

Solin's Anti-Colonial Thanksgiving

"Our shared
responsibility to
give thanks with
open eyes and
awareness...
Remember that
there is still
work to be done"

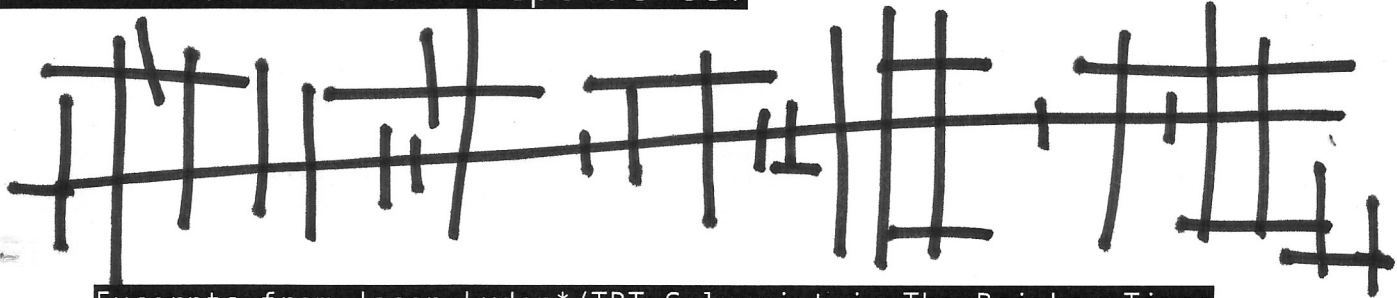
a brief history of
Canadian thanksgiving,
Colonialism +
The Kanien'kehà:ka
people



by: KWATTS

Why Celebrate Anti-Colonial Thanksgiving?

The dominant histories and images associated with Thanksgiving celebrate the lives of the colonizers, ignoring and erasing the colonial genocides as well as the real struggles of indigenous peoples for self-determination and independence.



Excerpts from Jason Lydon*/TRT Columnist in The Rainbow Times

We need to take time to be honest about where the holiday comes from and how it impacts people today. The rates of incarceration of Indigenous young people is unconscionable, the impacts of drug and alcohol use, and the continued theft of land are all part of the ongoing oppression of Indigenous people. Yet people survive, dance, worship, celebrate and keep culture alive.

Our shared responsibility is to give thanks with open eyes and with awareness to what is going on around us. Take a moment to tell some truth about the theft of this country's land. Get some pumpkin pie, mashed potatoes, collards, or whatever other harvest foods you like best, and remember that there is work to be done.



History of Canadian Thanksgiving

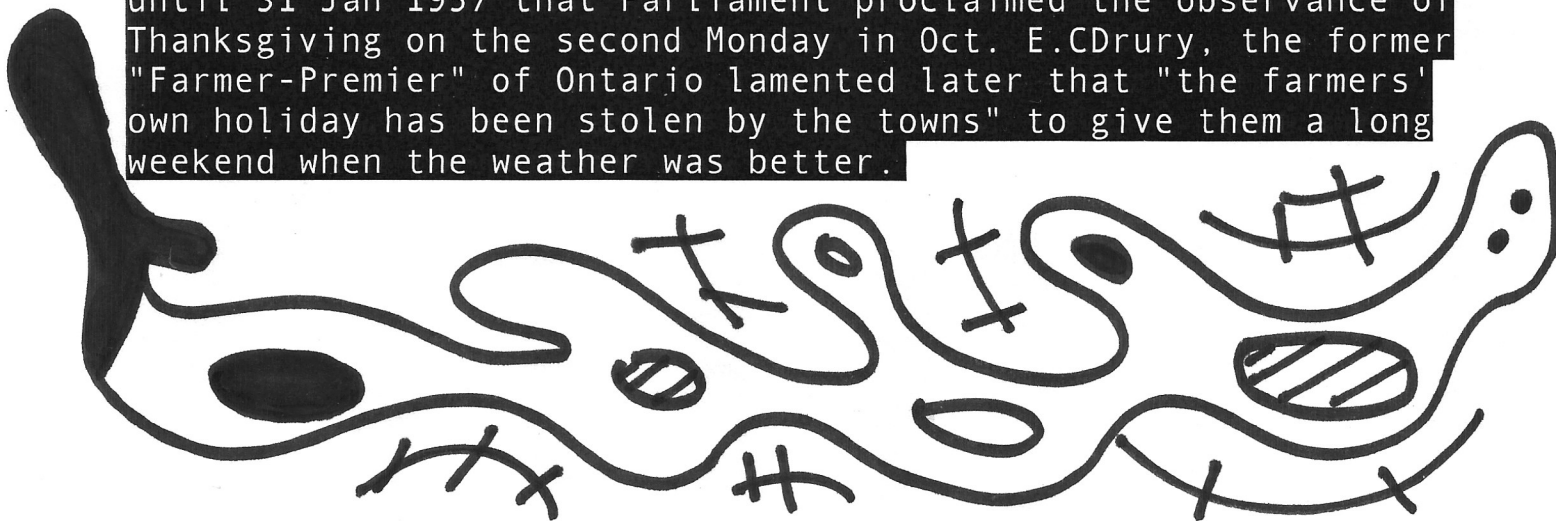
Excerpts from Article by David Mills + Laura Neilson Bonikowsky in
The Canadian Encyclopedia
www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca

Proclaimed by Parliament in 1879 as "a day of General Thanksgiving to Almighty God for the bountiful harvest with which Canada has been blessed," Thanksgiving draws upon 3 traditions: harvest celebrations in European peasant societies for which the symbol was the cornucopia (horn of plenty); formal observances, such as that celebrated by Martin Frobisher in the eastern Arctic in 1578--the first North American Thanksgiving--in which Frobisher and his crew gave thanks for their well-being; and the Pilgrims' celebration of their first harvest in Massachusetts (1621) involving the uniquely American turkey, squash and pumpkin.

The celebration was brought to Nova Scotia in the 1750s and the citizens of Halifax commemorated the end of the Seven Years' War (1763) with a day of Thanksgiving. Loyalists brought the celebration to other parts of the country.

Starting in 1879, Thanksgiving was officially celebrated annually in Canada. Parliament declared 6 Nov 1879 as a day of Thanksgiving; it was celebrated as a national rather than a religious holiday. Later and earlier dates were observed, the most popular being the third Monday in Oct.

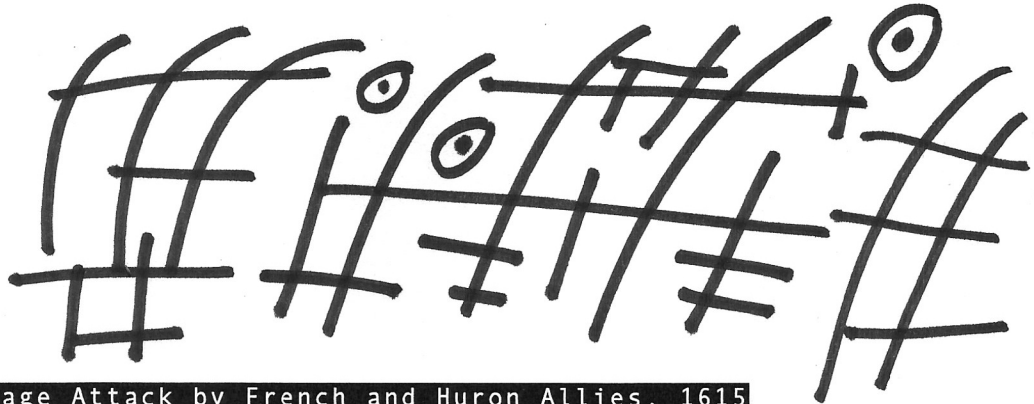
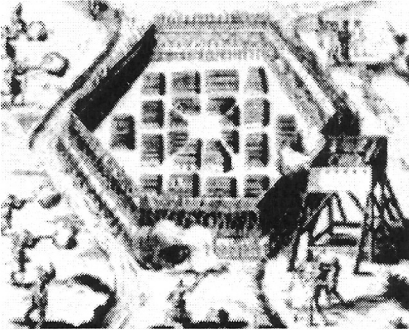
After the First World War, Thanksgiving and Armistice (later Remembrance) Day were celebrated in the same week. It was not until 31 Jan 1957 that Parliament proclaimed the observance of Thanksgiving on the second Monday in Oct. E.C. Drury, the former "Farmer-Premier" of Ontario lamented later that "the farmers' own holiday has been stolen by the towns" to give them a long weekend when the weather was better.



Canadian Colonialism

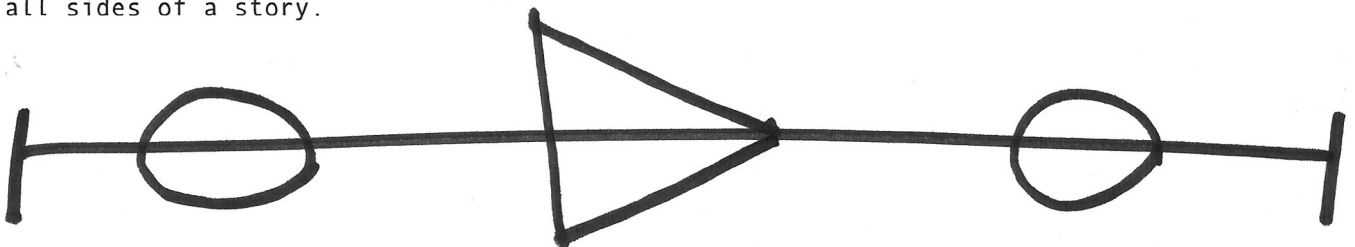
Excerpt from essay by Taiaiake Alfred: a Kahnawake Mohawk educator and writer. He has long been involved in the public life of his own and other Indigenous nations. He holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from Cornell University and is the founding director of the University of Victoria's Indigenous Governance Programs.

Ask yourself: Do you know the name of the Native people in whose territory you live? You may not realize it, but your home is built on land that has been occupied and used by Native people for thousands and thousands of years. Most people in Canada do not perceive themselves as newcomers to an ancient land that was civilized by people thousands and thousands of years before the French, British and others arrived. This is a serious problem in our society. What it means is that most Canadians do not know the history of their own country; they are in the dark about the past and the present, because after all, we create the present based on our understanding of the past.



Iroquois (Onondaga) Village Attack by French and Huron Allies, 1615
Credit: Library and Archives Canada, C-36647
Canadian Heritage Gallery, #10071

What kind of present are we making when such an ancient and important part of the story of our country is left out? What's more, every one of the Indigenous nations who occupied this land before there was a Canada are still alive. They are living people and cultures and communities. It is often said that without understanding each other we cannot respect and coexist peacefully. Distrust, hatred and racism grow in an environment of ignorance. If this is so, we have a long way to go as a society before we can stand proudly and proclaim that we are free of these scourges and that original people and newcomers understand and respect each other as they prepare to face the future together. The vast majority of Canadians have little direct experience with Indigenous people either in their personal lives or as communities. Most people in Canada understand very little of the realities of Indigenous peoples' lives, the challenges they face, or the history of interaction between Indigenous peoples' ancestors and their own ancestors that have created these realities. If anything, Canadians have a sense that there are "Native people" or "Indians" who lived here for a long time before the arrival of European and other settlers, and later immigrants to this country. But that's it - as if Indigenous peoples are a part of the past and the history of this country but not its present! In place of the true facts of past and present, Canadians are taught in school and in mainstream culture a version of history that is basically one side of the story. It is as if there were an argument taking place in your school hallway and you were allowed to hear only one person's words and not the other's! And that's just not fair, either in the hallway or in the history classroom. It's important to have all the information and to hear all sides of a story.

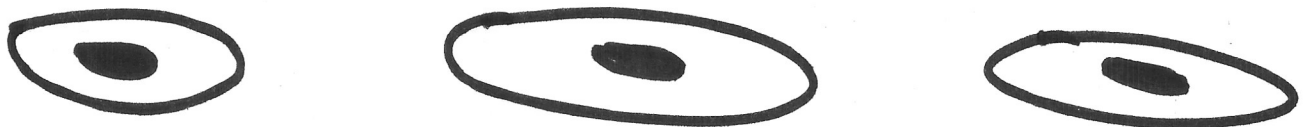


Ignoring the past and the voices of Native people is what "colonialism" is all about. Colonialism is the disconnection of Native people from the land, their history, their identity and their rights so that others can benefit. It is a basic form of injustice in the world, and has been condemned as a practice by the United Nations. Yet, we have never acknowledged that Canada was built as a colonial country and that it is, in fact, still colonial in many ways. And we have very little understanding of Native peoples' efforts and struggles to survive in spite of colonialism, what is called "Native resistance."



Amité Lubicon-Québec in Support of Lubicon Lake Cree of Alberta
Courtesy of *Windspeaker*

Since the 1970s, the media spin regarding Native resistance has changed little, sticking to certain themes that build on colonial ideas and serve to make Native people look bad for standing up for their own existence and rights. The spin focuses mainly on violence and is rarely cast as an act of self-defence; rather, Natives are portrayed as criminals for protecting themselves and their lands, creating an image of the Native as being afflicted with violent mental sickness, when in fact they are people struggling to survive and defend themselves against cultural, political and physical attacks. Native people, particularly the youth, are portrayed as angry and inherently violent, prone to drug abuse, drunkenness, suicide, shootings, gang fights, assault and murder. These images are all part of the process of creating a false image and identity of the Native so that governments and corporations can make profits and keep control of the homelands the Native people have been cleared from - the same land you live on.



Ask yourself this question now: Can you live with the knowledge that you are part of a colonial system?

Canadians who believe in justice and in doing right by others must educate themselves about the past, present and future of their country as a colonial enterprise. It is only by gaining knowledge about Native peoples and of themselves that a person can have a vision of coexistence that lives up to the values that this society proclaims as fundamental: fairness, honesty, sharing and respect. The films from the National Film Board's collection are a real tool in helping you to educate yourself and, in a sense, "decolonize" your mind. Learning to listen to the voice of Native wisdom with Ojigkwanong: Encounter with an Algonquin Sage will open your eyes to a whole new world view. In Forgotten Warriors you will come to understand the contributions of the Native soldiers who have always fought in Canada's wars, in spite of the mistreatment their people suffered at the hands of the white man and the lack of recognition when they returned home. In such films as Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance and Is the Crown at war with us?, you will be shocked, perhaps, to see images of Native people today having to defend their land and their people from violent attacks by police and the Canadian armed forces. There are many more films in the NFB's collection illustrating and informing the many aspects of Native life in the past and today. Take the time to watch and learn, and then take your new knowledge and make a real contribution to defeating colonialism and making Canada's future one that we can all, Natives and newcomers, look forward to—living together in peaceful coexistence.

The Kanien'kehá:ka People of the Flint

From: Kahnawà:ke Kanien'kehá:ka Kanakeráhsera
Kahnawà:ke Branch of the Mohawk Nation
Ne Ià:ia'k Nihonohontsá:ke - Six Nation Iroquois Confederacy
www.kahnawakelonghouse.com

The Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) of Kahnawake speak a language that belongs to the Iroquois family. The Iroquoian-speaking peoples of North America include the Cherokee from the Southern Appalachian area; the Tuscarora and the Susquehanna of the mid-Atlantic region; and the Huron, Wenro, Erie, Tobacco, Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca of the Great Lakes -St. Lawrence River Valley regions of North America. These last five nations; the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca are the most renown of the Iroquoian linguistic group, particularly for the alliance or Confederation called the League of the Haudenosaunee, the People of the Longhouse. They were also known as the Five Nations Confederacy, now Six Nations.

The language of and imagery of the Great Law of the Haudenosaunee speaks best for the spirit and function of the League:

"Roots have spread out from the Tree of the Great Peace, one to the south, one to the north, one to the east and one to the west. These are the Great White Roots, and their nature is peace and strength...

We place at the top of the Tree of the great Peace an eagle, who is able to see afar. If he sees in the distance any danger threatening, he will at once warn the people of the League...

I, Tekanawí:ta, and the united chiefs, now uproot the tallest tree and into the hole we cast all the weapons of war. Into the depths of the earth, down into the deep underneath currents of water flowing to unknown regions we cast all the weapons of strife. We bury then from sight and we plant again the tree. This shall the Great Peace be established and hostilities shall no longer be known between the Five Nations, but peace to the united people."

First Contact and the Two Row Wampum

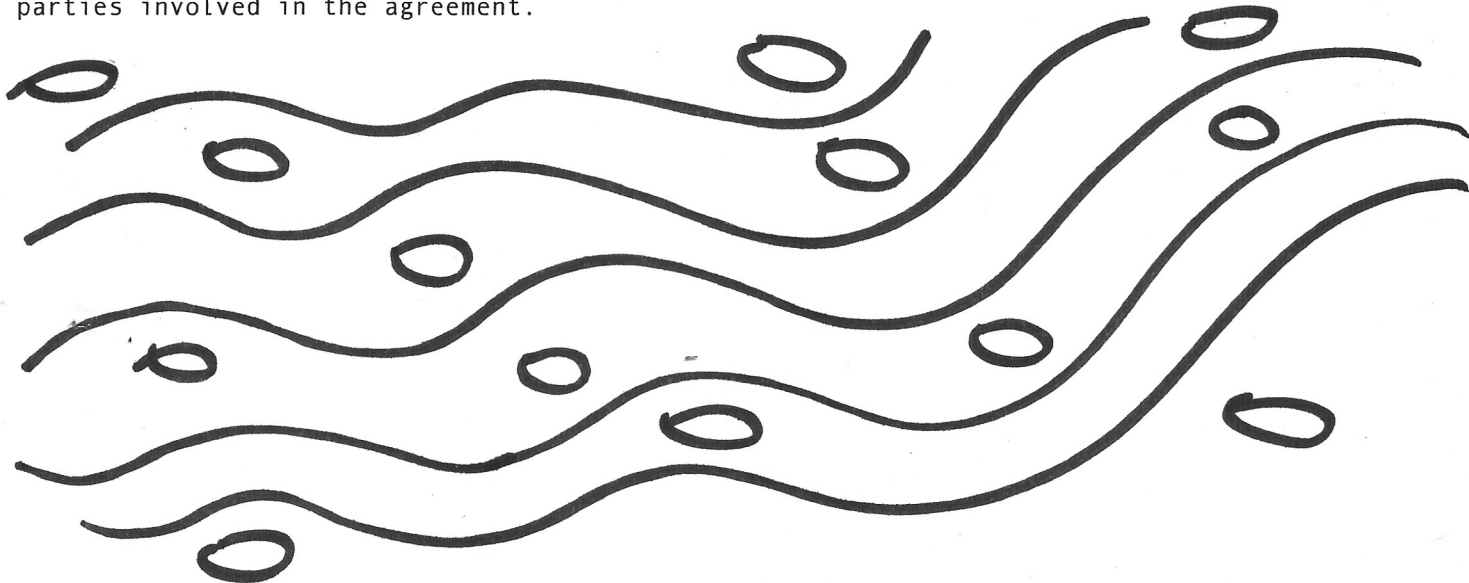
Due to their eastern location, the Kanien'kehá:ka were the first nation of the Confederacy to make contact with the new comers to North American. The first Europeans to meet the Kanien'kehá:ka were the French, who arrived in 1534 with Jacques Cartier. Cartier and his men did not pave a smooth road for the other Europeans who followed. They exposed the Kanien'kehá:ka to treachery and despair after the Kanien'kehá:ka had taken them in, relieving them from hunger and curing them of scurvy.

When Samuel De Champlain arrived in the St. Lawrence River Valley in 1608, the Kanien'kehá:ka were at war with the Algonquin. Champlain allied himself with the Algonquin and lost the trust of the Kanien'kehá:ka. For a short time, French interference and their supply of firearms to the Algonquin, allowed the Algonquin to over power the Kanien'kehá:ka. Cartier and Champlain had showed the Kanien'kehá:ka that the newcomers were different than any of the people who the Kanien'kehá:ka had dealt with for centuries.

The first Europeans who established continuous contact with the Kanien'kehá:ka were the Dutch. Henry Hudson, an Englishman employed by the Dutch East Indian company, sailed up the Hudson River in 1608 and Fort Orange (Albany) was established in 1614. The Mahicans were at war with the Kanien'kehá:ka and the Dutch allied themselves with the Mahicans. Six Dutch soldiers and their commander, Kriekkebeck, joined a battle which took place nine miles upriver from Albany. Although the Dutch had firearms, the Kanien'kehá:ka were victorious and Kriekkebeck and his three men were killed. Shortly after, the Mahicans were defeated and the few remaining permanently left the territory.

The Kanien'kehá:ka were puzzled as to why the Dutch had allied themselves with the Mahican. The Kanien'kehá:ka had never done anything to disrupt the peace between themselves and the Dutch. The newcomers did not understand the ways of the people on Turtle Island (North America). As a result of their experiences, the Haudenosaunee realized that a special agreement was needed in order to restore peace with the Dutch. The Two Row Wampum concept was introduced, recognizing an agreement of peace and respect for each other's way of life.

The understanding was recorded with a belt of wampum. Wampum beads are made from the shells of the Quahog clam. The belt was made with a background of white wampum beads with two rows of purple that run parallel from one end to the other. The words that go with the explanation of the Two Row Wampum speak of the relationship that should exist between the parties involved in the agreement.



The background of white bead represents a river and the two parallel rows of purple beads represent two vessels traveling the river. It is recognized that the river is large enough for the two vessels to travel down together. In one vessel shall be found the Haudenosaunee and in the other, the Dutch. Each vessel shall carry the laws, traditions, customs, languages, and spiritual beliefs of each nation; in short, all which makes a people who they are.

It is the responsibility of the people in each vessel to steer a straight course. Neither the Dutch nor the Haudenosaunee shall interfere with the lives of the other. Neither side shall attempt to bring or force their laws, traditions, customs, languages, and spirituality upon the other. Such is the agreement of mutual respect that is recorded in the Two Row Wampum.

The Haudenosaunee Nation has used the principles embodied in the Two Row Wampum as the initial guide or set of rules for relations between themselves and any other nation. They have been careful to abide by the concept that was developed so long ago and each succeeding generation is taught the importance of maintaining the principles of the Two Row Wampum.

land Acknowledgement

Solin Hall acknowledges that we are on the traditional territory of the Kanien'kehá:ka people. The Kanien'kehá:ka are the keepers of the Eastern Door of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. The island we call Montreal, called Tio'tia:ke in the language of the Kanien'kehá:ka, has historically been a meeting place for other Indigenous nations, including the Algonquin peoples.

RESOURCES ON CAMPUS

QPRiG-McGill

3647 University, 3rd floor
 qpirmcgill.org

First Peoples' House

3505 Peel Street
 firstpeopleshouse@mcgill.ca

Social Equity and Diversity Education (SEDE)

3610 McTavish, Suites 11 & 12
 equity.diversity@mcgill.ca

The Union for Gender Empowerment (The UGE)

3480 Rue McTavish
 http://unionforgenderempowerment.org