

The True Story of Thanksgiving

The first recorded Thanksgiving took place around 1620–1621. During this time, the Pilgrims were struggling to survive, and there were conflicts with the Indigenous peoples in the surrounding areas. In 1637, Puritans in Massachusetts celebrated a day of thanks—not for peace, but for what they considered a victory in violent conflict. For many Indigenous people, Thanksgiving is a reminder of the loss of their people and land. This raises the question: why should anyone partake in a day that, for some, symbolizes colonization and tragedy?

Some accounts claim that after every massacre of a village, European settlers celebrated and called it Thanksgiving. However, others argue that this is not the full story of America's beginnings. They believe that history is sometimes rewritten to fit certain agendas, but the reality is more complex.

The Pilgrims' Journey

Imagine a quiet English village called Scrooby. It was a small town, not a palace or a castle, but a humble place where ordinary believers—moms, dads, and their children—gathered in secret by candlelight to worship God and read the Bible. The Bible had just been printed, and these people, known as Separatists, wanted to read it in their own language. They separated from the Church of England and later became known as the Pilgrims.

These families were not revolutionaries; they simply wanted peace, to know God, to love their country, raise their children, live quietly, and honor the scriptures. But their faith clashed with King James I, who saw the Bible as a tool for power and demanded absolute control. Those who disagreed faced torture, mutilation, imprisonment, or even execution. Ministers had their ears cut off, tongues pierced, and faces branded as warnings to others.

When King James heard of the Separatists in Scrooby, he vowed to drive them out or do worse. In 1607, they sold everything and arranged a secret trip to Holland for religious freedom. However, they were betrayed by a ship captain, handed over to the king's soldiers, and humiliated. The men were imprisoned in harsh conditions, and the women and children were left alone and terrified. After their release, they attempted another escape, but again faced betrayal and separation. Eventually, the families reunited in Holland, but life remained difficult.

Life in Holland and the Voyage to America

In Holland, the Pilgrims found spiritual freedom but struggled economically. Dutch unions denied them good jobs, and their children worked in sweatshops. The culture, though tolerant, threatened their faith, and news of a possible Spanish invasion made their

situation precarious. They decided to risk everything and journey to the New World for the sake of their children's future.

They boarded two ships, the Speedwell and the Mayflower. The Speedwell leaked, so only half could fit on the Mayflower. What was supposed to be a short voyage turned into a 66-day nightmare of storms. The ship was battered, and the main mast cracked, but they managed to repair it. They were blown off course and landed at Cape Cod, outside their intended destination and royal jurisdiction.

The Mayflower Compact and Survival

With no government to protect them, the Pilgrims created their own form of self-government, the Mayflower Compact, signed on November 11, 1620. It began with "In the name of God. Amen." There was no king or elite class—just families under God. This covenant became the pattern for future colonial charters, the Declaration of Independence, and the Constitution.

Freedom in America began not with a king, but with desperate prayer on a broken ship. When they landed, they found an abandoned Native American village. The first winter was brutal; half the colonists died by March. Mothers were found dead in the snow, lying on top of their frozen children. They buried their dead in unmarked graves to avoid showing weakness to surrounding tribes.

Help from Squanto and the First Thanksgiving

In the spring, the Pilgrims were forced into communal farming by their financial backers, which led to starvation. Against all odds, a Native American named Squanto appeared. He spoke perfect English, having been kidnapped and taken to Europe years earlier. Squanto taught the Pilgrims how to farm, fish, and survive. Through him, they met Massasoit, chief of the Wampanoag tribe, and established a 50-year peace treaty.

However, communal farming led to resentment and poor productivity. Governor William Bradford abandoned the socialist model and assigned each family their own land. Productivity soared, and Bradford noted that socialism bred confusion and discontent. Personal responsibility and freedom made all the difference.

The First Thanksgiving

Just as things improved, a devastating drought struck. The Pilgrims fasted, prayed, and humbled themselves. On the day they prayed, gentle rain came, reviving their crops. Governor Bradford recorded this miracle in his journal. In gratitude, they set apart a day of thanksgiving. This was the first true Thanksgiving—a day of giving thanks to God, not just

feasting. Their lives were spared, and they declared a day of gratitude, which became the foundation of the American holiday.