

WHAT'S THE REAL HISTORY OF BLACK FRIDAY?

Black Friday is the day after Thanksgiving, when crowds of turkey-stuffed shoppers descend on stores all over the country to take advantage of the Christmas season's biggest **bargains**. But the real story behind Black Friday is a bit more complicated—and darker—than that.

The first recorded use of the term *Black Friday* was applied to a financial crisis, specifically, the crash of the U.S. gold market on September 24, 1869. Two speculators, Jay Gould and Jim Fisk, bought up as much as they could of the nation's gold, hoping **to drive** the price **up** and sell it for huge profits. On that Friday in September, the conspiracy was finally revealed, sending the Wall Street stock market into **bankruptcy**.

The most commonly repeated story behind the post-Thanksgiving shopping-related Black Friday tradition links it to **retailers**. As the story goes, after an entire year of operating at a loss ("in the red"), stores would earn a profit ("go into the black") on the day after Thanksgiving, because holiday shoppers spent so much money on discounted merchandise. Though it's true that retail companies used to record losses in red and profits in black when doing their **accounting**, this is an inaccurate version of Black Friday's origin.

In recent years, another myth has appeared, giving a particularly ugly **twist** to the tradition and claiming that back in the 1800s, Southern plantation owners could buy slaves at a discount on the day after Thanksgiving. Though this version of Black Friday's roots has understandably led some to call for a boycott of the retail holiday, it has no basis in fact.

The true story behind Black Friday, however, is quite different. Back in the 1950s, police in the city of Philadelphia used the term to describe the chaos on the day after Thanksgiving, when thousands of shoppers and tourists arrived in the city on the day before the big Army-Navy football game held on that Saturday every year. The Army-Navy game, one of the biggest rivalries in American sports, is usually played in Philadelphia, the first capital of the U.S. Philadelphia cops were not able to take the day off because they had to work extra-long **shifts** to deal with the big crowds and added traffic. Shoplifters would also take advantage of the confusion in stores to steal merchandise, adding to the policemen's headaches.

By 1961, the expression *Black Friday* had caught on in Philadelphia. The city's merchants tried unsuccessfully to change it into *Big Friday* in order to remove the negative connotations. The term didn't spread to the rest of the U.S. until much later. Sometime in the late 1990s, however, retailers found a way to reinvent Black Friday and turn it into something that reflected positively on them and their customers. The day after Thanksgiving became America's shopping day, marking the point when stores turned a profit. It is interesting to note, however, that stores traditionally see bigger sales on the Saturday before Christmas than on Black Friday.

The Black Friday story stuck, and soon the term's darker roots in Philadelphia were forgotten. Since then, the one-day sales bonanza has become a four-day event, and has inspired other retail holidays such as Small Business Saturday/Sunday and Cyber Monday. Stores started opening earlier and earlier on that Friday, until Walmart, the world's largest retailer, opened its stores on Thanksgiving evening in 2011. Ever since, retailers have been in a race to catch up and now, millions of Americans say they plan to shop immediately after their Thanksgiving meal. Retailers have come up with a name they hope will catch on: Grey Thursday.

Text adapted from an article by

Sarah PRUITT. *History.com* [on line] (November 24, 2015)

bargain: ganga

to drive up: incrementar

bankruptcy: bancarrota

retailer: comerciant que ven al detall / comerciante minorista

accounting: comptabilitat / contabilidad

twist: gir / giro

shift: torn / turno

Part 2: Writing

Choose ONE topic. Write about number 1 or 2. Minimum length: 100 words.

[4 points]

1. You and a friend are planning to go shopping. You want to go on Black Friday and take advantage of all the bargains, but your friend thinks this day only promotes consumerism. Write the dialogue between you and your friend. Make sure you do NOT use your own name in your dialogue.
2. Buy Nothing Day was created as a reaction to the Black Friday shopping madness, and its creators want people to reflect on their consumer habits and to make them consume less and produce less waste. Do you agree with this idea? Write an opinion essay.

Grammar	
Vocabulary	
Text	
Maturity	
Total	
Nota de la redacció	