SOAR - NARRI
Native American
Recruitment & Retention
Initiative

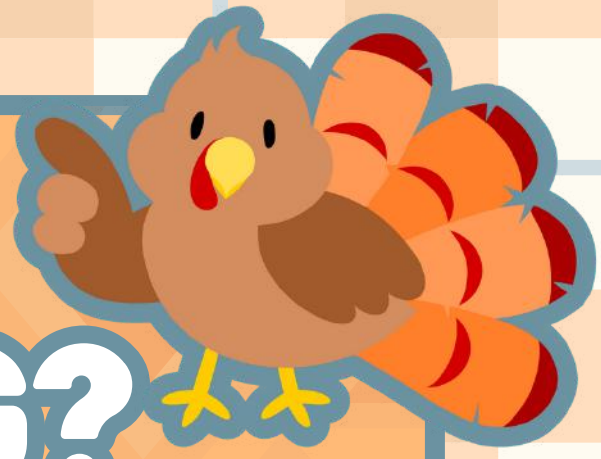
THANKSGIVING

THE COST OF COLONIZATION

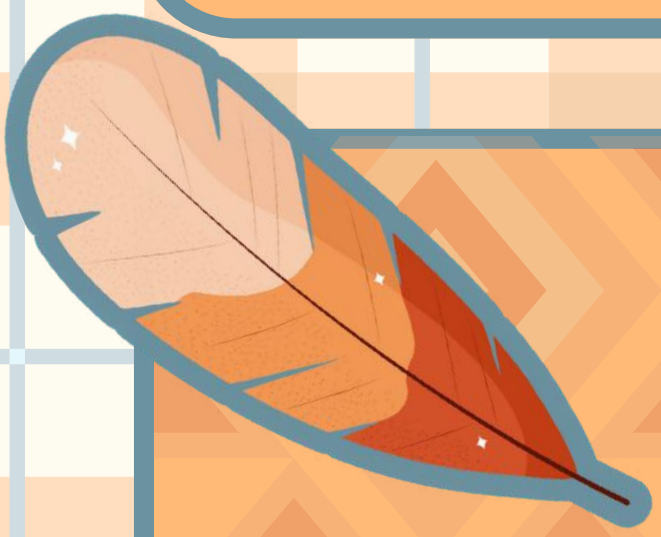
EDUCATIONAL POST



WHAT IS THANKSGIVING?



For many Native Americans, Thanksgiving carries a complex and often painful significance that extends far beyond the popular "First Thanksgiving" narrative taught in schools. While the harvest gathering shared between the Wampanoag Nation and English colonists in 1621 did occur, the version we often hear and learn about is a romanticization of the truth that erases the contexts of colonization, disease, displacement, and broken promises.



HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

During autumn 1621, around 90 Wampanoag joined 52 English colonists at Plymouth, Massachusetts. This gathering was not born just from amicability, but from a treatied relationship. The colonists had arrived on Wampanoag territory, not on unsettled land, where some Wampanoag already spoke English from prior European contact and, for some, through enslavement by Europeans. To observe the day as one of peace is an injustice to the surrounding context and environment which gave rise to the observance called “Thanksgiving”.



THANKSGIVING AFTERMATH

“The First Thanksgiving” narrative rarely addresses what came after. Within one generation, war sprouted out of the expansionistic tendencies of English colonists. From this, the Wampanoag lost their political independence and much of their territory, and many of the Wampanoag were killed or sold into slavery. By 1680, nearly 50 percent of the nearby Native American populations had been killed. Today, many Native American communities view “Thanksgiving” as a painful reminder of colonization's devastating impact and legacy.

NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING



Since 1970, a Native-led gathering in Plymouth has been held to commemorate a National Day of Mourning on the “Thanksgiving” holiday. At the 350th anniversary of the Mayflower landing, Wamsutta (Frank) James of the Aquinnah Wampanoag tribe was invited to speak; after sharing his speech about the truth of “Thanksgiving” and colonization for approval, he was then uninvited to speak. This was a key moment in the beginning of a National Day of Mourning, which recognizes the genocide of Native peoples, stolen lands and broken treaties, and celebrates Indigenous survival and resistance across the Americas.

LEARN MORE:

Native American Slavery in New England

- https://newenglandhistoricalsociety.com/native-american-slavery-in-new-england/

Thanksgiving from an Indigenous Perspective

- https://www.smithsonianmag.com/blogs/national-museum-american-indian/2022/11/23/thanksgiving-from-an-indigenous-perspective/

Thanksgiving: Historical Perspectives

- https://visit.archives.gov/whats-on/explore-exhibits/thanksgiving-historical-perspectives

Do American Indians Celebrate Thanksgiving?

- https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/thanksgiving/sq4ss3.html#:~:text=Metacom%20formed%20alliances%20with%20neighboring,to%20live%20on%20designated%20reservations