

2019 Solstice Greeting

Here in El Norte, the shortest day of the year is again upon us. Solstice is an astronomical fact. All the feast days which various cultures celebrate or have celebrated in this approximate time of year all now together known (so as not to offend anyone) as: the "Holiday Season" are related to Solstice. PLEASE WATCH THIS SHORT VIDEO (cut and paste into your browser):

http://pmdvod.nationalgeographic.com/NG_Video/869/467/1120823363982_1513796873851.mp4

A few past recipients of this annual Solstice e-Card have commented that Solstice is a Pagan Feast, perhaps because many relate Solstice to photographs of Stonehenge Celebrations.



The Astronomical Fact of Solstice took place for uncountable eons before there were any Jews, Christians, Romans, Mayans, Zoroastrians or Druids for that matter.

We are Northern Hemisphere culture: We think December has to do with winter, but the Astronomical Fact is that it is the Summer Solstice 'Down Under', and this Southern Hemisphere "summer" Australia is burning in a most concerning manner. We express our empathy and solidarity.

In past twenty some years of this annual Solstice e-Card, we have looked at the different ways historical cultures celebrated the time around Solstice. How will those who come after us view our feast days of Black Friday, Cyber Monday and most recently Super (Panic) Saturday?

Which group do you find more grounded in reality:
the Stonehenge crowd or the TV grapplers?



How they see us: Horror as Black Friday goes global

As if Halloween and Santa weren't enough, America has inflicted yet another excuse for "superfluous consumption" on the world, said *El Correo* (Spain) in an editorial. Black Friday, the sales frenzy that takes place the day after Thanksgiving in the U.S., is now observed all over the globe, from Russia to China to Brazil, and shoppers have come to expect bargains online and in stores. This imported tradition is wreaking havoc on our smaller merchants, who struggle to "continuously compete with the promotions" offered by big-box stores and massive e-tailers.

In Spain alone, online retailers made sales worth \$1.75 billion on Black Friday in 2018. That's 10 percent more than in 2017, and another record will probably be set this year. Meanwhile, shuttered downtown storefronts make us "remember with a bittersweet pang the old shops of yesteryear"—the florist, the bookshop, the hardware store—that enlivened our communities.

Don't blame the consumers, said the *Mail & Guardian* (South Africa). In an era of skyrocketing inequality, "Black Friday is a desperate moment where we try to catch up." It's the one chance that poor people have to replace "a faulty fridge or broken stove," or even to stock up on cut-price food. No wonder the Mall of Africa outside Johannesburg was crammed this year with shoppers dressed for battle in running shoes and backpacks. Yet many of the sales aren't even legit, said Michal Bernath in *Lidove Noviny* (Czech Republic). Apple brought Black Friday to the



Grabbing discounted TVs in São Paulo

Czech Republic in 2011, discounting goods at its online store. But local retail giants there "game the numbers," jacking up their prices ahead of time before lowering them to the original price on sale day.

Some of us are rebelling against this "consumerist madness," said Jean-Marcel Bouguereau in *La République des Pyrénées* (France). In Germany, Spain, and the U.K., workers at Amazon distribution centers went on strike for the day. In France, dozens of environmental activists

blocked access to one of the retailer's warehouses. And French lawmakers are now considering outlawing Black Friday sales altogether, because they fuel the kind of overconsumption that is destroying the planet.

The scenes in Brazil were embarrassing, said Rodrigo Leite in *O Estado de São Paulo* (Brazil). People waited in line for hours at a Burger King restaurant in Brasília to snag six burgers for \$3.50, and they wrestled one another to get cheap flat-screen TVs in São Paulo. Let's adopt a different holiday, "also born in the U.S." Only a few Brazilians know about Giving Tuesday, as evidenced by the fact that we collectively donated some \$285,000 to charity on that day in 2018—a far cry from the \$620 million we spent that Black Friday. Next year, let's try to do better. Wouldn't it be nice to "make Giving Tuesday bigger than Black Friday"? Instead of Americans' acquisitiveness, let's emulate their generosity.