

## ORIGINS OF THANKSGIVING DAY

Americans consider Thanksgiving Day a national holiday based on a harvest feast shared by English colonists (Pilgrims) of Plymouth and the Wampanoag Native American people in 1621 in New England.

The history of the Thanksgiving holiday has its origins in the late 17th century. In September 1620, a ship called the Mayflower set sail from Plymouth, England, with 102 passengers on board who wanted to seek a new life in the "New World." They were a blend of religious separatists, looking for a new home where they could practice their faith free of persecution, and people who were enthralled by the possibility of owning land and building a prosperous life.

The tradition of celebrating Thanksgiving continued sporadically in different parts of the country. Sarah Josepha Hale, editor of the popular magazine *Godey's Lady's Book*, campaigned for a national Thanksgiving Day to promote unity. She finally won the support of President Abraham Lincoln. On October 3, 1863, during the Civil War, Lincoln proclaimed a national day of thanksgiving to be celebrated on the final Thursday of November.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt officially established the fourth Thursday in November as Thanksgiving Day. It was mandated by a joint resolution passed by Congress in 1941 and a proclamation issued in 1942, making Thanksgiving a national holiday observed throughout the United States to this day.

Scan the QR code to learn more about significant dates in November.



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## CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The tradition of eating turkey on Thanksgiving can be traced back to the very first Thanksgiving feast in 1621. Unfortunately, the story of Thanksgiving is usually told from only one side – that of the European pilgrims who came to America. Rarely is it told from the perspective of the people who were already here. According to historical accounts, the Wampanoag people who attended the dinner brought five deer and "wild fowl" to share with the Pilgrims.

The role of the Wampanoag in helping the pilgrims survive is often downplayed or ignored. Many Native Americans view Thanksgiving as a day of mourning because it is a reminder that in return for their help, the Europeans stole their land and killed their people.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR ENDING RACISM

Sharing the history of Native Americans is a crucial step in developing awareness of the prejudicial practices and injustices they experienced. Discussions of this event are often sanitized and centered around the white settlers. The fact is that Native Americans had been on the land for centuries before the Europeans arrived, and their story far predates a joint feast.

When Europeans began coming to what is now known as the United States, about four years before the Mayflower arrived, they carried foreign illnesses which killed Native people at exceedingly high rates. Colonizers took over Native lands and sold Native Americans into slavery. From the perspective of the Native people, there is no reason to observe a Thanksgiving holiday.

While observing a day to give thanks, we can also acknowledge the fact that Thanksgiving Day has a complex history. Working to end racism requires being aware of that history, dispelling myths created by white people, and telling the whole story.

Ending  
RACISM USA

# November 2025

## Advocacy in Action

During Thanksgiving, promote conversations about the history of Native Americans and racial justice, or donate to organizations that work on Native American issues. Visit Native Land Digital at <https://native-land.ca/>, find your community on the map, and learn the history of the land you live on.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11 Veterans Day	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27 Thanksgiving Day	28	29
30						