

In the Spotlight: Celebrating the tradition, inheritance of Thanksgiving

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Two traditions embrace every American: Thanksgiving Day and the Fourth of July. Each has its own ritual and purpose. The Fourth recalls the beliefs, duties and vision that make us American. Thanksgiving is an acknowledgement of our inheritance as a people.

We have been doing this throughout the land since the settlements of Jamestown (1607) and Plymouth (1621). No matter how wicked or comfortable the conditions, Americans have celebrated a thanksgiving. And from the presidency of George Washington, a formal Thanksgiving Day has been annually declared by every president.

But why? Do the Turkey Producers' lobbyists have presidents in their pocket?

Cultures need traditions and rituals to flourish. Otherwise they die. Traditions serve as the culture's lifeguards against the ever-increasing yet unpredictable riptides of American life. The current tides of cynicism, unbelief, pessimism, distrust, strife and individualism can quickly sweep us out to sea.

Traditions preserve. They provide time to reflect on the big picture. Traditions bring order and meaning into our lives. They get us refocused on who we are, what we are about — or should be about — and how best to go about it. Traditions keep the priorities straight.

America is the greatest nation on Earth. Those who don't think so have never been outside the country. Where else in the world can you do what you want, think what you want, live as you want, protest when you want, and worship or not where you will and not be imprisoned or have your head lopped off? Where else does our unique culture of freedom, independence and economic opportunities exist?

America has never been faultless. Name a human society that has. But those who came before us have always worked to make a better nation, to correct what needed correction and to improve American life and the lives of their families. And we ought to be thankful

for that inheritance, pick up their baton and be as Lincoln said, “Dedicated to the great task remaining before us.”

Thanksgiving has a personal as well as cultural effect. It stimulates generosity. It breaks through the membrane of self-absorption. It counters pride, self-centeredness, neglect of the common good and fosters the recognition that our well-being depends upon the good will of others — and theirs on ours.

Community, not hierarchy, is an American thing. We the people make things happen. We the people correct the bad things that happen. We the people have made and make America.

This is a culture for which to be thankful. This is a culture to take pride in. This is a culture to be preserved. But it's only done by working and collaborating with one another.

Thanksgiving Day drives home the reality that our personal and national achievements depend upon the good graces of others and the Creator of all things. That's the American tradition.

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