**Fair Trade vs. Holiday Consumer Madness**

Once upon a time, Thanksgiving meant family, good food, and gratitude. Recent years, however, have witnessed this holiday’s meaningfulness sapped by Black Friday – the day when retailers tap into the consumer craze and go from operating at a loss (i.e., “in the red”) to turning a profit (i.e., “in the black”). Black Friday has gained so much popularity that it now intrudes on Thanksgiving itself, with big box stores opening in the evening – forcing employees to cut the holiday short, and whipping consumers into a violent frenzy over sweatshop manufactured toys, electronics, and apparel.

In response, conscious consumers, proponents of the “Voluntary Simplicity” movement, and other activists have created their own take on the day after Thanksgiving – Buy Nothing Day. By sitting out the shopping madness, participants in Buy Nothing Day hope to send an economic message of restraint that flies in the face of overconsumption.

Thankfully, colleges and universities are closed during the insanity that is Black Friday, but as they re-open and dive headlong into finals and the winter holiday break, institutions of higher learning are not immune to consumption craziness. Critical voices have noted that college and universities today are feeding right into the unsustainable consumption cycle, cranking out graduates who aim to make lots of money to buy lots of stuff.

This is where campus Fair Trade movements can come in. Fair Trade, with its explicit emphasis on conscious consumption and better lives for workers, offers a much-needed counter balance to the uber-consumption ushered in by Black Friday. Last holiday season, St. John’s for Fair Trade (St. John's University, Queens, NY) sold Fair Trade coffee, crafts, and apparel (in collaboration with HandCrafting Justice, a Queens-based Fair Trade organization) and raised awareness about Fair Trade at a campus pop-up market. This year, St. John’s for Fair Trade will build on their Fair Trade Friday initiative (started this semester), by offering holiday-themed products from HandCrafting Justice and continuing to educate the campus community about Fair Trade.

We’d love to hear how your college or university plans to celebrate Fair Trade during the holiday insanity. Please take a moment to respond on our Community Grounds forum. Thank you!