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How New York City Invented the Holiday Season: The Rise and Fall of the World's First Global Holiday

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Jesus may have been born in Bethlehem, but it was the city of New York that transformed the traditional day of his birth, December 25, into a national and eventually global holiday season. The evolution of the Christian religious holiday of Jesus' birth into a secular global holiday that embraces all religions, cultures, and traditions is a unique example of the emergence of a global culture. Little did Clement Clarke Moore realize when he transferred the holiday of St. Nicholas from December 6 to the 25th, nor Macy's Department Store when it organized its first Thanksgiving Day Parade, that they were crafting a secular mid-winter holiday that would one day be catapulted onto the global stage to become the planet's first global holiday, an integral part of the human cultural patrimony. Yet, today, in the early decades of the 21st century, this first global holiday is under siege from all sides and may not long endure.

This article will trace this evolution through eight major periods: 1) The establishment of the Christmas holiday in the early churches and the controversies surrounding the holiday during the Protestant Reformation, 2) The Great New York City Christmas War, 3) The emergence of the need for a unifying secular national holiday during the early American Republic and Civil War, 4) The engineering of the "Holiday Season" stretching from Thanksgiving to New Years' by commercial and marketing interests, 5) The entertainment, food, and fun industries give a hand, 6) The inclusion of non-Christian holidays into the Holiday Season, 7) The globalization of the Holiday Season, and finally, 8) The tinsel covered Trojan Reindeer: the anti-Holiday Season backlash.

The Establishment of the Christmas Holiday in the Early Churches and the Controversies Surrounding the Holiday during the Protestant Reformation

The celebration of a mid-winter holiday is as old as the first day humans migrated to the northern climes. The sadness of the death and desolation that surrounded our ancient ancestors of the northern hemisphere mingled with hope that the days would lengthen, the sun would grow stronger, the trees would burst into bloom, the animals would give birth, and the crops would again ensure their survival. To placate the often angry gods and goddesses who regulated the laws of nature, our ancestors offered sacrifices, prayers, and rituals to grant them still another spring, summer, and fall. [1]

It was only natural that when the first Christians began separating themselves from their Jewish roots, they too would feel the need for some form of mid-winter holiday. The Romans were busy celebrating their holiday of Saturnalia, the Persians had Sadeh, the Slavs had Maslenitsa, the Germanic tribes had Yule, the pagans had the Winter Solstice, and the Jews had Chanukah. So by the fourth century the Christians of Rome, Greece, Egypt, Palestine and Syria had assigned a holiday celebrating the birth of their Messiah to the mid-winter season. The Bible of course only noted that on the day of Jesus' birth the shepherds were in the fields with their flocks, which definitely excluded mid-winter from the possible dates for his birth. But as is often the case, Christians lost no time and had no qualms about adding still another holiday to the merriment that surrounded them. One might conclude that "The Holiday Season" long predates Christmas and that the modern New York "Holiday Season" is only a revitalization of the similar season of ancient times. [2]

Thus, already by the fourth century, and in keeping with the mid-winter celebrations of their neighbors, the three early Christian Churches in Rome, Greece and Egypt assigned Christ's birth on or near December 25. In 350 Pope Julius I proclaimed December 25 as the official Catholic Christmas holiday. The various calendar revisions of the first centuries still kept the holiday near mid-winter.

The Greek, Roman and Egyptian churches, as well as the equally ancient Ethiopian, Armenian, Georgian and Syrian churches, and later the Germanic, Slavic, Celtic and Magyar peoples of Europe, easily and effortlessly surrounded the holiday of Jesus' birth with decorations, foods, traditions, music, celebrations, and rituals drawn from their various pre-Christian religions and cultures. For example, holly, Yule logs, mistletoe and decorated evergreen trees became part of the new Christian holiday of Christmas among the Germanic tribes that inhabited modern-day Germany, Holland and Scandinavia.

Catholic missionaries saw no difficulty adopting such pagan elements into the holiday. Unlike Judaism and Islam, Christianity did not elaborate a long and complex list of social, sexual, economic, political, culinary, dress, marriage, linguistic and other codes to regulate the lives of their followers to the minutest of detail. "My kingdom is not of this world," the Bible teaches in John 18:36, and "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's," Jesus instructed his followers in Mark 12:17. Without firm and divinely revealed instructions on how to order their day-to-day lives, the various churches and ethnic groups freely drew on the wealth of pagan elements to fashion their respective Christmas celebrations.

That Roman Catholics from Poland to Portugal and from Iceland to Italy would break into ecstatic celebrations every Christmas went unchallenged until the outbreak of the Protestant Reformation in the mid-1500s. Central to the reforms of Jan Huss, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Huldrych Zwingli, John Knox and others was the quest to return Christianity to the purity of the first centuries. Their test of Christian authenticity was its presence in the Bible. "If it's not in the Bible then it's not Christian" was the slogan that inspired them all. Out went the Latin language, nuns and convents, monks and monasteries, popes and cardinals, indulgences and the seven sacraments, and statues and pilgrimages. The followers of the Swiss reformers went even further and rejected priestly vestments, veneration of the saints, the veneration of Mary, bishops, and the holiday of Christmas. The followers of John Calvin's pupil, the Scotsman John Knox, went even further and eliminated church organs, figurative stained glass windows, and all church music other than chanted Psalms. [3]

As the Protestant Reformation worked its way through the cultures and peoples of Europe, each of the many churches inspired by the reformers adopted their own unique teachings regarding the holiday of Christmas. The Lutherans continued the Catholic tradition of Christmas and went on to add countless hymns and traditions to it. The Dutch Reformed Church downplayed the holiday but stressed St. Nicholas' Day on December 6 as the time of festivities, gift giving, and luscious foods. The Church of Geneva eventually tolerated even if they did not stress the holiday, but added their own riotous holiday to the season, The Escalade, on December 11-12. This holiday commemorates Geneva's defeat of the Duke of Savoy in 1602 who sought to add the rich city-state to his lands.

The Anglican Church lurched from periods of vicious opposition under Cromwell to festive celebration under Catholic monarchs, until Queen Elizabeth sanctioned the holiday in the famous English compromise that attempted to strike a balance between the Catholics and the Protestants. Latin was rejected, the king replaced the pope, and Christmas was permitted. The Scotch Presbyterians, English Baptists, Puritans, Quakers and Methodists rejected Elizabeth's compromise as a sell-out to Catholicism and fiercely opposed the pagan-Papist holiday of Christmas. But they all joined in the New Year's festivities on the night of December 31.

The Great New York City Christmas War

"First come, first grab" was the slogan that determined the European colonization of the Americas. Spain was the first unified nation-state of Europe, and deeply inspired by its Catholic faith it dispatched Columbus to discover a direct sea route to Asia without having to round Africa. In 1492 he "discovered" the Americas, and soon everything from Texas, Florida, and California to the southern tip of Argentina was in Spanish hands. Portugal also threw out the Muslims and Jews, united under the guidance of one king and one church, and grabbed Brazil. France, Holland, and England were late-comers to the Americas. France grabbed the Mississippi Valley and Quebec; the English seized New England and Virginia; and the Dutch laid claim to a vast area stretching from Cape Cod to the Chesapeake Bay and north to French Quebec.

In flowed thousands of Spanish, Portuguese, French, and English settlers to fill the expanses of their land claims. They each brought their own particular attitudes toward Christmas. For the Spanish, Portuguese and French Catholics, Christmas was not an issue. The English colonies of Virginia, the Carolinas, Maryland and later Georgia likewise had no qualms about celebrating the December 25 birth of Jesus. For the English Puritans who settled in New England and Long Island, the Quakers who settled in Queens, New York, and later in Pennsylvania, the English Baptists and Methodists, and the Scotch Presbyterians, Christmas was discouraged if not outright forbidden.

Little Holland, which claimed an expanse of land from Cape Cod to the Chesapeake River and was then the richest country in the world, had difficulty rousing settlers to leave the bucolic canal houses, wealthy trading towns and counting houses of home. New Amsterdam, founded in 1624, remained a mere village of 2,000 souls, equal to that of English Boston, when in 1647 Peter Stuyvesant was appointed Governor-General of the colony. He received instructions to increase the population of the colony or

else the English, French or Spanish would seize it. When a band of English Baptists requested permission to settle in the colony, the governor granted them land in what is today Flushing, Queens. A group of French Huguenots staked out New Rochelle, and some Scotch Presbyterians were given territory in Brooklyn. German Lutherans, Mennonites, Moravians and Reformed Christians were welcomed, in 1657 a group of Sephardic Jews were reluctantly allowed to settle, and eventually some English Quakers and Anglicans arrived. Only Catholics were banned, because it was feared they would constitute a Fifth Column in league with their fellow religionists in Quebec or Florida who would be eager to take over the colony. [4]

Unfortunately, the diverse settlers were not able to put the memories of the Reformation aside in their new homeland. The English Baptists sought out any chance to preach to non-Baptists that they were hell-bound because child baptism was not biblical. They marched so many residents down to the East River where they washed away their Original Sins and opened the gates of heaven for them that they earned the nickname "Dunkers." The Quakers, who founded a new Meeting House in Manhattan, were also aggressive in pointing out the sins of others. The governor attempted to expel them, but they protested to Holland and gained permission to remain. This protest is called the Flushing Remonstrance and remains the first American call for religious freedom. The early English Baptists often joined the Quakers in disrupting church services and Christmas celebrations in the colony.

The English takeover in 1664 confirmed Stuyvesant's worst fears. In spite of his efforts to build up the colony, the Dutch had lost it. The occupying English demonstrated their rule by building Anglican (Episcopalian) churches in prominent locations in every settlement and town in the colony and declaring their church the established church of the city and surrounding counties. On Broadway they raised Trinity Church and in the center of Quaker and Baptist Flushing they built a church dedicated to St. George the Dragon Slayer. The first pastor preached that he had come to town to slay the dragon of Quakerism. At the same time scores of Scotch and North Irish Presbyterians arrived, and with migration their hatred of the English only increased. But of course Catholics were still banned, and even the secret celebration of the Mass by an itinerant priest was a crime punishable by death.

English Governor Edward Hyde undertook a vicious campaign to force the residents of the colony into the Anglican Church. He revoked or refused to grant preaching licenses to many non-Anglican ministers and churches in one of the many holy wars that plagued the colony. Large numbers of French Huguenots, German Lutherans and Scotch Presbyterians joined the Anglican Church. Presence at official religious celebrations and events became a necessity for residents of the city who aspired to positions of political power or economic influence. The city was firmly ruled by Episcopocrats. Although Hyde was recalled to London for his double crimes of religious persecution and excursions through the town in female attire, the rule of the Episcopocrats remained. Trinity Church presented lavish Christmas celebrations and even staged the first global presentation of Handel's Messiah in 1770. Meanwhile, the staid Dutch Reformed citizens further downplayed the holiday of Christmas while putting their emphasis on wild times in honor of St. Nicholas on December 6 and a routine of house visits on New Year's Day. Likewise, the Presbyterians, Baptists and Methodists retreated into the New Year's celebrations which featured house visits, drinks, and parties. [5]

The American Revolution of 1776-1783 marked the end of the English era, the disestablishment of the Anglican Church, and the flight of most American Anglican clergymen. When Trinity Church on Broadway burned during the great fire of 1776, it is said that the residents of the city erupted in cheers. With independence came the American Constitution with its freedom of religion and separation of church and state. But these freedoms were restricted to the Federal level, and many states retained religious restrictions and established churches. However, unlike the other 12 colonies become states which had large English majorities, New York State and City were religiously diverse. In 1776 the city had a total of 14 houses of worship, including 3 Anglican, 2 Dutch, 2 Lutheran, and one each for Huguenots, Quakers, Presbyterians, Baptists and Moravians, and one synagogue. Six were firmly in the Christmas camp, four were for subdued celebrations, and four (including the synagogue) were non-Christmas celebrators. [6]

Christmas remained a controversial issue in the city. The city surged from a population of 25,000 in 1776 to 152,000 in 1820. Hordes of immigrating Irish Catholics, German Catholics and Lutherans, and English Anglicans brought their Christmas celebrations with them. Equal numbers of English Baptists, Methodists and Puritans, German Baptists, and Scotch and North Irish Presbyterians adamantly refused to abandon the purity of their Christianity in the new city. In addition to these throngs of new immigrants, with the loss of state support and patronage, Presbyterians, Methodists and Baptists quickly realized that it was sink or swim for each denomination. Edwin Scott Gaustad describes the thousands of Bible toting and quoting lay-preachers that fanned out across the young republic, transforming the Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists into the three leading denominations of the land. Tent revivals, Sabbath worship, and home Bible reading and study dominated this movement. The American Sunday School Union, American Bible Society, and American Tract Society provided these missionaries with all that they needed in the form of cheaply bound Bibles, tracts, and teaching materials. In this Bible oriented religious revival there was little room for non-Biblical traditions like Christmas. [7]

In New York City these Bible fundamentalists targeted the newly arriving Catholics. Forbidden to migrate to the city under the

English, after independence the gates were thrown open wide and both Irish and Germans carved out ethnic neighborhoods. Christmas midnight mass was the usual target of their saving ire. In 1806 fifty reformers gathered outside the newly dedicated St. Peter's Church to taunt worshippers. Word spread of the attack, and the worshippers who arrived for the early morning services were well armed with cudgels, stones, and brickbats. The police attempted to separate the antagonists, one officer was killed, and the Protestants cleared the church and went on to invade "Irishtown" where they wreaked havoc. [8]

These Protestant nativists not only opposed Christmas. They objected to statues, which they routinely defaced, nuns, whom they attacked in the streets, and Irish and German bars and taverns, which desecrated the Sabbath by opening Sunday afternoons. But the mass arrival of Irish and German Catholics seemed to be a tide that not even the most fervent Bible-based Christian could resist.

Recognizing defeat on the battlefield of the city, a group of Presbyterians and like-minded Bible Protestants retreated to a newly laid-out square and turned it into an island of God. Abandoning the rest of the city to the pagans, they transformed Washington Square into a New Jerusalem. Their stately Federal homes surrounded the square and crept up Fifth Avenue. First Presbyterian Church at 12th Street and 5th Avenue, and New York University (NYU) "The Presbyterian University," dominated the new neighborhood. With the eclipse of the Episcopacy during the American Revolution, the Presbyterians took over the reins of power in the city. Around the square clustered the city's new elite of bankers, mayors, intellectuals, industrialists and inventors. The flickering candles of Christmas services, the tinsel of a tree, or the echo of a carol were not to be found on Christmas Eve in Washington Square. In her book, *Old New York* (1924), Edith Wharton describes the throngs of visitors who passed from one brownstone to the other, the merriment of greetings, the bowls of punch, and tables laden with delicacies; but this was not Christmas, it was New Year's Eve. [9]

It was not only Irish and German Catholics and Lutherans, and Bible-based reformers who battled over Christmas during the first decades of American independence. The Second Great Awakening gave rise to many new denominations that also battled over this clearly non-Biblical but so attractive holiday. William Miller (1782-1849) urged his Millerite followers to abandon all their property, dissolve their marriages, and retreat to a mountain in Upstate New York in preparation for the millennium. When Jesus did not appear as predicted in 1843, his followers adopted the belief that the Second Coming of Jesus was "imminent." The Seventh Day Adventists, as they came to be called, rejected the non-biblical Sunday Sabbath along with the equally non-biblical December 25 Christmas. Like most new converts the Adventists entered the Christmas war with fervor, distributing tracts, preaching on street corners and organizing public prayer. Another reform movement that struggled to enter the fray was the Oneida Community founded by John Humphrey Noyes (1811-1886), also in Upstate New York. Along with rejecting traditional marriage, patriarchal rule and urban life, his followers sought to return to Christianity in its purest form. Out went Christmas, of course, but eventually the clamor of children for decorated trees and gifts proved a force they were unable to resist. The compromise was that the innocent children would have their tree and gifts but the more mature adults would not celebrate the holiday. Other new churches that had to chart their ways through the troubled waters of Christmas were the followers of Charles G. Finney, the Campbellites (Disciples of Christ), and the Mormons. [10]

Christmas joined Sabbath observance, slavery, women's rights, corruption, immorality, crime, drugs, prostitution, gambling and alcohol, as major moral issues that risked plunging the city and the nation into chaos during the early decades of the young republic. In fact, daily violence reached such proportions that in 1828 the city established its first professional police force following an especially violent Christmas riot. Herbert Asbury's book and later film, *The Gangs of New York* (1927), portrays the turmoil of those decades. [11]

Need for a Unifying Secular National Holiday during the Early American Republic and Its Emergence at the Time of the Civil War

Clement Clarke Moore (1779-1863) was professor of ancient languages at the Episcopal General Theological Seminary in Manhattan and an ordained clergyman. But before he achieved his scholarly fame, in 1803 he composed a little poem for his children titled, "A Visit from Saint Nicholas," popularly known as "The Night before Christmas." It was not published until 1823, and Moore only acknowledged his authorship of the little children's ditty in 1837. Scholars believe that Moore incorporated many of the traditions surrounding Christmas drawn from various sources that were current in the city.

Image: Clement Clarke Moore merged the old Dutch December 6 gift giving Feast of St. Nicholas with the December 25 Christmas to create the modern Christmas holiday.

His little children's poem serves as a snapshot of how many New Yorkers celebrated Christmas at his time. First the poem transferred



the ancient Christian and beloved Dutch holiday of St. Nicholas (Sinterklaas in Dutch), with its festive foods, entertainment and gift giving, from December 6, when it is still celebrated by Catholics, to December 25. Secondly, the poem relocated the saint from his Mediterranean coast home of Myra (Demre in Turkish) to the North Pole and dressed him in fur rather than traditional Greek Orthodox bishop's robes.

Interestingly, the poem still referred to him as "St. Nick" or "Saint Nicholas." Third, the poem described the saint as a "right jolly old elf" rather than the tall, stately, dignified bishop usually portrayed on

holy cards. Fourth, the poem noted that Saint Nicholas used a team of 8 tiny reindeer to propel his miniature sleigh. In spite of the poem's continued use of the name "Saint Nicholas," Moore's poem marked a major step in the secularization of the saint and the holiday. [12]

Washington Irving (1783-1859) also played a very important part in the evolution of the New York Christmas holiday. Moore, a theologian and professor of religious languages, elaborated Christmas as a fun-filled children's and family holiday. Irving, a founder of the New-York Historical Society, author, essayist, biographer, historian and diplomat, recognized the potential of the holiday as a force capable of uniting the northern and southern colonies, old family Knickerbockers and new Irish and German immigrants, upper and lower social classes, and rich and poor.

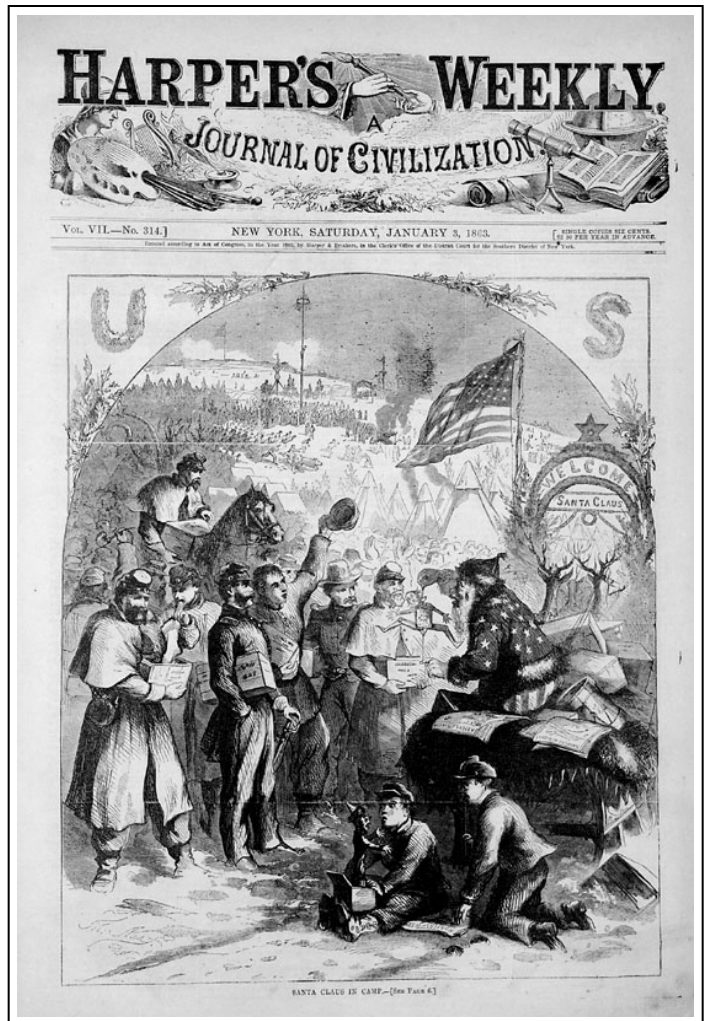
Compared to Spain, England, France and Russia, the newly established United States of America had no history, no national language, no national religions, no national identity and no national culture. Irving set out to rectify this lacuna. In his *A History of New-York from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty* (1809), written under the name Diedrich Knickerbocker, Irving evoked a glorious if largely fictitious Dutch history of New York. In fact, he wrote, the English takeover of the colony in 1664 was part of God's plan for the unification of the 13 colonies, their victory in the American Revolution, the writing of the Constitution, and the spread of freedom and liberty around the world. [13]

In *The Keeping of Christmas at Bracebridge Hall* (1822), Irving described how the celebration of Christmas in England bridged class and wealth and contributed to a stable and happy country. In *Old Christmas* (1856) he retained the name "Saint Nicholas," although various forms of the Old Dutch translation of the name, "Sinterklaas" and eventually "Santa Claus," were commonly used in the city. Irving stressed the holiday as one that not only transcended all social classes and could unite all New Yorkers and Americans, but transcended all religions as well. Even the most militant Presbyterian, Methodist, Puritan or Baptist could celebrate the holiday. [14]

Image: Nast created a Civil War star spangled Santa as a symbol of American patriotism.

Still another New Yorker who contributed to the emerging holiday season was Thomas Nast (1840-1902). During the American Civil War, Nast mobilized Santa as a representation of American nationalism, often portraying him wearing a blue outfit with stars distributing gifts to Union soldiers and referring to him as "Santa Claus." [15] Following the war, after several experiments he designed Santa's red outfit that we all recognize today. [16] Under Nast's brush, Moore and Irving's "right jolly old elf" named St. Nicholas became a secular grandfatherly figure named Santa Claus. He was totally devoid of any religious meaning, and Nast even provided him with a wife, something St. Nicholas' Greek Orthodox superiors would not have approved of. [17]

As late as 1855, the growing Christmas holiday was still



shunned by many churches. The *New York Daily News* for December 26, 1855 reported, “The churches of the Presbyterians, Baptists and Methodists were not open on Dec. 25... They do not accept the day as a Holy One.” The writer continued that Episcopalian, Catholic and German churches were all open and decked with evergreens for the holiday. [18]

But during the Civil War, Christmas emerged as a secular symbol of American nationalism. In 1870 Congress declared Christmas a holiday for Federal employees in DC, and in 1885 extended the holiday to all Federal employees. States began proclaiming Christmas a holiday already in 1836 when Alabama began the trend, with New York State joining the pack in 1849.

The growing American public school system in the 1880s and 1890s mobilized Santa and Christmas as a quasi-national holiday. Students were required to decorate the school Christmas tree, participate in pageants, bring gifts to exchange, and as homework describe their family celebrations. The celebration of Christmas, like speaking English, voting, and hard work, had become a test of assimilation, Americanization, and loyalty to their new nation for the millions of Italians and Eastern European Catholics, Orthodox and Jews who flowed through Ellis Island. [19]



Image: This Nast centerfold depicts the various ways Christmas was being celebrated after the Civil War.

W. Lloyd Warner argues in *Structure of American Life* that by the turn of the twentieth century Christmas had become part of American civil religion. Under the guiding hands of Moore, Nast, and the public school system among others, the holiday had lost its specifically Christian characteristics. Christmas joined Thanksgiving, Memorial Day and the Fourth of July, he wrote, as part of the “ceremonial calendar of American society.” They allow Americans to express common sentiments, share their patriotic feelings, draw people together, emphasize their similarities and common heritage, and minimize their differences. [20] Robert Bellah reflected this sentiment in his classic article, “Civil Religion in America,” by arguing that while Christmas is selectively derived from Christianity, it “is clearly not itself Christianity.” [21]

Engineering of the “Holiday Season” Stretching from Thanksgiving to New Years’ by Commercial and Marketing Interests

When Thomas Edison (1847-1931) presented his first string of electric Christmas tree lights in 1880, modern technology began lending a hand to the growing importance of Christmas to New York City and the nation. In a massive publicity blitz, his “Edison Ready to use Electric Lighting Outfits” made their way into the city’s homes. To power them he constructed the first commercial electricity generating plant in Lower Manhattan. The ancient pagan Germanic Christmas tree could now safely be brought indoors, and Christmas became a popular middle class family celebration. To advertise his new lights, Edison and his General Electric Company sent picture postcards to families that featured a modern, middle class family decorating their home for the holiday. The father is on a stepladder dressed in a stiff white collar, tie, vest and black smoking jacket while his wife is neatly tucked in her corset. Strings of lights not only decorate the tree but are strung throughout the house. [22]

Of course all these indoor trees needed decorations. Into the season stepped F. W. Woolworth (1852-1919), who traveled to Germany and signed a monopoly agreement with the German manufacturers of glass ornaments which he marketed at his growing national chain of stores. The smaller ones sold for 5 cents and the larger ones for 10 cents, thus the origin of the 5 and 10 cent store. He constructed his corporate headquarters on Broadway which reigned as the tallest building in the world from 1913 to 1930. Woolworth strongly contributed to the New York Christmas holiday going national. His newspaper and magazine advertisements, like those of Edison, made celebrating Christmas a New York institution. [23]

Another merchant who contributed mightily to the commercialization of the holiday season was Frederick August Otto Schwarz (1836-1911), who migrated to the city where he opened his toy store in 1870. Mercifully he shortened the name of the store to FAO Schwarz, and in 1896 he declared his store the “Original Santa Claus Headquarters.” His gift catalogue made Christmas a national obligation. Together with other toy merchants such as Woolworth, Schwarz made New York City the toy capital of the nation. In February 1903 the first American International Toy Fair was held in the city to bring together toy professionals, advertisers, merchants, designers, importers and the press. Toys are now one of the largest American industries, with an annual sales of \$23 billion in 2014. [24]

The individual who singlehandedly transformed Christmas into the Holiday Season was Adolph Simon Ochs (1858-1935), a German-born Jew who bought *The New York Times* newspaper in 1896 and built its new corporate headquarters on 42nd Street and Broadway in 1903. To celebrate, his new building began hosting outdoor displays to welcome in the New Year. Eventually the celebrated crystal ball drop became the highlight of the celebration. In short order, the Holiday Season extended from Christmas to New Year’s. [25]

Macy’s Department Store extended the season even further when the store held its first Thanksgiving Day Parade in 1924, at the height of the Roaring 20s. The last float features Santa Claus coming to town and announces the official beginning of the Christmas shopping season. With the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade at one end and the Times Square New Years’ ball drop at the end, the Holiday Season was now clearly delineated. The rest of the story is simply filling in the nearly month-long season between Thanksgiving and New Years with almost daily celebrations.

Shortly after Macy’s first parade, in 1931 in the midst of the Great Depression, the workers at the rising Rockefeller Center complex of buildings erected their first tree to celebrate the holiday. Until today the lighting of the tree is not only a major New York event, but like the Times Square Ball Drop a national and even international event. [26]

So overwhelming had the juggernaut of the Holiday Season become as it steamrolled across helpless immigrants, through ethnic New York City neighborhoods, and into mid-western farms and villages, that none could stand in its path. As much as diehard parents, ministers, priests and rabbis railed against not only the pagan Christmas holiday itself but the rabid commercialization of it, nobody, not even God himself, could resist the incessant and pitiful clamor of children for candy, cookies, cakes, Christmas trees, and most importantly, Christmas presents.

Charles W. Jones wrote in the *New-York Historical Society Quarterly* that Christmas customs were like tuberculosis germs; no matter what we did to resist them, they inevitably find a way to enter into the social body where they germinate, often become

virulent, and change into a plague. The weakest link in the social body was children. “Children will outwit reformers every time,” he wrote. [27] After all, it was William Gilley’s little children’s book that first popularized the name “Santa Claus,” [28] and Clement Clarke Moore wrote his poem for his children.

The Reverend James W. Alexander, pastor of Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, was one of the last and most dedicated holdouts against the creeping incursions of the holiday. As early as 1851 he described some “three hundred and fifty urchins and urchinesses” assembled at one of the church’s mission chapels eagerly expecting holiday treats just like at any other church. The reverend rationalized holding a Christmas celebration for the children by insisting that Christmas was no longer a religious holiday in the city, and so the celebration did not violate the teachings of the Presbyterian Church against engaging in any form of worship not specifically commanded by the Bible. Eventually his church, like most of the traditional anti-Christmas denominations, was swept up by the growing Christmas frenzy. Neither ministers nor theologians, neither dogma nor Scriptures, neither sermon nor resolution could resist the clamor for Christmas festivities emanating from the children in Sunday School. Alas for the Presbyterians, Christmas services joined the church organ, hymn singing, and Tiffany figurative stained glass windows in the downfall of the Reformation quest to return the Scots to the Christian purity of the first centuries. In 1906 the Presbyterians in the northern half of the nation published official prayers for Christmas, and in 1932 the Southern Presbyterians did likewise. [29]

The Jews of the city likewise had no choice but to give in to the mounting pressure of children, but they remained troubled by what they termed “The Christmas Problem.” The almost half million eastern European Jews of the Lower East Side of Manhattan and Brownsville in Brooklyn had little choice but to send their children to the public schools of the neighborhood. Along with learning English, saluting the flag, reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, learning American history, celebrating Thanksgiving and the 4th of July and referring to Webster’s Dictionary of the American-English language, celebrating Christmas was part of the process of Americanization. The few religious yeshivas charged tuition, and the new immigrants could barely keep body and soul together, much less find the funds for private school. Like the Presbyterians, most Jews considered Christmas as a secular American holiday along the lines of Thanksgiving and the Fourth of July. Some Jews objected to the singing of outright religious hymns in schools, and the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations even mounted a school boycott of the public schools in Brownsville at the turn of the century.

But the *New-York Tribune* of December 25, 1904 reported, “Jews Keep Christmas: Children Demand It on the East Side, and That Settles It.” [30] The article wrote, “Santa Claus visited the East Side last night and hardly missed a tenement house.” The reporter asked “an official of one of the big East Side synagogues” if he allowed his people to celebrate Christmas. The official declared, “There is no reason why we should not. Christmas no longer has any religious significance. At least it has none in cosmopolitan New-York.” He continued that if he ordered them not to celebrate the holiday, they would demand to know why. He would then have to describe what the holiday was all about, “and that would give the day religious significance in their eyes.” [31]

Rather than resist, Jews undertook a concerted campaign to secularize the holiday. Many Jews put up Christmas trees, and Jewish children clamored for presents just like their Christian friends. Christmas was not a Christian religious holiday but rather an American national holiday. Jonathan D. Sarna wrote in his book, *Is Judaism Compatible with American Civil Religion?: The Problem of Christmas and the ‘National Faith,’* that Jews considered Christmas part of the “familiar American sancta,” which included family ties, friendly reunions, timeless values, domestic harmony, brotherhood among all peoples, love, and lasting peace. [32]

Among the Jews who contributed mightily to this secularization of Christmas was Irving Berlin (1888-1989), an immigrant from Russia who composed the all-time Christmas favorite “White Christmas” in 1942. There is no mention of Jesus or religion. The anxious wait for snow replaces any expectation of the arrival of the Messiah. Berlin was joined by Robert May’s “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer” (1949), “Let It Snow, Let It Snow” (1945) by Sammy Cahn (Cohen), “Silver Bells” (1951) by Jay Livingston (Levinson), “Rockin’ Around the Christmas Tree” (1958) by Johnny Marks, and other secular Holiday Season favorites. [33]

Rabbi Joshua Eli Plaut described this Jewish strategy of dealing with what Jonathan Sarna dubbed the “Christmas Problem” in his book, *A Kosher Christmas: ‘Tis the Season to Be Jewish* (2012). He quotes Philip Roth’s novel *Operation Shylock* (1993), where Roth boasts that Irving “de-Christ” Christmas. “He turns Christmas into a holiday about snow—he turns their religion into schlock (Yiddish for something cheap, shoddy, or inferior).” Roth continued, “If supplanting Jesus Christ with snow can enable my people to cozy up to Christmas, then let it snow, let it snow, let it snow.” [34] Secularization remained the principal Jewish coping strategy until after the Second World War, when the elaboration of Chanukah as a Jewish alternative replaced it.

With the first Macy’s Thanksgiving Parade in 1931, shopping became a major, if not *the* major, preoccupation of the season for many Americans. By 1975, Black Friday, the day following the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade, had become the most profitable shopping day of the year for most stores. Soon Cyber Monday joined the lineup, and today Grey Thursday is

clamoring for admission to the shopping spree. After-Christmas sales also contribute to the shopping frenzy. New York City's department stores compete to produce the most elaborate store window displays, with Macy's, Lord and Taylor, Saks Fifth Avenue, Bergdorf-Goodman, and Barney's claiming the first five prizes. [35] People come from all across the country and around the world just to see the city's Christmas store windows.

One recent new Holiday institution is the National Ugly Christmas Sweater Day, which began in 2011 as a protest against the reigning bad taste of the season but morphed into a national movement. Specialized stores and even many chains labor to create the ugliest Christmas sweater of the year and revel in the organization's motto, "Normal bounds of good taste simply don't seem to apply." The celebration was held on December 12, 2014, giving ample time for celebrants to pass their ugly sweater on to its next victim. [36]

Thus, the flowering Holiday Season has encouraged long-established retail institutions to undertake major advertising campaigns to encourage the residents of the city to spend ever more money to decorate their homes, fill chimney stockings, surround trees with wrapped packages, and splurge on Christmas dinner delicacies. But the holiday season also spawned a host of new industries specific to the holidays.

The Entertainment, Food, and Fun Industries Give a Hand

Central to the success of the emerging Holiday Season was the fact that it was fun. Religions, nations, clubs and societies have long recognized that fun must be part of any organization if it hopes to succeed. Early Christian leaders, Protestant Reformers, and the founders of more recent religious movements recognized that once the initial founding enthusiasm began to wane, when the founding generation began to marry, have children and found families, construct houses of worship, and establish hierarchies—what sociologist Max Weber described as the passing from the charismatic to the institutional stages of religious evolution, [37] holidays became central to the survival of the new faith. And even the most restrained holiday inevitably adopts the foods, traditions, music, art, and entertainments of the ordinary people. Thus it should not be surprising that, as one die-hard anti-Christmas Baptist, Bruce T. Gourley, wrote, Christmas has become the "cash cow for corporate America." [38]

The first known effort by a New York City religious group to harness secular public entertainment to the Christmas season was on January 16, 1770, when Trinity Episcopal Church on Broadway presented a public presentation of Handel's *Messiah*. Handel composed the piece for Easter in 1741, and the first presentation was on April 13, 1742 in Dublin. It spread rapidly throughout Europe and had its first American performance at Trinity, but it was still an Easter piece of music although gradually migrating toward Christmas. On December 25, 1815 the newly founded Handel and Haydn Society staged a December 25 performance, and it has remained a Christmas highlight ever since. [39]

Significantly, the Trinity Church presentation was not inside the church itself, but aimed at a broader, inter-denominational and even secular audience by renting for the occasion the meeting room above Burns Coffee House opposite Bowling Green, at what is today #9 Broadway. The music rapidly found its place as Holiday Season entertainment in spite of its strong religious content. Today thousands of sing-alongs, every major choral society and orchestra, high school and college chorus presents the piece, when it often constitutes the major fund raising event for many of these cash strapped ensembles.

Sibyl McCormack Groff wrote in an article titled "Gothamtide: Christmas words and images in nineteenth-century New York" that by the mid-nineteenth century public entertainment had joined church and family hearth as part of the holiday festivities. Barnum's American Museum, Griffin and Christy's Minstrels Opera House, and Niblo Gardens advertised holiday shows in the newspapers. Christmas night balls, operas, banquets, and choral concerts were staged by secular institutions. [40]

The political importance given to Christmas during the Civil War further encouraged the popularization of the holiday. For Christmas 1864 Nast published a large print titled "The Union Christmas Dinner" that featured a lavish banquet hall with President Lincoln inviting Confederate soldiers to take their seats at the table. The empty seats are clearly marked with the names of the Southern states. [41] For the following Christmas, the readers of *Harper's Weekly* were greeted by a print Nast titled "Merry Christmas to All," a Santa Claus that all today would recognize. The print is bereft of any religious imagery or symbols. On both sides of Santa two children play with their toys, and two other medallions show families at home. However, along the bottom of the double-paged print is a public theater stage with an attentive audience watching a show. Thus, by the mid-nineteenth century public celebrations had joined church services and the family home as the focuses of the holiday.

The advent of radio and later television not only took the Times Square ball drop to national and even international fame but also launched Guy Lombardo and the Royal Canadians and the little-known Scottish song by Robert Burns, "Auld Lang Syne." First broadcast on radio in 1929 from the Waldorf-Astoria Ballroom then on CBS television in 1956, a new American tradition was born. Dick Clark's countdown began to rival Lombardo's in 1974.

In 1933 Radio City Music Hall launched its Christmas Spectacular with the Rockettes, a show that today attracts a million

visitors. Rivaling the Rockettes in popularity and revenue earnings is the New York City Ballet, which in 1954 singlehandedly transformed Peter Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker Suite* into a Lincoln Center blockbuster. Today performances stretch from Black Friday to after New Years to accommodate the throngs who seek tickets. Since 1984 the nationally televised CBS Army-Navy football game has become a central celebration for couch-bound revelers. One of my all-time favorites is the Annual Merry Tuba Christmas show at The Rink at Rockefeller Center. Since 1974 tenor and bass tuba players from across the nation have congregated in the city for what is billed as the largest assembly of tuba players in the universe. [42]

Not far behind public entertainment venues in celebrating the season and making millions in the process is the food industry. From eggnog to candy canes, Christmas cookies to whiskey, chocolate Chanukah *gelt* to boxed and filled Christmas chocolates, and fruit cakes to cards, the Holiday Season constitutes the major revenue generating season of the year. In April 2002 Hershey's opened its 16-story Times Square Chocolate World that has become an all-year-long tourist attraction. Each of the holiday season industries hosts its annual trade fair during the Holiday Season in one of the major cities of the nation. December 14 is National Poinsettia Day, when thousands of producers, retailers, dealers, breeders, advertisers and designers gather to prepare for the next Poinsettia frenzy. An estimated 99.99% of that industry's profits come from one short two-week season. National Cookie Day is December 4, National Egg Nog Day is the 24th, and National Candy Cane Day is the 26th, among others. [43]

In recent years, beer producers, sellers, and consumers have united forces to sponsor a beer crawl called SantaCon. Since the first SantaCon in San Francisco in 1994, New York City has claimed the largest, rowdiest and drunkest celebration in the world. In 2012 an estimated 30,000 participants descended on Brooklyn and Lower Manhattan in an event that was criticized by the New York Times for its "sexism, drunkenness, xenophobia, homophobia and enough incidents of public vomiting and urination to fill an infinite dunk tank." The op-ed further enhanced event's popularity when it wrote that it "contributes absolutely zero value" to the culture of the city. [44]

Jews likewise recognize that to compete with Christmas and attract non-observant Jews, they had to create a steady stream of secular celebrations and events. Chanukah on Ice features outdoor ice skating at the Woolman Rink in Central Park. There are Spin the Dreidl Tournaments, Menorah Hora dance shows, the famous Matzo Ball where young people dance the night away, a Chanukah Billiards for Young People event, and even Chanukah Beer Drinking Contest.

Inclusion of Non-Christian Holidays into the Holiday Season

Like a bulldozer, the Holiday Season roared through the city, the nation, and even the world, overcoming religious and cultural opposition, absorbing racial, ethnic and religious groups into the season, and adding holidays to the season like decorations on a Christmas tree. Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian and Jewish resistance to Christmas was worn down, and they were drawn willy-nilly into the Holiday Season craze. Without question the tremendous success "The Holiday Season" has achieved as the major American and global holiday was and remains its ability to absorb different traditions and holidays into its ever growing corpus.

While some Jews sought to merge with the Holiday Season by totally secularizing Christmas, following the Second World War other Jews sought to add a traditional Jewish holiday to the season to counterbalance the Christian Christmas. Chanukah had been a minor holiday, greatly overshadowed by the biblical holidays such as Yom Kippur, Passover, Sukkot and Rosh Hashanah. But with the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 strengthening a growing sense of Jewish national as well as religious identity and pride, a concerted effort was undertaken to rebrand Chanukah as a festival to compliment, or even rival, Christmas. [45]

Chanukah commemorates the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem following the defeat of the occupying Greeks by the Jewish revolutionaries called the Maccabees in 165 BCE. The priests discovered that only enough oil remained in the temple lamp for one day, rather than for the required eight days. But miraculously, the oil continued to burn for eight days. In memory of this miracle, the holiday's central ritual is the daily lighting of a new candle on a nine-branched candlestick called a menorah. A long-established European Jewish tradition was spinning a *dreidl*, little four-sided top with the Hebrew letters *Nun*, *Gimel*, *Heh* and *Shin* on the sides. These letters stand for *Nes Gadol Haya Sham*, "a Miracle, a Great one, Occurred There (in Jerusalem)." The holiday menu included special fried potato pancakes called *latkes*, and children received coins called *gelt*. A recipe book featured Maccabean sandwiches composed of either tuna fish or egg salad resembling a bite-sized Jewish soldier and a Menorah fruit salad.

Slowly Chanukah trees and even secularized Christmas music fell out of favor, replaced by a plethora of Chanukah celebrations and newly invented traditions. Mordecai Kaplan in his classical work *Judaism as a Civilization* took the lead in reformulating the holiday to equal Christmas. [46] He emphasized gift giving to enhance the holiday in the eyes of children. The holiday "must be made as interesting and joyful for the Jewish child as Christmas is made for the Christian child." The market grew for Jewish versions of scrabble, Chanukah decorations for the home, toys, books, napkins, wrapping paper, ribbons, records and cards. Soon menorahs, bags of foil-wrapped chocolate Chanukah gelt, chocolate figures of armed Maccabean soldiers, and Stars of

David filled shelves alongside chocolate Santas, trees and reindeer. [47] In his influential book *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* (1955), Will Herberg considered Judaism to have reached mainstream status alongside Catholics and Protestants and that Chanukah was as much an American national holiday as Christmas. [48]

The Brooklyn based Chasidic movement, the Lubavitchers, took the lead in insisting, even demanding, that in whatever public location a Christmas Tree was erected, a giant Menorah must also be put up. City Halls, schools, public parks, town squares, hospitals, and eventually private buildings such as apartment buildings, stores and shopping centers felt the pressure to honor “the other” great holiday in the Holiday Season.

Over time, the traditional Chanukah gelt became elaborate wrapped gifts, synagogues began holding lavish Chanukah parties, and the public display of Chanukah menorahs became mandatory in home windows. In places like New York City where there were large Jewish populations “Happy Holidays” all but replaced “Merry Christmas.”

Image: Blumstein department store in Harlem was the first to feature a black Santa.



African-Americans, who were largely of the Baptist, Methodist (AME and AME Zion) and independent churches, were likewise drawn into the Christmas craze and made their own unique contributions to the season. In the 1930s Harlem had become a Black mecca, yet Blumstein Department Store on 125th Street in the heart of Harlem refused to hire any Blacks. In 1934 The Reverend Adam Clayton Powell Sr. and his son organized a march against the store, and eventually the store not only agreed to hire Blacks but featured a Black Santa, claimed to be the first in the country. [49]

But by the 1960s many in the Black Pride, Black Power and Black Separatist movements began to demand more than participation in the season. Ronald Everett, who was swept up by the emerging movement, changed his name to Maulana Karenga and created the holiday of Kwanzaa in 1966 as an alternative to Christmas. He drew on African traditions and ideals to fashion a week-long holiday from Christmas Day to New Years. At first he counseled African-Americans to shun the Christian holiday of Christmas and embrace Kwanzaa, which could be safely celebrated by people of any faith because of its strong ethical teachings and pan-African and pan-Black character. Strongly influenced by the teachings of Marcus Garvey, Karenga envisaged a holiday that would be celebrated by African-Americans, Blacks in the Caribbean and Latin America, African migrants to Europe, and Africans in Africa. [50] In time the holiday’s separatist roots were downplayed, and Kwanzaa took a prominent place in the Holiday Season lineup.

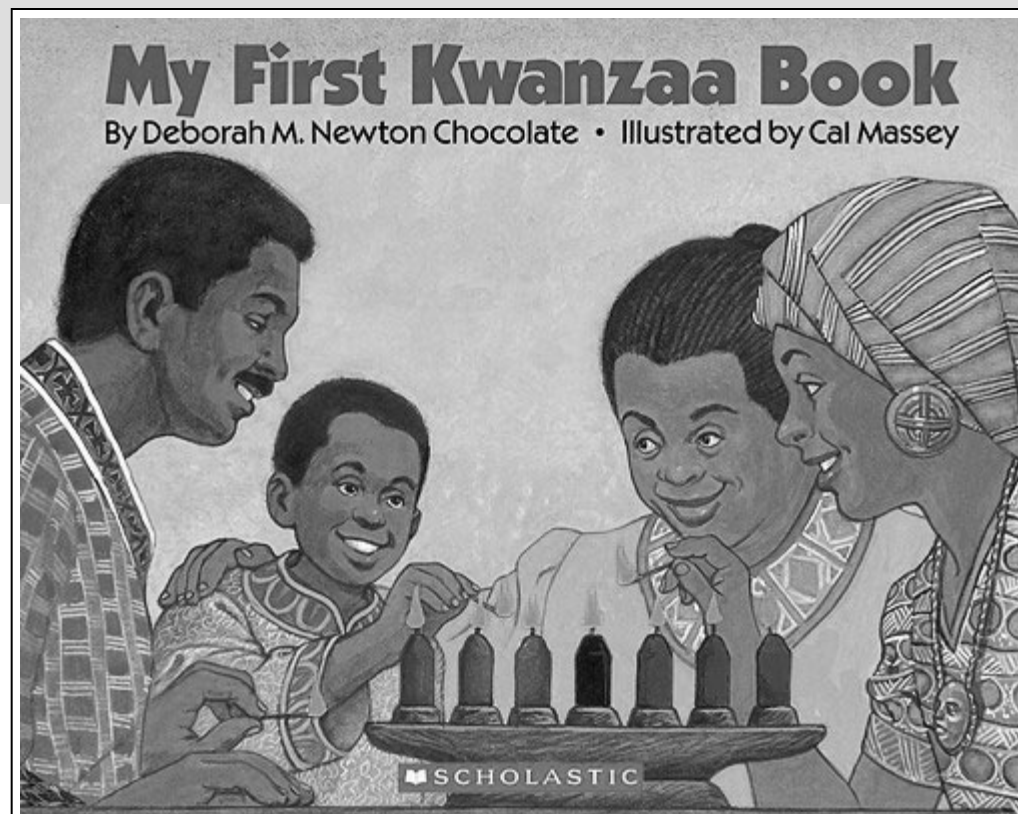


Image: The holiday of Kwanzaa bor-rowed from East African, African-American, Christian and Jewish traditions

Another attempt to transform Christmas into an African-American holiday was undertaken by the Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes, who rewrote the classic Nativity story for an all-black cast with gospel style carols. *Black Nativity* was first performed off-Broadway on December 11, 1961 and has become a national holiday classic. A filmed version was produced in 2013. [51]

Still another holiday that was added to the growing Holiday Season was the True God's Day, established by the founder of the Unification Movement, the Reverend Sun Myung Moon. Founded in 1954, like all new religious movements the church was in need of festive occasions to bring members together, inspire their work, reinforce their beliefs and have a celebration. In 1968 Reverend Moon established True God's Day to be celebrated the night of December 31 and the day of January 1. Each year he would write in calligraphy the motto to inspire the work for the year. After a period of silent meditation, at the stroke of midnight all heads bowed and the first moments of the new year were spent in prayer. A table of fruit and candy represented the abundance of all things that members share with God and each other. The next morning the celebrating began and lasted all day. In 2010 Reverend Moon decided to switch the holiday to the lunar calendar, which places it in February, well beyond the scope of the Holiday Season. Unfortunately, with this switch the celebration has lost much of its importance, but a brief Google search revealed that certain local churches still gather on the night of December 31. [52]

Like Chanukah that emerged from the shadows to become a major, if not *the* major Jewish holiday in America, the ancient Nordic celebration of the Winter Solstice was reinvigorated after millenniums of suppression. This holiday, which celebrates the shortest day and longest night of the year, has been celebrated ever since humans migrated into the northern climes during the Stone Age. Followers of the monotheistic faiths called it a "pagan" holiday, and it had long been persecuted by Jews, Christians and Muslims for worshipping the forces of nature rather than the one "true" God, for permitting women to participate and even lead Solstice celebrations, and for recognizing the priesthood of all followers. The ancient pre-Christian Germanic tribes called it Yuletide, and the Celts, Scandinavians, Finns, Slavs, Siberians and other northern peoples celebrated their respective versions of it as their mid-winter holiday. Central to the festival was fire, whether a giant bonfire, a candle, or a crackling fire in a fireplace. Christians readily absorbed these fire displays into their new religion in the form of Advent Wreaths, Santa arriving through the chimney, and candles and electric lights on trees.

The Winter Solstice began its revival in the 1930s, when Gerald Gardner organized groups and published books and articles on witchcraft and pagan holidays. In 1967 a group calling itself the New Reformed Orthodox Order of the Golden Dawn, in San Francisco (where else?) began performing rituals and founding groups throughout the country. [53]

The Winter Solstice officially joined the roster of New York City holiday celebrations in 1979 when the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine presented its first Winter Solstice celebration. Ironically, the very reason that the early Christians adopted December 25 as the day to celebrate the birth of Christ was because throughout the Roman Empire residents celebrated the festival of Saturnalia, when they prayed for the return of the Sun and the success of the following planting and harvest season. It is as if the cathedral had returned to the pagan roots of the Holiday Season. Paul Winter, a celebrated saxophonist and artist-in-residence at the cathedral since 1980, organizes the annual early December celebration. The official website presents it as a reflection of "our need to come together in times of extended darkness. We celebrate not only the rebirth of the sun, but the community of life on earth." [54]

Still another holiday was added to the season by New Yorkers of British extraction, Boxing Day. While the lord of the manor and his family and upper class friends were celebrating their Christmas Eve holiday, the scores of servants, cooks, waiters, drivers, musicians, and other staff were overloaded with work. To reward them for their labors and the loss of a holiday with their own families, each employee was presented with a box filled with goodies, gifts and drink, and December 26 was a day off for all. It is still celebrated in lands where large numbers of British people live or have settled.

Muslims in New York City and possibly elsewhere in the country have slowly been coming aware of the cultural importance of the Holiday Season and have begun a search for a way to add a Muslim component. One interesting example is the Muslim Education and Converts Center of America on 43rd Street in New York City, which began sponsoring an open house. Under the Arabic and English names of the center, the words "A House Full of Light" seeks to integrate Islam into the larger mid-winter theme of the winter absence of light.

The Globalization of the Holiday Season

The highpoint of the American Holiday Season corresponded with Henry Luce's declaration in the pages of *Life* magazine on February 17, 1941 that the post-Second World War era would be henceforth known as "The American Century." [55] With the defeat of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Imperial Japan, the United States would rule the world. There could be no greater monument to this new age than the construction of the United Nation's Headquarters, the seat of world government, in the Empire City itself, New York City.

The New York Holiday Season has become a major instrument of Americanization of millions of immigrants and as well a weapon in the Americanization and Westernization of the planet. One often either celebrates or laments the rapid pace of global Americanization, with the spread of Blue Jeans, sneakers, baseball and basketball, McDonalds and Coca Cola, Hollywood movies, Jazz and Rapp music, the adoption of English as the global language, and the spread of the Holiday Season. Today, it

has become one of New York City's greatest contributions to the human patrimony. In the 21st Century it will no doubt penetrate to the most obscure corners of the planet and overcome all resistance to become the greatest celebration on Earth. On August 28, 2000, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan stated, "It has been said that arguing against globalization is like arguing against the laws of gravity." [56] It is the same with the Holiday Season; its globalization is as irresistible as gravity.

Time magazine of December 15, 2014 featured a section titled "Roundup: World's Most Festive Records" that included three examples of the Holiday Season going global. First, readers were thrilled to learn that the largest gathering of Santa's elves was held in Bangkok, Thailand and featured 1,792 kids "wearing matching hats and pointy plastic ears." Second, the largest Christmas stocking, measuring 168 ft. in length and 70 ft. in width, was erected in Tuscany, Italy, and was "stuffed with candy-filled balloons." The third thrilling world Christmas record was at the Emirates Palace in Abu Dhabi where "The Priciest Christmas Tree" was adorned with jewelry valued at \$11,026,900. [57]

Two features of the New York City Holiday Season have encouraged its spread across the nation and the planet. First, the season readily and easily absorbs local holidays, traditions, foods, and even deities into this ever growing season. Second, advertising agencies, the mass media, the film industry, food marketers, music agencies, clothing manufacturers and candy makers recognize the phenomenal money-making potential of the season. I doubt that it was love for baby Jesus that convinced the Emir of Abu Dhabi to decorate "The Priciest Christmas Tree" in the world. I'm sure some store owner in New York, Geneva or Paris had a role in the decision and made a good profit in the process. [58]

Mexico is almost as swamped by the Holiday Season as is its neighbor to the north. Mexicans have always lamented that their country is cursed by being too close to the United States and too far from God. But when it comes to adapting the gringo Holiday Season to Mexican conditions, God has clearly shown that He still has the upper hand. For the opening gun of the shopping craze, American Thanksgiving is replaced by the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe on December 6. The apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary to the Indian peasant Juan Diego in 1531 has become a symbol of the indigenization of Catholicism in Aztec culture, and images of a dark skinned, Nahuatl-speaking Mary are emblazoned on cards and posters, tattooed on bodies, and portrayed in statues and paintings. Wherever Mexicans have settled, the December 6 procession at the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe marks the opening of the Holiday Season. Likewise, the closing gun of the Holiday Season is not the Times Square ball drop but the Feast of the Epiphany (The Feast of the Three Kings, *El Dia De Los Reyes*) that is celebrated on January 6. Processions and festivals fill Mexican streets from Mexico City to Los Angeles and from New York to Oaxaca. [59]

In China and throughout the many Chinatowns of the world, the traditional Chinese love of lanterns and lights have become a central feature of the season. Hong Kong and other major Chinese cities feature some of the "biggest, brashest and most colorful" skylines in the world all year long. But as the Holiday Season approaches, giant, skyscraper-sized light displays cover major buildings, "some with undulating and flickering effects" according to a *New York Times*' description of the recent season in Hong Kong. [60] Often the traditional Thomas Nast figure of Santa rides aback a dolphin rather than a sleigh with reindeer, but the message is the same: spend your money here. The light displays are modified to mark the blending of the New York Holiday Season with the Chinese New Year celebrations that usually closely follow New Year's, making for one prolonged, almost two month holiday.

During a recent Holiday Season there was a tragic stampede in which 36 New Year's revelers in Shanghai were killed. Allegedly, someone adapted the ancient Chinese tradition of giving money to friends during the Chinese New Year's to the Western New Year's. Piles of imitation dollar bills were thrown out of windows, and party goers madly rushed to catch the bills. [61]

The spread of the Western (Christian) New Year's celebration around the world is a prime example of the globalization of the Holiday Season. But more is at issue than just a holiday. Along with the December 31-January 1 holiday comes the Western 12-month calendar, the 30 or 31-day month, and the year 2016 as numbered according to the calendar devised by Pope Gregory in 1582, to say nothing of the Western numeral system (so-called Arabic numbers) that covered signs, eye glasses, hats, beer mugs and whistles that dominated the streets. It is a fact that the Chinese, regardless of whether they were Christian, Buddhist, Confucian, Muslim or atheistic Marxist, were celebrating the 2016th year after the birth of Jesus.

A similar phenomenon can be seen in India and Hindutowns around the world, such as Jackson Heights in Queens, New York City. The Hindu Festival of Diwali, also called the Festival of Lights, is celebrated according to the lunar calendar and commemorates victory of light over darkness, knowledge over ignorance, good over evil, and hope over despair. Both in India and in Indian settlements around the world such as Jackson Heights, bright electric lights festooned across streets, in front of homes, and in stores have come to dominate the holiday. But even when the holiday falls well before the opening bell of the Holiday Season, the lights remain lit throughout the season. [62]

In the former Soviet Union, where "Christmas" and the Holiday Season were regarded as symbols of Christianity and western decadence, elements penetrated like a virus. The Christmas tree, which had long been introduced by German immigrants and was taken as a sign of decadence if not subversion, simply migrated to the following week and became the "traditional" Russian

New Year's Tree, conveniently placed between the Catholic December 25th Christmas holiday and the Orthodox Christmas in January. [63] Stalin had no more luck in stemming humanity's clamor for a mid-winter holiday than did John Calvin, the Boston Puritans or the First Presbyterian Church in New York City.

New York Times journalist Thomas Friedman wrote that in the 21st century, products, capital, culture, ideas and labor will flow freely across once impenetrable national borders, knitting the peoples of the planet into one. To the unifying forces listed by Friedman, I will add, the Holiday Season. [64]

The Tinsel Covered Trojan Reindeer: the Anti-Holiday Season Backlash

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the demolition of the Iron curtain, Francis Fukuyama announced to the world that human history had reached its culmination in his book, *The End of History*. [65] Except for Cuba and North Korea the last two Marxist holdouts, Western liberal democracy, capitalism and freedom had conquered the planet, and the rest of human history would simply be the working out of the remaining kinks in this process. Countering this rather boring future vision, Samuel P. Huntington argued in his 1996 book, *The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of the World Order*, that the 21st century would be marked by the rise of the nine ancient global civilizations: Western Catholic and Protestant Christian, Eastern European Orthodox Christianity, Hindu, Islamic, Sinic (China, Korea, and Vietnam), Buddhist (Mongolia, Tibet, and Thailand), Latin American, Christian African, and Japanese. [66] Huntington also argued that while economic globalization will no doubt continue, these civilizations will set about elaborating their own political, cultural, linguistic, and religious cultures. Recent events in the world have shown that "The Holiday Season" is on the hit list of these reemerging civilizations. The Holiday Season, and especially Christmas, has now become a global target.

The bloodiest battleground currently is the Islamic World, where along with Christianity and other non-Muslim minority religions, Western dress, mixed beaches, unveiled women, gays and lesbians, the presence of American troops and Hollywood movies, The Holiday Season is in the sights of Muslim reformers. Elizabeth F. Ralph, in an article titled, "The World War on Christmas: Five places where Santa really does have to watch his back," listed five countries at the forefront of this anti-Christmas war: North Korea, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Saudi Arabia and Cuba. In austere Saudi Arabia where non-Muslim religious activities are banned in public, religious police circulate looking for stores selling Christmas cards, florists displaying poinsettias, or images of Santa. One Saudi reported that in several trees from Holland were intercepted at the airport, hacked to pieces and then sent back to Holland. [67]

Chinese who are worried about the culture effects of its engagement with the global economy are also having second thoughts about Christmas. While welcoming western markets, technology and profits, many Chinese feel that they are losing their culture in the process. A recent article in the *New York Times* reported that some "hardline traditionalists and Communist doctrinaires" described Christmas celebrations as a "tinsel-draped Trojan house that aims to subvert traditional Chinese culture." [68]

In the newly independent former Soviet republic of Uzbekistan, President Islam Karimov banned Santa Claus from television, as well as the celebration of New Year's Eve; he canceled Valentine's Day as well. The South Korean military taunts the vehemently North Korean government by erecting a 100-foot tall Christmas tree-shaped tower just near the border as form of psychological warfare. In Venezuela, President Hugo Chavez banned Christmas trees and images of Santa Claus from government offices because he deemed them too American. Elizabeth Ralph concludes her list of nations warring against Christmas with Cuba, which banned the holiday in 1969 but restored it in 1998 "thanks largely to pressure from the Vatican."

Israel is another country that has waged war against the holiday. According to Orthodox Jewish and Israeli law, a Jew is anyone born of a Jewish mother or converted by an Orthodox rabbi. But the Israelis added a third requirement that the person does not celebrate non-Jewish holidays. Until the election of Prime Minister Menachem Begin in 1977 this last requirement was little evoked, but his Orthodox Jewish supporters demanded that the new prime minister enforce it. Even attendance at a Christmas party in Nazareth or Bethlehem became dangerous for a Jew, but few Israelis had Christian friends. But the Israeli holiday of Sylvester the night of December 31 had taken deep roots in the country. Most Israelis are totally unaware that the name "Sylvester" for New Year's is derived from Pope Sylvester, who died on December 31, 335 and whose feast is celebrated on December 31. [69]

In 2009 the Lobby for Jewish Values, with support from the chief rabbis of Israel, printed and distributed fliers condemning Christmas and called for a boycott of restaurants and hotels that sell or put up Christmas trees and other Christian symbols. [70] The campaign expanded to hotels and restaurants that held Sylvester parties as well. This warning was not an idle threat, because in Israel the Chief Rabbis grant kosher licenses. For hotels and restaurants in Israel the loss of the license can spell bankruptcy. One Tel Aviv hotel lost its license when the religious police raided the ballroom and found a Sylvester party in progress.

In India the Hindu Nationalist Party (BJP) has long advocated a return to Hindu values and a rejection of what it calls "Westoxification." Muslims, Sikhs, Jains, Jews, Buddhists, Christians, and other minority religions were accused of proselytism,

kidnapping Hindu children, and indoctrination to spread their faiths. The public and often festive celebration of Christmas and New Years' are increasingly viewed as thinly veiled attempts to attract Hindu young people to Christian churches. [71]

Some new Christian religious movements have resurrected the long resolved issue of whether Christians should celebrate the December 25 holiday. Jehovah's Witnesses still consider the holiday a pagan import, and as the season approaches its Watchtower publication prints or reprints articles affirming that "nowhere in the Bible are we commanded to celebrate Christmas" and that the date of Jesus' birth is unknown. The Kimbanguist movement founded by Simon Kimbangu (1887-1951) in the Congo in 1921, not only rejected the pagan date of December 25 but "after several prophetic revelations" in 1999 church leaders decided that Christmas should be celebrated on May 25. [72] Today the church has about three million followers in central Africa with communities in Europe and the United States.

In the United States the anti-Holiday Season backlash began in the 1960s, when groups of Catholics and Protestants launched a "Keep Christ in Christmas" campaign and media blitz. *Time* magazine referred to this as the beginning of an American "Christmas *kulturkampf*." The backlash intensified after September 11. In his less well known book, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (2005), Samuel P. Huntington argues that the rival of patriotism brought on by September 11 also brought with it a heightened awareness that non-European and especially non-Christian immigration to the United States is eroding America's national identity. [73] This has motivated campaigns to restore the country's ancient Christian values.

These campaigns have taken many forms, but the return of Christ to Christmas is central. Non-denominational Christian organizations like the Christian Research Institute published articles and even how-to books encouraging Christian families and congregations to place Christ in the forefront of the holiday. They instruct readers to reject pagan Christmas trees and Santa Claus but keep Christ. [74] Baptist teachers and journalists Vanessa and Deron Snyder compiled a program titled, "50 Ways to Put Christ Back in Christmas, and Keep the Spirit All Year" in 2004. [75] One of the most militant Christmas preachers against the secular Holiday Season is charismatic preacher and televangelist Creflo Dollar. In a sermon titled "Keep 'Christ' in Christmas" on December 21, 2007 he called on believers to resist Satan's strategy to distract them with money and gifts from the "true reason for the season." He praised a recent boycott organized by the American Family Association, the Catholic League, and other conservative Christian groups of a retail chain that had changed "its holiday greeting from 'Merry Christmas' to 'Happy Holidays.'" He reported that the chain had "decided to revert back to 'Merry Christmas' only after they lost a significant amount of sales." [76] African-American Baptist gospel music singer Kirk Franklin sang Marshall Chapman's song "Jesus is the Reason for the Season," which swept the music charts to reach and influence millions more than any sermon, article, or book. [77]

These campaigns would in fact overthrow the two centuries of careful social, intellectual, and religious engineering that created "The Holiday Season" that all Americans, and even the world, could celebrate. By rejecting the totally secularized St. Nicholas painfully engineered by Moore and Irving, and described by Thomas Nast, the non-religious "Holiday Season" would revert to Christmas, the day that celebrates the birth of Jesus the Messiah. In a city like New York, the Golden Gate of immigration, "Happy Holidays" would be replaced by a carefully chosen "Merry Christmas," "Happy Chanukah," or "Happy Kwanzaa." Rather than a holiday that unites people, it would become a series of religious holidays that divides them. In short, one of the greatest accomplishments of American social history would be undermined, if not totally destroyed. [78] Yet, it is still too early to say if the secular New York City Holiday Season is fated to the dustbin of American and global history.

Conclusion

In guise of a conclusion I would like to make a proposal. In 1989 the United Nations ESCO issued a Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore that would work toward the protection of the human intangible cultural heritage. Of course, what immediately springs to mind is the traditional Karabakh horse-riding game in Azerbaijan, Mongolian calligraphy, the Muslim hajj pilgrimage, kimchi making in Korea, ritual singing in India, basket weaving in Africa, and wedding traditions in Algeria. But the elaborate and carefully crafted New York City "Holiday Season" is also an intangible cultural heritage deserving recognition. Our New York City ancestors carefully passed the season onto their descendants, each ethnic, racial, and religious group adding to it, elements falling away, minor celebrations being transformed into major ones, groups attacking it with vehemence, but always surviving, growing, and spreading. In this sense, even with all its commercialization, the Holiday Season is without a doubt one of the greatest New York City contributions to the world's cultural patrimony.

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