

# *Thanks To...Whom?*

by  
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This month most American families will gather on the fourth Thursday to join in the uniquely American ritual of setting aside a whole day to eat themselves silly, watch football, and fight with their relatives. Tens of millions of those Americans will also, just before the eating-silly part, join in the only prayer they'll mutter all year, something (thankfully) short that usually begins, "Lord, we thank you for all ..."

Okay for them. But those of us who don't talk to imaginary friends have to ask, to whom do we talk? Most of us feel thankful, but whom do we thank?

This year at my family's table I think I'll thank Abe Lincoln for instituting the holiday in the first place. The 1621 Pilgrims-and-Indians affair was a one-day one-timer, as was Washington's in 1789, which was actually about our new nation's success in the late unpleasantness with England. Lincoln's Day of Thanksgiving, too, had more to do with politics and battlefield victories in the Civil War than about bountiful harvests and roasted turkeys. But then so did the Emancipation document, his other big Proclamation of 1863. I'll thank Lincoln for Thanksgiving.

While I'm at it, I'm going to thank those same god-obsessed Pilgrims, who would have created a theocracy here if they could, but who nonetheless conceived the idea of a country based not on geography, ethnicity or ancient hates, but on an ideal, a "city on a hill."

I'll thank the Founders, who risked their lives and fortunes to win a country for me, and made the Pilgrims' ideal a possibility. And I'll thank the tens of millions of Americans who have since served and defended my country—and me and mine.

I'll thank the generations of slaves on whose scarred black backs so much of my country's wealth and power were built. Then I'll thank the hundred million or more of "wretched refuse"—micks and dagoes, beaners and hebes and chinks—who have since stood in courtrooms to announce that they wanted to be Americans, swore allegiance to my country, and contributed their talents and their sweat to the building of our city on a hill.

No, it's not perfect, it's not "undimmed by human tears," but we're still building our city, all of us.

That's who I'm going to thank: all of us. I'm thankful not just that I'm an American—which is an accident of birth, and there's no one but my parents, who are gone, to thank for that—but that I live in this country with so many other Americans, millions of whom I disagree with about dozens of issues, but nearly all of whom share my ideals, nearly all of whom I can count on to return to me the respect I give them, and who count me their fellow-American. For which I thank them.

This Thanksgiving, I thank us.