

# Do you buy your significant other chocolates and roses? Fascination with American holidays explained

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Buying chocolates as a sign of love, getting the best deals on Black Friday and putting on a spooky costume for Halloween. In recent years,

these holidays and traditions have taken off in the Netherlands, even though they originated on the other side of the ocean. Why are we so excited about American holidays?

"These holidays and traditions catch on because there is a certain fascination with the United States," explains professor by special appointment Giles Scott-Smith. He sees that this interest in the country plays a role both at an academic level as well as in the rest of society. "America is still quite glamorous to us. If you go to America, you're really visiting someplace important. Perhaps that glorification is slowly changing, but it's still apparent in Dutch media and television, for example."

## Century-long relationships

Our fascination for America goes back a long way, because the Netherlands and America share quite a history. "It goes all the way back to the War of Independence. From that point onwards, there have always been commercial ties. Many investments have been made over the years. Initially mainly by the Netherlands in America, but in the last few decades also the other way around."

This age-old business relationship encourages the adoption of American holidays and [traditions](#). "Companies want America to be the biggest in the commercial market. That means that if something is successful in America, it's often exported to other countries," says Scott-Smith. "Music is a good example, think of jazz or hip hop. There's a constant flow from the United States to the Western world. Of course, there are also new popular musical styles in the rest of the world—think K-pop, for example—but America is still the major driving force."

But it also happens more naturally, for example with holidays like Black Friday. "Black Friday is really nothing more than a commercial move.

It's just like Valentine's Day now, which was originally a Christian day to honor holy martyrs. Americans are good at focusing on the happy moments, but the commercial aspect is never far away. You show someone you love them by buying them something. The American economy is based on consumption." He adds, however: "Of course, for us it's just an excuse to party. Nobody will pass up on a good party," jokes Scott-Smith.

## **Land of extremes**

He also observed another reason behind the captivating effect of the United States. "It's a country of extremes," according to Scott-Smith. "Take Trump, for example: many people find him strange. It's extremely fascinating that someone like Donald Trump could become president. Some people have a fear that if something happens in America, the same will happen here in five years' time. In the cultural sense, the United States is a bit ahead."

The fact that they are a little ahead has two sides: positive and negative. On the positive side, we have the export of music and films from Hollywood, for example. On the other hand, he says, there are the rifts that have arisen in American society. "If you don't watch out, it could lead to terrible events. We haven't reached that point yet, but we are also slowly seeing rifts in politics and society here with the protests against COVID-19 measures, for example. The United States is a bit of a double-edged sword for us: It's a very fascinating country, but it also shows a future we'd rather not see happen."

Provided by Leiden University

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