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“We Gather Together”: Consumption Rituals of Thanksgiving Day

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Abstract

Thanksgiving Day is a collective ritual that celebrates material abundance enacted through feasting. Thanksgiving Day both marks and proves to

participants their ability to meet basic needs abundantly through consumption. So certain is material plenty for most U.S. citizens that this annual celebration is taken for granted by participants. Not just a moment of bounty but a culture of enduring abundance is celebrated. This article draws on ten data sets compiled over a five-year period. We interpret the consumption rituals of Thanksgiving Day as a discourse among consumers about the categories and principles that underlie American consumer culture. That is, Thanksgiving Day is read as an enacted document orchestrated symbolically and semiotically through consumption. The cultural discourse of Thanksgiving Day negotiates meanings and issues in both the domestic and national arenas that are difficult for many to acknowledge, articulate, and debate verbally. Through the use of multiple perspectives and sources of data, we attempt to elucidate both the emic and etic meanings of this holiday.

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