

Thanksgiving is a National Day of Mourning



New York, November 23 (RHC)-- In the United States, "Thanksgiving" marks the anniversary of pilgrims arriving at what's now known as Plymouth, Massachusetts.

The so-called first Thanksgiving has been celebrated and taught to schoolchildren as the origin story of what would later become the United States. But many Native Americans say Thanksgiving Day is a reminder of the slaughter of millions of Indigenous people and the theft of their lands by outsiders.

The United American Indians of New England declared Thanksgiving a National Day of Mourning 50 years ago. In 1970, the descendants of the pilgrims wanted to hold a banquet to celebrate the anniversary of the Mayflower landing in Plymouth and asked a Wampanoag man named Wamsutta Frank James to make a speech, says his granddaughter, Kisha James.

The banquet organizers invited Wamsutta Frank James to speak on one strict condition: He needed to provide a copy of the speech in advance. Under the guise of editing for spelling and grammar, their true motivation was to check the content, Kisha James says.

Her grandfather's speech didn't praise the pilgrims as their descendants wanted.



“They told him that he absolutely under no circumstances could give the speech that he was planning on giving and they offered to write him a different speech,” she says. “They were quite angry about the speech he wrote because it told the truth about Thanksgiving.”

Wamsutta Frank James refused to give the edited speech, his granddaughter says. Instead, he and a group of supporters met atop Coles Hill in Plymouth on Nov. 27, 1970, to commemorate the first National Day of Mourning.

While millions of fellow Americans carve turkeys to celebrate Thanksgiving, 21-year-old Kisha James attends the National Day of Mourning every year.

Many Indigenous people fast from sundown the night before to sundown the day-of to remember the hardship and genocide their ancestors faced, she says. The National Day of Mourning also engenders Indigenous unity, with people from around the world speaking at the event.

This Thanksgiving, Kisha James asks non-Native people to educate themselves and their families on the real history of the holiday. Take time to learn the tribe whose land you’re on, then look into the tribe’s struggles and donate to help, she says.

“Try to divorce your Thanksgiving celebrations from the Thanksgiving mythology,” she says. “So no more pilgrims and Indians, no more teaching your children about the first Thanksgiving as we learn it in public school where it was a friendly meal.”

And don’t only think about Indigenous people on Thanksgiving, she says.

As many Americans start to wake up to the realities of the Thanksgiving story, some people are receptive to learning the truth about the holiday and accept that what they learned in school is a lie, she says. But a

significant amount of people accuse Indigenous people of trying to “ruin” the holiday and disrupt family celebrations, she says.

Kisha James says she doesn’t object to families gathering to eat a meal together, but rather the false mythology surrounding the day.

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