



THANKSGIVING

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Sunday, November 21, 2010 and or Thursday, November 25

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I. Historical document

Proclamation of Thanksgiving

On October 3, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln signed the proclamation designating the final Thursday of November to be a national holiday of “Thanksgiving and Praise.” That official creation of a “day of our annual Thanksgiving made a National and fixed Union Festival”¹ occurred within the same year that Lincoln signed another, even more historic proclamation, the Emancipation Proclamation. The one that directly concerned the fate of every black person in the United States at the time and since then: which had freed the enslaved in any territory “in rebellion,” namely the Confederate States of America. The fact that these two proclamations took place a few months apart coincides providentially

to set the perfect context for America's national day of Thanksgiving. The millions of black women, men, and children who were about to witness the emancipation from what seemed to be the interminable nightmare of chattel slavery had much in which to rejoice in the wake of Lincoln's twin proclamations of 1863. In turn, the people who were once dehumanized by the peculiar institution of slavery would obviously have much for which they could be truly thankful during that first Thanksgiving.

By the President of the United States of America.

Washington, D.C.

October 3, 1863

A 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 soften even the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever watching 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 theatre of military conflict; while that theatre 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 defence, have not arrested the plough, the shuttle or the ship; the axe 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 battle-field; 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 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: Abraham Lincoln

William H. Seward,
Secretary of State²

II. A Thanksgiving Sermon delivered by Rev. Benjamin W. Arnett in 1876

In the late nineteenth century, the Thanksgiving holiday was celebrated in churches throughout the African American communities with specific Thanksgiving sermons. The following example comes from Reverend Benjamin Arnett, a prominent AME minister at St. Paul AME Church in Urbana, Ohio. He delivered this Centennial Thanksgiving sermon on November 30, 1876. Basing his sermon on the biblical passage, "*Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people*" (Proverbs 14: 34), Rev. Arnett uses the occasion of this relatively new holiday during the two hundredth anniversary to reflect upon the triumphs and failures of American society towards its black citizenry, yet proclaims the potential for a promising way forward for America's future.

Excerpt from Centennial Thanksgiving Sermon

We have patiently tried to examine the record of the nations of antiquity and learn the cause of their decay and decline, their fall, why their early death; and why so many implements of destruction around and about their tombs, and everywhere, in the silent streets, mouldering ruins, tottering columns, mouldy and moist rooms, and the united voice from the sepulcher of the dead past is, "sin is a reproach to any people." We see it written on the tombs of the Kings, and engraven on the pages of time, "sin is a reproach to any people." These are the principles of governments, Right and wrong; and the people who are the advocates of Right have bound themselves together and by their united effort they have brought light out of darkness and forced strength out of weakness.

We as a nation have a grand and glorious future before us. The sun of our nation is just arising above the horizon and is now sending his golden rays of peace from one end of the land to the other. The utmost extremities of the members of the body politic are warm and in motion by the commercial and financial activities of

the land. Her face is destined to blush with beauty when peace and justice shall be enthroned. The grand march of progress shall mark her in her onward advancement in moral strength, intellectual brilliancy, and political power. Then we can say that we give to every man, woman and child the benefit of our free institutions, giving all the benefits of our common school and the freedom to worship God under their own vine and fig tree. Then will we see written, on the banner of our free, redeemed and disenthralled country, the sublime words written, not in the blood of men, but in the sun-light of truth, that "Righteousness exalteth a nation." It will fall like the morning dew on the lowly; it will descend like the showers of May on the poor; and like the sun it will shine on the good and bad, dispensing from the hand of plenty the blessings of a government founded on the principle of justice and equality.

Standing on the threshold of the second century of the nation's life, with the experience of the past lying at our feet, we are saluted by the shout of triumph from the millions who left their homes and business and attended the Great Exposition of the skill and genius of the world, collected at Philadelphia. We were permitted to receive the greetings from the oldest to the youngest nation of the earth. Egypt and the United States clasped hands over the waste of 5,000 years, and lay their treasures at the feet of our civilization. The material, intellectual and mechanical deterioration of the one, and the unprecedented progress of the other, stand in great contrast; in all that makes the nation great,--morally, religiously and socially, the young nation is ahead.

Following the tracks of righteousness throughout the centuries and along the way of nations, we are prepared to recommend it to all and assert without a shadow of doubt, that "Righteousness exalted a nation;" but on the other hand following the foot-prints of sin amid the ruins of Empires and remains of cities, we will say that "sin is a reproach to any people." But we call on all American citizens to love their country, and look not on the sins of the past, but arming ourselves for the conflict of the future, girding ourselves in the habiliments of Righteousness, march forth with the courage of a Numidian lion and with the confidence of a Roman Gladiator, and meet the demands of the age, and satisfy the duties of the hour. Let us be encouraged in our work, for we have found the moccasin track of Righteousness all along the shore of the stream of life, constantly advancing holding humanity with a firm hand. We have seen it "through" all the confusion of rising and falling States, of battle, siege and slaughter, of victory and defeat; through the varying fortunes and ultimate extinctions of Monarchies, Republics and Empires; through barbaric irruption and desolation, feudal isolation, spiritual supremacy, the heroic rush and conflict of the Cross and Crescent; amid the busy hum of industry, through the marts of trade and behind the gliding keels of commerce.

And in America, the battle-field of modern thought, we can trace the foot-prints of the one and the tracks of the other. So let us use all of our available forces, and especially our young men, and throw them into the conflict of the Right against

the Wrong.

Then let the grand Centennial Thanksgiving song be heard and sung in every house of God; and in every home may thanksgiving sounds be heard, for our race has been emancipated, enfranchised and are now educating, and have the gospel preached to them.³

III. Stories and Illustrations

Each year the weather gets colder in most parts of the United States by the last week of November. The leaves display their autumnal glory as they turn colors before falling off the trees. That typically means that Thanksgiving is almost here, and it's time to immerse us in our holiday traditions in regards of both making new ones as well as possibly brushing up on old ones. On Thanksgiving, the emphasis on family traditions—whether it's reliving old, time-honored traditions or developing new ones—is what makes this particular holiday so special and endearing, especially when spent in the company of family and friends. Nothing is better than spending time with family and friends, relaxing, eating, watching television--whether sports, parades, favorite TV shows and maybe even a couple of movies.

For my wife and me, Thanksgiving has become a very special time. My mother has always made it a top priority that we spend Thanksgiving together. Even before my wife and I got married, we worried about how we would negotiate the holidays expectations of our respective families. Gratefully, our mothers were able to agree amicably that my mother-in-law would have dominion over Christmas while Thanksgiving officially belonged to my mother. Regardless of what we wanted to do during the other holidays, Thanksgiving was Mom's favorite. I can tell you she still feels the same. Now, for roughly fifteen years, my wife and I have made an annual pilgrimage to Atlanta to celebrate Thanksgiving without fail. Furthermore, our mothers have become such great friends that both sides of the family gather at my mother's house to share in the festivities. Every detail, from cooking to clean up, is carried out evenly and equally by every member of the family to the full enjoyment of one and all.

Needless to say, there are many variations on the Thanksgiving menus emblematic of the rich legacy of African American food ways as well as folkways all depending on what each family is accustomed to eating during the holiday. In the journey from Africa to America, it must be remembered that black women, men, and children in this nation—especially in the Deep South—historically were the ones doing the majority of agricultural and domestic labor for centuries. In this case, black labor and culinary expertise helped define many of the delicious aspects that cover the Thanksgiving tables of most American families. This can be seen in the preparation of either the traditional oven roasted turkey, fried turkey, Turduken (a regional delicacy that features a turkey stuffed with both boneless duck and chicken), or vegetarian tofu-turkey as well as side dishes consisting of "soul food" staples such as candied yams, collard greens, macaroni and cheese and countless other culinary delights borne of a African-derived cuisine largely by the descendents of black folks who, recently freed from bondage, still could

not imagine the decades of sharecropping, segregation, and disenfranchisement that would ensue but the spirit of thankfulness still prevailed.

IV. A Poem that Speaks to the Moment

Heralded as the unofficial poet laureate of black America in the late nineteenth century, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper wrote this poem to be read at the dedication of the "Allen Centennial Monument" on November 9, 1876. Written almost a half-century prior to the James Weldon Johnson and John Rosamond Johnson penned "Lift Every Voice and Sing" (also known as the Negro National Anthem), Harper's poem expressed the heartfelt sentiments and a rising spirit of a new generation of African Americans who were experiencing a then-unprecedented level of liberty. Although the murky prospects of their post-emancipation were still unclear, the African Americans of the era were thankful to God for their greater progress towards freedom, justice, and equality.

We are Rising

We are rising, as a people,
We are rising, to the light;
For our God has changed the shadows
Of our dark and dreary night.
In the prison house of bondage,
When we bent beneath the rod,
And our hearts were faint and weary,
We first learned to trust in God.
We are marching along, we are marching along,
The hand that broke our fetters was powerful strong.
We are marching along, we are marching along,
We are rising as a people, and we're marching along.
For the sighing of the needy,
God, himself did bare his hand,
And the footsteps of his judgments,
Echoed through the guilty land;
When the rust of many ages,
On our galling fetters lay,
He turned our grief to gladness,
And our darkness into day.
We are marching along, etc.

Unto God, be all the glory,
That our eyes behold the sight.
Of a people, peeled and scattered
Rising into freedom's light.
Though the morning seemed to linger,
o'er the hill tops far away
And the night was long and gloomy.
Yet he was our shield and stay.

We are marching along, etc.
Help us, Oh! great Deliverer.
To be faithful to thy Word.
Till the nation's former bondmen,
Be the freemen of the Lord.
Teach, Oh, Lord, our hands to battle
Against the host of vice, and sin.
And with Jesus, for our Captain,
The victory we shall win.
We are marching along, etc.⁴

V. Ideas to Show and Teach Thankfulness

Now, many kids have a lot and they obtain it early in their lives. Gratitude is a rarer attitude. To teach kids gratitude, and perhaps remind yourself, the following are ideas to teach thankfulness for more than the accumulation of material goods.

- (A) This Thanksgiving, if you have children in middle school or high school, invite one of their classmates, whom you also know, and his or her family who cannot afford a lavish Thanksgiving. Neither the invitation nor the dinner should be a sign of your accumulation of wealth but rather a sign of your appreciation of God and understanding that this is what Jesus would do.
- (B) Invite a widow or widower to your home for dinner. If necessary arrange their transportation to and from your home.
- (C) Take a meal to a home-bound senior or disabled person, especially a home-bound veteran. Be prepared to have your family visit with the person. So, don't eat a lot before you leave home.
- (D) Take food (uncooked and properly packaged) to a homeless shelter or well known group in your community who have historically served the poor during Thanksgiving. Even one bag of food will help. Additionally, be sure that you and your children or young people from your church either help serve food or clean up after the food is served.
- (E) This year over dinner, let your children begin by saying what they are thankful for. If you do not like what you hear, this is your opportunity to do some teaching in words and in deeds.

VI. Songs that Speak to the Moment

Thank You

I'm compelled to praise you
Like a woman out of control
So I lift up holy hands

I take advantage of this chance to say thank you
When I think about what you brought me through
I'm reminded to praise you for all that you had to do
So I lift up holy hands
I take advantage of this chance to say thank you
So from the bottom of my heart I say

Thank you, Thank you, Thank you

When I think about where you brought me from
I gotta praise you like the victories already won
And I lift my hands
I take advantage of this chance to say thank you
When I think about oh Lord yes
Why you love me so
I'm compelled to praise you because
I really don't care who's looking and who knows that I love you
And I lift up my holy hands
I take advantage of this chance to say thank you
Oh, every day of my life I just wanna say

Thank you, (Thank you Lord)
Thank you, (I gotta thank you)
Thank you, (Because of who you been to me)
Thank you, (You been a shelter in the storm)
Oh and I Thank you
You been a rock that I can stand on Thank you Lord
And I say Thank you
You been a bridge over any kind of water
I gotta say Lord I thank you
With all my heart with all my soul
Everything within me says thank you Lord
Thank you Lord
Lord I thank you, Lord I thank you, Lord I thank you
For all you done to me
Thank you Lord
There're no words that I can say but you been good
I can't thank you enough no no no no no
Thank you Lord (I just wanna thank you)

I wanna thank, I wanna thank you
I gotta thank you, just wanna thank you
I thank you yes, I thank you yes, I thank you yes, I thank you yes
And I say.....I wanna thank you
Said Lord I thank you yes

Thank you.⁵

Thank You

(Verse:1)

I was young (BOP)
And didn't have no where too run
I needed to (wake up) and see (and see)
What's in front of me (na-na-op)
There had to be, a better way
To show I'm grateful (hum)
So I thought up this song
To show my appreciation for
lovin' me so long
You don't know much you mean to me.

[Chorus]

Cause even though when times got rough
You never turned away
You were right there
And I thank you (thank youooo)
When I felt I had enough
You never turned away
You were right there
And I thank you (thank you).

(Verse: 2)

All through my life
I knew that you'd be my world
Knowing everywhere I go
Things you taught me they would show
So many times and changes
You've seen me through
I sure enough couldn't have
survived without you
And so I thought up this song
To show my appreciation for
lovin' me so long...
You don't know how much you mean to me

(Chorus)⁶

Thank You

For every time that You protected me
When I didn't know Your name
(Lord I say thank you).
How You loved on me and cared for me,

when I didn't return the same, I.
(Lord I say thank you)

Now when it seemed like I was losing and I felt like giving up,
I (Lord I) I wanna say (say thank you).
Your love rushed in like a mighty flood and lifted me above, and I (Lord I)
I wanna say (say thank you).

Chorus

I'll be thanking You and praising You for the rest of my life.
For I've come to know the power of Your love and sacrifice.
(thank You for your sacrifice)
I appreciate all that You do
(everything You do, and I want to say)
Just want to say thank you

Well, how You kept your hand upon me though I've often gone astray,
Yeah I ... (Lord I say thank you).
And how Your spirit gently led me back to safety in Your way,
I wanna say, Lord I say thank You.
(and I'll be thanking You)

Chorus

I'll be thanking You and praising You for the rest of my life.
For I've come to know the power of Your love and sacrifice.
I appreciate all that You do (I just want to say)
Just wanna to say thank you (all of my days) ,
Just want to say thank you.

Bridge

(And I'll give You praise)...just want to say thank you. Lord I thank You.
(Lord I thank You. Yes I do.
Right now I just want to say thank you)
I wanna say! (I wanna say wanna say)
I wanna say thank you. (I just want to say)
I gotta say! (Gotta say, gotta say it, thank you) I gotta say thank you!

(Now you've been good) I want to say
(And I want to say)
I want to say thank you
(That you've been kind)
I've gotta say
(Gotta say, please just let me say)
I've gotta say thank you
(You made a way)

I want to say
 (You let me see a brand new day)
 I want to say thank you
 (You never let me go astray)
 I gotta say
 (And I gotta gotta gotta say)
 I gotta say thank you
 (Thank you for my family)
 I want to say
 (Thank you lord for keeping me)
 I want to say thank you
 (Thank you Lord for bringing me through)
 I've got to say
 (And I thank you for my husband too)
 I gotta say thank you
 (Thank you Lord for saving me)
 I wanna say
 (Thank you Lord for loving me) I wanna say thank you
 (And I gotta gotta gotta say)
 I've gotta say
 (I want to say, gotta say thank you)
 I've gotta say thank you
 (Thank you. Thank you.)⁷

Notes

1. Hale, Sarah Josepha. Letter to President Abraham Lincoln on 28 September 1863. Sarah Josepha Hale is credited as the individual most responsible for making Thanksgiving a national holiday in the United States. Online location: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sarah_Josepha_Hale accessed 5 July 2010
2. President Abraham Lincoln. "Proclamation for Thanksgiving." Teaching American History.org. October 3, 1863. Online location: <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=32> accessed 5 July 2010
3. Arnett, B.W. "Centennial Thanksgiving Sermon." African American Perspectives: Pamphlets from the Daniel A.P. Murray Collection 1818-1907. The Library of Congress: American Memory. See full text of Reverend B.W. Arnett's Centennial Thanksgiving Sermon in African American Perspectives 1818-1907, online location: <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/murray:@field%28DOCID+@lit%28lcrbmrpt0d03div1%29%29> accessed 5 July 2010
4. Foster, Frances S. and Frances E. W. Harper. A Brighter Coming Day: A Frances Ellen Watkins Harper Reader. New York, NY: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1989. pp. 237-238.
5. Adams, Yolanda. "Thank You." Believe. New York, NY: Elektra, 2001.
6. Boyz to Men. "Thank You." Thank You. Detroit: Motown Records, 1995.

7. Page, Lisa. "Thank You." Lisa Page Brooks: The Compilation. San Diego: Shofa Records, 2009.