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## Ritual Components of Black Friday

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Each year, just as the Halloween moon is setting, retailers are preparing for what has become the single highest grossing retail day in America, Black Friday. Throughout November, as stores are filling their stock rooms, shoppers from Connecticut to California are readying their lists and honing their bargain hunting skills, in preparation for the biggest shopping day of the year. The Christmas season, and its abundance of shopping, is typically seen as a boon for retailers and a well needed boost to a struggling economy.

For decades, shoppers wanting to get an early start on their holiday gift lists have ventured out the day following Thanksgiving, colloquially called Black Friday; however, it has been within the last 10-years, that this day has become the key focus for consumers and retailers alike during the Christmas buying season. Millions of people have shifted their holiday preparations

to this day, making it the single largest retail day in America, replacing the Saturday before Christmas in 2002 [i].

This year, Walmart, America's largest retailer, has forgone Thanksgiving entirely, keeping some stores open all day, while the rest will open at 10 pm to offer early holiday savings to the holiday masses. Compare this to a decade ago, when Walmart kept its doors shuttered until 5 am Friday morning in many of their locations [ii]. This increasing push of retailers to open on Thanksgiving day has led many in the media and across the country to begin crying fowl, saying Black Friday is infringing on Thanksgiving and robbing the day of its meaning [iii]. Contrarily, an estimated 247-million people took to the stores Thanksgiving weekend, showing wide-spread approval [iv].

Recent research found that this overwhelming popular support, in conjunction with the manner many prepare for Black Friday has many elements similar to ritualized behavior[v]. In conjunction with this ritualized element, increased consumerism and violence on Black Friday has caused many to ask if the thanks has been removed from Thanksgiving. However, given Thanksgiving's historical relationship with capitalism, including the turkey industry, NFL Football and the Macy's parade, Black Friday consumerism is only an extension of the historical commercialization of Thanksgiving, and does not infringe but rather enriches the holiday, providing additional layers of tradition.

Controversy surrounding this Black Friday is not limited to its influence on Thanksgiving. Numerous written accounts over the last 20-years, from publishers as renowned as Time Magazine to any number of ad-hoc, on-line news services and countless newspaper articles, have provided misinformation regarding the genesis of this day. The story typically reported is, "Black Friday is the day many businesses go into the black" (i.e. gain a profit); however, Bonnie Taylor-Blake from the American Dialectic Society can prove differently.

Mrs. Taylor-Blake has become something of an expert on the origins of the term Black Friday. As Mrs. Taylor-Blake informed me in an interview conducted via email, she never felt right about this reason for the term Black Friday. She says, "This explanation never made sense to me, especially because the general term Black Friday was previously applied to those Fridays in which some calamity had taken place.\_ Moreover, there's a fairly long tradition (at least in the first half of the 20th century) of referring to a Friday the 13th as 'Black

Friday.'" [vi]

It was this dissatisfaction with an answer which lead her to an article in the Public Relations News written by Denny Griswold in 1961. In this article, Griswold describes how the term Black Friday was coined by Philadelphia Police in reference to the traffic problems. Griswold's piece describes the city's efforts to have the day's name changed to Big Friday following pressure from the retail community. Retailers feared the name would ward off shoppers. Although this public relations campaign eventually failed, a subsequent one held in the 1970's and 1980's was successful. Taylor-Blake describes a second effort to tie the name Black Friday with business' profits. She says, "In the end, that was a pretty successful, clever maneuver, because – with Black Friday's explosion nationally over the past decade – the "red ink to black ink" explanation is the one that has stuck.\_ It's been repeated by public relations bulletins put out by the retail industry, but it's also been put forth by print, radio, and TV reporters covering holiday sales trends.\_ That the retail industry has been able to sell journalists on the "real" explanation behind the name just goes to show how well they've succeeded." [vii]

Taylor-Blake was able to validate this account by separate account, written by Martian Apfelbaum, Executive Vice President of Earl P.L. Apfelbaum, Inc. In this account, Mr. Apfelbaum begins by saying, "'Black Friday' is the name which the Philadelphia Police Department has given to the Friday following Thanksgiving Day. It is not a term of endearment either. 'Black Friday' officially opens the Christmas shopping season in center city, and it usually brings massive traffic jams and over-crowded sidewalks as the downtown stores are mobbed from opening to closing." [viii]

Holiday shopping has a long standing tradition dating back to the middle of the 19th century. One newspaper article from as early as 1848 urges people to go shopping despite an economic recession. [ix] Another article from the Milwaukee Sentinel, 1959, says, "The cold weather seemed to stimulate the pace of Saturday's buying. Although the crowds downtown were somewhat under Friday's smashing turnout." [x]

Finally, in another article from the Milwaukee Sentinel written in 1970 describes the day following Thanksgiving, "Thousands of persons poured into city and suburban stores Friday in their annual welcome to the Christmas season. Shoppers swarmed the stores from early morning to late afternoon." [xi]

These reports show both a long standing tradition of shopping on the day following Thanksgiving, but also show a scene of relative calm, without the overcrowding typically associated with today's Black Friday. An article from the Schenectady Gazette, Albany, NY from 1988 quotes a general manager of Albany's Cross-Gates Mall as saying, "A lot of Black Friday is media hype. Everybody was worried about Black Friday last year so they waited to shop until Saturday or Sunday, which were much busier days." [xii]

An article, from the New York Times in 1987, describes the scene at a Northern New Jersey mall on Black Friday. "It's 8:30 in the morning, much too early to be leaning against a wall in a shopping mall, but Joy Vicari is here, waiting patiently outside Child World, a large well stocked toy store...The store won't open for another 30-minutes, but Ms. Vicari said she doesn't care. Today's mission, she explained, is to complete this year's Christmas shopping." [xiii]

These articles describe a scene much different from today's mass hysteria and can be used to gauge the general public sentiment regarding Black Friday. Both describe scenes of relative calm and much different from images captured during Black Friday 2012. During this year, like others, thousands of people flooded stores everywhere, mobbing cashiers and overwhelming facilities. [xiv] This comparison in the relative order versus disorder shows how, over the last 20-years, Black Friday has become something more than just a typical shopping day.

Another gauge one can use to track the evidence that Black Friday has changed in recent years, from a normal shopping event into something much more intense, are the acts of violence, and even deaths, resulting from Black Friday shopping. Beginning in 2008 with the trampling of Jdimytia Damour, there has been at-least one death associated with Black Friday shopping per year. [xv]

Since then, Black Friday sales across the country are typically marred by consumer misbehavior, violence, vandalism and other anti-social or maladaptive behaviors [xvi]. This year, like the four previous years, deep discounts and fears of low stock caused riotous scenes in front of retailers across America, including a shooting in Tallahassee, FL and a shoplifter being beaten to death by Walmart employees in Georgia. Although easy to blame the dynamics of crowd psychology to these events, Kenneth Rogers suggests behavior like this cannot be solely attributed to the behavior of crowds. He argues it is the retailers who are

at fault. By offering deeply discounted merchandise in limited quantities, merchandizers create scenarios which manipulate consumer behavior.

In a recently published article in the Clothing and Textiles Research Journal, Sharron Lennon and her colleagues looked at these acts of violence, what their root causes are, and steps consumers can take to reduce violence. [xvii] In the article, A Perfect Store, the author surmised that people engage in these behavioral extremes for both intrinsic and extrinsic reasons. Intrinsically, the shopper who prepares, arrives early and gets the good-deal they find are motivated by a sense of being a smart shopper. Extrinsically, however, the money saved and the ability to give someone the perfect gift motivates consumers to go to extremes. Misbehavior occurs when there is a violation in the relationship paradigm between the consumer who has prepared and the merchandizer who fails on the delivery of a desired good (e.g., the item is out of stock). Through their research, they found that by ensuring adequate stock of merchandise and longer sales hours, retailers can avoid the triggers of consumer misbehavior. [xviii]

In spite of these simple steps, retailers continue to manipulate market conditions to ensure Black Friday continues to draw millions each year. Many people, in an attempt to be guaranteed deals and to be first in line, have begun camping out for days prior to Black Friday sales. When interviewed, the majority of people shared they were motivated by the sales; however, this is not always the case.

In 2010, two campers in St. Petersburg, FL, Tina Thain and Lori Davenport, were recognized for being the first in the country to start the Black Friday camp-out, some nine-days before Black Friday. For this, the ladies were rewarded with an iPad. When interviewed about their motives, Thain said, "It isn't about the sales. We just wanted to be first." Davenport followed, "There is just something about being first, a satisfaction in firstness." [xix]

Unlike Thain and Davenport, Samara Rembern, is here for the sales. As of Monday, November 20, 2012, 3-days before Black Friday, Rembern set up her tents outside of the Best Buy in Deptford, NJ. Her camp site is equipped with heaters and generators, and she says she looks forward to providing people with the gifts they want. She plans on purchasing, "A 40-inch (television) for my nephew, a 55-inch for my mom and hopefully the new Nintendo game for the kids if they have it in stock." [xx]

Another un-named man camping next to Samara, said, "Its worth it (camping out and missing Thanksgiving) if you can save thousands. This is my third year out here. Last year, my mom brought me Thanksgiving dinner. I ate it on the hood of her car." [xxi]

Samara said she is expecting members of her family to bring Thanksgiving dinner to her. When asked if this is extreme, Samara responded with, "We're here and we're guaranteed to get our deals. Its all worth it." [xxii]

With people camping out, shopping at the same stores and conducting the same behaviors year to year, some have begun to argue that Black Friday has become a ritual, or pseudo-holiday, unto itself. A recently published article titled *An Exploratory Investigation into Black Friday Consumption Rituals* looks at the components of ritual outlined by Rook and applies them to the consumer practices of Black Friday. Rook's definition of ritual used for this research was, "a type of expressive, symbolic activity constructed of multiple behaviors that occur in a fixed, episodic sequence, and that tend to be repeated over time." [xxiii]

To gain insight on consumer practices, the researchers provided questionnaires to 38 women over a 2-year period related to their Black Friday shopping habits. The researchers then analyzed the results and applied their findings to the principles of ritual established by Rook. The results of this research were, "Black Friday shopping activities constitute a collective consumption ritual that is practiced and shared by multiple generations of female family members and close friends." [xxiv]

The authors summarize their findings by saying, "The communal nature of the event (Black Friday shopping), the detailed planning that takes place in advance, and the time bounded nature of the activity appear to be a section of the ritual that has been borrowed in some form from traditional holiday rituals... Thus Black Friday is a unique consumption ritual that blends aspects of traditional shopping rituals with elements of traditional holiday rituals in its social construction." [xxv]

Another way to look at the apparent ritualistic nature that Black Friday consumerism has taken on is to use Catherine Bell's six-category framework for ritual classification. As can be seen Black Friday has aspects which meet each of the six categories, includes: formalism, traditionalism, invariance, rule-governances, sacral symbolism and performance. [xxvi]

Formalism, or a set bound of behaviors, is apparent in the traditional consumer-merchant relationship. The consumer exchanges money with a clerk or cashier who is standing behind a counter, typically wearing some kind of formalized uniform or other vestibles. Beyond this traditional consumer formalism, Black Friday shopping has an etiquette until itself including websites, phone apps, and price matching. These tools, which, if not utilized, can lead to a loss of savings and the intrinsic rewards which accompany smart shopping.

As can be seen in the research completed by Lennon (et, al), many families have long standing traditions of Black Friday shopping, some going back over 30-years. Their study also show that it is an intergenerational trend, typically among females to shop with their mothers, sisters, grandmothers and other family members. This provides a sense of the traditionalism needed for Bell's rituals.

Black Friday shopping excursions are seen to take on a sameness year-to-year. Market consolidation and the ability of only large retailers to purchase enough merchandize to offer steep discounts, has led to people shopping at the same stores each year. In a consolidated sample of nearly 3,000 twitter users, on Black Friday, 2011, a market research firm was able to identify nine stores which were discussed: Walmart, Best Buy, Target, Macy's, Amazon, Kmart, Kohl's and Nordstrom's. [xxvii] This illustrates the small number of retailers fighting for consumer dollars. Although the marketplace is constantly changing, the factors including market consolidation, has provided a limited number of retailers available for Black Friday shopping, thus providing an invariance in the way people approach the day.

Black Friday's roots in consumerism establishes certain rules of conduct; however, a new form of governance is on the rise as well. Public shaming has become a newly minted phenomenon on both social networking sites and morning news shows. With the availability of video ready cellphones, consumer misbehavior can easily be captured, shared with the masses, and is frequently used to punish bad behavior. This establishes a second tear of governance beyond the state, focusing on societal norms in the shopping situation, and establishing a new set of rules governing actions in situations like Black Friday.

Like the rules of governance, Black Friday's roots in consumerism also brings with it a set of sacred symbols. An Austrian study conducted in 2010 shows



that children recognize corporate logos long before literacy skills are developed.[xxviii] This suggests an inborn attraction to symbols and highlights the potency of corporation branding. This predisposition towards logos and branding, in conjunction with the limited number of retailers able to offer the steep door-buster savings people crave, leads to these retailers becoming beacons during the holiday season, and elevated to sacred symbols of saving.

Bell's final category, performance, is endured throughout November. As retailers hoard merchandise for the Black Friday rush, consumers are accessing a variety of resources to plan for their holiday shopping. In a survey conducted of 31 participants on SurveyMonkey.com, 50% of respondents reported using some tool on Black Friday. This use of aids in preparation for Black Friday has also been seen by Lennon and helps meet the performance criteria established by Bell.

From this analysis, and supported by the literature, Black Friday has ritualized elements that separate it from traditional shopping. Although shopping rituals do meet some of the criteria listed above, the singular importance of the day in conjunction with many people having a long weekend, an established history of shopping and the popular response to Black Friday has propelled it to become a holiday unto itself, but, does this holiday impose its capitalism onto Thanksgiving?

This has been a question asked more this year than in years prior in response to many of the large retailers, including Walmart, Target and Toys R' Us, opening their doors on Thanksgiving night. This left many asking if Black Friday has begun infringing upon the Thanksgiving holiday. In a survey conducted via SurveyMonkey.com, 41% of respondents said "Yes," but can a consumer holiday infringe on Thanksgiving?

Although traditionally a New England Holiday, Thanksgiving as we celebrate it today owes its genesis to figures like Sarah Josepha Hale, Abraham Lincoln and not anyone from the Mayflower. Hale, author of the popular home journal *Goodey's Magazine* and *Lady's Book*, used her position as editor to outline how Thanksgiving is celebrated, what food should be present and how it should be prepared.[xxix] Through her efforts, and endorsed by Lincoln, Thanksgiving became known as the first national holiday in 1863, to be celebrated on the fourth Thursday in November. [xxx]

Matthew Dennis, author of *Red, White and Blue Letter Days*, feels Thanksgiving escapes the commercialism of many American holidays. He says

that Thanksgiving, "...more successfully than most holidays, has managed to escape the wanton commercialization that purists complain has debauched other sacred calendrical moments." He continues, "...the most striking thing about Thanksgiving is that today, amid commercial blitzes and multicultural battles, the holiday remains remarkably unpoliticized and uncommercialized." [xxxi]

For an author like Dennis, Black Friday's "wanton commercialization" would most definitely impose upon the traditional Thanksgiving ritual. Although, later in this chapter Dennis blindly includes the NFL into the non-commercialization of Thanksgiving, a farce, given that the NFL makes millions in broadcasting these games, Dennis would see Thanksgiving night shopping as an imposition.

Contrary to Dennis, Elizabeth Pleck writes about the invasion commerce has already had on the traditional Thanksgiving holiday. Pointing to things like NFL football and the Macy's Thanksgiving parade, Pleck feels Thanksgiving has already become a commercial holiday. She says, "The Macy's Thanksgiving day parade, begun in 1924, was a symbol of the commercialization of a holiday the general public regarded as noncommercial. In truth, Thanksgiving had some commercial elements as early as the nineteenth century, when a man might give his brother a Bible as a Thanksgiving present...A Crisco ad from 1916, for example, showed a grey-haired granny with wire rimmed glasses holding her mince pie made with its product." [xxxii]

Adding to evidence of a commercialized Thanksgiving is a precedence set by Franklin D. Roosevelt. In 1939, Thanksgiving day was going to fall on November 30, leaving only 24 days until Christmas. Under duress from American retailers, and fearing this may stall economic recovery following the Great Depression, FDR signed a bill making Thanksgiving the third Thursday of the month, creating a political firestorm.[xxxiii] As a result, Thanksgiving was celebrated over the course of two weeks, on the third Thursday for the Nation, but on the fourth Thursday for traditionalists. Although this only lasted for two years, the move to side with retailers and reschedule Thanksgiving around the Christmas shopping season established a national precedence commercializing the Thanksgiving holiday.

Another indicator of Thanksgiving's economic importance, according to the IBIS World Inc.'s 2010 Holiday spending report, Thanksgiving is the second

highest grossing American Holiday for retailers, brining in an estimated \$30-billion in 2010.[xxxiv] This comes not only in food consumption, but holiday travel as well. Given Thanksgiving's rating of the second highest grossing holiday in combination with events like the Macy's Thanksgiving parade, and Thanksgiving's historical association with NFL football, Thanksgiving has proven itself to be a holiday as commercialized as Christmas or any other holiday associated with consumerism. Thus, Black Friday is merely an extension of the consumeristic culture which has surrounded Thanksgiving since its inception.

Thanksgiving has also become an important date for on-line retailers. Although e-commerce currently does not meet the sales volume of traditional retail, each year, on-line sales climb, specifically on days like Thanksgiving. According to the National Retail Federation, Thanksgiving sales rose nearly 20%, from 29-million last year to nearly 35-million transactions completed by on-line retailers on Thanksgiving.[xxxv] This growing trend of on-line sales during Thanksgiving can be interpreted both as the commercialism already inherent in the Thanksgiving holiday and the consumer's desire to begin holiday shopping early.

Finally, in a study completed by Melanie Wallendorf, she and her colleagues analyze Thanksgiving, determining that it is a celebration of abundance and consumption. Guests and hostesses alike are encouraged to gorge themselves on the bountiful feast presented, as food is prepared in abundance, plates are piled high, second and third helpings are encouraged. From the observations conducted of numerous Thanksgiving celebrations, Wallendorf notices, "When the hostess offers dessert, participants decided to wait because they were 'too full'. Instead of feeling rejected, the hostess feels successful in feeding them well." [xxxvi]

She continues to describe this as a prescribed set of behaviors, a certain formalism which is expected by both the hostess and the guests. Wallendorf uses this scene to illustrate the Thanksgiving ritual celebration of abundance and consumption in which this day is meant to embody.[xxxvii] Thus, how could Black Friday impose its commercialization on Thanksgiving if Thanksgiving already has a long history of commercial influences and is built upon ideals of abundant consumption if not gluttony? Given this history, Thanksgiving itself is already sufficiently commercialized, although this is hidden by a veil of traditions. By opening their doors on Thanksgiving Night, retailers are not taking away from

Thanksgiving, but rather providing consumers with what they desire. Retailers are adding another layer of tradition on Thanksgiving rather than imposing upon the sacredness of the holiday.

As for the future of Black Friday, I believe it will soon become a thing of the past. With retailers opening their doors this year on Thanksgiving night, the crush of shoppers seemed much less. In my own personal experience, the Walmart I went to at 10 pm had little in the means of a rush. Although fairly crowded for a Thursday night, I witnessed no bedlam or any of the other scenes depicted in modern media accounts of the day. Instead, I saw people with full-carts and sleepy eyes, trying to get their shopping done.

The economic estimates show this same sluggish nature in store receipts. Black Friday sales volume was down 1.8% from last year; however, overall weekend sales were up 13% from last year's spending.[xxxviii] This shows a trend that one might expect. With many stores opening on Thanksgiving night, Black Friday was robbed of its potency. Although I believe the tradition of Black Friday, as identified by Lennon, will continue, as a family-centric shopping ritual, the consumer ritual of Black Friday will soon end and become part of a four-day consumption festival in which we eat, sleep, and shop only to eat some more.

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## Charlesgate: Palimpsest of Urban Planning

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"Not only are we allowing individuals to destroy a naturally beautiful landscape, but we are by default allowing these same or other individuals to replace or deface it with ugliness of an antihuman dimension."

– Richard Latham, *The Artifact as a Cultural Cipher*

Between Boston's Back Bay and Kenmore neighborhoods, a small park branched off from the Charles River. This park, once a salty bog, was transformed into a tranquil urban oasis: Charlesgate Park. Today it is again a wasteland, albeit one capped by a highway overpass.

Charlesgate Park, over its century lifespan, was a small stretch of parkland through Boston's Back Bay. It had grassy fields; a tranquil, flowing river; and plenty of reeds, shrubs, and trees. It provided residents an escape from the dirt, concrete, and artifice of the city. The first architectural imposition upon this landscape, Charlesgate Park was representative of the values held

by urban planners at the turn of the twentieth century.

The Bowker Overpass was an ordinary stretch of elevated highway. However, it was an unconventional instance of urban highway development. Its construction required no demolition or relocation of residents. It did not invade a minority neighborhood or introduce questions of eminent domain. The overpass was not even constructed on purchased property. It was built upon the cheapest land possible, city owned land, which benefitted both taxpayers and politicians. To the planners of the 1960s, the parkland was entirely dispensable.

The small, rectangular plot between Kenmore and Back Bay has experienced multiple iterations since its initial development. The dominant urban design theories of multiple eras imposed themselves upon it. Currently the landscape is in dire disrepair, but looking beyond the developments of more recent decades reveals a rich heritage. Before the highway, what was the relationship between the parkland and the city? Was the land so valueless as to have no protection against disruptive development? What has happened to the landscape after the overpass's construction; was value added?

This paper does not lament the loss of a park; it has been replaced by a highway and the past is immutable. Instead, this paper will examine the transformation of the landscape over time. It will analyze the landscape by tracing its history, observing it, identifying the ambitions that guided its development, and finding the realistic limits of those ambitions. (1) This is a study of how a landscape is an expression of the society surrounding it.

The twentieth century was dominated by three distinct periods of urban planning and design. The first, leading into 1900, was influenced by transcendentalism. It sought to replace a natural beauty destroyed by industry and commerce. The second, following the end of World War II, was focused upon the automobile and suburban development. The third, emerging in the early 1960s, treasured urban neighborhoods and refocused on residents.

Frederick Law Olmsted was the co-leader of the first period along with Andrew Jackson Downing. Robert Moses was not the leader of the second period, but he was its preeminent practitioner. The third wave of urban design theory emerged from criticisms of Moses and the second wave. Led by Jane Jacobs, this school of thought carries into the present and will have inevitable effects upon the landscapes of tomorrow.