Lunch & Learn

Thanksgiving: A Complicated History

Fall 2022
International Center
What is Thanksgiving?

Thanksgiving is a U.S. national holiday:

- Different forms of “Thanksgiving” or “Harvest Festivals” were held since the 1600s by settlers to the Americas.
- Signed into law as a holiday by Ulysses S. Grant in 1870, along with Independence Day (July 4), New Years Day, and Christmas. Abraham Lincoln had declared it a holiday in 1863, but wasn’t official until 7 years later.
- Always hosted on the fourth Thursday in November. This set date was not legally set until 1941 though (more on that later).
- Thanksgiving is meant to honor the harvest meal shared between the Wampanoag tribe and Pilgrims in 1621.
Who are the Pilgrims?


They landed on land that is present day Cape Cod, Massachusetts and called it the “Plymouth Colony”
Who Are The Wampanoag Tribe?

Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe, also known as the People of the First Light, has inhabited present day Massachusetts and Eastern Rhode Island for more than 12,000 years.

Tisquantum (nicknamed Squanto) was an English speaking diplomat and political advisor who taught the Puritan settlers how to farm. While not part of the tribe, he played a pivotal role in making the first Thanksgiving when their first harvest of corn was celebrated in 1621.
Thanksgiving Expectation:

- The holiday is meant to represent people coming together and give thanks for the things that they have. Tradition is often to have each family member go around the table and state things you are thankful for that year.
Thanksgiving Reality:

- The Wampanoag people and the pilgrims had a treaty of peace after their arrival in 1620, but after more than 50 years of disease, resource exploitation and land encroachment made tensions high, resulting in Great Philip’s War. This devastated the Wampanoags and they never recovered.

- The inaccurate story of the pilgrims and native americans was a tourism/marketing tactic to sell the idea of pilgrims seen as the founders of the country.

- The story also supported the Manifest Destiny ideology during the Indian Wars and was used to justify nationwide efforts to displace natives. It also gave New Englanders a storyline of bloodless colonization in an effort to help them feel good about their colonial past, free of slavery and the Indian Wars.
Indigenous Tribes in N. America:

- [https://native-land.ca/](https://native-land.ca/)
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Current Issues with Indigenous Communities:

- U.S. continues to exploit Native American lands for resources, usually at the detriment of their communities:
  - Supreme Court and Indian Child Welfare Act (Currently on trial)
  - Dakota Access Pipeline at Standing Rock
  - Line 5 pipeline under the Straits of Mackinac
  - Use of sacred sites for drilling or inappropriate monuments (Mt. Rushmore)
- Restrictions and lack of certain resources in Native communities can lead to unemployment and poverty and lower educational opportunities.
- Erasure of culture and cultural exploitation has affected many tribes
Indigenous Influence U.S. Culture

- Michigan is derived from the Ottawa word “misigami” which means “large water” or “great water” in reference to the Great Lakes.
- Cheboygan County – Ojibwe word "zhaabonigan" meaning "sewing needle" or "chabwegan" meaning "a place of ore"
- Mackinac Island: Odawa word "michilimaciknac" meaning "great turtle"
- Washtenaw County – Ojibwe word "washtenong" meaning "far away waters"
Indigenous Influence U.S. Culture

- Native American governments, like the League of the Iroquois, became the model for how the Colonists would set up the U.S. government. Based on a system where there was central authority (Federal) and smaller units of government (states).

- **Common inventions used today:**
  - Kayaks, rubber, raised bed agriculture, syringes, oral contraceptives, mouthwash, hammocks, topical anesthetics and pain relief, suspension bridges, baby bottles, snow goggles, CORN!
How Do People Celebrate?

- “Traditional” Thanksgiving Dinner:
  - Turkey, mashed potatoes, gravy, stuffing/dressing, pumpkin pies, cranberry sauce
  - Original dinner would have seen items such as deer, seafood, corn, pumpkin (but not pie), and local fruits.

- Paper Turkey hands!
Thanksgiving Parades

Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade (1924 - New York City)

America’s Thanksgiving Day Parade (1924 - Detroit)

Football Games

Detroit Lions vs. (1934)

Dallas Cowboys vs. (1966)
White House Turkey Pardon

I’m honored to welcome you
Fun Facts About Thanksgiving

- Americans eat roughly 46 million turkeys and 50 million pumpkin pies each Thanksgiving
- Busiest travel day of the year (usually)
- Around 1,000 “Turkey Trot” races were hosted in 2018
How Indignious Peoples Celebrate Thanksgiving

- Thanksgiving is a day of mourning and protest for many Native American tribes.
How Indignious Peoples Celebrate Thanksgiving Cont.
Many Thanksgiving Tables
Where to Get a Thanksgiving Meal

Mosher-Jordan Dining Hall

- On Thanksgiving Day 11/24, Mosher-Jordan will be open from 12:00pm-2:00pm
  *please note this Thanksgiving meal will be charged at a dinner rate.

Order a pre-cooked meal from grocery stores:

- Kroger Holiday Meals
- Whole Foods
- The Produce Station
- Plum Market
With Special Guest: **BLACK FRIDAY**

- In 1939, President Franklin D. Roosevelt moved Thanksgiving to the “Fourth Thursday” in an effort to promote more days for holiday shopping. (Previously the last Thursday, and sometimes there are five).
- Called Black Friday because it was a day for retailers to get their finances “back in the black”
- Busiest day for consumer traffic, but not necessarily profits. The few days right before Christmas are usually more profitable.
Questions?