

EEP 124- Nov. 2022 Hot Take: Empathy for the Real Story of Thanksgiving

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SPEAKER

Maria Ross

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As we slide into thanksgiving here in the United States, I'm facing mixed emotions about this holiday as I get older and wiser. Now, don't get me wrong, I have a lot to be thankful for. I'm grateful to you, dear listener for tuning into this podcast every week. And joining me on the journey of embracing empathy as a competitive advantage and as a new definition of success. But let's get back for a second to the myth of thanksgiving. From a tradition perspective, gathering with friends and family and reflecting on all we have to be grateful for holds comfort and joy. I get that no matter how dysfunctional our communities or our families may be. Many of us are able to come together at this holiday, eat amazing food, watch the kids play, catch some football, and gracefully sidestep any divisive political debates, which in recent years has taken on a whole new level of Herculean effort. And PS I'll put some links in the show notes to some of my past great guests, who can help you navigate those tense discussions this holiday season. But having a more realistic understanding of the roots of this holiday gives me pause. It's a fiction, we've been sold as good little American boys and girls that this holiday is about peace and harmony between the pilgrims and the digital in the indigenous communities they invaded, that it symbolizes coexisting with those who are different from us. But this is actually a far cry from the reality of the holiday. Please take a listen to Jasmine Bradshaw's great podcast on the true history of thanksgiving. She's the host of the first name basis podcast. She's amazing. And I'll place a link in the show notes. This is where I got a lot of this information and she's done deep research into the event. And she explains it much more articulately than I can and in a very factual and kind way without sparing the truth.

As a summary, the reality is that when Columbus and other Europeans arrived onto these native lands, they brought the plague and other diseases that nearly wiped out many indigenous populations who are already here. They also dug up the winter food store that the Native community, the Wampanoag had buried for safekeeping and declared it a miracle from God that they found the food which they stole from the people who were here first. They also dug up some graves and stole some contents as well. But that's for another discussion to quantum or Squanto, as we may have learned about growing up was an English speaking go between from the Wampanoag people to the English settlers. But what

we're not taught is that the reason he knows English is because he was one of the many indigenous people kidnapped back to Europe into slavery. Between Columbus's arrival and the arrival of the Mayflower. He escapes, gets back to his home country, and finds his people practically wiped out from the plague. Which by the way, the Europeans also claimed to be a gift from God, that in wiping out the indigenous population, gave them a place to live and settle. Nice. And then in March of 1621, Massasoit, who is the leader of the Wampanoags, forms an uneasy alliance with the Europeans to protect them from the Narragansetts, who they don't get along with in exchange for mutual protection. They teach them about seeds, planting and harvesting indigenous crops, which is why we have all the foods at the first thanksgiving that the Europeans didn't even know about. Turns out this first thanksgiving in air quotes was actually a harvest festival, which is common in many places throughout the world. And the indigenous community found out about it, and decided to investigate. It was not a banquet they were invited to, according to the myth that we've learned. After that the relationship sours and eventually, Massasoit son who takes over is killed, no more joyous sharing of pumpkin pie between these two groups.

Again, this is just a summary the tip of the iceberg but what I loved about Jasmine's podcast episode and her research is that she also talks about the manufactured myth of thanksgiving and how it was brought to us by the same woman who helps sell Christmas as an American tradition. Sarah Josepha Hale. Now, why do I tell you all this on a podcast about empathy as a competitive advantage? Well, I'm truly not trying to steal your joy about thanksgiving, but to share why it's important to see things honestly, and from others points of view. If you're a member of a native community here in the US, thanksgiving might be pretty damn painful for you. Also, it speaks to the way we've been indoctrinated into systems and traditions that were born from marginalizing and oppressing others. Even if that's not our intent. Now, we need to own that. And those systems are very real today in the form of organizational and systemic racism, xenophobia, and bias. We talk a lot on the show about how to better understand and connect with others who are not like us. We talk about it a lot in the work context, but you understand my sneaky mission, which is really to help you live your lives as more empathetic people. And I should say live our lives as more empathetic people because it's something I'm constantly working on as well. We're trying to connect and understand with others, who have different experiences, perspectives, opinions and beliefs. And we can't have those conversations without acknowledging that one of the country's most revered holidays is a false picture of history, and has roots in oppression. Not to make you feel guilty for sharing a wonderful meal with your loved ones, but rather to help all of us truly embrace gratitude and empathy.

A holiday dedicated to gratitude is not a bad thing. We need to be more thankful for our blessings in my humble opinion. And in doing so we can also show grace and compassion for those whose ancestors were not just hurt, but victimized by colonizers. We can be honest and still honor our own family traditions. We can speak the truth to our kids about what really happened at the first thanksgiving, not to guilt or shame them, but to ensure we understand how we can do better and reached out to others, as family as colleagues, as humans. Just because it's not the truth we grew up with doesn't make it any less true. Please don't be afraid of how our knowledge evolves, even if it means uncomfortable mindset shifts. That's how we get better over time as humans. So, shine the light into the dark places, have honest conversations, shatter facades to replace them with something true, honest and loving. This is equally true in our personal lives, as it is within our work relationships. Only then, can we form

connections and build communities that can truly celebrate, collaborate, and break bread together. If you're celebrating with your family or your friends, I wish you a happy Thanksgiving. And I wish you all the love and peace in the world. Until next time, remember that cashflow? Creativity and compassion are not mutually exclusive. Take care, and be kind.