

What does Thanksgiving mean to the Wampanoag people?

In a new film, made by SmokeSignals, on the Southampton Mayflower 400 website ([watch here](#)) members of the Wampanoag tribe spell out what Thanksgiving means to them.



The US national Thanksgiving holiday is inspired by the traditional story of the Wampanoag people coming together with the Mayflower passengers. However, this is a colonial story which does not sit comfortably with Wampanoag people. Instead, for them, the third Thursday

of November is a Day of Mourning, when instead of celebrating, they take the opportunity to honour the sacrifices of their ancestors.

Wampanoag artist, Robert Peters says:

“The myth created around Thanksgiving and how it has been taught has done great harm to Native Americans, to our place in this country, to the perception of us. That the Pilgrims came together, that we all sat around and had a big feast is not accurate.



It is actually hurtful and harmful to think this very pivotal time for native people is completely overlooked in American society.” The traditional story gives the Wampanoag people only one role in the story, that of not letting the Mayflower settlers die. The rest of their history has been completely bypassed.

Smoke Signals producer, Steven Peters, explains how that feels: *“Thanksgiving marks the beginning of a dark history for Wampanoag people. As a Native American, that’s a painful thing. You don’t want to think your history and your people have been completely ignored, but that’s exactly what has happened.”*

The idea of giving thanks however is central to Wampanoag culture, through ritual, ceremony and the sharing of food. The Wampanoag people give thanks on many occasions, whenever there are gifts from the creator or to honour sacrifices, as when there has been a successful hunt, this includes giving thanks for harvests of: corn, strawberries, herring, and dear/venison.

The film explains how Thanksgiving could better think back to what the Indigenous people did for the Pilgrims, what they really provided - a safe harbour, a place to stay, the ability to live and thrive. This has inspired Southampton’s *Giving Thanks* scheme.



Miles Bernadett-Peters says: *“To follow the meaning of Thanksgiving is to be thankful, to be respectful, to be caring to other people, to be giving. Not just to you and your own, not just to you and your family, but to strangers, to homeless people, to people who have nothing, people who are just trying to survive. That’s what the Indigenous people did for the people who came across the seas on the ships.”*

The film also explains more about the true history of Thanksgiving traditions. For example, the traditional foods eaten on Thanksgiving day, the corn, the turkey, the pumpkin, the squash, the cranberries, have all been co-opted out of Wampanoag tradition and made mainstream.

Giving Thanks

Giving Thanks is a new campaign to create digital memories that bring the people of Southampton together in a shared celebration of our city and our communities. It is delivered as part of the on-going city-wide Mayflower 400 programme and aims to not just mark the anniversary, but to bring people together as best we can in these days of social isolation, through generating an understanding of difference and encouraging an attitude of gratitude.

Giving Thanks is supported by the Barker-Mill Foundation and Arts Council England. More information available online at: www.mayflower400southampton.co.uk/get-involved/giving-thanks and at #MyGivingThanks



#MyGivingThanks