



A 1914 painting from Jennie A. Brownscombe depicts Pilgrims at their bread-breaking with Wampanoag Indians at Plymouth in 1621. President Abraham Lincoln declared the first Thanksgiving Day more than 200 years later.

Thank Lincoln, not the Pilgrims, for Thanksgiving

BY WILLIAM C. KASHATUS

Most Americans believe that the Thanksgiving holiday originated with New England's Pilgrims in the early autumn of 1621 when they invited the Wampanoag Indians to a feast to celebrate their first harvest. However, the Pilgrims' celebration was actually a continuation of a European agricultural tradition in which feasts and ceremonies were held during harvest time.

President Abraham Lincoln actually established the holiday more than 200 years later, in 1863, as a permanent fixture on the calendar to celebrate Union victories in the Civil War and to pray to God to heal a divided nation.

Prior to 1863, the U.S. government informally recognized periodic days of thanksgiving. In 1777, for example, Congress declared a day of thanksgiving to celebrate the Continental Army's victory over the British at Saratoga. Similarly, President George Washington, in 1789, declared a day of thanksgiving and prayer to honor the new Federal Constitution. But it took the national trauma of a Civil War to make Thanksgiving a formal, annual holiday.

With the war raging in the autumn of 1863, Lincoln had very little for which to be thankful. The Union victory at Gettysburg the previous July had come at the dreadful human cost of 51,000 estimated casualties, including nearly 8,000 dead. Draft riots were breaking out in northern cities as many young men, both native and immigrant, refused to go to war. There was personal tragedy, too.

Lincoln and his wife, Mary, were still mourning the loss of their 11-year-old son, Willie, who had died of typhoid fever the year before. In addition, Mary, who reportedly was battling mental illness, created tremendous emotional angst for her husband.

Despite — or perhaps because of — the bloody carnage, civil unrest and personal tragedy, Lincoln searched for a silver lining. Sarah Josepha Hale, editor of Godey's Lady's Book, provided the necessary inspiration.

Hale, who had been campaigning for a national Thanksgiving holiday for nearly two decades, wrote to the president on Sept. 23, 1863, and asked him to create the holiday "as a permanent American custom and institution."

Only days after receiving Hale's letter at the White House, Lincoln asked his Secretary of State William Seward to draft a proclamation that would "set the last Thursday of November as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise."

On Oct. 3, the president issued the proclamation, which gave "thanks and praise" to God that "peace has been preserved with all nations, order has been maintained, the laws have been respected and obeyed, and harmony has prevailed everywhere, except in the theater of military conflict."

Unlike other wartime presidents, Lincoln did not have the arrogance to presume that God favored the Union side. Instead, he acknowledged that these "gracious gifts" were given by God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins,

Lincoln's Thanksgiving proclamation

The year that is drawing toward its close has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of so extraordinary a nature that they cannot fail to penetrate and even soften the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever-watchful providence of Almighty God.

In the midst of a civil war of unequalled magnitude and severity, which has sometimes seemed to foreign states to invite and provoke their aggressions, peace has been preserved with all nations, order has been maintained, the laws have been respected and obeyed, and harmony has prevailed everywhere, except in the theater of military conflict; while that theater has been greatly contracted by the advancing armies and navies of the Union.

Needful diversions of wealth and of strength from the fields of peaceful industry to the national defense have not arrested the plow, the shuttle, or the ship; the ax has enlarged the borders of our settlements, and the mines, as well of iron and coal as of the precious metals, have yielded even more abundantly than heretofore. Population has steadily increased, notwithstanding the waste that has been made in the camp, the siege, and the battlefield, and the country, rejoicing in the consciousness of augmented strength and vigor, is permitted to expect continuance of years with large increase of freedom.

No human counsel hath devised, nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy.

It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently, and gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and one voice by the whole American people. I do, therefore, invite my fellow-citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are

had nevertheless remembered mercy. Lincoln also asked all Americans to express thanks to God and to "commend to His tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife," to "heal the wounds of the nation," and to restore it as soon as may be consistent with Divine purposes to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility and Union."

Since 1863, Thanksgiving has been observed annually in the United States. Congress insured that tradition by codifying the holiday into law in 1941, days after the U.S. entered World War II. At a time when we are struggling with the volatile



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President Abraham Lincoln issued a proclamation on Oct. 3, 1863, designating the last Thursday in November as Thanksgiving Day.

sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next as a Day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the heavens. And I recommend to them that, while offering up the ascriptions justly due to Him for such singular deliverances and blessings, they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to His tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners, or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty hand to heal the wounds of the nation, and to restore it, as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes, to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility, and union.

In testimony whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the city of Washington, this third day of October, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, and of the Independence of the United States the eighty-eighth.

By the president and his Secretary of State, William H. Seward.

issues of race, immigration and the impeachment of a president who has divided the nation along partisan lines, Lincoln's Thanksgiving proclamation reminds us of the necessity to put aside our differences, if only for a day, and celebrate the good fortune that unites us as a people regardless of ethnicity, race or creed.

Perhaps then we can do justice to the virtuous example set by Lincoln, who urged us to act on the "better angels of our nature."

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Refugee resettlement policy 'blatantly discriminatory'

BY JENNY YANG

Recently, the Trump administration signed a refugee ceiling that sets the resettlement cap to a historic low of just 18,000 for fiscal year 2020. It's a move that undermines our country's moral leadership and keeps thousands of persecuted refugees at risk for their lives around the world. But possibly even more concerning is the president's legally questionable executive order on Enhancing State and Local Involvement in Refugee Resettlement, which would give localities and states the ability to deny the entry of refugees to their areas — despite the refugees' having already been approved for resettlement.

The order states that refugees will only be allowed to be resettled "in those jurisdictions in which both the State and local governments have consented to receive refugees under the Department of State's Reception and Placement Program."

This policy is not only constitutionally suspect but blatantly discriminatory. When refugees arrive in the United States, they should be able to live anywhere they choose that is best for them and their families.

By limiting where refugees can be resettled, this policy also undermines family unity. At World Relief, most of the refugees we have been privileged to resettle in recent years have been directed to a particular community because they have family members already living in that community. While the executive order makes an exception for spouses and children, many refugees could remain separated from their siblings, grandparents or cousins who could help facilitate their adjustment and integration into the U.S.

In addition, the Office of Refugee Resettlement considers what resources are available, like job training and educational resources, in resettling refugees. Having a state and local entity reject refugees would mean many refugees might be resettled far away from vital integration services. This executive order undermines one of the main goals of the program, which is to help refugees become self-sufficient as quickly as possible.

Most U.S. communities are eager to welcome more refugees. Just this month, over 390 state and local elected officials from 46 states signed a letter affirming that they support refugee resettlement in their communities. Within just a few months of being resettled, refugees give back to their new communities; they start working, pay taxes, start businesses, purchase homes and take steps toward becoming U.S. citizens. Over a 20-year-period, refugees contribute, on average, \$21,000 more in taxes than the initial investment to resettle them. In 2015, refugees contributed \$21 billion in U.S. taxes. Permitting states and localities to opt out of refugee resettlement has a deeply negative economic and fiscal impact on our country's communities.

Refugee resettlement also advances U.S. economic and foreign policy interests. Refugee resettlement is a critical national security and foreign policy tool, and giving so much power to states and municipalities jeopardizes the effectiveness of the resettlement program in foreign policy contexts.

Local community input has long been welcomed in refugee processes. Resettlement agencies are required by their federal agreements to convene consultation meetings with appropriate stakeholders at least quarterly and cover a range of topics. The State Refugee Coordinator in each state must also agree to placement numbers.

We must remember that every refugee is a human being made in God's image, no matter which country they have come from or why they have fled.

To welcome so few of them, and only into certain parts of the U.S., is an un-American choice for our country's leadership.

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