

A THANKSGIVING READER

America's Table[®]

celebrating our diverse roots and shared values



AJC

**American
Jewish
Committee**
Global Jewish
Advocacy

As we gather to celebrate Thanksgiving together, let's take a few minutes to read the text of this annual edition of *America's Table*®, either collectively, or taking turns around the table. Perhaps some might choose to share their stories of immigration and integration into America.

Thanksgiving is one holiday in the year that unites us, whatever our backgrounds and wherever we are in our lives. It is a day that we can all express our gratitude for the manifold blessings of this land—for food, shelter and security, but also for the strength and vibrancy of our nation, and for our diverse roots and shared democratic values and institutions. It is also a reminder of how far we have come as a nation, even as “we pursue justice but still have a way to go.”

However we choose to reflect on this day, we will give meaning to this much loved and unifying holiday of Thanksgiving.

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We are each on a journey.

These are the names of the generations that came to America.

They reveal individual lives that represent the story of our nation.

These are the names of the generations that built America.

They recall our parents and grandparents and mirror ourselves.

These are the names of the generations that will care for America.

They remind us why we gather at this Thanksgiving table.

Calderon Lew Durley Branovan Sharma Hassan Montalto Paterson
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Letona Linares Brooks Gilchrist Mineta Levine Patel Tsosie
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Sandy Annabi “Seeking a better life” for his children, Sandy Annabi’s grandfather came to Yonkers, N.Y., in a wave of immigration from Ermanin, Jordan. Once established, he slowly brought his family over in the late 1960s.

The biggest differences her family encountered were the freedom of speech and the broad civil rights of America. As a rising political voice in Westchester, Sandy embodies just how far an immigrant family has come in one generation.

Seeking public office in the Yonkers Council, her primary date was September 11th, 2001. Before then she was a media darling, but “after 9/11, I became the ‘Arab candidate.’ It was difficult to overcome the hostile reaction.” So she ordered 10,000 American flags and went door-to-door, discussing her politics and religion (a strict Catholic upbringing). Two weeks later she won the primary, 2 to 1.

She is proud to be the first Jordanian, and the first Jordanian woman, to win an election in her state, and hopes that this paves the way for others. She now plans to run for County Legislator.

Annabi calls Yonkers “a true melting pot” with “every ethnicity under the sun”—including people of Arab, Italian, and Irish descent, Hispanics, Catholics, Muslims and Jews—and she has gotten to learn about different cultures and ideas. She says: “People become more accepting when they live side by side and get to know each other.

“ We’re all so different and contribute in different ways, yet we all respect each other.”



The insightful questions of our children, innocently asked, compel us to reconnect with our past.

When our families came to America.

How they got here.

What they found.

Why they came.

At every table the answers are different, but much the same.

Many of us were immigrants and refugees from all regions of the world, fleeing the afflictions of poverty and oppression.

Drawn by the promise of a better life, we chose America and she took us into safe harbor.





Not every journey was easy.

The first arrivals sometimes shunned those who followed.

Not every journey was voluntary.

The first African slaves landed in Jamestown a year before the Pilgrims settled in Plymouth.

Not every journey was righteous.

Native Americans were devastated by a new nation's need to conquer, cultivate, and build

We are each part of America's journey.

We did not leave history behind, like unwanted baggage at immigration's door.

Our particular pasts and our shared present are wedded in hyphenated names:

African-American,
Irish-American,
Italian-American,
Korean-American,
Polish-American.

We are not always on a first-name basis with one another.

But we quickly become acquainted in playgrounds and classrooms, in college dorms and military barracks, and in offices and factories.

We feel at home.



In some parts of the world, our differences would be threatening.

We feel enriched.

In America, our differences resonate in our names, language, food, and music. They inspire art and produce champions and leaders.

We feel free to disagree.

We are a family, and what is a family gathering without debate?



We believe in fairness.



In America, the loudest voice does not always have the last word, and every voice has a right to be heard.

We act with hope.

Not because life is perfect, but because we are free to face life, and all its imperfections, on our own terms.

We rely on faith.

In a sturdy and tested framework of law and government that works because of the confidence we place in it and in each other



We are each responsible for keeping America on course.

“Are we there yet?” the children ask.

We know the answer.

We pursue justice.

But still have a way to go.

We celebrate freedom.

But endlessly debate what it means to be free.

Our table is brimming.

But not everyone receives a fair portion.

Progress can be slow as we propose and protest,
argue and advocate.

But we are grateful to be part of this vigorous democracy.

We enjoy its unparalleled privileges and accept
its obligations:

To pursue our dreams while helping others.

To advance our convictions while respecting others.

To prepare our children for the gift of the American
journey.

We are the stewards of America,

her ideals and institutions, her cities and natural beauty.

We are entrusted to understand America’s past and guide
her future.

To create an ever more just America that is secure and free,
abundant and caring for all her inhabitants.

We are thankful for the freedom to worship.

We are thankful for the freedom to speak our minds.

We are thankful for the freedom to change our minds.

We are thankful for the freedom to chart our lives.

We are thankful for the freedom to work for a better world.

We are thankful for the freedom to celebrate this day.

**In America, each of us is entitled to a place
at the table.**



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AJC seeks a secure Jewish future in a more just world.

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