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Christmas Around the World: *Comparing Celebrations Across Cultures*

BY HALLE MARTIN

IT'S THAT SPECIAL TIME OF YEAR when we gather with our loved ones to decorate our Christmas trees, bake cookies, and wait for Santa to come... But what does any of this have to do with the anniversary of Jesus Christ's birth? Where do our traditions come from and how do we celebrate holidays around the world? In America, we are lucky to have crafted a Christmas that combines all the best traditions from the heritage of the vast cultural melting pot that is our country.

Europeans have begun practicing a mid-winter celebration hundreds of years before Christ was born, gathering during the winter solstice to celebrate the worst of the cold days passing and the sun that would soon return. According to the History Channel, Scandinavians began this tradition on December 21st and would celebrate through the end month, into January. As a symbol of the sun and warmth, families would celebrate the winter solstice, also known as Yule, by burning giant logs in the fire pit while embarking on a lengthy feast, bringing us to the beginnings of the yule log.

In 17th Century Germany, the first official Christmas Tree came into existence. According to the History Channel, it is widely believed that Martin Luther, 16th century Reformer, first added lighted candles to a tree. These decorated trees eventually spread throughout the country and made their way to America in the 1820's by a German family living in Pennsylvania.

And what about those pretty red flowers? In 1828, an American minister in Mexico, named Joel R. Poinsett, brought back the luscious plant from Mexico, which has naturally become known as the poinsettia.

What traditions haven't we traditional Americans adopted? Well, in Greece they believe in goblins who wreak havoc during the twelve days of Christmas. Mexico celebrates with candy-filled pinatas, while in Holland, children wait for a familiar-sounding man called Sinterklaas, a bishop dressed in red robes (accompanied by his white horse), who delivers gifts to all the little boys and girls.

Ethiopians don't celebrate Christmas until January 7th in accordance with their Julian calendar, and spend the holiday attending church. Twelve days later, they celebrate again for the baptism of Jesus Christ.

Meanwhile, in Scotland, the holiday was actually banned for three-hundred years by a minister named John Knox who believed only holidays mentioned in the bible should be celebrated. It was not until 1958, that Scotts began legally celebrating Christmas once again. Icelanders celebrate a tradition called Jolabokaflokkur, "The Christmas Book Flood," in which friends and family exchange books on Christmas Eve and spend the night reading and eating chocolate. Additionally, Ukrainians imbibe in a twelve-course meal on Christmas eve, with each course dedicated to one of Christ's apostles. While traditions vary across cultures, what truly matters is spending the holidays surrounded by ones you love. So, however you choose to celebrate this year, have a safe and happy holiday break! †

Climate Change is Affecting You

BY HALLE MARTIN

GROWING UP, climate change and global warming were associated with images of polar bears floating adrift on a lone chunk of ice, stranded in the middle of the ocean. This was an image that frequently resurfaced in textbooks and documentaries studied in grade school, causing the hairs on our necks to stand on end. But class would end, the next class would start, and the polar bear would be forgotten. The effects of global warming seemed as distant as the arctic bears themselves.

However, this issue is not one that stops at the polar bears, nor is it distant. Climate change is already wreaking havoc all over the world. It is no longer just an issue of melting ice caps, but our very own country engulfed in flames and wiped out by gargantuan riptides.

Despite these very visual impacts, along with dense scientific research, many have been quick to write it off as either a hoax or simply mother nature doing her work, ignoring the signs as our world gradually suffers from one natural disaster to the next. Unfortunately, these events are not merely inevitable acts of mother nature, but rather, her screaming at us, telling us she is in pain and that we need to take immediate action.

It is true that the temperature of our earth naturally fluctuates and has both risen and fallen since the beginning of time, but climate is changing more rapidly than ever, beyond the natural amount, according to the BBC.

Over the last few centuries, rising temperatures have spiked more than substantially, corresponding almost directly with the rise of the Industrial Revolution. In fact, NASA reports that since the Industrial Revolution began, humans have increased carbon dioxide emissions by a third.

It is absurd to deny the correlation between the earth's atmosphere and human impact. The warming of the earth has a human impact probability of more than ninety-five percent, since the mid-20th century. Temperatures are no longer naturally rising and dropping, but have become overtaken by the greenhouse effect, where the trouble truly lies. The leading greenhouse gas is carbon dioxide, produced by the burning of fossil fuels, like oil, which is not only the basis for what our modern world runs on (how we heat our homes, run our cars, etc.), but oil is also a multi-trillion-dollar business that ties countries around the world together.

NASA reports that the warmest years on record have been since 2010, with 2016 ranking as the warmest. Many of the extreme effects of climate change in the United States are happening outside of the Midwest, with wildfires in the east, and hurricanes in the south and the west, but that does not mean we are immune. Look around and you can see the impact of climate change. Winters in Minnesota are riddled with extreme conditions, be it unusually

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