**A Story Full of the Stuff of Sorrow**

*by Leonard Pitts Jr.*

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1 I like stuff as much as the next guy.

2 My closet is stuffed with stuff, my shelves groan with stuff, boxes full of stuff jam my garage. I like stuff just fine.

3 But I would not kill for it.

4 Last week, a 34-year-old man was trampled to death by a mob rushing into a discount store to buy stuff. Jdimytai Damour was a seasonal worker manning the door of a store in Valley Stream, N.Y., as shoppers eager for so-called “Black Friday” bargains massed outside. The store was scheduled to open at 5 a.m., but that was not early enough for the 2,000 would-be shoppers. At five minutes before the hour, they were banging their fists and pressing their weight against the glass doors, which bowed and then – it exploded – in a shower of glass. The mob stormed in like a wave.

5 Four people, including a pregnant woman, were injured. And Damour was killed as people stomped over him, looking for good prices on DVDs, winter coats, and game systems. Nor was the mob sobered by his death. As authorities sought to clear the store, some defiantly kept shopping; others complained that they had been in line since the night before.

6 And here, it seems appropriate to observe the senseless irony: Black Friday is the traditional beginning of the Christmas shopping season, Christmas being the holiday when, Christians believe, hope was born into the world in the form of a baby who became a man who preached a gospel of service and compassion for our fellow human beings.

7 It is hard to see evidence of either in the mob’s treatment of Jdimytai Damour and if your inclination is to heap scorn upon them, I don’t blame you. But I would caution against regarding them as freaks or aberrations whose madness would never be seen in sane and normal people like ourselves. That would be false comfort.

8 You may think I’m talking about mob psychology and to a degree, I am. From soccer riots to the Holocaust itself, human beings have always had a tendency to lose individual identity and accountability when gathered in groups. You will do things as part of a crowd that you never would as an individual. Theoretically, anyone who lacked a strong enough moral center and sense of self could have been part of that mob in Valley Stream.

9 But it’s not just our common vulnerability to mob psychology that ties the rest of us to last week’s tragedy. It is also our common love of stuff. Indeed, it is hard to imagine a starker illustration of our true priorities. We say children are a priority, but when did people ever press against the door for Parents’ Night at school? We say education is a priority, but when did people ever bang against the windows of the library? We say faith is a priority, but when did people ever surge into a temple of worship as eagerly as they do a temple of business?

10 No, sale prices on MP3 players, that’s our true priority. Jdimytai Damour died because too many of us have bought, heart and soul, into the great lie of American consumerism: acquiring stuff will make you whole. “You, Happier,” is how a sign at my local electronics store puts it. As if owning a CD, a DVD, an HDTV, will elevate you to a level of joy otherwise impossible to attain.

11 Hey, you might be a total loser, might not have a friend, might not have an education, might not have a job, might not have a clue, but it will all be OK as soon as you get that new digital camera, especially if you get it for 50 percent off.

12 It would be nice to think—I will not hold my breath—that Damour’s death would lead at least some of us to finally see that for the obscene lie it is, to realize that seeking wholeness in consumer goods is an act of emptiness, not joy.

13 You, Happier? No.

14 Just you, with more senseless stuff.

2**. retinue:** assistants attending an important person.