

AMERICA'S TABLE

A THANKSGIVING READER

— A program of AJC's —
COMMUNITY of CONSCIENCE



CELEBRATING OUR DIVERSE ROOTS
AND SHARED VALUES

AJC

Global Jewish
Advocacy

AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

THANK YOU

to the generous sponsors and supporters of America's Table

Lead Sponsor



Helping Here.®

Media Partner



Corporate Sponsors

Memorial Hermann

Frost Bank

Individual Sponsors

Martha and Don Freedman

Ann and J. Kent Friedman

Joan and Stanford Alexander

Production Sponsors

Big A Productions

Lorelle Media

Community of Conscience Supporters

Dorit and Marty Aaron

Susan and Milton Altschuler

Anonymous

Nancy T. Beren

Barbara and Mark Brookner

Iris and Alan Fisherman

Ruth Goldberg and Allan Van Fleet

Diane Kaplan

Eve and Bobby Lapin

Victoria and Alex Lazar

Barbara and Barry Lewis

Ora and Irwin Levowitz

Diane and Mitch Levy

Sherry and Gerald Merfish

Iris and Uri Mushin

Marcia and Michael Nichols

Paula and Irving Pozmantier

Arthur Schechter

Debbie and David Simon

Tracy and Gary Stein

TLC Wealth Management/Mike Levy

Becky and Joe Williams

Barbara Winthrop and Jay Steinfeld

Helene and Dror Zadok

As we sat at our Thanksgiving tables one year ago, none of us could have imagined what the coming year would bring. This year, as we gather – whether virtually or in person – to celebrate community and give thanks for our blessings, I invite you to make use of this annual edition of America’s Table to reflect on the life of our nation.

The first edition of America’s Table was produced at another fraught time in our nation’s history – shortly after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Its verses invited all Americans to grieve the loss of innocent lives, express empathy with the families and friends who ache for them, but also celebrate our unity in diversity as a nation created by immigrants of all faiths searching for a better life.

Now, 19 years after our first *America’s Table*, we return to the table, wounded and weary from a global pandemic and reckoning with polarization, tumult, fear, and rising bigotry. But we also return to the table grateful – grateful for the gift of life, grateful for the blessing of each other, and grateful for the democracy and freedoms our nation bestows on its citizens, even as we work to perfect those freedoms.

I hope that, by reading *America’s Table*, you will find new meaning in this much loved and unifying holiday of Thanksgiving because, yes, we are all Americans and part of the rich tapestry of this land.

— David Harris, CEO, American Jewish Committee (AJC)

For those who believe, as we do, that our liberty and aspirations depend on the noble principles articulated by President Lincoln and defended by generations of brave Americans since the founding of this Republic, our call could not be more urgent.

“Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.”

—Abraham Lincoln

We invite all who share our concern for the future of this great country, our appreciation of its fundamental strengths, our conviction that it must overcome its challenges, and our resolve to honor the American spirit, to join us in the Community of Conscience.

“I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.”

—Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

“...If hate, violence, bigotry, bitterness and antisemitism are to be defeated in our world, we must move in the direction of dignified dialogue where we talk with others....”

—Dr. Bernice King

WHEN WE CAME TO AMERICA

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, oppression and brutality.

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.

Not every journey was smooth.

Obstacles were placed in the paths of too many.

“ I had always hoped that this land might become a safe and agreeable asylum to the virtuous and persecuted part of mankind, to whatever nation they might belong. ”

—George Washington

“ Ultimately, America’s answer to the intolerant man is diversity, the very diversity which our heritage of religious freedom has inspired. ”

—Robert Kennedy

“ All great change in America begins at the dinner table. ”

—Ronald Reagan

WE ARE EACH PART OF AMERICA’S JOURNEY

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

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

But we quickly became acquainted in our daily surroundings

We are 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.

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

“ Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door! ”

—Emma Lazarus

“ The land flourished because it was fed from so many sources—because it was nourished by so many cultures and traditions and peoples. ”

—Lyndon B. Johnson

“ The essence of America—that which really unites us—is not ethnicity, or nationality or religion—it is an idea—and what an idea it is: That you can come from humble circumstances and do great things. ”

—Condoleezza Rice

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, accept its obligations, and defend its values.

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.

“The best things and the best people rise out of their separateness; I'm against a homogenized society because I want the cream to rise.”

—Robert Frost

“It is never too late to give up your prejudices.”

—Henry David Thoreau

“...in diversity there is beauty and there is strength.”

—Maya Angelou

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.

“This country will not be a good place for any of us to live in unless we make it a good place for all of us to live in.”

—Theodore Roosevelt

“We must be free not because we claim freedom, but because we practice it.”

—William Faulkner

“I ... try to teach through my opinions, through my speeches, how wrong it is to judge people on the basis of what they look like, color of their skin, whether they're men or women.”

—Ruth Bader Ginsberg

The Community of Conscience includes a declaration of nine principles aimed at rejecting bigotry and amplifying values that unite all Americans.

Please join in reading the nine principles:

1. Join us, in the spirit of the American motto E Pluribus Unum, as we unite across difference, celebrate our diversity, contribute to a shared society, and resolve to advance the welfare of all.
2. Join us, in the spirit of patriotism, as we strive proudly and boldly to uphold American ideals of equality, of dignity, of opportunity for all.
3. Join us, in the spirit of civility, as we reject antisemitism and all forms of bigotry, incendiary partisanship whatever its sources, dehumanizing and demonizing rhetoric, and threats of violence.
4. Join us, in the spirit of democracy, as we reaffirm and reinforce our constitutional system, seek equal justice for all, and safeguard our fundamental freedoms.
5. Join us, in the spirit of pluralism, as we promote mutual respect—not mere tolerance—as the standard for enlightened coexistence.
6. Join us, in the spirit of inclusiveness, as we reach out to and uplift the poorest among us, as we welcome the stranger in our midst, and as we fully enfranchise the differently abled.
7. Join us, in the spirit of love, as we counter those who purvey hate, intolerance and incivility, especially those who legitimize their inappropriate practices based on “holy writ.”
8. Join us in seeking to fulfill the biblical teaching that we are all “b’Tzelem Elokim,” all created in the divine image, the very foundation of human equality.
9. And join us in pursuing the Prophet Isaiah’s age-old vision that one day “nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore”—that peace, love, and unity will reign.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- For what do you give thanks?
- What American leader inspires you?
- What is your family's American story?
- What American values inspire you?
- How can we all contribute to an integrated American society?
- In what ways can social action contribute to unity and understanding? If you have the opportunity to perform community service, what can you do to individually serve others?
- How can we help achieve unity in our pluralistic society without diminishing the diversity within it?
- A person is more inclined to honor the rights of people he or she knows personally. How can we get "closer" to those who are strangers to us and have very different beliefs?



AJC Mission:

To enhance the well-being of the Jewish people and Israel, and to advance human rights and democratic values in the United States and around the world.



AJC.org



[/AJCGlobal](https://www.facebook.com/AJCGlobal)



[@AJCGlobal](https://twitter.com/AJCGlobal)



Helping Here.

