

## A More Accurate Historical Thanksgiving: What Are You Celebrating?

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Thanksgiving — oh, that wonderful holiday in which we should give thanks. Something we should do every day. Where did this national holiday come from? Well it is not what you think and definitely not what you were taught in school. Many scholars give credit to the Americans, but many cultures and countries had national days of giving thanks long before the United States established such a day.

With that being the case, why do we think of the Pilgrims and Plymouth, Massachusetts for the national holiday of Thanksgiving? Like most of our history it comes from miss-history and the fact that most people think of the Pilgrims as these incredibly righteous people that invited the savage Indians to their first Thanksgiving so that the savages would not starve. This is incorrect history and information. Here is a more accurate historical Thanksgiving account:

Long before any Europeans came to the New World, Native Americans had many feasts and celebrations of thanks. Although the Pilgrims were searching for some religious freedom from the British Crown, they were really nothing more than English Colonists. They came for many other reasons also but regardless of what those reasons may have been, they were still loyal subjects to the British Crown.

In 1620 an English ship called the Mayflower set sail for the Americas. The ship was chartered by a religious sect known as the Puritans. They were headed for what was called the Virginias. Unfortunately the Puritans ran out of beer and needed to make land as quickly as possible. Beer was used more often than water on the high seas since water on a ship could not be kept drinking safe. Thus they landed in December of 1620 on the shores of what is now Massachusetts. They did not establish a settlement right away as often thought and taught in schools. They were not able to settle at the original landing.

These so called Pilgrims were not the first Europeans to the shores of the New England coast. In 1605 a British expedition led by Captain George Weymouth had landed on this particular coastline. When they left in 1614 they took 24 Natives as slaves and left smallpox, syphilis, and gonorrhea in their wake. One of the Natives taken back to Europe was named Tisquantum (called Squanto by the white man).

The 102 Puritans landed and built their colony called The Plymouth Plantation on the ruins of the Native village of Pawtuxet. Pawtuxet had been destroyed by the Weymouth expedition. The Puritans survived by stealing the food stores of neighboring Native Summer Villages as well as eating corn that was still growing wild from abandoned cornfields near the ruined village.

Strangely enough, Tisquantum, who had survived his trips to Europe, happened to come upon these Puritans while hunting with another Native named Samoset. They observed the

newcomers and finally one day Tisquantum send Samoset over to greet the Puritans with the word "welcome." Tisquantum soon joined and the Puritans were surprised to find two "savages" that spoke their language. The Puritans were terrible at survival, but with the help of Tisquantum they were able to harvest some late corn and learned to catch some game. Tisquantum also helped the colonists negotiate a treaty with the Wampanoag People near by who were led by Massasoit. Still many of the Puritans quickly succumbed to pneumonia and consumption. It was a hard winter and some 46 of the original 102 Mayflower people died.

The next year, 1621, with the help of the Wampanoag People, the Puritans learned how to live and make a bountiful harvest. In celebration of their good fall harvest, the colony's governor, William Bradford, declared a three-day feast after the harvest.

The Natives that attended this feast were not even invited. The Puritans had only invited Massasoit the Wampanoag leader. It was Massasoit that brought the other 90 or more of his Native brothers and sisters that saved the colony to the chagrin of the rather rude and indignant Puritans. The Natives also provided most of the food. There were no prayers of thanksgiving of any kind and the Natives were not invited back ever again for any other such events.

The following years the Puritans became pre-occupied with themselves and their superiority over the Native People. This along with spiritual pride, jealousy, envy, greed, bad relationships (adultery was rampant ñ remember the Scarlet Letter) and other sins, caused the Puritans to lack. Now at this moment most scholars write that the drought of 1623 was the cause for much of this. While the drought was hard, it was not an excuse for the many un-righteous things the Puritans were doing.

Now the peace settlement between this first colony of Puritans and the Wampanoag People meant that the Puritans were to have 15 years to establish a firm colony. By 1629 there were no more than 300 Puritans in present day New England in small and isolated communities. This survival prompted a wave of Puritans that soon established growing settlements north of Plymouth in Boston and Salem. Over the next 10 years the wave of Puritans greatly increased.

Soon the Puritans begin to discuss the legal ownership of the land. At this time Governor John Winthrop declared the Indians had not subdued the land and therefore all uncultivated land should be public domain according to English Common Law. In other words this meant that the land belonged to the King of England. Thus the colonists decided that they did not need to consult with the Natives and that the land was theirs for the taking. As far as they were concerned they only had to inform the representative of the crown and that was the local governor.

To Biblically defend the force taking of the land from the Native People, the Puritans embraced Psalms 2:8 Ask of me and I shall give thee the heather for thine inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. This forced taking of the land included murder. A company of Puritans led by Miles Standish actively sought out the head of a local

chief. They eventually accomplished this gruesome trophy when they beheaded the Native Leader Wituwamat. The head was displayed on a wooded post in the Town Square of Plymouth.

On May 26, 1637 a force of Puritans attacked about 700 Pequot People near the mouth of the Mystic River at Groton, Connecticut. The Pequots had gathered for their Annual Green Corn Dance. During the gathering they were surrounded and attacked by the English and the Dutch. The Natives were ordered from the Gathering Building and as they came forth they were shot down and cut up. The rest were burned alive in the building. The English Captain John Mason and Commander John Underhill attacked the camp with the words fire, sword, blunderbuss, and tomahawk. They also added that to see them {Indians} frying in the fire, and the streams of their blood quenching the same and the stench was horrible, but the victory seemed a sweet sacrifice to the great delight to the Pilgrims and they gave praise thereof to God. The next day, the Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony declared: A day of Thanksgiving, thanking God that they had eliminated over 700 men, women and children. A second Pequot Village was attacked, massacred and destroyed on June 5, 1637 near present day Stonington and a third Pequot Village was attacked, massacred and destroyed on July 28, 1637 near present day Fairfield.

The Puritan fathers believed they were the Chosen People of God and that this justified anything that they did. They were in a sense Calvinists that believed most of humanity was predestined to damnation. During this period of their history the Puritans along with other European sects declared days of thanksgiving to celebrate mass murder more than to celebrate harvest. In fact for the next 100 years every Thanksgiving Day ordained by any leader (Governor, etc.) was to honor the gruesome victories of 1637 and thanking God that the battles had been won.

Learning from the Puritans, in 1641 the Dutch began to offer scalp money for Natives. The Dutch Governor Willem Kieft of Manhattan paid money for the scalps of each Native brought to him. In 1643 Governor Kieft ordered the massacre of the Wappinger People. In this massacre, 80 Native People were killed and their severed heads were kicked around the streets of the village of Manhattan. One Native was castrated, skinned, and then forced to eat his own flesh while many colonist watched and laughed. Later, Kieft got Commander Underhill to carry out a massacre near present day Stamford, Connecticut. A village was set on fire and around 500 Natives were put to the sword.

Soon the settlers launched an all out genocide of the Native People. The government of Massachusetts made an order offering 29 shillings bounty for every Native scalp and 40 shillings for every Native prisoner that could be sold into slavery. Colonial men were allowed to enslave and rape any Native woman and enslave any Native child under what was thought to be the age of 14.

Any Native People that had converted to Christianity were accused of shooting into the trees during battles with the hostiles and were therefore enslaved or killed. Other peaceful Natives of Dartmouth and Dover were invited to a negotiating meeting in which they were

taken captive and sold into slavery. Colonial Law gave permission to “. . .kill savage Indians on sight at will.”

By 1675 Massachusetts and surrounding colonies were in an all out war with the Wampanoag People. The Wampanoag leader Metacomet (called King Phillip by the white man) grew angrier as he watched the steady destruction of his culture and his people. He was forced to strike out with raids on several isolated towns for food.

Captain Benjamin Church tracked down and killed Metacomet. His body was drawn and quartered and the parts as Captain Church said were left for the wolves. Metacomet's hands were cut off and sent to Boston for display and his head was sent to Plymouth where it was set upon a pole on the newly declared Thanksgiving Day of 1675. Metacomet's son was to be killed because the Puritans proclaimed that the offspring of the Devil must pay for the sins of their father. Instead he was sold to a slave ship bound for the Caribbean.

On June 20, 1676 the Puritans governing council held a meeting to determine of a way to in their own words; express thanks for the victories in War with the Heathen Natives. And from that moment they proclaimed June 29 as a Day of Thanksgiving. The celebration over the heathen Indians became a major event and was celebrated semi-annually among the New Englanders and the early colonies for many, many years to come.

By 1704 the massive Holocaust and Genocide of the Native People caused Governor Thomas Dudley to declare a General Thanksgiving for God's infinite goodness to extend his favors.. In defeating and disappointing.. the expeditions of the Enemy Indians against us. And the good Success given us against them, by delivering so many of them into our hands.

Now the holiday that most Americans celebrate has nothing to do with the Puritans or the Native Americans. The holiday most are acquainted with came about during the American Revolution for Independence when in 1777 things looked bleak for the American Rebels against the British Crown. General George Washington sent out a plea to all that supported the cause of Freedom for a day of prayer and thanksgiving. Later as President, Washington Proclaimed a Day of Thanksgiving on October 3, 1789 to be observed by all on November 26, 1789. Not all the new states agreed and not all observed such a day.

While subsequent Presidents and most Americans did not continue the tradition, it was Washington's proclamation that spurred and guided the 16th President Abraham Lincoln to make a Proclamation of a National Day of Thanksgiving in 1863. This was a plea to all Americans to have a day of prayer and thanksgiving during the bleak and trying time of our American Civil War. Lincoln copied Washington and made the proclamation on the same day of October 3 and for the observation of the holiday to be the same as Washington had for Thursday, November 26.

After this, the holiday was proclaimed by every president since Lincoln and observed on the last Thursday of November. The date has changed a few times with the most recent change done by Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1939. At the request of many businesses, Roosevelt moved the Thanksgiving Holiday to the 3rd Thursday of November to make for a

longer Christmas shopping season. This change created a huge public out roar and finally in 1941 Congress made the 4th Thursday of November a legal holiday and our National Day of Thanks.

Should you decide to celebrate this holiday on the fourth Thursday of November, please remember the Native Americans. Weather you be a teacher or a parent or both be very careful not to sugar coat what the Pilgrims did and how they treated the Native Americans, not even to the youngest age. Please avoid stereotypic Thanksgiving pictures, stories, and programs that depict inaccurate images that are unfair and degrading. By all means do not have children or adults make Indian headbands, Indian vests, do ceremonial war dances or such inappropriate things. Also do not put on Pilgrim and Indian pageants or plays (unless they are historically accurate and tell the story from the true perspectives of Native Americans as well as the European immigrants).