



“Challenging People to Shape a Better Future Now”

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The Scam That Stole Thanksgiving

When I think of Thanksgiving Day, I think of family, gathered around a table that groans with turkey and dressing, green beans and candied yams, mac and cheese or whipped potatoes, and lots of other goodies. I look forward to seeing folks I haven't seen in a while, savor the food and fellowship, bring in the late evening over coffee and pie. Nobody is rushing out to go shopping – most people save that for the Friday after Thanksgiving, often called, Black Friday, because many stores find themselves in the black after the profligate shopping that day.

There have been tragedies associated with Black Friday. A few years back, a Walmart employee was trampled to death by a crowd way too eager to get to the consumer goods. There have also been altercations, bruises, and cuts as customers have vied for some of the scarce goods available or for crazy deals (often only for the first 200 people). Lines often snake around stores as people wait for a chance for a bargain.

Now Walmart has upped the ante. Last year, they opened at 10 p.m. and this year they will open at 8 p.m. on Thanksgiving Day. Just when folks settle down from their meal and start swapping lies, someone is going to have to get up and rush to work so they can serve those consumers who want to shop on Thanksgiving Day.

Many of those who will work do so out of desperation. Many Walmart employees don't have a full 40-hour shift; some find their hours adjusted each week.



BENNETT COLLEGE

Julianne Malveaux

Thanksgiving work will augment scarce incomes. Just this week, I talked with a couple whose joint income at Walmart is \$26,000 a year, partly because neither has a full week's schedule.

There are those who ask, “Well, why do they work there?” as if there are easy alternatives. But Walmart is one of our nation's largest employers, and they often set the tone for similar stores such as Best Buy, Sears and others. With Walmart opening at 8 p.m. on Thanksgiving, their competitors will follow because they don't want to lose momentum to Walmart.

This is why some Walmart

taken against its employees, and have initiated a series of protests, including strikes, rallies, an online campaign, and other actions. Their organization, Making Change at Walmart, says that Walmart can help revive our economy if they will simply offer workers full-week schedules and fair pay.

Barbara Ehrenreich captured the ways that people are forced to work at a store very much like Walmart in her book, *Nicked and Dimed*. She wrote about the workers who were forced to work “off the clock,” after they had punched out, or before they punched in. She wrote about the low pay. And she wrote about those supervisors who had made a deal with the devil – implementing unfair policies for their own survival.

When Walmart employees speak out there is retaliation. They are fired, or their hours are cut back. They very swiftly get the message that speaking out will be punished. Too many silently seethe at

tant. It challenges the notion that economic growth is dependent on the exploitation of workers, and suggests, instead, that paying people a living wage is a way to grow a stable and secure workforce.

Walmart is not the only company that prefers to pay its workers on a part-time basis. Many fast-food operations do the same thing, varying hours each week so that workers have no way of knowing when they will work. This means they have difficulty arranging for childcare with these variable hours. Of course, that this does not concern their employers. They are more interested in their bottom line, profits.

Many who are aware of the labor exploitation at Walmart say that their prices and deals are unbeatable, and with their money tight they have no choice but to seek the best bargains they can find. Yet the price of the great deals is exploitation of another worker.

The action to inform Walmart customers about Walmart's unfair pay and illegal actions allows people who shop on Thanksgiving Day and on other days to make informed decisions about their shopping. One of the ways consumers can make a statement is to stay home on Thanksgiving Day, enjoying family, giving thanks, and postponing shopping.

Julianne Malveaux is a Washington, D.C.-based economist and writer. She is President Emerita of Bennett College for Women in Greensboro, N.C.

When Walmart employees speak out there is retaliation

employees are protesting the way that Walmart treats its employees. They want to inform the public of illegal actions that Walmart has

unfair policies; too dependent on the little pay they get to raise their voices.

This is why the Making Change at Walmart campaign is so impor-

Income Inequality Growing in U.S.

THE CURRY REPORT

George E. Curry



est increases.”
The poorest fifth of households

“On average, incomes grew by just 1.2 percent among the middle fifth of households between the late 1990s and the mid-2000s, well below the 8.6 percent gain among the top fifth,” the report stated. “Income disparities between the top and middle fifths increased significantly in 36 states and declined significantly in only one state (New Hampshire.)”

The report contains charts that show how income equality plays

(\$161,162), a ratio of 3.2. New Mexico was followed, in order, by California, Georgia, Mississippi, Arizona, New York, Texas, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Louisiana.

Those gaps were even larger when poor and middle-class households were compared with the top 5 percent of all earners. For example, the income of the top 5 percent of households was 13.3 times the average income of the bottom fifth. The ratio was more than 15 times that in Arizona, New Mexico, California, Georgia and New York.

According to the report, the major reason for the growing economic disparity has been the stagnant wages for workers in the low and middle-income brackets while wages of the highest paid employees have grown significantly.

“The erosion weakness of wage growth for workers at the bottom and middle of the income scale reflects a variety of factors,” the report noted. “Over the last 30 years, the nation has seen increasingly long periods of high unemployment, more intense competition from foreign firms, a shift in the mix of jobs from manufacturing to services, and advances in technology that have changed jobs. The share of workers in unions also fell significantly.

The major reason for the growing economic disparity has been the stagnant wages for workers in the low and middle-income brackets while wages of the highest paid employees have grown significantly

in the U.S. had an average income of \$20,510. The top fifth had eight times as much – \$164,490.

“On average incomes fell by close to 6 percent among the bottom fifth of households between the late 1990s and the mid-2000s, while rising 8.6 percent among the top fifth,” the report found.

“Incomes grew even faster – 14 percent – among the top 5 percent of households.

A similar gap existed between top earners and middle-class households.

out at the state level.

The state with the largest household income gap was New Mexico, where the bottom fifth averaged \$16,319 annually and the top fifth of households earned \$161,162, a top-to-bottom ratio of 9.9. New Mexico was followed, in order, by Arizona, California, Georgia, New York, Louisiana, Texas, Massachusetts, Illinois and Mississippi.

New Mexico also had the greatest gap between the middle fifth of households (\$51,136) and top fifth

