

Thanksgiving: then and now essay sample



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Americans love Thanksgiving. Let's face it. They love eating, and they love football. But, where did this holiday come from? Actually, the tradition of Thanksgiving dates back to the time before our country's birth. Modern day Thanksgiving represents a time where Americans gather together with their friends and family. It is a time of year where people are thankful for being blessed with these friends and family. The first Thanksgiving was also a gathering where its participants gave their thanks for what they were fortunate enough to have. The Pilgrims are credited with organizing the first Thanksgiving after they arrived in America. It was a celebration of a bountiful harvest. Both the early and modern Thanksgiving centered around a feast consisting of a variety of foods. There are few other similarities to discuss aside from these. Overall, there is a sharp contrast between the first Thanksgiving held nearly 400 years and the Thanksgiving that Americans now celebrate in modern times.

The Pilgrims were a group who fled England in late 1620 because of increasing religious persecution. It took them approximately sixty-five days by sea aboard a ship called the Mayflower to arrive in an area of New England that is now known as Massachusetts. After a brutal winter, the Pilgrims became allies with a Native American tribe. One Native American who was especially critical was named Squanto. Squanto taught the Pilgrims several survival skills. Before long, the Pilgrims were able to obtain their food from nature, mainly by planting and maintaining crops. As autumn rolled around, the Pilgrims found themselves with quite a bountiful harvest. As a result, Governor William Bradford declared a day of thanksgiving in October 1621.

The Pilgrims invited their Native American neighbors to the festival. The celebration actually endured for three days. The Pilgrims and Native Americans shared in games, entertainment, contests, and a feast. Oddly enough, the first Thanksgiving for the Pilgrims and Native Americans was also their last. Because the next year's harvest was inadequate, the celebration was not continued. The first Thanksgiving was not considered to be a holiday by the Pilgrims or historians, but rather a one time celebration to commemorate a positive event.

Over the next 250 years, Americans celebrated Thanksgiving at sporadic intervals. Continental Congress declared the first nationally celebrated Thanksgiving in 1777. Unorganized celebrations continued at irregular periods until 1863. It was in 1863 that President Abraham Lincoln actually declared two separate thanksgivings. The first was held on August 6. It was meant to celebrate a victory at Gettysburg during the Civil War. The second thanksgiving was held on the last Thursday in November. This thanksgiving has become an annual holiday for the past 140 years. But how has our modern culture influenced how Americans now celebrate Thanksgiving? A modern Thanksgiving usually involves gathering at a relative's house with family and friends. Everyone may crowd around the television to watch the Thanksgiving Day Parade or an afternoon football game, while a large meal is being prepared in the kitchen area. When the meal is ready, everyone gathers in the dining room and enjoys a carefully prepared meal. The meal itself probably takes the better part of the day to prepare. This picture of a modern day Thanksgiving is a sharp contrast to the first Thanksgiving involving the Pilgrims and Native Americans.

Perhaps the principal difference between the early and modern Thanksgiving is the food that was eaten. The first Thanksgiving was a large feast that included over ninety people. Numerous varieties of seafood, such as clams, lobsters, mussels, oysters, cod, bass, herring, shad, bluefish, and eel were consumed. The main sources of meat included, wild turkey, goose, duck, and deer. Fruits and vegetables such as raspberries, strawberries, grapes, plums, cherries, blueberries, beans, onions, and pumpkins were also served. Indian corn was served as well, however, it was processed into corn meal. A variety of nuts were also available. Some of the luxuries available include herbs, oils, honey, butter, cheese, and eggs. In modern times, the meal is usually centered around a turkey. It can be served with gravy and stuffing. Side dishes, however, can change from table to table. Side dishes may include sweet potatoes, cranberry sauce, green vegetables, or anything that pleases the dinner guests. After dinner, a pie may be served. Traditionally, the pie is apple or pumpkin.

The tradition of Thanksgiving has come a long way since 1621. Both the food and the culture of America have changed dramatically. It is not likely that our country will stop celebrating Thanksgiving any time soon. After all, we have a lot to be thankful for. Thanksgiving is a holiday that serves as a gateway to the Christmas holiday season. Traditionally, the day after Thanksgiving serves as a busy shopping day. The end of the year is usually a happy time because we are surrounded by those we love. Thanksgiving is only a beginning to this period. It is important not to take our loved ones for granted. This is what Thanksgiving is all about. It is true that we enjoy good food, a day off from work, and a chance to watch the big game. However,

these are not reasons to celebrate Thanksgiving. This holiday is about people. Without the people whom we love, none of those things would exist. Perhaps, we should consider this the next time we are gnawing at a drumstick or filling our faces with pie.