

Opinion: what is the real meaning of Christmas?

By Brett McCleod

Christmas. It's celebrated yearly by families across the globe, probably including your own and many of your friends'. A simple Google search defines Christmas as "the annual Christian festival celebrating Christ's birth, held on December 25 in the Western Church." Growing up I questioned why my friends who were non-Christian and non-believers celebrated Christmas. I thought Jesus was a big part of it? Even I have my apprehensions about religion, yet yearly I buy presents for those around me, attend gatherings miles out of the way, begrudgingly leave the radio on for Dominic the Donkey, and eat foods that are only acceptable during the holiday season. In the midst of eggnog and aunt Evelyn, I beg the question: what is the real meaning of Christmas?

At a time the Christ in Christmas may have had more meaning, but Christmas has evolved into what Grazian refers to as a pseudo-event. David Grazian, author of "Mix It Up: Popular Culture, Mass Media, and Society," defines a pseudo-event as any media ritual created for the sole purpose of being reported or reproduced. So Christmas is a pseudo-event, and I know this revelation is shocking. Who would have ever thought that Christmas was meant to bring in a metric ton of money into the economy, helping the families of the world ensure that their debt is just as thick as their wallet could be for the coming year, year after year?



Christmas is a cultural icon that is exploited yearly as well, further cementing its position in popular culture as a pseudo-event.

Small pseudo-events within it, like Black Friday and Christmas Eve all thrust the idea of the pseudo-event that is Christmas. Foods, movies, music, coupons, sale prices, and more centralize themselves around Christmas. One day a year that allows families to spend thousands on the needless accessories in their homes for their children, spouses, and themselves.

The beginning of Christmas starts just after Thanksgiving on Black Friday.

With stores opening as early as 6 p.m. on Thanksgiving day, Black Friday attempts to bring the best deals of the year, often hosting enormous lines before opening many retailers' doors. According to BlackFriday.com, "the term 'Black Friday' was coined in the 1960s to mark the kickoff to the Christmas shopping season. 'Black' refers to stores moving from the 'red' to the 'black,' back when accounting records were kept by hand, and red ink indicated a loss, and black a profit." The page continues, explaining that once retailers realized how large the crowds were when discounting prices, it became tradition. In 2012, Business Week reported in their article "What Black Friday's \$59 Billion Really Tells Us" that 247 million shoppers spent an average of \$423. The pseudo-event of Black Friday merely feeds into larger pseudo-event of

Christmas.

The pseudo-event of Christmas has undoubtedly helped our economy at a hefty cost to consumers. According to a report by Forbes, "How Big is Christmas For Retail?" electronics and appliances, clothing and accessories, and sporting goods and hobbies see nearly 30-40% above their average sales in the months of November and December alone. These numbers are staggering. So what is the hefty cost? Debt, and lots of it.



What does celebrating Christmas mean to you?

ABC News published an article called "Lingering Christmas Bills Can Lead to Debt Woes." They report, "Consumer counseling agencies see a 25 percent increase in the number of people seeking help in January and February, and most of that traffic is propelled to their doors by holiday bills that haunt consumers like the ghost of Christmas Past." Credit cards become a large issue, as they mention "that while 40 percent of credit card users pay their bills in full each month, the remaining 60 percent roll them over – and over and over. [Robert Manning, a senior research fellow at the University of Houston and author of "Credit Card Nation – The Consequences of America's Addiction to Credit] calculates the

average balance of these 'revolvers' at more than \$11,500."

Christmas is a cultural icon that is exploited yearly as well, further cementing its position in popular culture as a pseudo-event. ABC Family just began its annual "25 Days of Christmas," where they show a Christmas related film or show every night up until Christmas night. Nearly every year Christmas movies are released, some like "How the Grinch Stole Christmas," which according to Box Office Mojo is the highest grossing Christmas film with a lifetime earning of \$260,044,825.

These films center around Santa Claus, presents, and occasionally wholesome plots like family, the true meaning of Christmas, and more. But when a child is watching "A Christmas Story," will they understand the true meaning of Christmas? Chances are, no. They don't care about the parents' scruples or the way the children learn how to appreciate the holiday. They care about when they finally give their son the famous Red Rider BB Gun that he strived for the entire film. It reinforces the desires for wants, and not needs. Christmas is all about wanting awesome presents, and these films reinforce that notion.



With stores opening as early as 6 p.m. on Thanksgiving day, Black Friday attempts to bring the best deals of the year, often hosting enormous

*lines before opening
many retailers' doors.*

Even small parts of our cultures like food products are centralized around Christmas. Eggnog is only sold around Christmas time, for whatever reason. All of the candies emblazon their brands with holly and Christmas trees and Santa.

Popcorn tins with three kinds of popcorn, and a uniquely designed tin flood the pharmacies around America, and candy canes, which nobody likes, are everywhere.

'Tis the season to spend frivolously, and since we bought that TV for our 12 year old son, why not buy him a Nestle Crunch Bar with Rudolph on it. That way we can reinforce that while he's sitting on his couch playing video games, he needs to be eating candy too. It's only fitting.

The circle of life exists within the pseudo-event of Christmas. Retailers make their prices lower to entice those parents, who have to buy a multitude of presents for their children because of how the media portrays Christmas to them. It's not about getting together with family, celebrating the birth of Christ and relishing in the gift of giving. It's all about receiving, spending money, helping our economy, and going into debt.
