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OPINION | OUR VIEW

Giving Thanks For Black Friday?

Perhaps the one thing that's almost as popular as a Black Friday sale is complaining about it. This is such an easy target. The prospect of people lining up in the middle of the night to get a jump-start on the Christmas shopping season by going after insane deals does tend to set some of us off. So, too, does the newest trend of stores offering crazy-mad sales that start on Thanksgiving Day, luring throngs of people away from their homes and families to spend, spend, spend. It's ironic that, on the day after we give thanks for what we have, we rush out to buy more. However, before we dismiss all this hungry commercialization and mourn what has become of the thankless Thanksgiving holiday, perhaps we should give due respect to the good tidings that come with it. For instance, Black Friday ranks as the biggest day of the year for many retail businesses, not to mention that it kicks off the most important season of the year for shoppers. It's said that some stores do 40 percent of their annual business during the holidays. This year's Black Friday produced mixed results, with Friday sales actually down about 1.8 percent from a year ago. But a huge reason for that, many sources note, is because there were more Thanksgiving Day sales that siphoned off a bit of the Black Friday crowd.

The crowds that tend to clog up the brick-and-mortar stores may have compelled more people to shop online this time. According to *Computerworld*, online sales last Friday surpassed the \$1 billion mark for the first time, up a whopping 26 percent from a year ago. There were expectations at press time that this week's Cyber Monday sales may surpass the Black Friday haul. The brick-and-mortars did OK, too. According to ShopperTrak, the number of shoppers to hit real stores rose 3.5 percent from a year ago. Overall, it's estimated that about \$59 billion was spent by shoppers either in stores or online during the four-day holiday weekend, which also included Small Business Saturday. That was up 13 percent from a year ago. So, there are people who are thankful, and even critics of Black Friday shopping hysteria could be among them. Retail spending — i.e., demand — is the backbone of our economy. As long as people are willing to spend, there is going to be cash flow and the opportunity for growth. It demonstrates that the U.S. consumer is still the most important and dynamic economic force there is, and it can produce wonderful results on many levels. This year's numbers and practices show a shift occurring in the consumer pattern. More stores are going with Thursday sales because of the ever-growing popularity of around-the-clock online shopping. It will be interesting (besides merely irritating to some of us) to see how this trend develops in the years to come. All this is good economic news. Sure, it's not holiday shopping the way it used to be, but the sales numbers sure aren't what they used to be, either. And for that, we should all be thankful — like it or not.

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SPEAK OUT!

Share your thoughts with us. Write to the **PRESS & DAKOTAN** on a topic of the day or in response to an editorial or story. Write us at: Letters, 319 Walnut, Yankton, SD 57078, drop off at 319 Walnut in Yankton, fax to 665-1721 or email to views@yankton.net.

TODAY IN HISTORY

- By The Associated Press**
Today is Wednesday, Nov. 28, the 333rd day of 2012. There are 33 days left in the year.
- Today's Highlight in History:** On Nov. 28, 1942, nearly 500 people died in a fire that destroyed the Coconut Grove nightclub in Boston.
- On this date:** In 1520, Portuguese navigator Ferdinand Magellan reached the Pacific Ocean after passing through the South American strait that now bears his name.
- In 1861, the Confederate Congress admitted Missouri as the 12th state of the Confederacy after Missouri's disputed secession from the Union.
- In 1885, at the end of the Third Anglo-Burmese War, British troops occupied Mandalay.
- In 1905, Sinn Fein was founded in Dublin.
- In 1912, Albania proclaimed its independence from the Ottoman Empire.
- In 1922, Captain Cyril Turner of the Royal Air Force gave the first public sky-writing exhibition, spelling out, "Hello USA. Call Vanderbilt 7200" over New York's Times Square; about 47,000 calls in less than three hours resulted.
- In 1958, Chad, Gabon and Middle Congo became autonomous republics within the French community.
- In 1961, President John F. Kennedy dedicated the original permanent headquarters of the Central Intelligence Agency in Langley, Va. Ernie Davis of Syracuse University became the first African-American to be named winner of the Heisman Trophy.
- In 1962, Princess Wilhelmina, the one-time Queen of the Netherlands, died at age 82.
- In 1964, the United States launched the space probe Mariner 4 on a course to Mars.
- In 1979, an Air New Zealand DC-10 en route to the South Pole crashed into a mountain in Antarctica, killing all 257 people aboard.
- In 1987, a South African Airways Boeing 747 crashed into the Indian Ocean with the loss of all 159 people aboard.
- Ten years ago:** In twin attacks in Kenya, three suicide bombers killed 14 people at an Israeli-owned hotel, while at least two missiles were fired at — but missed — an Israeli jetliner taking off from Mombasa airport.
- Five years ago:** A day after an international Mideast peace conference in Annapolis, Md., President George W. Bush told Israeli and Palestinian leaders he was personally committed to their mission of peace. Republican presidential rivals Rudy Giuliani and Mitt Romney clashed over immigration in a provocative, no-holds-barred CNN/YouTube debate. O.J. Simpson pleaded not guilty in Las Vegas to charges of kidnapping and armed robbery stemming from a confrontation with sports memorabilia dealers. (Simpson and a co-defendant were later convicted.) Broadway stagehands and theater producers reached a tentative agreement on ending a crippling 19-day-old strike.
- One year ago:** Egyptians, despite a recent wave of unrest, waited peacefully in long lines to vote in the first parliamentary elections since the ouster of Hosni Mubarak; Islamist parties were the big winners. Occupy Wall Street protesters defied a deadline to remove their weeks-old encampment on the Los Angeles City Hall lawn.
- Today's Birthdays:** Recording executive Berry Gordy Jr. is 83. Former Sen. Gary Hart, D-Colo., is 76. Singer-songwriter Bruce Channel is 72. Singer Randy Newman is 69. CBS News correspondent Susan Spencer is 66. Movie director Joe Dante is 65. "Late Show" orchestra leader Paul Shaffer is 63. Actor Ed Harris is 62. Former NASA teacher in space Barbara Morgan is 61. Actress S. Epatha Merkerson is 60. Former Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff is 59. Country singer Kristine Arnold (Sweethearts of the Rodeo) is 56. Actor Judd Nelson is 53. Movie director Alfonso Cuaron is 51. Rock musician Matt Cameron is 50. Actress Jane Sibbett is 50. Comedian Jon Stewart is 50. Actress Garcelle Beauvais is 46. Rhythm-and-blues singer David Robinson is 44. Hip-hop musician apl.de.ap (Black Eyed Peas) is 38. Actress Aimee Garcia is 34. Rapper Chamillionaire is 33. Actor Daniel Henney is 33. Rock musician Rostam Batmanglij (Vampire Weekend) is 29. Rock singer-keyboardist Tyler Glenn (Neon Trees) is 29. Actress Mary Elizabeth Winstead is 28. R&B singer Trey Songz is 28. Actress Scarlett Pomeroy ("Reba") is 24.
- Thought for Today:** "We are not all born at once, but by bits. The body first, and the spirit later." — Mary Hunter Austin, American novelist and playwright (1868-1934)

FROM THE BIBLE

As long as he lives, he is lent to the LORD. 1 Samuel 1:28. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis

YOUR LETTERS

Inventiveness
Sam A. Nusz, Yankton
 Pertaining to my letter of Oct. 24, I want to thank Charles Synder for the enlightenment on the background of electricity, Nov. 7. I found it informative and interesting. I appreciate your input. Having your letter read to me, I realized I should have used the word "develop" in place of "invent." However, the message I really wanted to convey was, because in America, being allowed to be FREE thinkers, it is less complicated to get ideas developed. And how fortunate, in America we can communicate our thoughts in newspapers, which are a valued part of our household. We need to keep a FREE USA.

An American Hypocrisy

BY KATHLEEN PARKER
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WASHINGTON — As events have unfolded in what shall ever be known as "The Petraeus Affair," one cannot escape noticing that the women in this sordid saga have been handed the short end of the stick, as though the men are mere victims of ambitious, hormonally driven vixens.

There's the so-called "socialite" in Tampa, Jill Kelley, who courted generals and exchanged at least hundreds of emails with our lead commander in Afghanistan, John Allen. And there's the biographer with toned arms, Paula Broadwell, who wore tight jeans and allegedly seduced America's most darling general, David Petraeus.



Kathleen PARKER

The double standard we apply to men and women in these very human dramas is nothing new, but also nothing short of appalling. Even as we urge women to behave in every way as men, even pushed to arms on the battlefield, the Madonna-whore dichotomy is alive and writhing.

The two men are golden, we are inclined to infer. The women, well, what is one to think? Tarnished and branded, discarded as chattel having each served her purpose.

Here's an alternative narrative. Let's assume for a moment that everyone involved in this spectacle is actually a good and decent, if flawed, person, variations of the definitions notwithstanding. Yes, Kelley and her husband have financial difficulties, but who doesn't these days? Isn't it also possible that Kelley, in addition to enjoying the company of generals, wanted to do something nice for her country by providing a social outlet for military personnel in the area?

As for her email exchanges with Allen, the only relevant concern seems to be that the general apparently has more time on his hands than a general should. Otherwise, communicating via social media and email is merely our modern campfire. We are social animals, and lonely people will find each other through the smoke. Do we really care so much who and how people choose to fill the void in their lives? Is it our business?

More complicated is the relationship between Petraeus and Broadwell, if only because of an investigation into questionable emails she sent to Kelley, whom she apparently considered a rival. Broadwell is being investigated for "cyberstalking" and also in regard to classified documents found on her computer.

These investigations are ongoing and, as yet, have

confirmed no personal or professional breach. Still, Broadwell has been essentially indicted in the public mind. Her security clearance, which ultimately might justify her possession of the documents in question, has been suspended, which is probably appropriate under the circumstances, though hardly conclusive.

Nevertheless, Broadwell's reputation has been tarnished well beyond the sin for which she has expressed sincere remorse. The married mother of two has been characterized by an increasingly tabloid press as the scarlet woman, the "mistress," an outdated word that indicts a woman but rarely the man, smirkingly suggestive of "kept-ness." Broadwell has even been criticized for showing too much arm on TV. Such observations seem odd in a sleeveless era launched by the first lady, whose enviable guns are legendary and often on display.

As much as we sympathize with the painful upheaval suffered by the families involved, let's pause a moment for Broadwell and recall that she was an Army officer, a West Point graduate, an accomplished, yes, ambitious, elite member of the military who, as it turns out, happens to have had a relationship with a man for whom she apparently had strong feelings.

Did she cause others pain? Of course, and for this she is suffering by all accounts. Does she deserve to be pilloried in the public square? Or does she deserve the same second chance any similarly accomplished man would be accorded?

One does not need to approve of the behavior to grant compassion and suspend judgment, at least until we know whether there is any reason for public interest beyond the prurient.

In the meantime, our urgency to apply different standards to women than to men deserves scrutiny. For women, there's no margin for error in public life, yet men walk away virtually unscathed — re-elected to office, rehired by Wall Street, re-assigned to a new parish, rehabilitated by the mere act of entering "rehab." Puh-leez.

Broadwell is one of America's success stories, if you buy the woman-warrior myth. Her only flaw seems to have been falling for another man and, in the way some men do, showing off biceps toned by hundreds of hours of hard work.

To the pyre, to the pyre.

Kathleen Parker's email address is kathleemparker@washpost.com.

The Plight Of Retail Workers

BY ROBERT B. REICH
 Tribune Media Services

We're officially into Christmas buying season — when American consumers determine the fate of American retailers and, indirectly, the American economy.

What's often forgotten is that consumers are also workers, and if their pay doesn't keep up, they can't keep the economy going.

A half-century ago America's largest private-sector employer was General Motors, whose full-time workers earned an average hourly wage of around \$50, in today's dollars, including health and pension benefits.

Today, America's largest employer is Walmart, whose average sales associate earns \$8.81 an hour. A third of Walmart's employees work less than 28 hours per week and don't qualify for benefits.

There are many reasons for the difference — including globalization and technological changes that have shrunk employment in American manufacturing while enlarging it in sectors involving personal services, such as retail.

But one reason, closely related to this seismic shift, is the decline of labor unions in the United States. In the 1950s, more than a third of private-sector workers belonged to a union. Today fewer than 7 percent do. As a result, the typical American worker no longer has the bargaining clout to get a sizable share of corporate profits.

At the peak of its power and influence in the 1950s, the United Auto Workers could claim a significant portion of GM's earnings for its members.

Walmart's employees, by contrast, have no union to represent them. So they've had no means of getting much of the corporation's earnings.

Walmart earned \$16 billion last year (it just reported a 9 percent increase in earnings in the third quarter of 2012, to \$3.6 billion), much of which went to Walmart's shareholders — including the family of its founder, Sam Walton.

The wealth of the Walton family now exceeds the wealth of the bottom 40 percent of American families combined, according to an analysis by the Economic Policy Institute.

Is this about to change? Despite decades of failed unionization attempts, Walmart workers are getting organized. Last Friday they staged protests outside at least 1,000 Walmart locations across the United States.

The action has given Walmart employees a chance

to air their grievances in public — not only lousy wages (as low as \$8 an hour) but also unsafe and unsanitary working conditions, excessive hours and sexual harassment. The result is bad publicity for the company exactly when it wants the public to think of it as Santa Claus.

What happens at Walmart will have consequences extending far beyond the company. Other big-box retailers are watching carefully. Walmart is their major competitor. Its pay scale and working conditions set the standard.

More broadly, the widening inequality reflected in the gap between the pay of Walmart workers and the returns to Walmart investors, including the Walton family, haunts the American economy.

Consumer spending is 70 percent of economic activity. As income and wealth continue to concentrate at the top, and the median wage continues to drop — it's now 8 percent lower than it was in 2000 — a growing portion of the American workforce lacks the purchasing power to get the economy back to speed.

Without a vibrant and growing middle class, Walmart itself won't have the customers it needs. Most new jobs in America are in personal services like retail, with low pay and bad hours. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average full-time retail worker earns between \$18,000 and \$21,000 per year.

But if retail workers got a raise, would consumers have to pay higher prices to make up for it? A new study by the think tank Demos reports that raising the salary of all full-time workers at large retailers to \$25,000 per year would lift more than 700,000 people out of poverty, at a cost of only a 1 percent price increase for customers.

Even retailers would benefit. According to the study, the cost of the wage increases to major retailers would be \$20.8 billion — about 1 percent of the sector's \$2.17 trillion in total annual sales. But the study also estimates the increased purchasing power of lower-wage workers as a result of the pay raises would generate \$4 billion to \$5 billion in additional retail sales. This seems like a good deal all around.



Robert REICH

Robert Reich, former U.S. Secretary of Labor, is professor of public policy at the University of California at Berkeley and the author of "Aftershock: The Next Economy and America's Future." He blogs at www.robertreich.org.