, where a nuclear arms deal was reached. The note said, “Don’t think your movie didn’t have any part of this, because it did.”



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