

# Thanksgiving in a Victim World. Resuming Our National Holidays After a Mass Violation

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*I recently traveled to Florida, to do research for a new book. I stayed in a hotel for almost a week, in a modest, touristy town, a few miles from the beach.*

Every day, from the moment I opened my eyes til the moment I settled into my cool hotel sheets, my heart exulted with an indescribable happiness.

You know those dreams in which a loved one who is dead appears to you, in full youth and health and vigor? You say to that person, in the dream, with tears of joy streaming down your cheeks, Oh my God — *you are not dead!* But then you wake up, and that person is still dead.

It was that dream.

But for a nation.

In Florida I was in a delirium of happiness mixed with nostalgia mixed with grief — because it felt like America.

That is, it felt the way I remember America to have felt, pre-2020.

The malls, the cookie-cutter townhouse developments, the chain stores and auto body shops, churches and sports bars, were the same as they were anywhere in the country.

But the people were entirely different. The culture was entirely different.

Everywhere I went I saw people who were — proud, and confident, and relaxed.

It did not matter who they were, or from where they had come. This was a universal birthright, it seemed, in that part of America.

The very young bartender/busboy, who had recently immigrated from Thailand, was proud, confident and relaxed. The multigenerational family reunion groups, families who had lived for generations in the region, were proud, confident and relaxed. The suburban moms walking to their vans in the mall, were proud, confident and relaxed. My Uber driver, a former Special Operator whose wife had opened a Philippine food truck in the downtown area, was proud, confident and relaxed. The pretty forty-something bartender with one side of her head shaved, and with a flowering vine tattooed down one arm, who showed me pictures of her two adult sons — one, as she explained, who had autism — the young men standing on either side of their mom, hugging her tight, and all of them grinning; she too was proud, confident and relaxed.

And so on. African-American, Caucasian, Latino, whatever, male, female, aged and young; this was a quality that united everyone.

There was a big, colorful sign — a piece of public art — in the little green park flanking the mall. People stood in front of it to take Instagram photos.

It read, “You Are Deeply Loved.”

Once, when I was walking back to my hotel, I passed a small group of people — three or four — with their arms around each other, heads bowed, in a huddle. Colleagues? Friends? A family?

I realized that they were unselfconsciously, publicly praying.

The pride in themselves, and the calm sense of security of people everywhere around me, simply being who they were, and gladly, openly, showing others who they were, really struck me.

I remembered this quality from the Before Era, as being generally true of Americans.

It was this once-American quality that had formerly so fascinated the rest of the world — the broken, fearful, inhibited rest of the world.

Whether it was the 1950s admiration in ravaged Europe of the proud, relaxed gunslinger John Wayne, or the French marveling in the 1960s at the unabashedly goofy Jerry Lewis, or the admiration worldwide in the 1970s with beat poet Allen Ginsberg sharing his wild free verse with rapt college audiences while seated on a meditation pillow, Americans were magnetically attractive because we were once so proud — of ourselves, our speech, our liberties — in a nation in which our individuality was protected by an intact Constitution.

We were relaxed, compared to other peoples, because our rights were inviolable.

The lure of America was not that “the streets were paved with gold” or that one could make a fortune in a generation, though that was attractive no doubt to many; the true magnetism of Americans was that we acted like free people.

It was that charismatic quality that everyone still had in Florida, and that had been lost in the “lockdown” and “mandates” states.

Because people in Florida felt relaxed, proud and confident, and because they had never been held indoors against their will, told where to stand, stripped of their holidays by the

state, or forced into submitting to poisonous unchosen injections, there was a rhythm to social life there still. People from all walks of life chatted away with one another; the lady who wrapped up the sandals I bought chatted away with me, she chatted with all who came in; the chiropractor I visited chatted away with his customers, the salad shop workers chatted with the people who dropped off the bagels, the lady moving her grocery cart around me made a jolly, friendly remark. All this complexity took place in a peaceful, almost measurable rhythm.

When social scientists have done stop-motion videos of people moving around a city intersection, they prove that humans move in a perceptible rhythm; by the same token, newborns sync their breathing and nervous systems with their moms', and vice versa, and happy couples' respiration and even heartbeats align when they sit near one another.

Whole communities unconsciously align with one another in creating complex rhythms.

I have felt that something is now discordant, jarring, in how we in the "lockdown" states relate to each other post 2022. The contrast with Florida showed me what it is: we have had our community rhythms broken off; silenced.

Now, as we start up our lives again, our interactions are tentative, awkward, erratic. Do we chat with the checkout girl? Do we not, as she is just trying to breathe behind her mask? Did she get out of the habit of chatting, if unmasked now? Do we drop in on a friend? Or do we zoom now forever? Do we hug, shake hands, not hug, not shake hands?

Or do we never again just embrace, just kiss, just stop by?

It's all smashed to smithereens.

But in Florida, I saw from the richness of those little social moments that these were a people who had not lost two years of church, of knitting clubs, of Rotary, of synagogue, of playdates. of ballroom dancing, of after-work happy hours, of bowling, of fishing, of brunch, of poker games, of christenings, of bar mitzvahs.

So the myriad, invisible bonds that are created with every human interaction, and woven tight by kindness and mutual enjoyment and shared mission — had never been severed . That continuity allowed for the restful, easy, elegant human rhythm I saw all around me.

How lovely it was; how heavenly.

If you want the Kingdom of Heaven — it turns out that other people simply acting decently to one another, in community, are in fact the Kingdom of Heaven.

(I think Jesus did try to tell us that.)

In contrast, we in the "lockdown states," the mandates states, barely know how to approach one another now; we have lost two years of weaving our lives together.

The babies and toddlers of 2020-2022 in Florida still engage in peek-a-boo. I realized, when a Floridian toddler launched into the game with me, how much I missed that ancient interaction.

I happened to visit Houston after my Florida journey. And while the freedom of Texas had not been as absolute as the freedom of Florida, I saw the same relaxed pride and confidence among adults and the same expressiveness among little ones, that I had seen in Florida.

The babies and toddlers of Florida and Texas still issue crazy, heart-melting smiles at passing strangers, and wave at them or babble at them or try to tell them things, as human babies and toddlers evolved to do.

But this innate expressiveness has become all but extinct among the babies and toddlers of 2020-2022 up in the Northeast, or in California, or in other “lockdown” “mandates” states.

These Northeastern little ones of 2020-2022 stare with blank, impassive faces at adult faces that have only recently emerged from terrifying, disorienting masks.

The expression of these poor children is more insect-like than human, and without that gorgeous interactivity, these babies and children of 2020-2022 lose much of the human charm with which they would otherwise be endowed. Their stony impassiveness is a devastating feedback loop. As they are not talking to or babbling to or smiling at adults, fewer adults talk to or smile at them.

Why do I raise all of this in relation to Thanksgiving 2022?

Because we must face the fact that adults in the parts of the country that “locked down” and endured “mandates” — do not have this relaxed pride, so formerly typical of Americans, any more, and their children too are now different.

These populations, I saw so clearly as I went from Florida and Texas to the Northeast, now have something broken in them; in us.

I realized when I left Florida and Texas and landed in Boston and drove to New York, that what blankets the “lockdown” “mandates” states are shame and fear.

Yes, still.

There is a palpable blanket of shame and fear now over New York, over Massachusetts, because we all have been through a life-changing traumatic experience, and not just for a day or for a month but for two years.

We were all violated in front of one another.

We were all made helpless to save one another or ourselves.

Husbands could not protect their wives from being forcibly injected, if the wives had to keep their jobs.

Parents could not save their adult children from being forcibly injected, if the adult children wished to feed their own families.

Adult sons and daughters could not save their elderly parents from miserable isolation and from dying alone.

Wives could not save their husbands from being neglected in hospitals or even murdered with Remdesivir.

I once knew a toddler who had to have her hair brushed, and there were tangles. She protested and bellowed and resisted, as a healthy child will. "You have to, darling" I said as soothingly as I could, as I brushed the tangles out as gently as I knew how. "Honey, you have to."

The minute she had the chance, a few days later, she sat me down on a stoop and pretended to pull tangles out of my hair. "Yer *hap* to," she told me furiously. "Yer *hap* to."

The desire to fight back, to avenge harm, is innate in us as healthy animals.

But for two years we in "lockdown" states were stripped of our powers to defend ourselves or our loved ones; and everyone saw our powerlessness.

As any sexual assault survivor knows, as traumatic as the violation is, equally traumatic is the fact that most sexual assault survivors were not able, whether they were overpowered or detained or threatened or they simply froze, to resist or to fight back.

Studies have shown that when a victim was not able to fight back, the attack leads to more serious and longterm PTSD than victims sustain (not to minimize their experience) who were able to fight back. This is true for PTSD among veterans as well.

For the past two years, all of us in "lockdown" states were violated and traumatized and very few of us were allowed, or allowed ourselves, to fight back.

I am a survivor of sexual assault in childhood, as you know if you read my essays. So I do not make this analogy lightly.

But there is so much of the same flavor, the same tenor, as that of the flavor and tenor of sexual assault, in the way that "lockdown" and "mandated" populations, men and women and children, were held against their will, forced inside, restrained, threatened and intimidated, publicly shamed, and compelled to submit themselves to an outside implacable power that claimed and invaded and penetrated their bodies against their will.

So yes, sexual abuse traumatizes for a lifetime, no matter how good your therapy is or how fortunate your circumstances or how safe your relationships are for the rest of your life.

By the same token, in the "lockdown" and "mandates" states, we are damaged and broken, with mass PTSD; and no matter what happens to us in the future, this will always be part of who we are and part of what happened to us.

You always have messed-up trust-related skills, as a sexual assault survivor. This safe situation turns dangerous in the blink of an eye. How can you ever be really safe again? This babysitter turns into a devil. This professor mutates into a monster. Where is true safety?

By the same token the rest of us who lived in "lockdown" and "mandates" states, will always live with a shadow of fear.

The public demonstration of the helplessness of a hostage, or of a target of sexual abuse, is standard in warfare. I will always be haunted by the survivors of mass rapes in Sierra Leone. Their assailants intentionally injured them vaginally and made the attacks a matter of public knowledge. The women were identified as having been damaged or "ruined". The shame inflicted on the victims was intentional but the community too was targeted with shaming by

the enemy, as the community was publicly revealed to the world as being too weak to protect its women and girls.

There is a reason that when an invading army wishes to break a population, it will force a father to watch the torture of a child, or force a husband to witness the rape of a wife. This helpless shame breaks people.

So the blanket of shame and fear I felt in Massachusetts, in New York State, compared to its absence in Florida and Texas, will be part of the feeling, the atmosphere, in those states for decades; for the rest of our natural lives.

And again, what does this have to do with Thanksgiving?

We in New York State, in Massachusetts, all over the country that went along with COVID tyranny in 2020-2022, are resuming shopping for, planning for and preparing Thanksgiving dinner, in a deeply shameful context. Because we lost two Thanksgivings to what has now been revealed as a massive hoax.

And we all know we all know it now. Our gullibility, the wool that was pulled over our eyes, is now a public matter.

At the checkout counter in my local supermarket, people were trying hard to chat and joke casually about the upcoming holiday, as they used to pre-2020. "I have the pies and the ice cream, and there is enough food for an army, so I figure, if there is anything else they want, they can do without or get it themselves." "Yes, the older generation likes to take control of cooking the turkey, and I am fine with that." "Yes, it's so true, I always leave too much shopping for the last minute — " and so on.

As if everything is normal now.

But — everything is not normal now.

We are having Thanksgiving in 2022.

But it turns out we could have had Thanksgiving in 2021.

And we could even probably have had Thanksgiving – those of us who might have chosen to do so — in 2020.

We were lied to right...down... the line.

So we lost two Thanksgivings.

There are children who are almost three years old now who have never had a Thanksgiving at all.

A famous poem, *A Shropshire Lad*, by A. E. Housman, about Springtime, reads:

"Loveliest of trees, the cherry now

Is hung with bloom along the bough [...]

Now, of my threescore years and ten,

Twenty will not come again,  
And take from seventy springs a score,  
It only leaves me fifty more.  
And since to look at things in bloom  
Fifty springs are little room,  
About the woodlands I will go  
To see the cherry hung with snow.”

We don't have that many Easters, that many Christmases, in a human lifetime; that many Passovers, that many Thanksgivings.

How many Thanksgivings do you have left?

Twenty? Sixty?

Two?

One?

None of us knows.

But the Dr Walenskys of the world, the Dr Faucis, the President, the Governors, who have no right over you, decided without your consent that they knew better than you what was important in your life; and they decided to take away forever two of your Thanksgivings.

You will never get those back.

So we try to pick up again, here in the Northeast, our rituals, with a sense of awkwardness and shame — shame that they were so easily stripped from us; shame that we were so duped; shame that we so publicly could not protect ourselves or our loved ones.

Men were unmanned. Women were un-womaned.

The Thanksgiving tables may even look different than they did pre-2020. Some families are broken right through. Some relationships will never heal.

All of us, outside of Florida, and Texas, and maybe South Dakota, the few non-“lockdown,” non-“mandate” states, are now victims.

We never won't be.

For Thanksgiving I want America back. But to make all of America, not just a few blessed states, free and confident, safe and relaxed once again, will take a generation.

And it can only happen for us as a nation trying to heal – just as this is true for any of us who try to heal as individuals — if we first face the agonizing fact that our bodies were, indeed, a battlefield, as feminists used to say; that we were indeed, as a nation, stripped; and shamed

before everyone; held hostage, and plundered, and violated.

Sorry to offer you such a bitter dish before a habitual feast.

But I think there is no honest way not to do so.

May your tables be blessed with abundance and grace tomorrow.

But, above all, may they be blessed as well, with the truth.

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