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Nowadays Holidays Mean 'Time Off'

HOLIDAYS apparently originated as "holy days." Later they were designated for other ceremonies and commemorations. Now they have degenerated into little more than time off from work.

Our calendars list more than two dozen regular holidays but not much attention is given to purposes for which they were set aside. Special days proclaimed by the president, governors or mayors usually don't create much of a stir in our self-centered world.

Many people noticed the recent legal holiday to observe the birthday anniversary of George Washington only when they discovered the post office and banks were closed on Monday, Feb. 15, instead of on Monday Feb. 22, date of his birth.

Perhaps the most widely publicized observances of both Washington's and Abraham Lincoln's birthdays was advertising by merchants offering "Truthful George" and "Honest Abe" sales to attract customers. St. Valentine's Day seemed to get more public participation than either Washington's or Lincoln's Day, even though its origin may be obscure.

Serious observances recollecting contributions of Washington and Lincoln were limited mainly to occasional newspaper and TV comments. A few debunkers got into the act to try to make them into non-heroes.

Religious holidays receive considerable interest due to the faithful who revere their meanings and also because others may find them enjoyable for different reasons. In addition to religious significance, Easter is regarded as a time for dressing up, Thanksgiving as a climax to the football season and Christmas as a time to receive bonuses and try to come out ahead in exchange of gifts.

Although our patriotism wanes during times of peace and prosperity, Independence Day remains paramount as a national holiday for Americans. However, Fourth of July orations saluting our heritage, patriotic parades and community picnics have become rarities.

Among the neglected holidays are Armed Forces Day, Flag Day, United Nations Day, Arbor Day and Columbus Day. The UN no longer inspires the hope that created it and

disparagers have tarnished the daring feat of Columbus that connected the Old World and the New.

Memorial Day is widely observed in the form of auto races, lake trips, increased highway fatalities, and also by a number of people who visit cemeteries to honor departed relatives and friends.

Mothers and fathers are honored on their days but efforts to add "Mother-in-Law Day" and "Grandparents Day" haven't caught on.

Some holidays are moved around like checkers so workers can tie their days off into weekends. Labor Day always has come on a Monday, which seems to suit both union and non-union people.

One holiday that probably ought to be moved is New Year's Day. It should be observed at the vernal equinox in March, when a new year of life and growth begins, but this could upset football bowl schedules and some people aren't very lively after New Year's Eve anyhow.

Many firms give employees personal holidays on their own birth dates, which may be as good an excuse as any for a day off.