

For many, Thanksgiving is a complex holiday. In a normal year, this holiday comes with stress and anxiety around access to food and having family. This year there is also the added stress of the global pandemic and racial unrest. The intersection around genocide and the generations of historical misinformation is a heavy reality as well. For these reasons, all Americans should approach this holiday with sensitivity.

There is a danger in a single story. Did you know this week there are two National holidays to recognize back-to-back? The historical untruths we teach about Thanksgiving cripples our ability as community to do better. The Thanksgiving story as we learned in school, media, and likely our homes reinforces the danger of a single story. It is the story of colonizer success. It is the story of misinformation. If ever there was an effective example of a one-sided story this is it.

The first Thanksgiving really has no origin beyond a presidential idea for a national holiday. The millions of people living on the east coast at the time of **settlement** had a much different story to tell around **colonization**. And among those communities, there are many historical stories of the genocide that occurred.

As we approach the Thanksgiving holiday, here are a number of reasons to approach this holiday with more than a single story:

1. November is **Native American Heritage Month**. Yes, we are still here. There remain millions of Indigenous people across the United States and over 500 treaties that are recognized by the United States government.
2. The day after Thanksgiving is **Native American Heritage Day**. News outlets and social media are a-buzz with Thanksgiving themes that perpetuate misinformation about this national holiday and totally miss **Native American Heritage Day** as it is shadowed by the news of the economy and stats about the biggest shopping day of the year.
3. Thanksgiving is a way of life for many of us. There is no need for an “Indian” and pilgrim story to sell a national narrative that encourages this act of well-being. In fact, now more than ever, we are using gratitude to help offset the anxiety and uncertainty of the times we are in.

How to approach Thanksgiving with more than a single story:

1. If you insist on telling a Thanksgiving story, be sure to include the truth— the truth about the stolen land you live on and the current problems caused by systemic racism.

2. Start a new story about the need to dismantle barriers- physical, economic, educational, psychological, and spiritual– that divide and oppress us.

With this we can move forward as a community to deliver hope, heal, and build a new narrative that remembers the gifts of our ancestors, celebrates the vibrant and powerful descendants that persist in revitalizing and preserving culture and true history, and remember the ones who pounded their fists on many tables to open the doors to tell more than a single story.

-Christina Woods

Christina Woods lives in Mesabikong, also known by its colonized name, Duluth. She is Anishinaabe and enrolled in the Bois Forte Band of Chippewa and is the Executive Director of the Duluth Art Institute.