

The Survival Podcast

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Episode 325 - A Survivalist's View of Thanksgiving

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First of all, the traditional view is in 1621, a bunch of Pilgrims got together with a bunch of Indians and had a great big feast. They had turkey, and gravy, and mashed potatoes. All right? All the Pilgrims were dressed in black and white, and had big buckles on. It's not that far off. Here's the problems with it.

One, they didn't have mashed potatoes; they didn't grow potatoes in the northern colonies that first year. Number two they didn't have buckles. You know all those Pilgrims, little kids, buckles? The buckles didn't get in fashion until 1700s. No buckles.

They were wearing black and white because they had the feast on a Sunday. And the Pilgrims wore black and white on Sundays; it was formal attire. They did not always run around in black and white while they were working in the fields, and hunting, and fishing, and farming. It's a myth. Women mostly wore colors like reds, greens, and tans. The men wore colors like tans, grays, greens, tweeds, beiges. So they weren't always running around in big top hats with buckles on and gaiters and things like that. Okay? So that's a myth—not a big myth.

Turkey they probably had. The original recorded journal entry of Thanksgiving says they shot as much fowl as they could. That would probably be a lot of ducks and geese that time in New England. Another belief is that they had this holiday the third week of November. They did not. It was somewhere between the end of September and beginning of October that they had the original Thanksgiving. If you've ever been to New England, you will know why.

Now here's the big myth that they had this first Thanksgiving feast and it immediately became a tradition. An original American tradition. And that every year thereafter they continued to have this holiday and that as the United States evolved and grew, wherever Americans went, wherever colonists went, the holiday went with them. That's not how it happened at all.

You see they didn't even have the feast the second year. Didn't happen a second year because the colony was ravaged with a lot of problems, diseases, and crop failures. And other colonists came and those other colonists didn't immediately pick up the holiday, but over time, as people began to settle, the United States, primarily initially in the northeastern United States, in the Virginia Colony, which ran from like the Hudson River area of New York down to what is Virginia. That whole thing was called Virginia Company.

And as that started to spread—and what I mean by spread is just that people started to spread out, started to set up actual, permanent places to live, building farms, starting to live normal lives, at least for the period and the time—the tradition of Thanksgiving, going back to that original meal

began to be created. And people began to sit down at the end of the harvest season and sometimes there was some formality in certain regions and certain areas to we're going to do it on this day, or we're going to do it on that day. But there was no official holiday and there certainly was no colony-wide holiday. It was just something people did.

And they did tell stories, and that's how the whole tradition of the original Pilgrims' and Indians' Thanksgiving got kept. It became part of history because people did tell that story by word of mouth.

And they would sit down at the end, once they had put everything away for the year, and finish making their winter preparations. And what does that remind you of? The ant and the grasshopper? Modern survivalism? That's exactly what it was, folks. That's exactly what Thanksgiving was in its origination. People would get ready for winter. They worked all spring, they worked hard all summer, they worked hard in the beginning of the fall. They put everything down in the root cellar; they did everything they possibly could. They went hunting, they went fishing, they stacked up the meat in the larder.

They did everything they could to get ready because they knew, especially if you've ever experienced a winter in Connecticut, or New Jersey, or Massachusetts, or Vermont, or New Hampshire, or Maine, or Upstate New York, then you understand what they were getting ready for. Brutal cold, short days. They didn't have greenhouses, folks. No ability to grow anything. And even the game would get scarce by about December because it would be hard to find because it would go hole up somewhere to keep warm itself, and it would have to travel long distances, so wouldn't congregate anymore. So it'd be hard to even go out and harvest anything at that point. Besides, it was too damn cold.

So hopefully they had enough wood chopped, they had enough food put in the larder, they had enough food in the root cellar. And remember, they didn't have refrigerators, freezers, electricity. But when they got everything is done as they could, they sat back, they came together, and they had a great, big meal.

I want you to think about something that most people will never, ever think about today. What they had done is put away enough that they hoped would be enough. And often people were quite hungry by the time the first days of spring started to come around. Sometimes a winter could go longer and it'd be later in the season before you could plant crops. Sometimes you'd start your crops and you know what would happen, folks? A late frost would come in and put you back three, four, five weeks. That's a long time to go without food.

So you would think that after they put all this food away they would immediately begin rationing their food. This is how much we have today; this is how much we have tomorrow. We have to plan for the future. People that put that much planning and effort into preparing for winter, you'd think that's what they would do. And folks, it's the way they lived 99% of the time. Except for Thanksgiving.

On Thanksgiving, they covered the table with food. And it was—at times it was a three-day event; Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, and you went to church on Sunday. And they would have

relatives, and friends, and anybody that didn't have a real close family to go be with would be invited into the home if they were a family friend. And food would be shared, and people would eat just like we do today until they couldn't move.

You know what that was? It was a Thanksgiving; it was also a reassurance that we're going to be okay. We've been good ants; we've worked hard enough. We're going to make it through the winter. We will be here to see spring. It's okay to enjoy the fruits of our labor and our efforts. It's okay to share with others. It's okay to be grateful for all that we have. It will be enough.

I sure wish that instead of just teaching our children in school about the Indians, and the Pilgrims, and the fake buckles, that maybe a little bit more of that was going into our education system. A little bit more of an understanding that when people 200 years ago, 300 years ago, sat around a table and ate that much food and shared with that many people at one time, that it wasn't like today where if you needed more food you went to Kroger, or you went to Publix, or you went to Winn-Dixie. If they're even still in business. I'm not sure. Albertsons or whoever. There wasn't anything like that. In many of the colonies, there wasn't even a lot of stores around of any kind or shape. You know?

It would be you'd have to get on a horse and ride for a day just to pick up a couple of sacks of grain for some extra provisions to make it through. And what if you had to do that in the winter because you ran out in the winter and the snow drifts were six feet high? That's how it was. We were still in the tail end of the Little Ice Age, folks, during the 1700s and 1800s. Early 1800s were cold. Long, cold winters, colder than you can imagine. But they had a feast. They had a feast and the main purpose of the feast, besides being thankful, was to reassure the family, to reassure everybody we're going to make it through winter. We're going to see spring.

It's an amazingly optimistic view of a holiday that many people that would like to go back and rewrite history have tried to tear down. But let me tell you a little bit more about Thanksgiving and why we should be thankful that there is a Thanksgiving today.

The first official declaration of Thanksgiving was by George Washington in 1789, but it was not made a national holiday until Abraham Lincoln did it in the middle of the Civil War. He was looking for a way to unify the nation, so he officially set a date of the third Thursday in November as Thanksgiving Day. After the Civil War was over, Thanksgiving was largely not celebrated in the entire southern United States. It was viewed as a damn Yankee holiday. And it was only over time as people began to relocate and the wounds between the states began to heal that the people of the South were willing to accept the holiday as an American holiday instead of a northern holiday.

Somebody tried to monkey with our holiday. His name was Franklin Delano Roosevelt. And I'm sorry. I think I said that Lincoln set the holiday for the third Thursday in November. It was the fourth Thursday in November, which it is today. If I made that mistake, I'm sorry. But it was Roosevelt who then moved it from the fourth Thursday to the third Thursday. Now why would somebody do that? Why would somebody mess with tradition?

What does everybody do on Friday after Thanksgiving? They go shopping. You'd like to believe that it was different during the Great Depression? It wasn't. People went shopping on Black Friday during the Great Depression. So Roosevelt thought if he moved Thanksgiving back a week, it would add one week to the Christmas shopping season and help spur the economy. Eventually people got pissed off and complained about it and it got moved back where it is today, the fourth Thursday. That's how it became that day and that's how it was put back on that day. And that's how it's been ever since.

And I think one of the things we really need to understand about the spread of Thanksgiving through the United States is how it was commensurate with healing of the wounds between the states from the Civil War. And I think if you're 10 years younger than me, maybe my generation was the last to really see it for what it was. And I'm glad that it's gone, and I'm glad that it's dead, but I think we need to remember it so that we understand what a great nation we've actually formed today. Because sometimes I get real hard on our government, and I'll continue to do it, folks. You'll tune back in and you'll hear me tearing up a senator, or the president, or a chief justice for stepping on our Constitution. But overall, we have a pretty great country.

And what I remember when I was a child, very young child—I'm talking kindergarten, first, second grade—and I moved from Pennsylvania to Florida with my family. My grandfather and his friends in Pennsylvania would always tell me, "You're down them with them damn rebels." And the kids that I went to school with would sometimes call me a damn Yankee until I picked up that Florida accent. And it wasn't like it is today.

I hear people call people Yankees today. And generally when you hear somebody call somebody a damn Yankee today, it's because you're putting them down for being a big government tax and spend liberal from Massachusetts or something like that. Or it's kind of like a Texas joke. Well, Yankees, where do they come from? They come from Oklahoma. Anything north of the Red River, you know that's the Mason-Dixon line in our opinion. But there's a joke and there's joviality to it.

I saw the last vestiges of the true animosity that was held over by my grandfather's generation and the generation before him that handed it down. I saw that. I saw it for what it was. You know? And I saw at the same time the last vestiges of true racism in this country where we were busing students for integration purposes and things like that and there was resistance to it. And all these other things. It was the tail end. It was the late '70s, early '80s. And that stuff's gone and behind us now.

But a lot of that healing, a lot of that unifying went right along with the spread of Thanksgiving as it slowly made its way through the United States. What I'm saying to you, folks, is in 1880 if you lived in South Georgia you didn't celebrate Thanksgiving at all. You didn't even notice. You didn't even care. If you had a kid in college up north, he'd write you a letter about it, you were like, "Yeah, you're with that damn Yankee holiday." And today, Thanksgiving is celebrated in all 50 states. And it's one of the first American traditions that's uniquely American, that legal immigrants, and even illegal immigrants—let me be fair—that come to our country adopt as one of their own. It is one of the most unifying things in America and it's why I get disgusted when people try to tear it down.

And on Thanksgiving Day we should not just get together and eat food and be thankful for the bounty in front of us. We should think of the other things that we're thankful for. So I ask you to pause today and just think what are you thankful for?

As you continue to prepare for the unknown future and try to make your life better, whether it gets bad or it doesn't, living the show credo as you continue to be an ant like those brave people before us that were preppers and survivalists and didn't even know that that's what it was called. It was just living back then. Think about all the things that make your life easier. The fact that you can turn a switch and a light bulb will come on. The fact that if you're cold there's a little box on your wall that you can turn up and if you're hot you can turn it down. It will change the temperature of your home.

The fact that a person like me is free to get on the Internet and blast his government—and sometimes support it—and no one shows up at my house to take me away. That you're free to listen to it and no one shows up at your house and takes you away. That you're free to go to any church, temple, or synagogue that you want to worship God is your choice or you're free to not.

The freedom to do so and the freedom to not do so is something that long ago became uniquely American. It's prevalent in many places in the world today. But people often think of the Puritans and the Pilgrims being deeply religious. And they held their own community to deep religious standards, but they didn't try to force that onto other communities. They really didn't. It's a misnomer. They did try to spread it among the Indians, and that didn't work out real good, but you know nobody's perfect.

Think about how grateful you should be that you can walk up to a police officer in this nation and ask for help and get it because there's places where people so fear their police they would never go to a police officer for help.

Think about how grateful you are that despite the fact that our education system needs a massive overhaul, at least everybody learns how to read that wants to in this country. And that's true. No matter how bad you want to put down the education system, any kid that goes to our schools, any of them, even the crappiest one, that wants to learn to read, to write, and do basic math, they'll come out with that education. There's places in the world where you can't buy that education.

Be grateful for all that we have. And just remember that unique part of Thanksgiving that no one ever talks about that I talked to you earlier. Just remember that when people 200 years ago sat down to a massive banquet, it wasn't just patting themselves on the back. It wasn't just being thankful. It was we know winter's almost here. We know that the last days that the sun really is warm on our faces are almost over for a while. We know that we're going to go into a darkness, we know that we're going to into a time where there's not very much.

But we also are going to feast and we're not going to ration today, or tomorrow, or the next day. We're going to feast for three days because we know we'll see spring. And folks, there could be no better time than to think of that than today. Because today, our nation is headed for some very tough times. Our government has pumped \$7 trillion of phony money into our economy. They've

done it. There's no way to pull it back now. It's already happened. Right now we're seeing prices come down. Prices on everything will go up; they have to. You can't put \$7 trillion into an economy without devaluing money. Can't be done.

We're going to go through some dark times but even while you're prepping, even while you're saving, even while you're preparing, I want you to stop not just on Thanksgiving, but every once in a while I want you to stop, I want you to gather around your family, your friends, people that don't have other people, I want you to sit down and I want you to feast. Doesn't always have to be with food, sometimes it can be with words, sometimes it can be with activities, but every once in a while I want you to just splurge on yourself with emotion, and even money, and certainly with food, and just enjoy it. And make it something special.

And make it part of remembering that even though you have to be smart about how you spend, you have to be smart about how you store, you have to be smart about how you work, how you save, that every once in a while you need to remind yourself that spring will come and that you're going to be there to see it.

That's really all I have for you today. This has been Jack Spirko with a Thanksgiving edition of The Survival Podcast, hoping that I've helped you figure out today how to live that better life if times get tough, or even if they don't.