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**THE FIRST THANKSGIVING**

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Diana Fuksová

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## **ABSTRACT**

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This thesis is concerned with Thanksgiving Day in the United States of America, or, more precisely, with the first Thanksgiving in 1620. This feast is very popular with American culture and has also become one of its most important days.

The thesis is divided into four sections. The first part of the thesis involves the history of the Pilgrim Fathers and their arrival in the New World, which are the foundations for Thanksgiving Day. Due to the fact that there were only a few preserved information sources regarding it, some important questions still remain unanswered. The second section deals with the rebirth of this feast and with the consequent proclamation of Thanksgiving as a national holiday, which brought significant changes about, in the feast. The third chapter is based on commercialism and its impact on the present Thanksgiving Day, which has been influenced by economic concerns. The final part throws doubts on the thought that Thanksgiving is purely an American holiday. It is pointed out that in the rest of the world there were and still exist similar celebrations which call the American uniqueness into question. In the conclusion, the findings acquired during work on this thesis are confronted with the real importance of Thanksgiving in the USA as well as in the rest of the world.

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## INTRODUCTION

The United States of America with its more than three hundred million inhabitants represents the third most populous country in the world and its extent is worth concerning. This country has the greatest diversity of racial, ethnic, and religious groups. We might claim that America is a country for everyone. People have come to find freedom and better living conditions from all countries for four centuries. Americans can reach an individual freedom at the expense of their self-reliance. They can be as free as they want, but they are forced to work hard. America used to have a strong economy, which has been affected by the economic crisis and global recession in recent years. However, it still represents one of the greatest world powers, especially for its natural resources, export, and high productivity. Americans are famous for their hard work and they are able to work almost without any days-off. This is closely connected to their style of living. They are used to working hard and they are known as lovers of competitive sports, where they can try to be the best one and show their abilities. Thanks to this value, they are not judged for their origin or race, but for their ability. In this way they are all equal. They have almost equal chance to find success in their lives.

Another distinctive feature of this country is its relatively short history. Despite of the fact, that North America was inhabited by Native Americans first, its history is concerned more in the beginning of sixteenth century which has started with the discovery of America in 1492 by Christopher Columbus. Even though there are speculations about the first discoverer, that sailing gave birth to explorations through the world. One century later, a British group, which called itself Separatists, took an interest in America. Separatists decided to leave Europe and start a new life in this unexplored land, later known as the New World. For Pilgrim Fathers this new country represented religious freedom, for others it meant better chances for personal success. The New World had no formal class system, a government, or any established religion. They were able to establish new towns and government based on their beliefs. However, the start was not easy and many of the passengers died during the long and stormy voyage. People who survived the journey had to struggle for survival in a new, unexplored, and completely different land. The first years of hard life bore fruit for them and they could live any life which they were willing to strive for.



These values have attracted people from the whole world in the next centuries as well as the Pilgrims in 1620's. The desire for freedom and success attracted all races, ethnics, and people of different religions. As a consequence, in the United States of America live White people, African Americans, Asian, American Indians, Hispanic, and other ethnics together. Their distinction creates the unique mixture of traditions and beliefs which we can find only in this country. Their common aims and set of values make them all Americans. People believe that they are able to make their dreams come true right in this union and for many of them America is more than a place, it is a dream.

And all these typical American features are somehow associated with one American feast – with Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving Day is one of the most important feasts for people in America. When Thanksgiving is spoken about we usually imagine a turkey, stuffing, cranberry sauce, potatoes, and other typical dishes. Some people may think of shopping or visiting their family as well. But how were these traditions created? What roots do they have? And how were these attributes linked to Thanksgiving?

This feast has a deeper meaning than roasting a turkey or doing the Christmas shopping. It is unique by its sense, because it incorporates all main American values and peculiarities. The very first Thanksgiving in America is linked to the Pilgrims and their longing for religious freedom. In order to gain control over themselves, they had to overcome many obstacles. Nevertheless, their efforts were rewarded and on the occasion of their survival of the first and hardest year in this strange land they celebrated Thanksgiving. There were many reasons for giving thanks. They survived the voyage through Atlantic Ocean, endured cold winter in rough conditions without any dwellings. And last but not least, their first harvest was good. And their hard work was rewarded.

The Pilgrim movement gave birth to the immigration of other groups of people, who also longed for freedom and better life in this dream land. And it continues until now. Thus Thanksgiving Day became a collective symbol of all Americans who left their native land for the sake of a chance for success. Besides that, Thanksgiving is a symbol of hard work and determination, which preceded its arrival. As a result, the feast has become a feast of all races, ethnics, and religions without any exceptions, because in this way, Americans are equal. They all (or their ancestors) came to America for similar reasons and there was no class distinction as in Europe there. Their achievements and conditions are based on their own abilities and hard work and they are not judged for their status or belief.

However, Thanksgiving was not always as popular as it is nowadays. It had to go through the complicated evolution and it was nearly forgotten. If it had not been a woman, named Sarah Josepha Hale, we would probably not know this holiday at all. Thanks to her unprecedented effort to persuade then presidents to proclaim Thanksgiving as an annual national holiday, the feast still exists. Although it has become something quite different, it helped the American nation shape their values and withstand the Great Depression, which had a negative effect on the whole of America.

In the thesis I would like to concentrate on the first Thanksgiving, its reasons, and progress. Because of insufficient information there exist several hypotheses about the first celebration and make the understanding of its origin complicated. The following years are even more cryptic.

Furthermore, the work demonstrates the rebirth of Thanksgiving and its modification up to twentieth century. With the growth of commercialism, Thanksgiving has become something completely different and the original purpose is almost lost. I tried to point to the main changes and reasons which were created by commercialism and business.

Finally, with extensive research, I was able to find some feasts, which are similar to American Thanksgiving throughout the world. There used to be and still are many similar holidays in cultures from the whole world. Nevertheless, the Thanksgiving Day in America still remains unique and has irreplaceable significance for all Americans.

## THE FIRST THANKSGIVING IN THE NEW WORLD

The first Thanksgiving has its roots in the seventeenth century and it is closely related to the discovery of America and its consequent wave of immigration. America, as a new unexplored land got Europeans interest in its settlement. Thanksgiving Day is linked to the Pilgrims and their desire for religious freedom in this free country and their consequent departure from the Old World for the New World in the beginning of seventeenth century. It would have been considered a courageous action at that time, even though people had been voyaging their across the ocean for more than two centuries. For understanding the beginning and the importance of this feast it is necessary to know the historical context. Thus I would like to begin with a brief history. Due to the fact that the feast is well-known and celebrated throughout the USA, there still remain many unanswered questions and hypothesis about its origin and substance.

The first British attempt to inhabit North America was recorded in 1584 by leader Sir Walter Raleigh (1554 – 1618) in Virginia in today's North Carolina and Virginia in 1607. This attempt paved the way for the next colonists. The first permanent settlement began in 1620 when Pilgrims (the group known as Pilgrim Fathers), as they called themselves, and the first settlers of Plymouth Colony, landed in Cape Cod, in today's Massachusetts. These Pilgrims came to America to find freedom and built a new colony and a Christian community for themselves and their descendants. (Šturma, 2011)

They belonged to an extreme and non-compromising sect, called Separatists. Because of their disagreement with King James I (1566 – 1625), they severed their ties with the Church of England and were forced to leave England to avoid persecution and went to Holland. Refugees inhabited the town Leiden and in taking into consideration their similarity to Calvinists, they lived in quiet and peace there. Newcomers could obtain only unskilled work and their children became more and more "Dutch", which was not what they longed for. (Šturma, 2011)

After 10 years in Holland, they decided to find a new place to settle. They decided for an uninhabited, free place – for the New World. The reasons were suggested by William Bradford (1590 – 1657), when he mentioned in his letter "the discouragements of the hard life they had in Holland" ; "the hope of attracting others by finding a better, and easier place of living"; "the children of the group being drawn away by evil examples into extravagance and dangerous courses", and "the great hope, for the propagating and

advancing the gospel of the kingdom of Christ in those remote parts of the world” (The Pilgrims). This was the important milestone for their resolve to move again. For the founding of a new colony in America James I gave them indirect permission (provided that he did not acknowledge their religion). Thanks to joint-stock company, The Plymouth Council, headed by William Bradford set out with 101 men, women, and children on a ship, the *Mayflower*, through the Atlantic Ocean to the New World. One half of the travellers were members of Leiden Congregation. The second half consisted of workmen and servants. (Šturma, 2011)

In July 1620, 101 Pilgrims began preparations for the departure to the New World on the ship, the *Mayflower*. All that we know about their voyage and first months in America comes from two extant letters and subsequent notes of the leader, William Bradford. With reference to his notes, we know that the voyage took two months, was fraught with starvation, uncounted thunderstorms, and diseases and killed almost one half of voyagers. During the voyage in 1620 Bradford described their passage in *The colonial period: The age of faith* as really hard, “after we had enjoyed fair winds and weather for a season, we were encountered many times with cross winds and met with many fierce storms with which the ship was shroudly shaken, and her upper works made very leaky...” (p. 13). The rest of the crew would have been grateful that they survived in those rough conditions.

However, when they landed in America, their concerns about their health and future did not end. Considering the fact, that they had reached a different place than was determined in a decree (the decree was issued after leaving the port), some of the Pilgrims started to call their rights in America into question and it was decided to create a new compact, which would ignore the original one written by investors. As a result, they wrote “The Mayflower Compact”, it was signed by forty-one English colonists on the 11<sup>th</sup> November 1620. Settlers proclaimed themselves devoted subjects to James I. (Šturma, 2011)

Bradford recorded the text of “The Mayflower Compact” in his book *Of Plymouth plantation*:

In the name of God, Amen. We, whose names are underwritten, the Loyal Subjects of our dread Sovereign Lord, King James, by the Grace of God, of England, France and Ireland, King, Defender of the Faith, e&. Having

undertaken for the Glory of God, and Advancement of the Christian Faith, and the Honour of our King and Country, a voyage to plant the first colony in the northern parts of Virginia; do by these presents, solemnly and mutually in the Presence of God and one of another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil Body Politic, for our better Ordering and Preservation, and Furtherance of the Ends aforesaid; And by Virtue hereof to enact, constitute, and frame, such just and equal Laws, Ordinances, Acts, Constitutions and Offices, from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the General good of the Colony; unto which we promise all due submission and obedience. In Witness whereof we have hereunto subscribed our names at Cape Cod the eleventh of November, in the Reign of our Sovereign Lord, King James of England, France and Ireland, the eighteenth, and of Scotland the fifty-fourth. Anno Domini, 1620. (Bradford, 1908, p.131)

Nevertheless, their administration was based solely on “The Mayflower Compact”, independently of the Plymouth Council. The contract was not a formal constitution, but only an agreement among members of a religious sect worked on the presumption that God concluded a contract about conditions of salvation with them.

They reached the American shore, Cape Cod, in present day Plymouth, Massachusetts in December 1620. Because of their shortage of food and drinking water, they started to explore the surroundings. It would have been obvious that they had to meet their new neighbours, the Native Americans, sooner or later. After several months building their new houses and a village, they made contact with the Indians named Squanto and Samoset. Squanto had spent several years as a slave in Europe and learned a little English. It was a great asset in communicating with the Pilgrims. Although the Pilgrims brought along seeds and plants, New England soil was different and their products did not flourish well. Their new Indian companions taught them fishing, hunting game and bears as well as planting corn, pumpkins, and beans. That was the main reason why the rest of the crew survived their first and the hardest year in the New World. On the grounds of their survival in such a hard year and rough conditions was held a three-day celebration – Thanksgiving. (Duane, 2006)

Our knowledge of it is only through a description of their first Thanksgiving from a letter, which was sent by Edward Winslow (1622) to his friend to England in December 1621:

We set last spring some twenty acres of Indian corn, and sowed some six acres of barley and peas. According to the manner of the Indians we manured our ground with herrings (alewives) which we have in great abundance and take with great ease at our doors. Our corn did prove well, and God be praised, we had a good increase in Indian corn. Our barley did indifferent good, but our peas not worth the gathering. We feared they were too late sown. They came up very well and blossomed, but the sun parched them in the blossom. Our harvest being gotten in, our Governor sent four men on fowling, that so we might, after a special manner, rejoice together, after we had gathered in the fruits of our labours. They four in one day killed as many fowl as with little help besides, served the Company for almost a week, at which time, amongst our recreations, we exercised our arms, many of the Indians coming amongst us, and amongst the rest their great king the Massasoit, with some ninety men, whom for three days we entertained and feasted. They went out and killed five deer, which they brought in to the Plantation, and bestowed on our Governor, and upon the Captain, and others. And although it be not always so plentiful as it was at this time with us, yet by the goodness of God, we are so far from want that we often wish you partakers of our plenty. (Winslow, 1622, p. 78)

This is the only documentation of their Thanksgiving which we have, thus all the hypotheses come from these short passage. And what really was on their menu? By what we can see from the letter, there was no mention of turkeys at all. They ate fowls and deer, of course, they could have killed some turkeys, but there is no evidence regarding it. Do you believe that cranberry sauce was known and available to them in seventeenth century? They did not eat it at all. According to historians it was fifty years before that berries were boiled with sugar. It is more likely that they ate pumpkins instead of pumpkin pies with complicated pie crust, when they had not yet built an oven. All of them are myths, which were created two centuries later and preserved until today. (Armstrong, 2002)

Even historians are not sure if Thanksgiving was a one-time event or if it was a regular feast celebrated jointly by the Natives and the colonists. In the text of E. Armstrong (2002) Mr. Curtin asserts that “we have only one documented harvest feast that occurred between the cultures,” and “you don't hear about [any other] harvests occurring between them. I assume that they did on some level, but it's fascinating that it is just that one source, one sentence in one letter. I wonder what else is there that someone just didn't jot down, and we now know nothing about” (“The first Thanksgiving”). But what they know is that Indians, especially Wampanoag tribe, which inhabited the area around Cape Cod, had such a “thanksgiving” every day. As Linda Coombs, associate director of the Wampanoag programme at Plymouth Plantation, claims in “The first Thanksgiving”: “we, as native people have thanksgivings as a daily, ongoing thing”. Furthermore, he explains that “every time anybody went hunting or fishing or picked a plant, they would offer a prayer or acknowledgement” (Armstrong, 2002).

In other words, for Indians:

[the] giving thanks for the Creator's gifts had always been a part of Wampanoag daily life. From ancient times, Native People of North America have held ceremonies to give thanks for successful harvests, for the hope of a good growing season in the early spring, and for other good fortune such as the birth of a child. Giving thanks was, and still is, the primary reason for ceremonies or celebrations (Bradford, 1952, p. 90).

Ms. Coombs clarifies, “neither the English people nor the native people in 1621 knew they were having the First Thanksgiving” (Armstrong, 2002). Presumably, it was not a feast or a celebration for them, but only sitting and eating together for a few days after their successful harvest. And this can be the reason why we have no evidence of their next “Thanksgivings” in following years. (Armstrong, 2002)

Furthermore, there also raises the question why they sat together; “we're not sure why Massasoit and the 90 men ended up coming to Plymouth,” Coombs says:

There's an assumption that they were invited, but nowhere in the passage does it say they were. And the idea, that they sat down and lived happily ever after is, well,

untrue. The relationship between the English and the Wampanoag was very complex. (Armstrong, 2002)

They could communicate only through Squanto with his limited English. Otherwise, the Pilgrims and Indians had completely different lives, customs, and knowledge. It would be very difficult to try to understand each other. Despite the fact that the Pilgrims survived mainly thanks to the Indians and their first year in an unfamiliar land would have been much more difficult without the Indians' help, we do not know if the Wampanoag tribe was invited. It is supposed that they happily celebrated a thanksgiving time together, but their distinctions and language barrier are unnoticed, as well as the massacre of Indians in following decades.

Pilgrims had a successful harvest in 1621, but their next harvest in 1622 failed. (Duane, 2006) Thus we do not know, if their Thanksgiving became an annual feast or not. We have no information or evidence about their next Thanksgivings. What Mr. Winslow recorded was only a one-time event. They would not know that their Thanksgiving would be of interest to people in the following centuries. (Armstrong, 2002) The questions concerning subsequent harvests have remained unanswered in some ways.

On the other hand, according to other sources, such as a journal *Gastronomica*, where Mr. Andrew Smith (2003), writer and lecturer on food asserted, that "New England Puritans did observe days of thanksgiving, and hundreds of thanksgiving proclamations were issued by ministers and governors" (p. 79). He added that "these observances were usually selected in response to specific events, such as a military victory, a good harvest, or a providential rainfall: no specific thanksgiving day was observed on an annual basis" (p. 79). There was no thought of creating a feast until 1636, when one church suggested the possibility of a feast after its services. It was described as "makeing merry to the creatures, the poorer sort being invited of the richer." But there is no evidence of specifying "makeing merry"; it is only supposed to be some kind of a feast (Smith, 2003, p. 79). There is also no mention about any connection between the "First Thanksgiving" and "Thanksgivings" in the following years and decades. Thus we may consider that the Pilgrims used "Thanksgivings" irregularly and unexpectedly and without any schedule.

In a journal, *The Aldine*, Mr. Hale (1873) wrote about Thanksgiving Days in the period of time from 1630's to 1660's. According to him, the Colony in Bay Colony gave thanks to God for different reasons and in different seasons of the year. For example, when



they had a shortage of food and were forced to ration food for some time, they were saved by the arrival of a ship with food supplies. Mr. Winslow noted that they “held a day of thanksgiving for this ship’s arrival – by order from the governor and council” (p. 213). This “Thanksgiving” was held on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February, thus it means that they did not celebrate “Thanksgivings” only in autumn. In July, 1630, “we kept a day of thanksgiving in all the plantations” when the colony had first landed without any problems (Hale, 1873, p. 213). In the next year, they held a Thanksgiving for the safe arrival of governor’s family from England.

The Governor said: “we kept a day of thanksgiving in Boston,” continuing with, “divers of the assistants and most of the people came to welcome them, and brought and sent, for divers days, great store of provisions, as fat hogs, kids, venison, poultry, geese, partridges, etc. So as the like joy and manifestation of love had never been seen in England” (Hale, 1873, p. 213).

Another mention of Thanksgiving was two years later. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of June, 1632, the fourth Thanksgiving was held in the Bay Colony:

The General Court, taking into consideration the great mercy of God vouchsafes to the churches of God...and for the safe arrival of all the ships, they having lost not one person, nor one sick among them, appointed the 13<sup>th</sup> day of this present month to be kept as a day of [public] thanksgiving throughout the several plantations. (Hale, 1873, p. 213)

Puritans as the first permanent settlers in the New World contributed to the development of cultural tradition and habits, which were based on their beliefs, culture, and knowledge. Besides other things, they also brought religious holidays to America – Sabbath, days of humility and fasting, and Thanksgiving. Mr. Baker in his book *Thanksgiving: The biography of an American holiday* wrote that their Thanksgiving in the New World in autumn 1621 was derived from England’s annual Harvest festival, which was celebrated in England from sixteenth century. Harvest festival had several forms according to its climate, crops, or region. Thus when Puritans came to America, they naturally brought their customs with them and after their first harvest there, they celebrated a Harvest festival, which we considered to be the First Thanksgiving. It indicates that Thanksgiving is not an American feast by birth, but it was developed by the immigrants as

their tradition which came from England. The Pilgrims also celebrated Fast Day, which is the opposite of Thanksgiving Day. The opposite is the time of the year and the celebration. Fast Day was celebrated in spring and people observed the fast instead of overeating on Thanksgiving Day and this feast of fasting and humility also comes from England. This is one more proof of its connection with Europe.

Not to mention the fact that the Pilgrims' Thanksgiving was based on a Harvest Festival in Britain, they also might have substituted Christmas for Thanksgiving. In following years, Puritans used Thanksgiving instead of Christmas, which they did not celebrate and rejected it as pagan and non-canonical. It was a preparation for the long and cold winter. Mr. Baker (2009) claims that “the old New England holiday had over time become a late November occasion – hardly a time of harvest in that region. It had also been the Puritan stand-in for Christmas, an early winter time for feasting and pious hope before the long, dreary months of cold and privation to follow” (p. 16).

Although the present-day Thanksgiving is perceived as an invention of the Plymouth Colony, the feast comes from England and the Pilgrims only brought it to the New World with their arrival. Even it has much more common with its twentieth century's rebirth and the Pilgrims are more likely icons than creators. There also remains the question if they really consider their three-day party as a feast or not. Nevertheless, the assumption that the Pilgrims were inventors of this feast and that their arrival in America connects them with all Americans almost for five centuries is amazing. We may consider contemporary Thanksgiving Day as a purely American celebration, but not by birth at all. It has developed into a feast of all Americans, independently of their origin and faith, hardly derived from an agricultural Harvest festival in Europe.

## THANKSGIVING'S REBIRTH AND PROCLAMATION

Sarah Josepha Hale (1788-1879), an influential woman, popular editor, writer, and author of “Mary had a Little Lamb”, “was respected as an arbiter of taste for middle-class women in matters of fashion, cooking, literature, and morality” (Howe, 2007, p. 608). She strengthened stereotypical gender roles, especially domestic roles for women. She supported education, particularly higher education for women. Besides that, she maintained American union, culture, and nation. She was one of the leading editors in that time, and much her work was published in her magazines *Ladies Magazine*, *Godey's Lady's Book*.

Among other things, she is responsible for the Thanksgiving Day as an annual holiday. Although the first national day of Thanksgiving was held already in 1789, when President G. Washington proclaimed Thursday, November 26 to be “a day of public thanksgiving and prayer,” to give thanks for formation of a new nation and constitution (Rosenberg, 2013). This feast was also celebrated only in New England and then “each state scheduled its own holiday, some as early as October and others as late as January; it was largely unknown in the American South. Her advocacy for the national holiday began in 1846 and lasted 17 years before it was successful” (Schenone, 2004, p. 118). During her lifetime, she wrote letters to then Presidents: Taylor, Fillmore, Pierce, Buchanan, and Lincoln to persuade them to proclaim Thanksgiving Day as an annual feast.

In her letter to Lincoln she explained:

You may have observed that, for some years past, there has been an increasing interest felt in our land to have the Thanksgiving held on the same day, in all the States; it now needs National recognition and authoritative fixation, only, to become permanently, an American custom and institution. (Baker, 2007, p. 12)

Except for Hale's proposal to make another annual feast in America, she also endeavoured to make it really significant, as she wrote already in 1851, “there would then be two great American national festivals, Independence Day, on the Fourth of July, and Thanksgiving Day, on the last Thursday in November” (Baker, 2007, p. 12). Hale also provided an explanation for her choice of the last Thursday in November:

The last Thursday in November has these advantages - harvests of all kinds are gathered in - summer travellers have returned to their homes - the diseases that, during summer and early autumn, often afflict some portions of our country, have ceased, and all are prepared to enjoy a day of Thanksgiving (Baker, 2007, p. 12)

Nevertheless, her attempts to create a new feast and tradition were unsuccessful until 1863 when her last attempt to persuade the then President of the creation of an American custom was successful. By President Lincoln, William H. Seward, Secretary of State, 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1863 wrote about the proclamation of Thanksgiving:

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 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 (Leidner, 2012)

Obviously, we can thank to Mrs. Hale not only for the proclamation of Thanksgiving, but especially for the preservation of American history and making new traditions. For these reasons, she was called “Mother of Thanksgiving” or “Godmother of Thanksgiving”. It is theoretically possible that without her project, next generations would not know about the First Thanksgiving at all. Despite the fact that she created new traditions, which have not anything in common with the year 1621 and landing of Pilgrims in the New World, we should be grateful for this pleasant feast in autumn. In fact, the present Christmas, Easter, and other feasts are also based on traditions changing during the centuries and decades. If we would not take account of her evident changes in traditions, she is responsible for the ensuing interest in Thanksgiving itself as well as in American history and the Pilgrims. Thus her concern for this feast had a positive effect on American nation in many ways.

On the other hand, it is curious that people are celebrating Thanksgiving Day, which is based solely on the three-day gathering of the Pilgrims and the Native Americans, who did not even know that they were “celebrating” Thanksgiving. As we have already

known, the Indians held harvest festivals and “celebrated” every hunt and harvest sitting together and enjoying the present time.

During the Great Depression, which was the decade preceding the World War II (1930 -middle 1940s), then President F.D. Roosevelt decided to change the date of the celebration of Thanksgiving. The reason was that people usually started Christmas shopping after Thanksgiving and this year Thanksgiving would have been on 30<sup>th</sup> November (twenty-four shopping days to Christmas only), thus he decided to move it a week earlier – on 23<sup>rd</sup> November. It means that he changed the last Thursday for the fourth Thursday. The Great Depression had the deepest impact on economy and personal income. On business leaders’ recommendation Roosevelt hoped that the prolonging of the pre-Christmas season would help to raise the earnings. Roosevelt wrote in his proclamation in 1939: “I, Franklin D. Roosevelt, President of the United States of America, do hereby designate Thursday, the twenty-third of November 1939, as a day of general thanksgiving.” The President made reference to the Pilgrims’ First Thanksgiving:

More than three centuries ago at the season of the gathering in of the harvest, the Pilgrims humbly paused in their work and gave thanks to God for the preservation of their community and for the abundant yield of the soil...

Continuing with the explanation of his decision of the date’s change:

...our Nation has gone steadily forward in the application of democratic processes to economic and social problems. We have faced the spectres of business depression, of unemployment, and of widespread agricultural distress, and our positive efforts to alleviate these conditions have met with heartening results...  
(Roosevelt, 1939)

Unfortunately, the change had a different impact and was considered controversial. Although the large companies were contented with longer shopping season, the smaller ones were afraid of losing business, especially if they depended on the previous date. Disagreement was also from families, schools, and calendar makers. Schools had already scheduled the holidays and football games. Calendar makers had already been made calendars in advance and small companies were afraid of taking a loss.

People were so disconcerted that they sent thousands letters to the White House to have the date change. One man, Charles A. Arnold from Arnold's Men's Shop, Inc wrote to the President:

Dear President Roosevelt: Would like to give you the view point of the small merchant in regard to your change of the Thanksgiving date. The small storekeeper would prefer leaving Thanksgiving Day where it belongs. If the large department stores are over-crowded during the shorter shopping period before Christmas, the overflow will come, naturally, to the neighbourhood store... (“The year we had two thanksgivings”)

In some states the disapproval was so strong, that they decided to defy the Presidential Proclamation. The governors declared Thanksgiving on 30<sup>th</sup> November. As a result, Thanksgiving Day in the states was celebrated on two dates for several years. Thus families which were spread over the USA could not celebrate this day together. This act led Congress to pass a law on 26<sup>th</sup> December 1941, assuring that all Americans would celebrate a unified Thanksgiving on the fourth Thursday of November every year.

Despite the negative responses of the general population, there was something positive in it. It has helped to shape American unity. Something special American, which was based on the first settlers, the Pilgrims, was created. As Ms. Brennan, president of Plymouth Plantation, clarifies, “in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Thanksgiving was really a tool for Americanization amid the great influx of immigration. It was supposed to bind this diverse population into one union” (Armstrong, 2002). Indeed, it happened and it continues up to now.

However, there remains a question to what extent is the rebirth of Thanksgiving focused on the real history of the Pilgrims and its preservation or if it is solely a creation of new traditions and holiday, calling an American. This holiday represents the Pilgrims more as a symbol or a logo than being about American heroes and founders of the “First Thanksgiving”. Even then President Lincoln in 1863 described the holiday as the birth of *our* American Thanksgiving, not as the *Pilgrims’* Thanksgiving. Mr. Baker (2009) in his chapter “New England’s Puritan holy days” even claims that there was “no mention of the colonists in presidential proclamations until 1905, when Theodore Roosevelt mentioned the “first settlers” as initiating the holiday. The Pilgrims were not invoked by name before

Franklin Roosevelt did so in 1939, long after the “First Thanksgiving” had become firmly fixed in popular culture” (p. 14). The modern Thanksgiving has been formed in nineteenth century and the history of Pilgrims has been preserved mostly in our minds rather than the main originators.

## COMMERCIALISM VERSUS HOLIDAY SPIRIT

Modern commercialism has developed mainly since the beginning of the twentieth century, when then President Roosevelt wanted to raise the earnings of companies and retailers during the Great Depression, which had a negative impact on American economy. He changed the date in order to prolong the pre-Christmas season, which is popular for buying gifts and decorations.

The first promotion of Thanksgiving was recorded in the late nineteenth century. Although advertisers and promoters were not so advanced in the marketing of products, they had not as many rival companies as today. They used printing technologies for pictures in magazines, printing postcards, trade cards, greeting cards, and posters, which was comparable to television and film in present day. The publication of the first printed cards with advertisement began in 1870's. Retailers added their names and references on the printed side. The cards usually carried images, which were not directly connected with Thanksgiving, such as flowers, children, or ethnic humour. The design of the cards had changed with time and the usual paper was replaced by thick cardboard, or even had silk fringe around the edge. Trade cards were substituted by picture postcards at the turn of the twentieth century. The most common pictures were, of course, a live male turkey (with puffed feathers and spread tail), the Pilgrims, then a bird, or well-dressed small girl. Another holiday icon, such as a turkey wearing a Pilgrim hat, Pilgrims and/or Indians, harvest icons – pumpkins, leaves, nuts, and flowers, or even flags, Uncle Sam, and the Dutch in traditional costume. In 1906, a card with a poor black family titled "Thanksgiving Morning in the South" also appeared and became very popular. But the picture of the feast of the Pilgrims and Indians was drawn a few years later. Unfortunately, a card-mailing had not become popular as Christmas, birthdays, Valentine's Day, Easter, Halloween, and St. Patrick's Day mailing. (Baker, 2009)





The picture of the Pilgrims and Indians' outdoor Thanksgiving, by J.L.G. Ferris in 1910's

A parade has also become a tradition of modern Thanksgiving. This event, as well as Black Friday, has not anything common with Thanksgiving, but with Christmas. If people cannot attend a parade, they watch it on TV at least. At first, the parades were family-oriented and very popular after World War II. The first parade was recorded in 1920's and during the twentieth century it was spread to other cities, such as Philadelphia with its Gimbel's Parade, or J. L. Hudson's in Detroit. Initially, the parades were not even connected with Christmas, but with different dates – New Year, Fourth of July, or Washington's Birthday. These parades were accompanied by children in costumes who begged for money. But this custom weakened and was substituted by “trick or treat” at Halloween. (Baker, 2009)

In spite of the fact that present parades have nothing in common with Thanksgiving, they have some important aspects for American people. Great Depression and World Wars had a great impact on population and they were desirous for normal family life. Americans took an interest in family values and patriotism. Historian D'Ann Campbell was asked if societal values were changed in WWII and he replied: “Yes, Americans emphasized more strongly the primacy of family and children in their lives than in previous eras” (Baker, 2009, p. 157). This hard period led American people to be interested in the USA past. According to an American novelist and folklorist, Mrs. Esther Forbes, “during the depression the United States became very curious about her own past...It was then the word “American” moved from the library shelf to the cocktail lounge” (Baker, 2009, p. 152). In other words, first half of twentieth century was centred on family, children, folklore, culture, and American past. Thus the increasing concern

about Thanksgiving and its roots in seventeenth century and Pilgrims was in order, as well as a creation of new traditions for Thanksgiving Day, which should have joined families and/or the nation together.

The very first parade was in Philadelphia, on 25<sup>th</sup> of November, 1920. It was composed of fifty people and fifteen cars. The main feature was “the official arrival of Santa Claus, in his most marketable guise as patron saint of holiday commerce” (Baker, 2009, p. 147). It means that parades based on commercialism and Christmas from their very beginning. The central themes of a parade were children and toys. Costumes usually represented fairy-tales and nursery rhymes, such as “The Old Lady Who Lived in a Shoe” and “Mother Goose herself”.

The most famous parade – Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade – began in 1924 in New York. It started with Santa Claus, Mother Goose, clowns and animals borrowed from the Central Park Zoo and now we can see cartoon characters such as Superman, Mickey Mouse, and Snoopy there. (Macy’s Thanksgiving day parade, 2013) In other cities over the USA are also held Thanksgiving parades – for example in Houston, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, San Francisco, and Hawaii.

Although the Thanksgiving Day is very important feast for Americans, it did not use to be so profitable for retailers and businessmen. It was overshadowed by more favourite Christmas and Halloween, which were more in favour of buying decorations, costumes, candy, and knick-knacks. (Baker, 2009) Thus the President Roosevelt’s decision to change the date of Thanksgiving Day and its lengthening of pre-Christmas season was purely economic move. Development of a shopping day called Black Friday and consequent creation of Cyber Monday was also focused only on earnings and an increase of popularity of this feast. If Thanksgiving Day stayed alone, without any connection with Christmas, it would probably not be so significant for Americans. We have to realize that the present-day Thanksgiving is not a commemoration of Pilgrims, but more likely a tradition, which was been developed in the course of time. And the modern age is full of commercialism, advertisements, and material things. For some people the original sense of the celebration and preservation of this feast from Mrs. Hale is forgotten and the commerciality has engulfed all Americans.

Due to the distance between many families, Thanksgiving celebration provides an ideal opportunity to pay a visit to parents and the rest of family. Thanksgiving Day is held on the fourth Thursday of November, and then comes Friday, when people usually have a

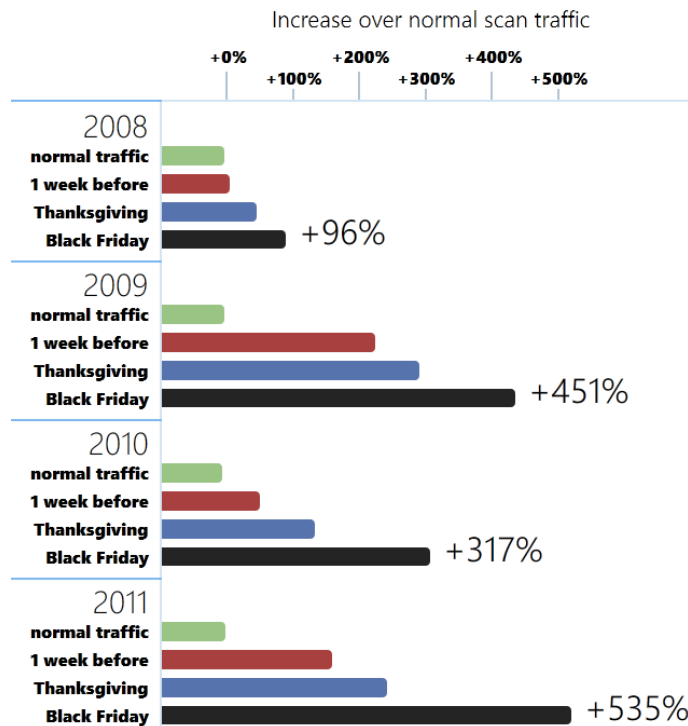
day off. So this four-day weekend is a great opportunity to see their relatives, at least once a year. It is not unusual that working people spend all their time at work and the only time, when they can go to their parents are just at Thanksgiving and Christmas time. According to AAA (the American Automobile Association, Inc.), “43.6 million Americans will journey 50 miles or more from home during the Thanksgiving weekend, an increase of 0.7 percent over the 43.3 million people who travelled last year” (Hunter, 2012). AAA also claims that “the increase marks the fourth consecutive [years of the growing holiday travellers] since 2008 when Thanksgiving travel fell by 25 percent” (Hunter, 2012). This analysis shows how important this event is for Americans and what they are willing to do for it even during the global recession also known as “Great Recession”. In 2008 the Thanksgiving travelling was the lowest in the last decade as a result of the financial crisis of 2007-2008.

Travel agencies are not the only one who makes a profit. Black Friday represents one of the most important and greatest business affairs. Shopkeepers and businessmen use this feast for their earnings as well as an average price of gasoline falls during the holiday. The average price of gasoline for Thanksgiving from 2007-2011 is \$2.75 a gallon. (Hunter, 2012) Usually, the prices of fuel drop about 40 cents a gallon in autumn.

The Friday, which comes right after the Thanksgiving Day, is called Black Friday. This day marks the beginning of the Christmas shopping season every year. It is also the day of the lowest prices before Christmas and most of the shops are open from early morning hours. It is not rare for a shop to be opened exactly at midnight.

We find two interesting theories why this Friday is called Black. The first one relates to an old way of recording business accounts when profits were recorded in black ink. It appeared in a World News Tonight segment by Dan Cordtz from November 26, 1982: “Some merchants label the day after Thanksgiving Black Friday because business today can mean the difference between red ink and black on the ledgers” (Drum, 2010). It indicated the profits of companies and businessmen already thirty years ago. The second theory is that people go shopping by cars and they left many black markings on the road surface in a heavy traffic. According to Apfelbaum “the day's name originated in Philadelphia, where it originally was used to describe the heavy and disruptive pedestrian and vehicle traffic which would occur on the day after Thanksgiving” (Apfelbaum, 2006, p. 239). Of course, we cannot deny the increase of the traffic before the fourth Thursday in November every year as well as profits of shopkeepers. Nevertheless, both theories are

connected to profits and earnings and they both are real. We can only guess what the real origin is, but the following picture shows the increase of traffic during the Thanksgiving, so the second theory is appropriate here.



ShopSavvy (iPhone Application), by A. Muse, 2011

Black Friday is a very popular day and people prepare for this shopping day and save money for it. We can find many predictions about forthcoming Thanksgiving on the internet, thus we can see which products are most popular and also the cheapest ones. On websites such as TheBlackFriday.com you can find useful information about forthcoming Friday and the goods, in recent years what the most favourite electronic products are, such as TVs, iPods, iPads, etc. About TV's we can read this:

TVs are getting cheaper and trend it to go over larger screen and 3D TVs. We may see good prices on TVs this year. We may see good prices on Internet TVs or Smart TVs. One thing to note here is that most stores offer good TV deals during black Friday, but if you are looking for a high-end, top brand TV, you may not find the best price during black Friday since most stores try to attract consumers by offering

great prices on non-branded or lesser known branded TVs. (Black Friday predictions -2012, 2012)

We may find various predictions, often added with prospective prices, which are more or less truthful, but usually very similar to each other. These predictions are not only important for the Christmas shopping season, but also for the entire following year. Although in recent years the economy has not been as strong as it used to be, people are not afraid of spending money for presents, Christmas decorations and food. NRF (National Retail Federation) has noted about Thanksgiving weekend, 2012 that “individual shoppers shelled out more money - spending \$423 this weekend, up from \$398 last year. Total spending over the four-day weekend reached a record \$59.1 billion, a 13% increase from \$52.4 billion last year [2011]” (Fox, 2012).

In recent years, you can use another, more comfortable kind of shopping – the internet. It has become more and more popular and the day designed for it is called Cyber Monday, which comes immediately after Thanksgiving four-day weekend. The Monday is relatively fresh. It was developed by Shop.org in 2005, when it was recorded that this day is one of the busiest online shopping days in the year. Online shops did not hesitate and use this day for gain. Although the prices are not so low as on Black Friday, some online shops, such as Amazon and BestBuy.com offer deals which are not available in stores. What is interesting about Cyber Monday is the fact, that it has developed into an international term used in some countries in each of the five continents. Apart from the USA, it is used by online retailers in Canada, Chile, Colombia, the United Kingdom, Germany, Portugal, Egypt, India, Australia, New Zealand, and in Japan. But the dates of “Cyber Monday” vary from each other and the period of sales is from the end of November to the half of December, depending on each country itself.

It may seem that Thanksgiving was created only for business and commercial purposes and all other important things, which are linked to the celebration of this feast, are secondary. Paradoxically, Black Friday is not provided by the peace and holiday spirit but purely by economic forecasters and power. People spend this day in overcrowded shops fighting for some goods at reduced prices. And these material things have become more important than the magic of Christmas and Thanksgiving itself.

The modern age appears to be influenced much more by material things, which cause the effect of commercialism everywhere around us. Kindliness and generosity were

pushed away and people focus more on money and their private lives. Holiday spirit has been overshadowed and the original reason, significance, and value of this enchanting time are not what they used to be in the past. Nevertheless, this time of year is still the loveliest one and we are caught up in the atmosphere of it if we want to be or not. People buy presents in order to make their close friends happy and give money to various charitable societies. Although this open-handedness is amiable, it should not be the only preciousness of the holidays, but an ongoing thing. Children have been becoming so interested in toys and how many presents they will have under the Christmas tree, that they do not understand what the holiday spirit is. More and more children also know that Santa Claus does not exist and it takes the magical atmosphere away. Families do not hold together as in previous centuries and marketing has taken control of the holiday, starting right on the Thanksgiving Day.

American football has also become an inseparable part of the current Thanksgiving celebration. Americans are well-known lovers of this sport. Boys dream about are encouraged to be the best football players in school and girls want to be cheerleaders. Universities offer the best players a scholarship and families use football games more likely as a gathering. It is enough to become a Thanksgiving tradition. This custom is almost as old as the rebirth of Thanksgiving itself. The first Thanksgiving football game was recorded in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1869. The games are usually called as Turkey Day Game or a Turkey Bowl. (Baker, 2009) Besides its traditional significance it is also tied up with earnings. For instance, the best colleges and universities schedule a game on Thanksgiving Day and their football tickets are sold in higher numbers and are usually sold out a few weeks ago.

Another artificially formed custom and feature of Thanksgiving is a turkey. A turkey cannot be missing on a table for a Thanksgiving supper. It is the most important part and a mascot of the feast and without him Thanksgiving would not be complete Thanksgiving because food is an integral part of every feast and holiday celebration time. Everyone knows that food is the basic need of human life. Besides that, food brings families together, especially in the modern age, when we live our hectic lives and do not have much time to spend dining with our families at home. People usually eat unhealthy meals in canteens and fast foods and having supper with relatives is a rarity. Holidays and feasts, such as Thanksgiving Day or Christmas bring a great opportunity to enjoy the time with family and abundant supply and variety of dishes.

The Thanksgiving supper usually consists of roasted turkey with stuffing, cranberry sauce, pumpkin pie, sweet potatoes, and vegetables. It is not rare for turkeys to weight more than ten kilos, so that, in the USA, families are prepared for cooking big meals and their ovens are bigger than the standard Czech one. We have already learned that turkey probably was not the meal of Pilgrims in seventeenth century; it was likely some fowl or deer. It was the same with cranberry sauce and pumpkin pie, certainly, they did not eat them. The reason, why we would be sure is that, berries were not used as aside dish at that time and Pilgrims probably ate only pumpkins instead of pumpkin pies. In seventeenth century, potatoes were not available to them. This menu was created two centuries later, along with several recipes, which are used up to now. Every year about fifty million turkeys are butchered and served in the USA. (Armstrong, 2002)

As we could see in the previous pages, the significance of the origin of this day is now overshadowed by commercialism and modern age, and artificially created traditions. People are focused most on Thanksgiving's food and its preparation or on shopping than on a holiday spirit and a presence of family members. In almost every family there is served a turkey, a pumpkin pie, cranberry sauce, and other typical thanksgiving foods. Nevertheless, these dishes are mostly based on European ones, so the other ethnics, such as Chinese or Hispanic people, preserve their own heritage and the dinner consist of their own ethnic cuisines, but the turkey is usually maintained. In spite of the fact that Thanksgiving Day connects all ethnics in the USA together and it is the feast of all, the traditional dishes are based on ingredients and recipes of a majority of White people, which is higher than seventy percent of total population. Nevertheless, the ethnic minorities have added to this traditional food something of their own culture and recipes. (Baker, 2009)

If you happen to be in Washington in autumn, you would not see only the White House and Japanese cherries, but also two turkeys, which spend one night in Hotel Washington in the third week in November. The very next day, the current president of the United States decides which one of them will survive this year and will be spared. Usually, the chosen turkeys do not turn red and stay calm, when they see the president. Then the head of the states signs turkey's pardon and they can spend the rest of their life in the farm in Virginia or in some livestock facility. They are usually given names such as Liberty, Freedom, or Peace (Konvalina, 2006). This speech of the president of the United States can be compared in some way to New Year's speech of the president in the Czech Republic. It

has likely a symbolic character and the president makes the annual speech reflecting on the past year and refers to plans of the future.

It is obvious, that this reprieve is not so much about a sparing a turkey as about the speech of the president and a tradition. And when did the pardoning tradition begin? There are a few hypotheses about the creation of this tradition. The one story sets it in the time of President Lincoln, when his son Ted asked his father for not to eat a turkey arguing it had as much a right to live as anyone else. So the turkey was spared. The second story has its origin in 1963, when then President Kennedy sent back the present (a turkey) from National Turkey Federation which they gave him for Thanksgiving. He said: “We’ll just let this one grow” (Slack, 2011). And the third one was the real offer to pardon a turkey. It was given by President George Bush, in November 1989, when he said that year’s bird had “been granted a presidential pardon as of right now” (Slack, 2011).



President Obama pardons a turkey, by A. Roberts for CNN, November 22, 2012

The turkey was also regarded as a national symbol of the United States of America, but an eagle won this position. Benjamin Franklin thought that “[a] turkey was the right choice because it was a good runner and had a sharp sight” (“Thanksgiving day symbols”).



## IS THANKSGIVING ENTIRELY AMERICAN?

“E pluribus unum” – translated as “Out of many, one” or “One from many” (Perry & Bank of the Manhattan Company, 1924, p. 173). This used to be the motto of the United States for two centuries (adopted by an Act of Congress in 1782 until 1956, when it was replaced by “In God We Trust” by United States Congress (MacArthur, 2013). It represents the unity of the States. Although, the USA is composed of many races, religions, and ancestries, they represent one nation together. It is astonishing that more than three hundred million inhabitants, coming from the entire world, form one nation.

We know that America is described as a “melting pot” or newly as a “mosaic” – people of different colours who create the unique American picture (Perry & Bank of the Manhattan Company, 1924, p. 173). And it is the same with Thanksgiving Day. This feast is mainly unique by its extent in the USA. It is celebrated by all races and religions there. This feast is typically American and connects American people together. Of course, believers also celebrate their own feasts, which are based on their religion or traditions. However, the Thanksgiving Day is for everyone.

The reason why it connects them together is simple. Almost every American (or his or her ancestors) came to America to find freedom, new opportunity, and better life. And it was the same with Pilgrim Fathers, who came to the New World nearly four centuries ago. They longed for religious freedom and opportunity to have new, better life for them and their descendants.

Not groundlessly, Alexis de Tocqueville (1805 – 1859), French political thinker and historian, assumed that Puritans decisively shaped all important elements of the American regime. Tocqueville (2000) considered his analysis of America's founding in *Democracy in America* the key to understanding the country that disclosed the “shape of democracy” to the modern world. He claimed that in America “there is not an opinion, custom, or law, nor one might add, an event, which the point of departure will not easily explain” (p. 32).

People generally consider men such as Thomas Jefferson and the Framers of the Constitution the most important of America's founders. Jefferson for his setting forth America's basic political principles in the Declaration of Independence and the idea that all Human beings have an equal right to freedom and the Framers of the Constitutions for their establishing a representative democracy based on these principles and designed the

Constitution to protect freedom by fragmenting political and social power, such as separation of church and state. (Caesar, 1984)

Nevertheless, Tocqueville thought the Puritans were America's founders because they first brought equal freedom to America and shaped their national character in ways that sustained this principle throughout their history. (Tocqueville, 2000) What is more, the dominant culture in the New World has its roots in white, Protestant, and western European (from which came the Pilgrims) until nineteenth century. The Virgin Colony, as a posed to Pilgrim movement, was motivated by the desire for gain, not for freedom. (Šturma, 2011)

In the early part of twentieth century, millions of immigrants moved to the USA and in spite of the misgivings of American inhabitants, new immigrants assimilated with them soon and without major changes in traditions and values. And it is the peculiarity of the United States of America. Ben Wattenberg, an expert on American culture, even hopes that the new immigration will help to the nation. Wattenberg even claims that in the USA "it is becoming the first universal nation in history" (Perry & Bank of the Manhattan Company, 1924, p. 173). And it is true, because there is no other state or a union in the world, in which could be used this special unity of values as in America.

John Zogby (1948 - ), an American pollster and author, who surveys public opinion, explains the reason, why the USA hold together as that "we all share a common set of values that make us American. We are defined by the rights we have. Our rights are our history, why the first European settlers came here and why millions more have come here since" (Perry & Bank of the Manhattan Company, 1924, p. 28).

Thus, it may seem like the present celebration of Thanksgiving Day is based exclusively on the year 1621 and Pilgrims' "First Thanksgiving". However, the truth lies somewhere else. There is much more in common between the modern Thanksgiving and its rebirth in nineteenth century. And even over the years, the Thanksgiving has grown and been transformed into something completely different.

Other delusion of Thanksgiving is that we usually consider Thanksgiving as an American holidays, coming from the Pilgrims in 1621. Despite the fact that the Thanksgiving is a special feast which is celebrated by all Americans, regardless of their religion and ethnic, it was and it is celebrated by a variety of other nations. For example the Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, Hebrews, and the Chinese all held harvest festivals and thanksgiving celebrations in different ways and extents in the ancient times. And some of

them continue up to the present time in sundry other forms. Jews hold a festival – Sukkoth – in the autumn (from late September to late October) for one week. Sukkoth commemorates how, according to the Bible, God cared for Moses and the Hebrew people during their wandering in the desert for forty years, when they escaped from slavery in Egypt and went to the Promised Land. During the feast, they build temporary huts from leaves and branches and hang fruits and vegetables there. Jews thank God for the harvest and they also remember their Hebrew ancestors and their deliverance from Egypt. (Harvest festivals around the world)

Besides that, the Chinese celebrate the August Moon Festival, a celebration which is observed in mid-August for three days. Traditionally, the families celebrate the end of the harvest season with roasted pig and moon cakes. The cakes symbolize family unity and the Chinese give the cakes to their relatives and friends to give thanks. The Vietnamese celebrate an autumn festival in mid-August, called Mid-Autumn Festival or Children’s Festival. This festival is centred on children, because parents had to work hard during the harvest and they left their children alone to play by themselves. The symbol of this festival is a lantern and a lantern procession in the evening, which represents success and brightness. Such “Thanksgivings” as in China and Vietnam are also held in Ghana, southern India, Korea, and Nigeria. However, Canada, the nearest neighbour of the United States of America has the most similar Thanksgiving Day. This feast is, after several changes of the date, held on the second Monday in October and the explanation for such an early date is simple, Canada is situated closer to the north, so winter comes earlier there as well as the general harvest. (Harvest festivals around the world)

As in the USA, also the Canadian Thanksgiving has a long history. Everything started in 1578, when explorer Martin Frobisher from England arrived in the Northwest part of Canada. Because of the ice and the weight of building material which they carried on the ships, one of the fifteen ships was lost, so Frobisher and his crew could not explore the Northwest Passage to the Orient and they decided to anchor in the bay of Baffin Island in the present Nunavut. The area was named after the explorer - Frobisher Bay. One learned man of their crew, Robert Wollfall, who was appointed to be their minister and preacher, made a sermon, appealing them to be thankful to God “for their strange and miraculous deliverance in those so dangerous places.” And it happened to be their “First Thanksgiving”. Although they had not found the Passage, they stayed alive (Collinson, 2010, p. 85).

French settlers with the head Samuel de Champlain arrived in Canada and they formed 'The Order of Good Cheer' and also held a feast of thanks and shared their food with First Nations<sup>1</sup> in 1604. After the American Revolution (1775 – 1783), some American refugees moved to Canada and brought their customs, such as Thanksgiving. And this was the milestone of the Canadian Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving Day was celebrated irregularly for the long time. In some years the feast was left out, and if the feast was held, the date of it had changed every year. For example, in 1872, Thanksgiving Day was on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April, as the celebration of the recovery of the Prince of Wales from his illness. Several years it was even held on the same date as Thanksgiving Day in the USA – on the fourth Thursday in November. From 1879, it was recorded that the Thanksgiving was observed annually. Finally, the date was officially declared by the Parliament of Canada on the second Monday in October in 1957, when it was proclaimed as “A Day of General Thanksgiving to Almighty God for the bountiful harvest with which Canada has been blessed – to be observed on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday in October” (Pelikan, 2001, p.501).

The present Thanksgiving Day in Canada is very similar to its American's counterpart. The parades, football matches and abundance of food cannot be missed there. Nevertheless, the importance of this celebration is not so obvious. People can celebrate it during the three-day weekend on the day which they choose - usually it is the Saturday. Apart from that, some of the provinces (New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island) do not consider Thanksgiving Day as a statutory holiday and the celebration is optional there. In Quebec, French-speaking people not even celebrate it, but have just a day off.

In spite of the fact that Thanksgiving Day seems to be a special American feast, which connects all Americans together and make people feel more American, the feast is not totally exclusive to Americans. As we can see, the harvests are celebrated in several countries over the world and it had even been celebrated in the ancient times, so it is not anything extraordinary. In my opinion, we all should be thankful for the harvest and for the abundance of food which we have or even for every day when we have food and are healthy, as the Indians did. The fact is that there is not anything peculiar about thanksgiving in general, it is only an ordinary season of the year, which we can or cannot use for a celebration and gathering together with our relatives. This time of the year is natural and inevitable and people in the USA use it for creating something special, which

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<sup>1</sup> First Nations were aboriginal peoples in Canada, neither Inuit nor Métis.

they consider purely American, and connecting it to well-developed traditions and customs.

## CONCLUSION

Thanksgiving Day is very important day for all Americans. Although its original meaning has been overshadowed by commercialism and progressive connections with Christmas. There has been a lot said about this feast and its commemoration of Pilgrims and their first good harvest in the New World. And people are sympathetic to, and admire them, for their bravery and founding of immigration movement. They also shared the values and reasons of arrival with them and they all had to struggle with difficult circumstance to gain freedom and a better life. But the progress and distinct changes are usually omitted.

The progress of development was very complicated and Thanksgiving was almost forgotten in eighteenth century. Its rebirth brought several changes and there were new traditions and customs created. Subsequently, Thanksgiving was joined to Christmas and became more popular. Otherwise it would not, in all likelihood, be as popular as it is in the present. The union caused great changes in the understanding of and the original sense of Thanksgiving. The present Thanksgiving represents a family supper, which does not bring any profits and earnings. Thus Thanksgiving was converted to the start of pre-Christmas season. In this way, Black Friday and Cyber Monday were developed. Inexpensive shopping with the lowest prices of goods and gasoline in the year outshone family-oriented Thanksgiving supper, which did not bring any positives for companies. Because of that, Thanksgiving was not dismissed at least and gained popularity, which is still increasing. Nevertheless, the commercialism and joining to Christmas had a positive effect as well. It was a great help for Americans during the Great Depression.

In my opinion, there is nothing unique about this feast. It was changed by time as well as other holidays – Christmas, Easter, etc. All old celebrations had entirely distinct reason and sense and they all went through complicated evolution and were engulfed by commercialism and the impact of the modern age. And it is a natural thing in the modern world. The present Christmas also means stressful shopping in overcrowded shops and spending money for useless decorations, presents, and artificially created customs. The twenty-first century is under the power of commercialism, materialism, and consumption.

The courageous action of Separatists also was not anything special. Religious disagreements and defiance had always been and always will be here. They were only among first newcomers in the New World and created a path for following immigrants.

Thus, they, as the very first settlers are most famous and their giving thanks stays in our minds and is often magnified by historians.

Furthermore, the giving thanks as well as the celebration of a successful harvest were not anything rare. It was a common habit and natural behaviour. We could see that this tradition can be found in other civilizations in the whole world. The Pilgrims' Thanksgiving was also based on their knowledge of Harvest Festival in Britain. Even illiterate Native Americans gave thanks for all food which they obtained – hunted or harvested. Therefore, it seems that the combination of Harvest Festival from Britain and the customs of the Indians to give thanks for all food created Thanksgiving Day.

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## SUMMARY IN CZECH

Bakalářská práce se zabývá Dnem díkyvdání ve Spojených státech amerických, nebo lépe řečeno, prvním díkyvdáním v roce 1620. Tento svátek je v Americe velmi oblíbený a patří mezi jedny z nejdůležitějších dnů vůbec.

Práce je rozdělena do čtyř částí. První část zahrnuje historii Otců Poutníků a jejich příchod do Nového světa, který byl posléze oslaven Dnem Díkyvdání. Přesto některé otázky o oslavě zůstávají nezodpovězené kvůli nedostatku informací. Druhá část se zabývá obnovou a prohlášením díkyvdání za federální svátek a jeho následnými změnami. Třetí kapitola je založena na komerci a jejím vlivu na dnešní díkyvdání, které bylo ovládnuto ekonomikou. Poslední část se zabývá díkyvdáním ve světě a zpochybňuje jeho jedinečnost v Americe. Na závěr jsou poznatky získané během psaní práce porovnány se skutečným významem tohoto svátku.