



# November & December 2008 News

## Information Resource Center (IRC)

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**Barack Obama**  
**President-elect**

Barack Obama, a one-term senator from Illinois, will be the first African-American president of the United States. Having served in the Senate from 2004 until November 16, 2008, Obama introduced a bipartisan bill allowing Americans to learn online how their tax dollars are spent. He also serves on the Veterans' Affairs Committee, which helps oversee the care of soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Previously, Obama worked as a community organizer in Chicago and as a civil rights attorney. He served for eight years in the Illinois State Senate.

Obama was born August 4, 1961, in Hawaii and has lived in many places, including Indonesia. His mother was from Kansas and his father from Kenya. Obama attended Columbia University in New York and earned a law degree at Harvard University in Massachusetts.

Although Barack Obama does not take office until January 20, 2009, the president-elect is busy preparing for his presidency by meeting with former and current government officials and appointing advisers who will play key roles in his administration.

## **Obama Transition Recap:**

### **November 16**

President-elect Barack Obama officially resigned his seat in the U.S. Senate, where he had represented the state of Illinois since 2005.

"Today, I am ending one journey to begin another. After serving the people of Illinois in the United States Senate — one of the highest honors and privileges of my life — I am stepping down as senator to prepare for the responsibilities I will assume as our nation's next president," Obama said.

It was during Obama's 2004 Senate campaign that his impassioned speech at the Democratic National Convention made him a national figure. On the day Illinois voters headed to the polls in 2004, an exit poll asked if the not-yet-elected Obama would make a good president. Nearly half of the respondents said he would.

### **November 17**

Barack Obama invited the man he defeated for the presidency, Arizona Republican Senator John McCain, for a private meeting at Obama's transition office in Chicago. In the United States, it is not unusual for former political rivals to work with each other, but it is somewhat extraordinary for two presidential competitors to meet so soon after the election.

"At this defining moment in history, we believe that Americans of all parties want and need their leaders to come together and change the bad habits of Washington so that we can solve the common and urgent challenges of our time. It is in this spirit that we had a productive conversation today about the need to launch a new era of reform where we take on government waste and bitter partisanship in Washington in order to restore trust in government, and bring back prosperity and opportunity for every hardworking American family," Obama and McCain said in a joint statement.

"We hope to work together in the days and months ahead on critical challenges like solving our financial crisis, creating a new energy economy, and protecting our nation's security," they said. Few details about the meeting were released.

### **November 18**

Future first lady Michelle Obama took her daughters, 10-year-old Malia and 7-year-old Sasha, to Washington to visit potential future schools.

"She brought the girls to visit choices for their new schools to make sure they find the right fit," Michelle Obama's spokeswoman Katie McCormick Lelyveld told journalists. "Their move to Washington is her top priority." The spokeswoman declined to say which schools the Obamas were visiting, but that did not keep Washington journalists from staking out the schools they thought were most likely contenders in hopes of catching a glimpse of the future first family.

This political transition also marks a personal transition for the Obama family, with two young children moving to a new city for the first time in their lives. Many Americans are interested in this personal transition and are following reports about how the daughters might redecorate White House bedrooms or what kind of puppy they will adopt — their father promised them a dog when they move to Washington. But avid first-family fans probably will be disappointed: Like most presidents before him, Obama has vowed to keep his daughters out of the public eye as much as possible.

## **November 19**

Obama's transition team announced it has established a series of policy working groups that will review existing policies and develop the priority policy proposals for the upcoming administration. The policy working groups will focus on the following areas: economy, education, energy and environment, health care, immigration, national security, and technology, innovation and government reform.

Some of the groups are led by people well-known to political observers. For example, Tom Daschle (Daschle is a confirmed nominee for Secretary of Health and Human Services), who oversees the health care group, is a well-known former senator who published a book earlier in 2008 on health policy. One of the leaders of the national security group is Susan Rice, a former State Department official and a foreign policy adviser to the Obama campaign.

More information about the working groups is available on the Obama Transition Web site, [www.change.gov](http://www.change.gov)

For more information:

**English** - <http://www.america.gov/publications/books/obama.html>

**Arabic** - <http://www.america.gov/ar/publications/books/obama.html>

[Transition Web site](#)

[Barack Obama's YouTube Channel](#)

[Barack Obama - An American Life](#)





**The Information Resource  
Center (IRC)**

The Information Resource Center is a specialized reference and research facility located in the American Cultural Center. Through a wide variety of online databases, we provide you with free, comprehensive and authoritative information on all aspects of the United States. We have access to documents on domestic and foreign policies, media issues, legislative developments, as well as social, economic and political issues.

The IRC is the place to access research and reference materials. The staff responds to inquiries for in-depth information from a diverse group of people including journalists, professors, authors, scientists, and business people. IRC staff can also provide individualized instruction for researchers, scholars and journalists, using the IRC's traditional and electronic resources.

**IRC service:**

**Outreach Program:** Our outreach program includes:

1. The creation of specialized information packages in response to institutional or individual inquiries.
2. Daily electronic distribution of news, articles and research papers on a wide range of topics such as political, economic, social and cultural issues. Interested Syrian professionals can join this service by contacting the IRC staff to enroll and start receiving materials in their chosen field of interest.
3. E-Docs alert service: provides an annotation and URL for reports, studies and papers. It includes documents from: (1) U.S. executive agencies and the Congressional branch; (2) think tanks; (3) professional associations; and (4) international organization. IRC will send you these annotations classified by themes, with the URL to access the full report. If it is inconvenient for you to print out long reports, IRC invites you to visit us and get the full text report in hard copy free of charge.

**Online Databases:**

The IRC offers you free access to the EBSCOhost online database. Access is only available through IRC computers. Research is free and you pay only 1 SP per printed page. Please contact us to learn more about this free service and arrange for an appointment.

**EBSCOhost** is a collection of online journal databases containing thousands of journal articles covering a wide variety of topics. This multi-disciplinary database provides full text for more than 4,500 journals, including full text for more than 3,700 peer-reviewed titles. PDF back files to 1975 or further are available for well over one hundred journals, and searchable cited references are provided for 1,000 titles.

If you need to find journal articles for a research paper or project, EBSCOhost is a great place to begin your search.

### **Become an IRC Fan!**



Visit our Facebook page and become one of our Fans!

Be the first to be invited to our cultural events, learn more about studying in USA, read our news and announcements, join our discussion board, send us questions and queries, and write on our wall.

### **IRC Damascus on Facebook:**

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Damascus-Syria/The-American-Cultural-Center-in-Damascus/48261722648>



## Upcoming *Web* Chats

Web chats are online, text-based discussions that allow audiences outside the United States to interact with American citizens on a wide range of topics. U.S. government and private sector subject experts, academics, journalists, and everyday citizens are brought on as guests to do web chats on USINFO.

To participate, you only need a computer with Internet access and a browser. There is no special software to be downloaded.

**For more information, please see the link below:**

<http://usinfo.state.gov/usinfo/Products/Webchats/faq.html>

**Date:** Tuesday, December 9

**Time:** 8:00 am in Damascus

**Topic:** English Roundtable



Join us as we explore the ins and outs of English in our next **English Roundtable on December 9.**

[http://www.america.gov/multimedia/askamerica.html#english\\_roundtable\\_2008](http://www.america.gov/multimedia/askamerica.html#english_roundtable_2008)

For the past 24 years, **Damon Anderson** has been in the State Department's Office of English Language Programs, working with teachers and future teachers in some 96 countries. Before joining the State Department, he directed the intensive English program at Arizona State University and lectured in the English and intercultural communications departments. He has a master's degree in applied linguistics and teaching English as a foreign language.

If you would like to participate in this webchat, please go to

<http://statedept.connectsolutions.com/englishroundtable>.

No registration is needed. Simply choose "Enter as a Guest," type in your preferred screen name, and join the discussion. Questions and comments can be sent in advance, and at any time during, the program.

[Transcript of our November 12 Roundtable \(PDF\)](#) Using Authentic Materials

**Date:** Wednesday, December 17

**Time:** 3:00 pm in Damascus

**Topic:** Study in the USA

Join Damascus-based education advisors for an English-Arabic discussion on how to study in the USA. If you have questions, they have answers.

How do you study in the USA?  
How do you apply?  
To which schools?  
What tests are required?  
How much does it cost?  
How do you get a scholarship?

Logon at <http://webchat.state.gov>

Past *Web* Chats

If you are looking for past web chats, please click here:

[http://www.america.gov/multimedia/askamerica.html#cumber\\_13\\_nov\\_2008](http://www.america.gov/multimedia/askamerica.html#cumber_13_nov_2008)

## **Welcome to the new “Blogs at America.gov”**

Welcome to the new Blogs at America.gov. This new site offers readers a place to join in conversation on variety of topics with experts from the United States and around the world. We encourage you to share your thoughts with our bloggers and fellow readers in the comments section of each post. Click on the title in red to go to the website.

### **President-Elect Barack Obama!**

By Michelle Austein, 7 November 2008

After a nearly two-year campaign, Democrat Barack Obama becomes the first African American to win the White House. On January 20, 2009, he is scheduled to be inaugurated the 44th president of the United States. What would you like to say to President-elect Obama?

### **World Reacts to U.S. Presidential Election**

By Michelle Austein, 4 November 2008

Earlier this week, *Campaign Trail Talk* asked you to [post your comments](#) to President-Elect Obama. What a response! It seems many are celebrating the 2008 election as a historic day in U.S. history.

Obama will face many economic and political challenges in his administration, which is why his transition team already is hard at work. What questions do you have about the next president of the United States and the transition? Post your questions below.

### **Work Begins Immediately for Next U.S. President and His Team**

By Michelle Austein, 5 November 2008

Barack Obama will not take the oath of office until January 20, 2009, but work to address the many challenges that await him in the presidency begins immediately.

As campaign staffs across the country clean out their offices, a transition team begins its work to ensure the Obama administration is ready to handle the major foreign policy and economic challenges facing the United States.

The transition team, which will include experts on every major policy issue, will begin preparing policy recommendations for the president-elect and help

him select Cabinet members. These Cabinet appointments are subject to confirmation by the new Congress after Obama is sworn in.

The transition team will receive help from the White House. The peaceful transfer of power from one presidential administration to the next is a hallmark of American democracy, and the Bush administration is committed to assisting with that transfer.

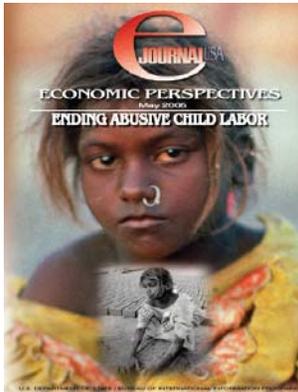




### **EJournal USA:**

A monthly electronic journal available in multiple languages about U.S. foreign affairs and U.S. society and culture.

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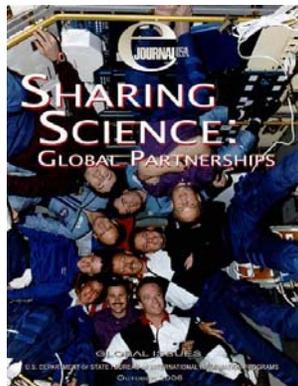


### **Ending Abusive Child Labor**

[http://www.america.gov/publications/ejournalusa.html#child\\_labor](http://www.america.gov/publications/ejournalusa.html#child_labor)

Creating a safe and healthy world for our children is as important a task as any that exists. Yet millions of children around the world remain victims of poverty, illness, armed conflict, and exploitive and forced labor.

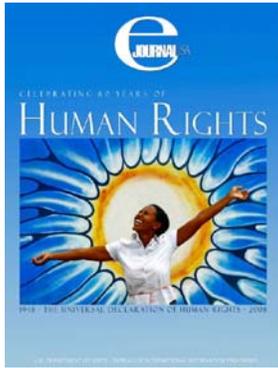
We examine this month some of the noteworthy initiatives under way to combat abusive child labor. We hope that this issue helps our interactive and print audiences to understand more fully the plight faced by the young girl pictured on our cover and the many efforts under way to help her and the many thousands of children in situations like hers around the world.



### **Sharing Science: Global Partnerships**

<http://www.america.gov/publications/ejournalusa.html#science>

This edition of eJournal USA focuses on science as an inherently international undertaking in which researchers share the results of their work with a scientific community that spans the planet, through a growing array of collaborative efforts, technical journals, conferences, the Internet, and dedicated high-bandwidth data networks for research and education. The eJournal has many examples of U.S. participation and leadership in these international undertakings.



### Sixty Years: Celebrating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

<http://www.america.gov/publications/ejournalusa/1108.html>

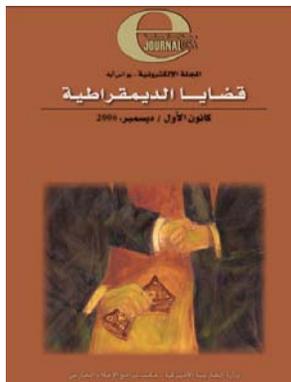
This issue of eJournal USA celebrates the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It explores the document's origins, sites it within humanity's common intellectual heritage, and explains how it has bettered the lives of individuals in every corner of the globe.



### الهيئة الانتخابية

<http://www.america.gov/ar/media/pdf/ejs/0908.pdf>

100  
538 / 4  
15 / 50  
1787



### تحويل ثقافة الفساد

[http://www.america.gov/media/pdf/ejs/1206\\_ar.pdf#popup](http://www.america.gov/media/pdf/ejs/1206_ar.pdf#popup)

## Photo Gallery *and* Videos

Offering an audio-visual tour of the stories and issues shaping our world, the photo gallery and videos are two of many invaluable services "America.gov" site offers for its audience. Both, the gallery and videos can be browsed by the following subjects: Foreign Policy, U.S. Politics, American Life, Democracy, Science and Health.

**Photo Gallery:** Please visit the below galleries or go to the photo gallery direct link to see more photo collections.

<http://www.america.gov/multimedia/photogallery.html#7a78bf28-e356-4d21-a311-0c218ec8f6f8>

<p><b>U.S. Politics:</b></p>  <p><a href="#"><u>World Reacts to Election of Barack Obama</u></a></p>	<p><b>American Life:</b></p>  <p><a href="#"><u>Jazz in America</u></a></p>	<p><b>Democracy:</b></p>  <p><a href="#"><u>American Media Satire</u></a></p>	<p><b>Science &amp; Health:</b></p>  <p><a href="#"><u>Monitoring Infectious Disease</u></a></p>
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**Videos:** Please point the mouse on any picture then use "Ctrl" key and click on the link to take you to the video you want to watch or go to the link below to see all the video collection.

<http://www.america.gov/multimedia/video.html?playerId=1475282956>

 <p><a href="#"><u>A Land Called Paradise</u></a></p> <p>4 min 11 sec.</p>	 <p><a href="#"><u>Election 2008, Election Day</u></a></p> <p>1 min. 46 sec.</p>	 <p><a href="#"><u>American Voices: Disagreement</u></a></p> <p>3 min. 11 sec.</p>
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## Websites *of* Interest

**1)** Free Online Magazine for English Language Learners (ESL) with quizzes, games and explanations of U.S. culture: this online magazine specializes in topics and issues connected with American history, geography, culture and people. The last page is devoted to exercises. In each issue you will find a contest question.

<http://www.usinfo.pl/zoom/>

**2)** The Office of the Senate explains just what it is that Vice Presidents do:

[http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/briefing/Vice\\_President.htm](http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/briefing/Vice_President.htm)

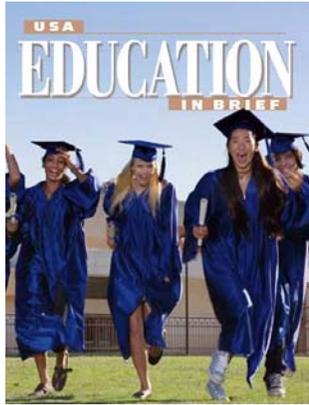
**3)** Free Medical Encyclopedias and Medical Dictionaries on the Web:

[http://eprints.rclis.org/archive/00014967/01/images\\_2008.pdf](http://eprints.rclis.org/archive/00014967/01/images_2008.pdf)

**4)** 2010 CENSUS: Policy analysts, mayors, government officials, and many others are anxiously awaiting the results of the 2010 Census. It's not taking place for a few years, but the U.S. Census Bureau has already created this website to provide information to a wide range of interested parties and stakeholders.

<http://www.census.gov/2010census/>

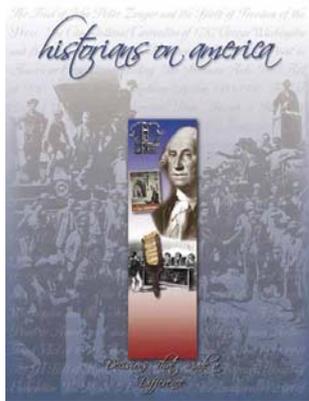
## Publications



### **USA Education in Brief**

USA Education in Brief covers the development of the public school movement, beginning with "common school," (the iconic little red schoolhouse) in the 18th century, through the Land-Grant university movement to the G.I. Bill of Rights and the civil rights movement which expanded educational opportunity to all U.S. citizens. Additional topics include 21st century challenges; civic, bilingual, and special education; foreign exchanges; and teaching democracy to a new generation.

[Inside this publication](#)



### **Historians on America**

*Historians on America* is a series of individual essays that selects specific moments, decisions, and intellectual or legislative or legal developments and explains how they altered the course of U.S. history. The book consists of 11 separate essays by major historians, ranging from The Trial of John Peter Zenger in 1735 to The Immigration Act of 1965.

[Inside this publication](#)

## American Holidays

### Thanksgiving Day a Time for Reflection, Gratitude

#### American tradition rooted in 1621 New England harvest celebration



Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade balloon Tom Turkey enters New York's Columbus Circle, November 27, 2003. (© AP Images)

Thanksgiving in the United States is possibly the premier U.S. family celebration, typically celebrated at home and marked with a substantial feast. As the anchor of what is for many a four-day holiday weekend, Thanksgiving provides an occasion for family reunions, marks the beginning of the “holiday season” that continues through Christmas and New Year’s Day and, as its name suggests, affords Americans a shared opportunity to express their gratitude for plentiful food and general

abundance.

Many cultures traditionally have marked a plentiful harvest with a celebration of thanks. Long before the first English settlers reached North America, Western Europeans observed “Harvest Home” festivals and the British an August 1 Lammas (“Loaf Mass”) Day, celebrating the wheat harvest. The American Thanksgiving holiday began in 1621 with the first successful Pilgrim harvest, one that truly provided an occasion to give thanks.

The Pilgrims had arrived in 1620, crossing the Atlantic Ocean to separate themselves from the official Church of England and practice freely their form of Puritanism. Arriving at Plymouth Colony—part of today’s Massachusetts—too late to grow many crops, and lacking fresh food, the Pilgrims suffered terribly during the winter of 1620–1621. Half the colony died from disease. The following spring, local Wampanoag Indians taught the colonists how to grow corn (maize) and other local crops unfamiliar to the Pilgrims, and also helped the newcomers master hunting and fishing.

Because they harvested bountiful crops of corn, barley, beans and pumpkins, the colonists had much to be thankful for in the fall of 1621. English Puritans had traditionally designated special days of thanksgiving to express gratitude for God’s blessings. In the autumn of 1621, the Pilgrims of Plymouth Colony held their first Thanksgiving. They invited their Wampanoag benefactors who arrived with deer to roast with the turkeys and other wild game offered by

the colonists. The colonists had learned how to cook cranberries and different kinds of corn and squash dishes from the Indians.

Many of the original colonists continued to celebrate days of thanksgiving for a bountiful autumn harvest. President George Washington proclaimed a national Thanksgiving in 1789, to celebrate the ratification of the United States Constitution. Gradually, a number of states began to celebrate an annual Thanksgiving. In 1863, during the long and bloody civil war, President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed the last Thursday in November an annual national Thanksgiving.



Boise State University football players help load donated turkeys to be used for Thanksgiving meals. (Photo courtesy of Idaho Foodbank)

Thanksgiving is a time for tradition and sharing. Even if they live far away, family members often gather for family reunions. As a result, Thanksgiving marks the busiest domestic air travel period of the year. Many Americans enjoy a local Thanksgiving parade, or the annual Macy's department store parade, televised live from New York City. Others watch televised American football, while all give thanks together for their food, shelter and other good things. Many volunteer their time to help civic groups, churches, and charitable organizations offer traditional meals to those in need.

On a more secular note, the day after Thanksgiving came in the 20th century to mark the beginning of the Christmas shopping season. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, Thanksgiving was moved to the fourth Thursday in November, which in some years lengthened that shopping period.

Although the fourth Thursday of November falls on a different date every year, the president is expected to proclaim that date as the official celebration.

## **SYMBOLS OF THANKSGIVING**

Turkey, corn (maize), pumpkins and cranberry sauce are symbols that represent the first Thanksgiving. These symbols often are depicted on holiday decorations and greeting cards. Corn in particular is held to represent the survival of the Pilgrim colonies. Used as a table or door decoration, corn or maize represents the harvest and the fall season.

Sweet-sour cranberry sauce, or cranberry jelly, was on the first Thanksgiving table and is still served today. The cranberry is a small, sour berry. It grows in bogs, or muddy areas, in Massachusetts and other New England states. The Indians used the fruit to treat infections and the juice to dye their rugs and blankets. They taught the colonists how to cook the berries with sweetener and water to make a sauce. The Indians called it "ibimi," which

means "bitter berry." The Pilgrims preferred "crane-berry" because the flowers of the berry bent the stalk over, reminding them of the long-necked crane. The berries are still grown in New England.

In 1988, a Thanksgiving night ceremony of a different kind took place at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City. Among the more than four thousand people gathered there were Native Americans representing tribes from all over the country and descendants of the later immigrants. The ceremony acknowledged publicly the Native American role in the first American Thanksgiving, a feast held to thank the Indians for sharing the knowledge and skill without the first Pilgrims would not have survived.