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OPINION

Thanksgiving and Forging Unity in Divisive Times

Praying for a nation's healing

BY MARC H. MORIAL

"This history of Thanksgiving teaches us that the American instinct has never been to seek isolation in opposite corners; it is to find strength in our common creed and forge unity from our great diversity. On that very first thanksgiving celebration, these same ideals brought together people of different backgrounds and beliefs, and every year since, with enduring confidence in the power of faith, love, gratitude, and optimism, this force of unity has sustained us as a people. It has guided us through times of great challenge and change and allowed us to see ourselves in those who come to our shores in search of a safer, better future for themselves and their families." — President Barack



Obama 2016.

While Thanksgiving is clearly a celebration of gratitude for a bountiful harvest, its origin and history in the United States tell an unexpected tale of unity that is particularly relevant in these divisive times.

While the early history of the United States is rife with atrocities committed against Native Americans, the "first Thanksgiving" — a three-day feast in 1621 — was a peaceful moment of fellowship between the English settlers and the Wampanoag among whom they lived.

In one of two existing accounts of that feast, Edward Winslow wrote of the "many of the Indians coming amongst us, and amongst the rest their greatest king Massasoit, with some 90 men, whom for three days we entertained and feasted." Another English settler who arrived shortly after that first feast, William Hilton, wrote in a letter to his cousin described "the Indians round about us" as

"peaceable and friendly."

Over the next century and a half, Thanksgiving was celebrated at different times by the separate colonies. The Continental Congress issued the first National Proclamation of Thanksgiving in 1777: "It is therefore recommended to the legislative or executive Powers of these United States to set apart Thursday, the 18th Day of December next, for Solemn Thanksgiving and Praise..." Over the year, various days of Thanksgiving would be proclaimed by Congress and Presidents, as well as governors, but an annual, recurring, nationwide holiday would not be proclaimed until 1863, in the middle of the Civil War.

He was prompted by the writings of magazine editor Sarah Josepha Hale, who wrote to him on Sept. 28, 1863: "You may have observed that, for some years past, there has been an increasing interest felt in our land to have the Thanksgiving held on the same day, in all the States; it now needs

National recognition and authoritative fixation, only, to become permanently, an American custom and institution."

Lincoln's proclamation was more than a declaration of a holiday, but a heartfelt plea for the end of the war and a reunification of the nation. He invited his fellow citizens not only to set apart the last Tuesday of November "as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens," but also to "fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty Hand to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility and Union."

In an effort to lengthen the Christmas shopping season and stimulate the economy in the midst of the Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt briefly changed the date of the holiday to the next-to-last Thursday, but the

move was considered an affront to Lincoln's memory and triggered partisan outrage. Nov. 30, 1939, was considered "Republican Thanksgiving" and Nov. 23 as "Democratic Thanksgiving" or "Franksgiving". The experiment appeared to fail, with no measurable boost to the 1939 and 1940 Christmas shopping seasons. On Dec. 26, 1941, Congress passed a law making Thanksgiving the fourth Thursday of November, where it has remained — a bipartisan celebration — ever since.

It's instructive that we find the pivotal moments in the development of modern Thanksgiving in the United States at the time of the Civil War and the Great Depression. We are once again facing a crisis of division. As we give thanks for the blessings that have been visited upon us, let us also remember to pray for healing and a reunification of our nation.

Marc H. Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.

Fragments of Shame, Contrition and Desperate Denial

Trapped in 'a man's world'

BY ROBERT C. KOEHLER

The "man's world" I grew up in is shattering into fragments of shame, contrition and desperate denial. Allegations of sexual harassment and abuse are catching up with powerful perps, sometimes decades after the fact. On Capitol Hill, we now know about a "creep list." Women shouldn't ride alone in an elevator with these guys. This is our democracy.

The only real surprise in all this is that suddenly it matters . . . that women — as well as young males, children of both genders — were harassed, humiliated, raped by powerful male adults: that "me too" resonates in the news. At one time, outright denial of a sexual abuse allegation wasn't even necessary because, even if it were true, so what? That was then. The idea of "a man's world" was solid and, well, boys will be boys.

"When Nelson got in Moore's car" — this is Beverly Young Nelson, describing an attempted rape by Alabama Senate candidate Roy Moore in 1975 — "she said he drove behind the restaurant and parked near a dumpster instead of taking her home. Nelson said Moore groped her and tried

to force her head onto his crotch. Nelson says she yelled and tried to leave the car, but Moore locked the door.



"I was not going to allow him to force me to have sex with him," Nelson said. "I was terrified. I thought he was going to rape me. At some point, he gave up."

"Nelson said before Moore opened the door — at which point she either fell out or he pushed her out — he told her: 'You're just a child and I am the District Attorney of Etowah County, and if you tell anyone about this, no one will ever believe you.'"

She was then 16 years old. Tempting as it is to revel triumphantly in moral judgment of Moore, the homophobe and evangelical hypocrite, I can't avoid putting his suddenly newsworthy behavior into a larger social context, not to let him off the hook but to figure out how real change can occur. Moore and all the other celebs and bigshots caught in the current avalanche of sex-abuse allegations have at least one thing in common. They grew up in a world where sex was a dirty secret and discussion of it was taboo, except adolescent-to-adolescent: "Did you get any last night?"

Men who attain power in such a world do so, often enough, un-

encumbered by maturity, which requires respect for the feelings of others. All they have is power and, creepily, a sense of permission.

And thus I quote President Trump: "And when you're a star, they let you do it. You can do anything. Grab them by the pussy. You can do anything."

A man's world is a world that values domination. It values winning. At the same time, it devalues "female" qualities: nurturing, em-

months ago, a staggering 6,172 cases of sexual assault were reported across the military in 2016, out of nearly 15,000 that actually occurred, according to the results of an anonymous survey. Eerily, the good news here is that the number of reported cases has nearly doubled from four years ago, when 3,604 cases were reported, out of an estimated 26,000 incidents that occurred.

However: "Fifty-eight percent

some compassion into the mix for the sexual harassers suddenly at the center of unwanted public attention. I know the world in which they grew up; I grew up in it too. This is a world in which young people "come of age" — come into their sexuality — in utter isolation. While violence is lovingly spread across the entertainment and news media, sex remains sealed in cringing aversion.

Remember Jocelyn Elders? She was the former U.S. surgeon general who, at a United Nations conference on AIDS in 1994, had the courage to respond candidly to a question about masturbation. Might teaching children about masturbation reduce unsafe sex? "I think that is something that is a part of human sexuality," she said, "and it's a part of something that perhaps should be taught. But we've not even taught our children the very basics."

Oh, the horror! Bill Clinton, responding to the shock and uproar these words provoked, immediately fired her.

And thus we live in a world in which powerful men are trapped in their own adolescence. Let's break the glass ceiling and free everyone.

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The truth is that the scourge of sexual assault in the military remains status quo.

— Senator Kirsten Gillibrand

pathy, love. These are for sissies. And the House of Representatives has just approved the National Defense Authorization Act of 2018, with a military budget of nearly \$700 billion to continue our wars around the planet. This is an increase of nearly \$80 billion in military spending over 2017 — at a time when virtually all other spending is slashed to the bone. There's a desperation here the size of an empire.

I mention this in the context of domination culture, with the U.S. military leading the way. According to a Reuters story from six

of victims experienced reprisals or retaliation for reporting sexual assault," Reuters reported.

And: "The truth is that the scourge of sexual assault in the military remains status quo," Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand said.

I hope the "me too" movement doesn't let up, and that its power and impact begin to penetrate U.S. military culture. I also hope the concept "it's a man's world" starts coming undone at the structural level and we start rebuilding our world around deeper values than winning and domination.

In that spirit, I also throw