

A different Thanksgiving story

Written by Neil A. Davis

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After doing some research on the origin of Thanksgiving, it's not clear to me if the event was an actual display of appreciation or a typical harvest festival. Either way, I like how we currently observe the day. There are some important lessons (as in all history), that should have been learned.

Pilgrim leaders Edward Winslow and William Bradford, helped establish the Plymouth colony in the winter of 1620-21. Both men were governors and both kept diaries. Winslow's account is the one used by most school books. Basically, the first winter was hard and half the colonists died. But, the survivors were hard working and learned new farming techniques from the Indians. The harvest of 1621 was bountiful. They held a celebration, gave thanks to God and lived happily ever-after.

William Bradford's recollection seems to tell a different story. In the harvest feast of 1621, "all had their hungry bellies filled," but only briefly. One observer noted that the first "Thanksgiving" was not so much a celebration as it was the last meal of condemned men. Why did he say that?

The Pilgrims were under a contract with sponsors in London that called for everything they produced to go into a common store (collectivism). Each member of the community was entitled to one common share. Rampant laziness ensued when colonists figured out they would still receive their "share," even though they didn't contribute. Near-starvation followed. Many relied on the Indians for help and others took to stealing.

To remedy the situation, Bradford assigned each family a parcel of land to use as they saw fit. When faced with personal responsibility, there was an immediate turnaround. They discovered the rewards of effort which gave them the incentive to produce even more. A free market was created where they could trade their surpluses for other goods, thus benefiting the whole community. By 1624, they were able to begin exporting corn. It wasn't a fairy tale, but no one starved either.

Aristotle who lived from 384-322 BC noted, "That which is common to the greatest number has the least care bestowed upon it." After 2,300 years of "learning" since Aristotle and countless failed attempts to make socialism work, there are still simpletons who want to "get it right."

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In a 1789 proclamation, George Washington said “Now therefore, I do recommend and assign Thursday, the Twenty-sixth day of November next, to be devoted by the people of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being who is the beneficent author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be; that we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks...”

This piece of history will probably fade away too, now that Barack Obama has cited “When President Lincoln set aside the National Day of Thanksgiving for the first time...” I didn’t think it possible to change history. But, Michelle Obama did say her husband is the one to do it.