

OLOC More on Thanksgiving – Patty

The National Museum of the Native American has created a study guide titled, *Harvest Ceremony: Beyond the Thanksgiving Myth*:

https://americanindian.si.edu/sites/1/files/pdf/education/NMAI_Harvest_Study_Guide.pdf

This Guide teaches us that Native American people around the country have different ways of approaching the idea of giving thanks. For example, there are community feasts, seasonal celebrations, and give away ceremonies.

One example of giving thanks is from the **Haudenosaunee**, a confederacy meaning the People of the Long House. This confederacy was known as the Iroquois Confederacy in French or as the League of Five Nations in English. This confederacy includes the Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, and Senecas. **The general Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address** acknowledges the people, earth, waters, plants, animals, birds, bushes, trees, winds, sun, moon, stars, as well as the unseen spiritual forces. They begin gatherings by offering greetings and thanks to all the elements of life that sustain us. This ritual brings everyone into the space with a good mind, ready to listen and learn.

Each November, some people across the United States celebrate Native cultures and achievements and bear witness to the difficult history of colonization of Native American peoples by white settlers.

What started as an effort to gain a day of recognition for the significant contributions the first “Americans” made to the establishment and growth of the United States, has resulted in a whole month being designated for that purpose as NATIONAL NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH.

In 1915, at the annual Congress of the American Indian Association meeting in Lawrence, Kans., formally approved a plan concerning American Indian Day. President, Rev. Sherman Coolidge, an Arapahoe, issued a proclamation on September 28, 1915, which declared that the second Saturday of each May as American Indian Day. The proclamation also contained the first formal appeal for recognition of Indians as citizens which did not happen until June 2, 1924, when the US Congress granted citizenship to all Native Americans born in the United States.

US President Reagan established “American Indian Week” in 1986 to run from November 23-30th to line up with the US national holiday of Thanksgiving. This was an unfortunate pairing of dates to further the thanksgiving myth of friendship between Indians and European white settlers.

In 1990, US President George H. W. Bush approved a joint resolution designating November 1990 “National American Indian Heritage Month.” Similar proclamations, under variants on the name (including “Native American Heritage Month” and “National American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month”) have been issued each year since 1994.

How can we honor Indigenous peoples without absorbing them into the dominate culture? How can we change the mindset and commercialization of the US Thanksgiving?

- First and foremost, honor Indigenous culture and acknowledge the Indigenous Peoples existence. Their ancestors resisted and survived the horrors of colonization. To honor a people empowers them, restores their identity, and tells the authentic story of Native America.
- To celebrate and honor Native American people we need to disassociate the idea of Thanksgiving having anything to do with Native Americans because it doesn't. And it surely doesn't acknowledge all the atrocities that occurred for centuries after the so-called Thanksgiving Dinner.
- Another major change would be to declare the US Federal holiday of Columbus Day to **Indigenous Peoples Day**.
This is something we could do - petition the US government to recognize that day as a national holiday for Native American peoples instead of Columbus Day who did not even "discover" the United States. There are now many states and cities that officially celebrate Indigenous Peoples Day in lieu of Columbus Day.

You can look for activities for Native American Heritage Month that may take place where you live or find publications.

These questions were given at the session – think about what your answer would have been:

- After learning about the myth of the "first thanksgiving" what are your thoughts?
- How do the ways of giving thanks by Native Americans impact your understanding of the US thanksgiving holiday?

There is an event that takes place on thanksgiving day that has been happening since the 1970s, which is National Day of Mourning at Plymouth Rock in Massachusetts. This gathering is hosted by the Wampanoag which is the tribal nation most connected with the fake Thanksgiving story. The National Day of Mourning is a solemn day, spiritual and highly political. It is a day when only Indigenous people speak about their history and the struggles that are taking place throughout the Americas. They welcome non-native people to support and stand with them.

Suggested Resources by the Participants:

- Grand Portage Band acquires historic Lake Superior beach near Grand Marais
<https://wtip.org/grand-portage-band-obtains-historic-beach-near-grand-marais/>
- *The Land Is Not Empty: Following Jesus in Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery* by Sarah Augustine
- *Waking Up White* by Debbie Irving
- *Mankiller* by Wilma Mankiller: former president of Cherokee nation