

A Native Take on Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving? It's Complicated.

So many Americans love the excuse to eat all of their favorite foods on Thanksgiving, but the day leaves a lot of Indigenous people with a sour taste in their mouths. Elementary school teaches most of us that the First Thanksgiving was a joyful feast between the "Pilgrims" and the "Native Americans," where both sides broke bread in a celebration of thanks for plenty and friendship. As an adult, you might get a slightly more nuanced version of events—European colonists and the Wampanoag people came together to enjoy a bountiful harvest in a show of togetherness and goodwill—but this is still whitewashed to the extreme.

Instead of peace, colonials brought disease and death to Native Americans; and instead of building a shared future, they built forts and started a genocide that lasted for hundreds of years. Many Native communities are still processing the generational trauma and discrimination that stemmed from these first interactions over 400 years ago, so it's no wonder there is some resistance to celebrating a day that erases a very dark history.



That said, Native people are not a monolith, and there are as many ways to celebrate, mark, or mourn the third Thursday in November as there are Native people. It's important to remember that what works for one Native person doesn't apply to every Native person. Some people replace Thanksgiving with Truthsgiving or a National Day of Mourning; others have a traditional gathering without recognizing it as "Thanksgiving." Some Native people celebrate Thanksgiving, complete with canned cranberry sauce and mom's mashed potatoes. Some Native people don't recognize the day at all. All of those choices are valid:

there's no correct way to celebrate—or not celebrate.

How Does Eighth Generation View Thanksgiving?

Eighth Generation has a vibrant, diverse team of staff, all of whom mark the day in different ways. Among our Native and non-Native staff alike, there is of course a deep respect for Native values, a recognition of the horrors of colonization, and a driving commitment to supporting the excellence of our Native community.

How our team marks the day is a mixed bag! Some of us do celebrate the spirit of togetherness by sharing food with friends and family. Some of us use the day off to further our personal activism work around decolonization. And some of us just sleep in! Here's what some of our team have to say about the day.



Magnus

Eighth Generation's Shipping Lead, **Magnus Jim** (Diné), celebrates in the traditional sense of gathering friends and family for a meal together. "My idea of Thanksgiving isn't within the sense of the usual thought of the actual holiday but a day to remember those within the community and celebrate the lives of my Indigenous "family" (actual family as well as friends who've become a second family). Reflecting and celebrating how we strive through the enduring tasks of navigating our lives daily as best as possible. That is to say, I show gratitude to myself and other Indigenous people through eating well and talking about what I'm up to and laughing about how much I feel like I could go into a food coma."

Colleen

Our CEO, **Colleen Echohawk** (Athabascan/Pawnee), celebrates a day of family, food, and rest. “We eat bacon and gingerbread waffles and watch the Macy’s parade. We love the big turkey dinner, but we have also done seafood or good steaks. So, for us, it’s about hanging out and getting to be together!”

Eric

Eric **Alipio** (Diné, Filipino) is the Warehouse Manager at Eighth Generation and celebrates his Filipino culture during the holidays. “Living closer to my Filipino family, we always celebrated Thanksgiving with a bunch of Filipino food. We didn’t really think about what the holiday was about, but rather, just took it as an excuse to have a big feast together.”

Sxeyilem

Sxeyilem (First Nation Coast Salish, Filipino), an Eighth Generation Warehouse Associate, spends the holiday sharing blessings and giving back to those who deserve a little hope. “In the past years, I’ve gone to the **Chief Seattle Club** and served meals to the brothers and sisters that come in for their turkey dinner. I’m so thankful for the blessings I’ve been given—so want to give back to the community.”

Cassius

Cassius Johnson (Diné), Eighth Generation’s Assistant Warehouse Manager, doesn’t celebrate Thanksgiving as a holiday, but his family does gather with each other. “We usually spend the day making and prepping tamales. It’s a whole day event and very satisfying at the end. We make enough to give out and freeze so we have tamales year-round! It’s a fun time to be with my family, joking and making food.”

Make Today Matter

No matter how you observe the day, you can spend a few minutes supporting your Native community. Google which tribe or tribe's ancestral land you're on. Donate to a local Native community organization. Support a Native-owned business or artist. Learn the **real history** of the holiday, and read the **Wampanoag side of the story**. And of course, continue to support Native excellence, this and every day.