

The Rise of Consumerism & Christmas

Taken directly from *Christmas: A Candid History* by Bruce David Forbes (University of California Press, 2007)

Some points to consider:

1. Before the 19th century, gifts were not the focus of Christmas observances.
 2. The Industrial Revolution in the 1700s and 1800s helped lead to the rise of consumer culture.
 3. Soon enough, merchants began to see holidays as an opportunity rather than an obstacle. That included Christmas.
 4. Earlier gift-giving traditions, associated with St. Nicholas' Day and New Year's Day, shifted across the American calendar to Christmas in the mid-1800s.
 5. Manufactured, purchased gifts began to replace homemade ones in the United States [and Canada] in the late 1800s and early 1900s.
 6. Commerce had more influence than Christianity in making Christmas the culturally-dominant holiday it is in the United States [and Canada] today.
- Think about: Christmas Cards, Christmas Decorations, Wrapping Paper . . .
 - In his book about gift giving in the modern American Christmas, William Waits did not discuss the religious aspects of Christmas. "The reason is simple," he wrote in the introduction:

Religion has not played an important role in the emergence of the modern form of celebration. This may come as a surprise – even a shock – to those who think of Christmas as being predominantly religious.

However, in practice, the secular aspects of the celebration, such as gift-giving, the Christmas dinner, and the gathering of family members, have dwarfed its religious aspects in resources spent and concern given. Although celebrants may have had meaningful Christmas experiences in church or in other religious settings, they have spent much more time during the holiday season on such secular matters as selecting presents, then wrapping and presenting them, and making arrangements for holiday visits and feasts.

