



CIVICS IN REAL LIFE

George Washington's Thanksgiving

Civics is all around us. There is a lot to know about the government and how “We the People” interact with the government and each other. Let’s help each other expand our civic literacy.

For many, the fourth Thursday in November marks the beginning of the holiday season, with family and friends together for a day full of food, fellowship, and of course, football. However, what you may not know is the roots of our national day of Thanksgiving lie with President George Washington and not the pilgrims of Plymouth.

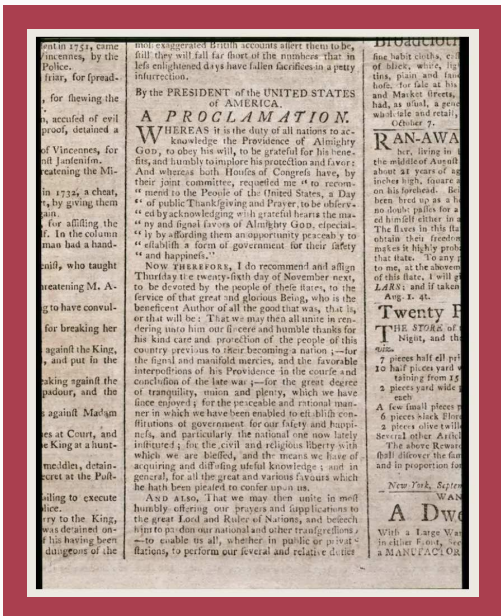
Holding days of thanks was a common practice for Europeans. These days could occur at any time during the year and were used to celebrate special occasions with solemnity and prayer. In St. Augustine, Florida, for example, the Spanish celebrated the first Thanksgiving on American soil on September 8, 1565. The later day of thanks at Plymouth would not have been an unfamiliar concept or unique to the new American way of life.

What was unique about President Washington’s day of thanks is that Congress authorized him to declare a national day of thanksgiving through a proclamation, which he issued on October 3, 1789.

In the proclamation, Washington declared Thursday, November 26, as a day of public thanksgiving for the people of the United States. Washington’s intention was for the American people to reflect on their good fortune and to honor the almighty for his guidance and wisdom in the American triumph over the British during the revolution, the writing of the Constitution and its creation of a new government, and for the peace and prosperity the United States enjoyed. It was to be a day devoted to the Declaration of Independence’s decree of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.



Washington’s day of thanks was not continued by later presidential administrations. It was not until 1863, when President Lincoln issued his Thanksgiving Proclamation, that Washington’s vision of a day of thanks was revitalized. It was not until 1941 that the fourth Thursday in November was established as a legal holiday, forever recognizing Washington’s Thanksgiving day.



To Think and To Do: Washington’s intention for the fourth Thursday in November was meant to be a day of reflection and thanksgiving for all that the United States was in 1789. On this Thanksgiving holiday, reflect on your own good fortunes and give thanks to those who have helped in your accomplishments.

Learn MORE about George Washington’s Thanksgiving Day Proclamation. Free registration may be required.

- [George Washington and Thanksgiving](#), from Mount Vernon
- [Thanksgiving Proclamation of 1789](#), from Mount Vernon



Lou Frey Institute