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### **Thanksgiving – Alternate Version**

We are here to offer our thoughts about the Thanksgiving holiday.

I would like to begin with a quote from Felix Okoye -- "**It would be better not to know so many things than to know so many things that are not so.**"

**Every time we approach the modern Thanksgiving Holiday, with its food, Football, and mythology based on a few unusual days in 1621, I ask myself – what it is all about? As a child I enjoyed the feast and as a teenager and young adult I overindulged on football and food. Now, having studied the myth of Thanksgiving I wonder why I did not ask earlier how the carefully crafted myth does not match the reality of the Native people of the Americas since 1621.**

We call it a myth because it meets Webster's definition – "*a usually traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the world view of a people.*"

Example: How do the rosy images of Indian and Pilgrim sharing the bounty of the land as brothers come to terms with the genocide that characterizes the taking of this land? *Surely something has been left out of the story.*

**We wonder why there are not enough citizens with a curious mind who would ask the question – “What the heck happened with our relationship to Native people when we had such an apparently wonderful start?” Is there a need to stay blind to such things? Why does American popular culture need to have its traditions based on myths, no matter how remote the connection to facts, or how damaging the effects?**

Before we go on, we would like to be sure that the audience knows that we are not against *gathering our families and friends to enjoy one another's company while taking a needed*

*rest and sharing a meal in the fall.* As with other cultures Native Americans have always gathered our communities together for a wide variety of reasons, including festivals and religious events. Our gatherings happen not only in the fall, but often over the course of the year.

**And so, if one takes this secular holiday for what it is for most citizens, there seems only good to come of it. Celebrate your fall gathering with family and friends! Who would argue that is a bad thing, if taken at face value, but it is almost never allowed to be just what it is. For some reason, we need to feel patriotic and united about all aspects of our daily lives, even if we have to invent a story to accomplish that.**

A more accurate accounting of history, based on written documents of the Puritans and those who came after, as well as the Wampanoag people's oral history, paints an ugly montage of conquest and genocide that is the legacy of these United States. Of course the interpretation of the documents and the thinking of the time leave a wide range of possibilities, but we argue that none of the histories would match what is common fair in our schools and the mass media even today.

The modern images of the holiday are "Pilgrims, Indians, Pumpkins, Turkey, Mashed Potatoes, Squash, Cranberries and Football" and to some, not in that order. School children are taught about the "First Thanksgiving" and are told, "They (Pilgrims) served pumpkins and turkeys and corn and squash. The Indians had never seen such a feast". But to quote Michael Dorris, Native American author, "On the contrary! The Pilgrims had literally never seen such a feast," since all foods mentioned are exclusively indigenous to the Americas."

**Left out of the story of Thanksgiving is any reference to indigenous people giving thanks independent of the Puritans. This omission leads to the impression that the Christian invaders were teaching the indigenous people how to be thankful for the harvest, when in fact Native peoples of the Americas traditionally give thanks for everything taken from the environment for daily use.**

**We are also bombarded with narrations of the season advertising the benefits of a visit to “New England where it all began.” What all began – “The Conquest?”**

**Further, textbooks such as “Land of Promise” leave out most of the unsavory details and give sugarcoated view of the early encounters of Natives and invaders.**

The books used to educate our children also neglect to say why the Puritans chose Plymouth (Patuxet) as their town site. Many of us have heard of Samoset and Squanto and don't really want to know why they decided to help the invaders maybe we accept that god sent them to assist the “chosen elect”. This is probably because of the unpleasant fact of the delivery of death to the inhabitants of the area via microbes not too long before the Puritans arrival, by the English fishing vessels that plied the waters off the New England coast.

The activities cited as the “first thanksgiving” even if the *first* for the Pilgrims was not the first for the Wampanoag peoples of what is now New England. The people we call Pilgrims today were in fact a combination of English adventurers and fleeing Puritans. To the Puritans, Thanksgiving was a religious event and would not have been conducted in a festival like atmosphere. Did a festival take place? It seems that between mid-September and early December of 1621, Plymouth Governor William Bradford did invite the local Wampanoag to a three-day gathering where food was shared, a mutual aid treaty was signed, harvest traditions of both cultures were observed, and military demonstrations were conducted by the Anglo contingent.

The Wampanoeg, who as guests of the colony, arrived with their leader Massasoit and 90 men, delivered most of the food.

There is no recording of another such event.

**In less than 15 years, the Puritan invaders felt strong enough to openly begin cleansing the lands of the “devils in disguise” – known today as Native Americans. Repayment for helping the Puritans through their first years in New England became characterized**

**by the 1637 attack treating 700 men, women, and children to fire and sword – during the annual Native gathering of the Green Corn ceremony – a target apparently too tempting for the colonists. Puritan leaders were by now aware of a least four large ceremonies of the local tribes. Mercenaries surrounded villages near the colonies and attacked, burning them to the ground, killing any who tried to escape.**

**The Puritan Governor, John Winthrop, of Massachusetts Bay Colony then declared “A day of Thanksgiving, thanking God, for eliminating their “enemies” so swiftly.” It appears the friendship established in 1620 was short lived.**

**It became a tradition in the colonies and later for states to proclaim a Thursday in late November as a “Day of Thanksgiving”, but between the first proclamation and President Lincoln’s National proclamation – meant to bring the country together after the North’s victory at Gettysburg – Indigenous people continued to be the target of genocide for the purpose of land acquisition. In a little more than a month of Lincoln’s proclamation – replete with references to the “first Thanksgiving” – the President signed off the execution of 38 Dakota by hanging, the largest mass execution in US history.**

**There are many more documents that add more detail to the history of this land, but little of it is recognizable when placed beside the myths that are perpetuated to this day.**

This is the reality of the relationship between Native Americans and the people of the United States. Certainly a Nation may tell its story in whatever way it likes, but if the pretense of the story is that it is factual, then have the courage to use ALL the facts.

“The antidote to feel-good history is not feel-bad history, but honest and inclusive history.” – Loewen, 1997.

Don’t set up an impossible myth that further alienates the first people of this country and masks the violent nature of the struggle for possession of the continent. We think you will

find that much of this country's current predicament can be explained by the way we fulfilled and continue to fulfill what some see as our National Destiny. If these United States owned its history, warts and all, we believe that current affairs of state would be much different. It is laughable that we travel the globe scolding other countries about their human rights records. Human rights must begin at home.

**Wouldn't it be better to ponder the "facts" of our origins to help guide us into the future? Isn't it more damaging to the American psyche to base our ideals on mythology than on the real strengths and weaknesses we have as a people?**

**Questions to leave the audience with –**

**Have we no actual events to base our Thanksgiving Holiday on? Is our guilt over the treatment of Native Americans too deep to allow us to teach a more accurate set of facts about the history of this country? Or, is there no factual historical thread at the heart of the United States to carry the supposed ideals of sharing of resources and thanksgiving for the bounty of the land?**

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