THE TRUTH ABOUT THANKSTAKING

ERASED INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES

THANKSGIVING
Giving thanks and celebrating harvests through feasts has been a tradition of many Indigenous Peoples since time immemorial. True thanksgiving has always been grounded in reciprocal relationships between the people and the land, and gratitude for all the gifts that Mother Earth offers.

TISQUANTUM (SQUANTO)
Tisquantum is only ever described as a Native who helped the Pilgrims survive in the "new world", but his life was much more complicated than that. He came from the Wampanoag village of Patuxet. As a boy, he was kidnapped by English invaders. He would spend nine years in England, where he learned to speak English. Shortly after returning home in 1614, he was kidnapped again, this time by English slavers, and he was sold into the Spanish slave market. In 1620, he returned to Patuxet only to find that his village had died from a disease spread by European invaders. Being the last of the Patuxets, he went to live with other Wampanoags.

A CENTURY OF INVASIONS
Before the Pilgrims invaded Patuxet (so-called "Plymouth") in 1620, Indigenous Peoples in the area had already endured nearly a century of invasions by other European colonizers. In 1524, Giovanni de Verrazano came into contact with the Narrangsett and Wampanoag Nations. In 1602, Bartholomew Gosnold traded with Wampanoags, but relations eventually turned violent. In 1614, twenty Wampanoag men, including Tisquantum, were kidnapped and enslaved by English invaders. The invaders brought diseases with them, causing a deadly pandemic among the Wampanoags in 1616 that killed Tisquantum's village of Patuxet. Invasion, slavery, and disease put Indigenous Peoples in a difficult situation by the time the Pilgrims invaded. Some individuals, like Wampanoag leader Massasoit, saw the formation of alliances with the invaders as a means to survive.

PILGRIM INVASION

"PILGRIMS"
The so-called "Pilgrims" were not primarily seeking religious freedom when they invaded Patuxet. In fact, only 35 out of the 102 Mayflower passengers were Puritan separatists who had lived in exile in Holland for 10 years. The majority of the passengers were looking to make money and colonize Indigenous lands. Furthermore, the Pilgrims were nothing more than invaders, robbers, and bad navigators. The Mayflower took six weeks of traveling around Cape Cod before landing in Patuxet in December 1620. Without the help of Tisquantum and other Native people, they would not have survived that winter. The invaders resorted to stealing winter provisions such as food and seed stores of the Indigenous Peoples who helped them survive. Not only that, they also robbed Indigenous Peoples' homes and graves.

"The next morning, we found a place like a grave. We decided to dig it up. We found first a mat, and under that a fine bow...We also found bowls, trays, dishes, and things like that. We took several of the prettiest things to carry away with us, and covered the body up again."
- from the journal of an invader

WESSAGUSSET MASSACRE
The Pilgrim invaders were violent from the start. One day, Massasoit told the invaders that the Massachusetts Nation was planning to attack the English towns of Wessagusset and Plymouth. On March 26, 1623, Mayflower passenger and military officer Myles Standish invited Massachusetts men Wituwamat and Pecksuot for what he said would be a meal. At the meeting, Standish and other invaders stabbed both men and beheaded Wituwamat. Standish displayed Wituwamat's head on a stake at a Plymouth fort. A total of seven Native people were murdered by Standish and other invaders that day.

WE DID NOT LAND ON PLYMOUTH ROCK. PLYMOUTH ROCK LANDED ON US. - MALCOM X
A CELEBRATION OF GENOCIDE

"THE FIRST THANKSGIVING"
What is known as "the first Thanksgiving" took place over three days in October 1621. About 50 invaders who survived the winter attended. After the invaders shot their guns and cannons into the air, 90 Wampanoags arrived to see what happened. The Wampanoags may not have been invited to the event at all, yet they ended up providing the majority of the food. The next Thanksgiving happened several years later, and it was a very different celebration.

PEQUOT MASSACRES
From May to July of 1637, European invaders massacred the Pequot Nation. The attacks occurred during the green corn festival, a Pequot thanksgiving event. One morning before dawn, invaders attacked the Pequots. The invaders used total war against the Pequots, meaning women and children were also attacked. Pequots were ordered outside of their houses and shot as they left. If they stayed in their houses, the houses were set on fire and they were burned alive inside. About 700 Pequot men, women, and children were killed. Those who survived were sold into slavery or went to live with Indigenous Peoples to the South. On October 12, 1637, Governor John Winthrop proclaims the first official Thanksgiving to celebrate these massacres.

"A day of thanksgiving kept in all the churches for our victories against the Pequots." - Governor John Winthrop

NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING

350TH ANNIVERSARY OF PILGRIM INVASION

CENSORSHIP OF WAMPANOAG RELATIVES
In 1970, descendants of the Pilgrim invaders planned a dinner at Plymouth to celebrate the 350th anniversary of the Mayflower landing. They invited a Wampanoag man, Wamsutta (Frank) James, to speak at the event. After reading James’ speech, which described the genocide inflicted upon his ancestors by the invaders, the group did not allow him to speak. Below is an excerpt from James’ suppressed speech.

"We, the Wampanoag, welcomed you, the white man, with open arms, little knowing that it was the beginning of the end; that before 50 years were to pass, the Wampanoag would no longer be a free people...Our spirit refuses to die. Yesterday we walked the woodland paths and sandy trails. Today we must walk the macadam highways and roads. We are uniting. We’re standing not in our wigwams but in your concrete tent. We stand tall and proud, and before too many moons pass we’ll right the wrongs we have allowed to happen to us." - Wamsutta (Frank) James

FIRST NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING
The censorship of James’ recounting of the true history of Thankstaking inspired the creation of the first National Day of Mourning. The United American Indians of New England (UAINE) declared the first event on Thankstaking day in 1970. At noon that day, about 500 Native people from all around Turtle Island gathered at a statue of Massasoit on Cole’s Hill in Plymouth. James gave his suppressed speech. Members of the American Indian Movement (AIM) such as Russell Means and John Trudell also spoke. Some entered a replica of the Mayflower and replaced its Union Jack flag with a flag that was flown at Alcatraz. Others painted the Plymouth Rock red and buried it.
WHY OBSERVE THE NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING?

**TO SHOW SOLIDARITY WITH OUR RELATIVES**
The UAINE has observed the National Day of Mourning every Thanksgiving since 1970. Some participants fast from sundown the day before Thanksgiving, through the afternoon of the next day. We can support our relatives to the East by learning and teaching the true history of Thanksgiving, by mourning those who have been lost to centuries of genocide, by fasting if we are physically able, or by watching this year’s event and learning more at [uaine.org](http://uaine.org).

**TO REJECT CELEBRATIONS OF GENOCIDE**
With its origins in the Pequot Massacres, it is hard to see Thanksgiving as anything other than a celebration of the genocide of Indigenous Peoples and of the colonization of Indigenous lands. By rejecting Thanksgiving and other anti-Indigenous holidays, like Columbus Day, we refuse to have colonizers perpetuate the erasure of Indigenous Peoples and we allow ourselves to learn accurate histories of invasion.

**TO REMIND OURSELVES OF THE GENOCIDE THAT HAPPENED HERE**
This month is also the anniversary of the Sand Creek Massacre. The massacre began before dawn on November 29, 1864 when 675 Third Colorado Cavalry soldiers murdered and mutilated at least 230 Cheyenne and Arapaho people, most of whom were Elders, women, and children. There are a number of parallels between the Sand Creek and Pequot Massacres. We have a responsibility to know these histories and how Colorado, and the United States more broadly, are built on foundations of genocide and enslavement.

**TO ENVISION ALTERNATIVES TO COLONIZATION**
On the 400th anniversary of "the first Thanksgiving", we see the destruction that centuries of colonization has caused the people and the land. Ongoing genocide, environmental catastrophe, and a worldwide pandemic should cause us to reflect on alternative, Indigenous worldviews that challenge the death culture of colonization while uplifting liberation and life. We must choose the path we want to take into our collective and interdependent futures.

ALTERNATIVES TO COLONIZATION: A PATH TO CHOOSE

The fork in the road stands atop a hill. To the left the path is soft and green and spangled with dew. You want to go barefoot.

The path to the right is ordinary pavement, deceptively smooth at first, but then it drops out of sight into the hazy distance. Just over the horizon, it is buckled with heat, broken to jagged shards.

In the valleys below the hill, I see the people of the Seventh Fire walking toward the crossroads with all they have gathered. They carry in their bundles the precious seeds for a change of worldview. Not so they can return to some atavistic utopia, but to find the tools that allow us to walk into the future. So much has been forgotten, but it is not lost as long as the land endures and we cultivate people who have the humility and the ability to listen and to learn. And the people are not alone. All along the path, nonhuman people help. What knowledge the people have forgotten is remembered by the land. The others want to live, too. The path is lined with all the world’s people, in all colors of the medicine wheel-red, white, black, yellow-who understand the choice ahead, who share a vision of respect and reciprocity, of fellowship with the more-than-human would. Men with fire, women with water, to reestablish balance, to renew the world. Friends and allies all, they are falling in step, forming a great long line headed for the barefoot path...

Robin Wall Kimmerer on the Seventh Fire Prophecy of the Anishinaabe Peoples

Braiding Sweetgrass (369)