

# THE *Thanksgiving* PLAY

Written by Larissa Fasthorse  
Directed by Bari Newport



**GABLESTAGE**



# LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to express our acknowledgment of our presence on the ancestral territories of numerous sovereign Native nations, including the Tequesta, Calusa, and today, the Seminole Tribe of Florida, and the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida. We extend our utmost respect to the traditional custodians, both past and present, by wholeheartedly recognizing Indigenous sovereignty and the enduring historical and contemporary bonds between Indigenous peoples and their traditional homelands. I encourage you to continue in your exploration and education of ways to actively support our local Indigenous communities in their endeavors to safeguard Seminole and Miccosukee land and water rights, preserve their cultural heritage, and promote environmental conservation. It is my aspiration that this acknowledgment of the land will serve to deepen our awareness of past wrongs and enable us to address the enduring impacts of violence within our communities, ultimately paving the way for genuine healing.

— Karina Batchelor; Production Dramaturg



# OUR PLAYWRIGHT



**Larissa FastHorse** (Sicangu Lakota Nation) is a 2020 MacArthur Fellow, award winning writer/choreographer, and co-founder of Indigenous Direction, the nation's leading consulting company for Indigenous arts and audiences. Her satirical comedy, *The Thanksgiving Play*, is one of the top ten most produced plays in America this season. She is the first Native American

playwright in the history of American theater on that list and the first Native American woman to have a show on Broadway.

# OUR DIRECTOR

Bari Newport joined GableStage as Producing Artistic Director in April 2021. She came to Miami from the Penobscot Theatre Company in Bangor, Maine, where she served as Artistic Director for nine seasons. Previously, she was artistic associate at the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta, artistic/literary manager at the Pasadena Playhouse, associate producer at Horizon Theatre and associate director of Florida Repertory Theatre. She earned her BFA from the



University of Southern California and MFA from the University of Iowa. Bari is a 20 year member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society and the Actor's Equity Association.



# LARISSA FASTHORSE

INDIAN TRIBES AND LINGUISTIC STOCKS, 1650

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- **Larissa FastHorse began her career as a classically trained ballet dancer and choreographer and was deeply inspired by Maria Tallchief (Osage County), America's first major prima ballerina.**
  - She was heavily influenced by Balanchine's collaborative approach with individual dancers, and this influence is reflected in her plays, which are characterized by a collaborative and movement-based style. FastHorse humorously likens her plays to "dances with furniture."
- **Currently residing in Southern California, Larissa embarked on her writing career by crafting scripts for television and film.**
  - Her writing talents have been put to use in the film industry, including scripting for Universal Pictures and producing two short films, "The Migration" and "A Final Wish."
- **In 2000, Larissa FastHorse served as a delegate at the United Nations in Geneva, where she delivered a speech on the transformative power of film for indigenous peoples and their stories.**

LINGUISTIC STOCKS	
1	Algonquian
2	Archaic
3	Caddoan
4	Catawban
5	Chiricahuan
6	Chiriquian
7	Coahuiltecan
8	Eskimoan
9	Iroquoian (see text)
10	Karankawan
11	Keresan
12	Kiowa-Tanoan
13	Kitunahan
14	Muskogean (see text)
15	Otomian
16	Salishan
17	Shapwailutan
18	Siouan
19	Tamauilpecan
20	Timucuan
21	Tonkawan
22	Tunican
23	Uchean
24	Uto-Aztecan
25	Waicurian
26	Wakashan
27	Yuman
28	Zuñian
29	Small linguistic groups of California and Oregon



The First Thanksgiving at Plymouth, 1914 is an Oil on Canvas Painting created by Jennie Augusta Brownscombe in 1914.



The

# History of Thanksgiving

(it's complicated...)

The origins of Thanksgiving are more complex and often carry a different historical context compared to the traditional American narrative. Many Native American tribes and nations had their own harvest festivals and ceremonies long before the arrival of European settlers. These ceremonies were a way to give thanks for the earth's bounty and often featured traditional dances, feasts, and rituals.

## The First Thanksgiving?

The arrival of the Pilgrims at Plymouth in 1620 marked a pivotal moment in American history, a moment where different worlds converged. The Pilgrims (aka Settlers, Colonialists, Separatists) found themselves in a challenging and unfamiliar environment. They were not alone in this encounter. The Indigenous peoples of the region, the Wampanoags, had long called this land their home, and their presence and knowledge were crucial to the survival of the Pilgrims. The Wampanoag leader, led by the sachem (chief) Ousamequin (erroneously called Massasoit which means Great Sachem) recognized the challenges the newcomers faced and saw an opportunity for an alliance, as the Pilgrims' arrival coincided with increasing threats from other Indigenous groups like the Narragansett (the Wampanoag had lost many of their people due to diseases introduced by the Europeans and were now vulnerable to succumbing to enemy tribes). Thus, a complex, often tenuous relationship emerged, where cultural exchanges and diplomatic negotiations took place.





Illustration depicting Squanto, serving as guide and interpreter for the English Pilgrims at the Plymouth colony, circa 1621.

(Kean Collection/Archive Photos/Getty Images)

In late November of 1621 after nearly half the colony died during a terrible winter, the Pilgrims reaped their first successful harvest, after Tisquantum (aka Squanto) and other indigenous people had taught the Pilgrims how to cultivate the land. Happy to have survived, the pilgrims, hearkening back to celebrations similar to the Harvest Home festivals common in England where farm owners provided a feast for laborers decided to celebrate. The celebrations included: eating, drinking alcohol, and shooting things. They ate water fowl, wild turkeys, venison, fish, shellfish, eels, Indian corneal, maize, and maybe fruit for desert. Interestingly, there seems to be little written about giving thanks and offering prayers as this would have meant fasting and praying.

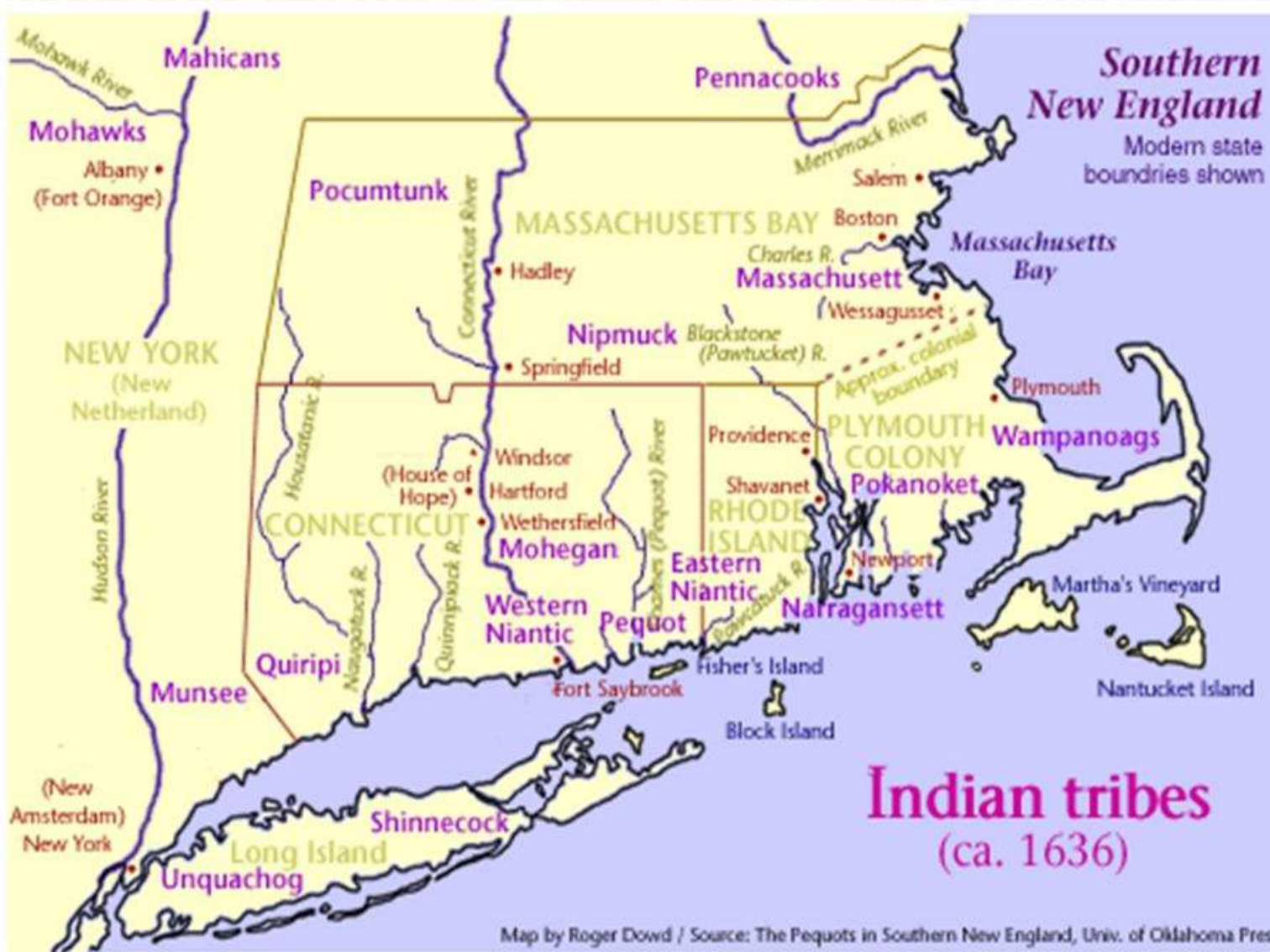
Eventually, the event turned raucous. The men practiced military drills and target practice to such an extent that the Wampanoags thought the Pilgrims were under attack from the Narragansett and arrived in a group of at least 90 ready to defend them. The Pilgrims thought the opposite. They assumed the Wampanoags were there to kill them. Due to their earlier alliance and having lived in proximity to each other where they traded and helped each other, the Wampanoags and the Pilgrims deescalated the situation and acknowledged each other diplomatically. This led to the two groups feasting together to celebrate diplomatic ties between the host country (Wampanoag) and the guest country (the Pilgrims).

## Post-Thanksgiving?

in the New World, tensions escalated over land, resources, and cultural differences. This led The period of amicable coexistence was short-lived. As more European settlers arrived to violent conflicts and a brutal pattern of colonial expansion, where the colonizers, driven by the quest for land and wealth, frequently betrayed their Native allies. The seizure of Native land was one of the most destructive consequences of European colonization. Through a combination of broken treaties, fraudulent land deals, and military conquest, the colonizers dispossessed Native peoples of their ancestral lands. This land theft left Native communities with diminishing territory and resources, severely impacting their way of life.



Moreover, the mistreatment of Native people included imprisonment, enslavement, rape, and murder. The colonizers often viewed Native Americans as obstacles to their expansion, and this dehumanization led to horrifying acts of violence. Native women and children were especially vulnerable to these abuses, as they were often targeted by European settlers. The so-called "Thanksgiving" celebrations that followed were, in many cases, responses to the brutal victories of the colonizers over Native people. The Pequot Massacre of 1637, for instance, was a horrific event where hundreds of Pequot men, women, and children were slaughtered in a surprise attack by the English and their Native allies. This event was not a celebration of gratitude but rather a celebration of conquest. Massachusetts Bay Governor William Bradford designated "a day of thanksgiving kept in all the churches for our victories against the Pequots." It's estimated that about 700 Pequot died that day, most of them women and children.





# 5 INTERESTING FACTS

American Indians have lived in the Western Hemisphere for at least 15,000-20,000 years. Well-developed systems of trails, including some hard-surfaced roads, interlaced the Western Hemisphere prior to European contact.

All of these terms are acceptable and respectful to refer to the indigenous people of America: American Indians, Native Americans, and Native peoples. However, Native Peoples often have individual preferences on how they would like to be addressed. To find out which term is best, ask the person or group which term they prefer.

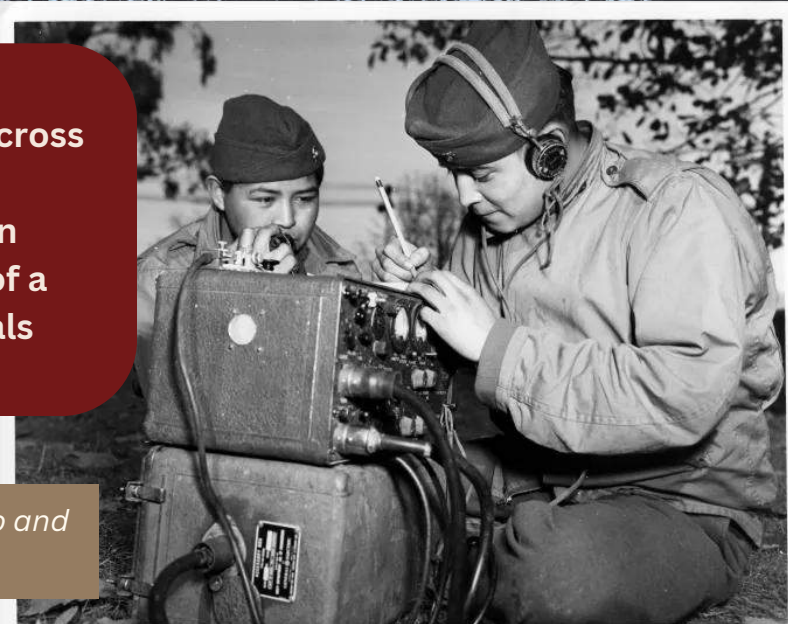
(source: [National Museum of the American Indian](#))

Throughout nearly two centuries, the Seminoles of Florida withstood three conflicts with the U.S. government, thwarted multiple attempts to force their relocation to federal reservations in the Western United States, and eventually established their residence in one of the planet's most unforgiving landscapes— the Florida Everglades.

The Boy Scouts of America grew out of a youth group called the Woodcraft Indians, which promoted "Indianness" as a way to teach Americanness to white boys. (Until last year, Boy Scouts were still allowed to dress up as Indians at official events.)

(source: [The Skinning Tree](#))

In World War II, the Marine Corps used the power of one of the numerous languages across the globe to devise an impregnable code: Navajo. The Navajo language emerged as an ideal choice for a code due to its absence of a written form and its rarity among individuals who are not of Navajo descent.



*Pictured: Navajo Indian Code Talkers Preston Toledo and Frank Toledo*





# DO

- REFER TO NATIVE PEOPLE AS NATIVE AMERICAN OR INDIGENOUS
- TELL STUDENTS NATIVE AMERICANS STILL EXIST
- EXPLAIN WHAT TRIBAL CITIZENSHIP MEANS
- TELL YOUR STUDENTS THE TRUTH ABOUT EUROPEANS COMING TO THE US AND COLONIZATION
- SHOW STUDENTS CONTEMPORARY PHOTOS OF NATIVE PEOPLES
- ACKNOWLEDGE NATIVE PEOPLES DON'T LIVE IN TIPIS AND THAT NOT ALL TRIBES LIVED IN TIPIS
- TELL STUDENTS THE NUMBER OF FEDERALLY RECOGNIZED TRIBES
- ALLOW NATIVE STUDENTS TO TELL THEIR STORY
- WATCH MOLLY OF DENALI
- BE HONEST AND TELL THE TRUTH, LIKE “MANY NATIVE NATIONS WERE FORCED TO LEAVE THEIR LANDS AFTER THE US GOVERNMENT BROKE THEIR TREATIES ”
- ACKNOWLEDGE THAT TRIBAL NATIONS RUN THEIR OWN ECONOMIC SYSTEMS AND REVENUE, AND AS SOVEREIGN NATIONS, THEY ARE ABLE TO SPEND AND GIVE AS THEY SEE FIT
- EXPLAIN WHAT CULTURAL APPROPRIATION IS AND WHY IT IS AN ISSUE
- TALK ABOUT CURRENT EFFORTS BY NATIVE NATIONS TO STRIVE FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY
- ALLOW ALL NATIVE CHILDREN TO WEAR TRADITIONAL REGALIA DURING GRADUATION CEREMONIES

# DO NOT

- PLAY COWBOYS AND INDIANS
- ASK YOUR STUDENTS TO DRESS UP AS NATIVE PEOPLE
- WEAR OR MAKE HEADDRESSES AS AN ACTIVITY
- CONFIRM A CHILD'S TRIBAL HERITAGE IF YOU DON'T KNOW
- THINK THAT A DNA TEST AFFORDS YOU TRIBAL CITIZENSHIP
- ROMANTICIZE NATIVE PEOPLES
- SHOW YOUR STUDENTS POCAHONTAS
- TOKENIZE YOUR NATIVE AMERICAN STUDENTS
- GIVE SPIRIT ANIMAL OR “INDIAN” NAMES TO YOUR STUDENTS
- EXPECT A NATIVE STUDENT TO KNOW ALL OR EXPLAIN ALL THINGS ABOUT NATIVE PEOPLE
- CREATE NATIVE “COSTUMES” AS PART OF A LESSON PLAN
- SAY WE WILLINGLY GAVE OUR LAND AWAY
- SPREAD THE MISCONCEPTION THAT NATIVE PEOPLES RECEIVE “FREE” MONEY/COLLEGE TUITION JUST FOR “BEING NATIVE ”
- TALK ABOUT FRYBREAD AS “TRADITIONAL NATIVE FOOD ”
- USE OR SUPPORT “INDIAN/REDSKIN” MASCOTS

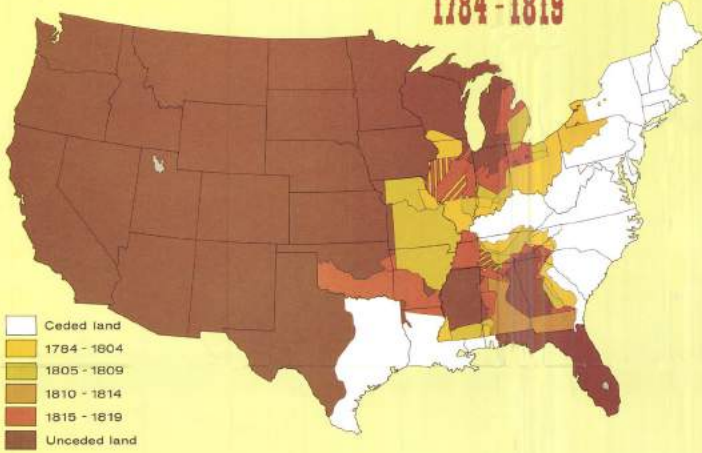
## JOIN THE MOVEMENT

VISIT [WWW.ILLUMINATIVES.ORG/NATIVENOW](http://WWW.ILLUMINATIVES.ORG/NATIVENOW)

THE NATIVE NOW CAMPAIGN IS EDUCATING AMERICANS ON HOW TO TALK IN A RESPECTFUL WAY ABOUT AND WITH NATIVE PEOPLES USE THIS HANDOUT AS A GUIDE TO CONVERSATIONS WITH YOUR CLASSROOM OR WITH FRIENDS

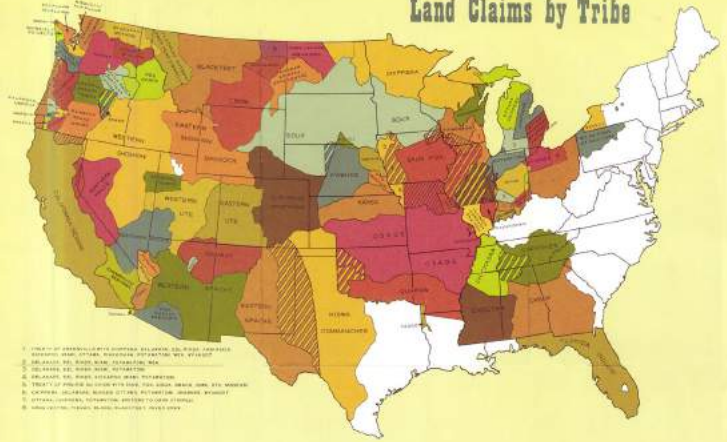


1784 - 1819



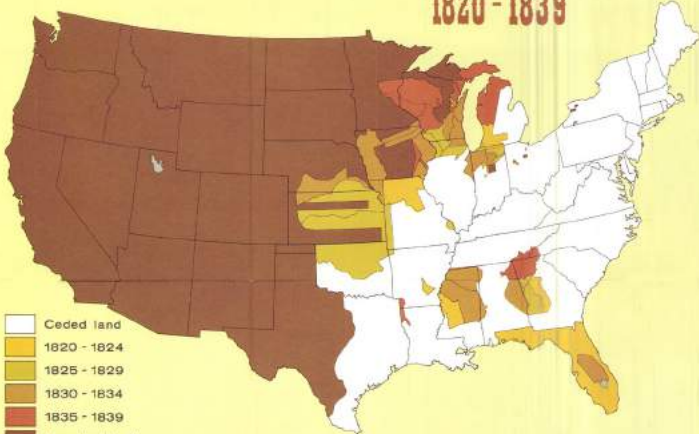
Ceded land  
 1784 - 1804  
 1805 - 1809  
 1810 - 1814  
 1815 - 1819  
 Unceded land

Land Claims by Tribe



1. ILLINOIS AND MISSOURI TERRITORIES, 1809-1812, 1820-1821  
 2. ILLINOIS AND MISSOURI TERRITORIES, 1809-1812, 1820-1821  
 3. ILLINOIS AND MISSOURI TERRITORIES, 1809-1812, 1820-1821  
 4. ILLINOIS AND MISSOURI TERRITORIES, 1809-1812, 1820-1821  
 5. ILLINOIS AND MISSOURI TERRITORIES, 1809-1812, 1820-1821  
 6. ILLINOIS AND MISSOURI TERRITORIES, 1809-1812, 1820-1821  
 7. ILLINOIS AND MISSOURI TERRITORIES, 1809-1812, 1820-1821  
 8. ILLINOIS AND MISSOURI TERRITORIES, 1809-1812, 1820-1821  
 9. ILLINOIS AND MISSOURI TERRITORIES, 1809-1812, 1820-1821  
 10. ILLINOIS AND MISSOURI TERRITORIES, 1809-1812, 1820-1821

1820 - 1839



Ceded land  
 1820 - 1824  
 1825 - 1829  
 1830 - 1834  
 1835 - 1839  
 Unceded land

# INDIAN LAND CESSIONS

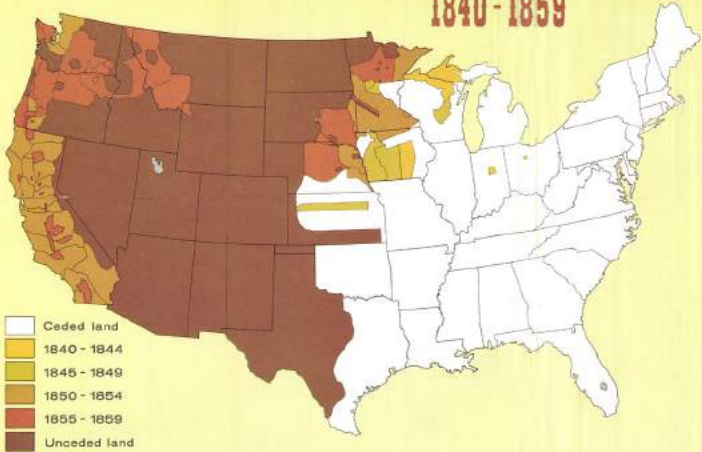
by  
**SAM B. HILLIARD**  
 Louisiana State University

Cartographic Design by  
**Dan Irwin**  
 and staff of the  
 Southern Illinois University Cartographic Laboratory



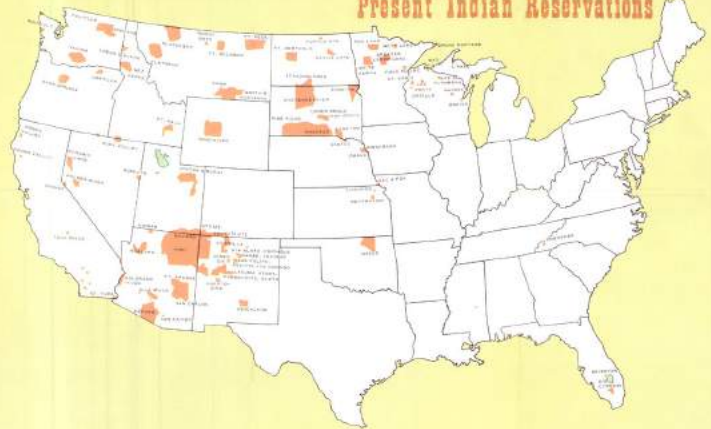
The Indian land cessions in the United States are presented in this map in chronological order. The map is divided into five periods: 1784-1819, 1820-1839, 1840-1859, 1860-1879, and 1880-1972. The map shows the extent of land ceded to the United States and the remaining unceded land. The map is color-coded by year of cession. The map is a valuable resource for understanding the history of Indian land cessions in the United States.

1840 - 1859

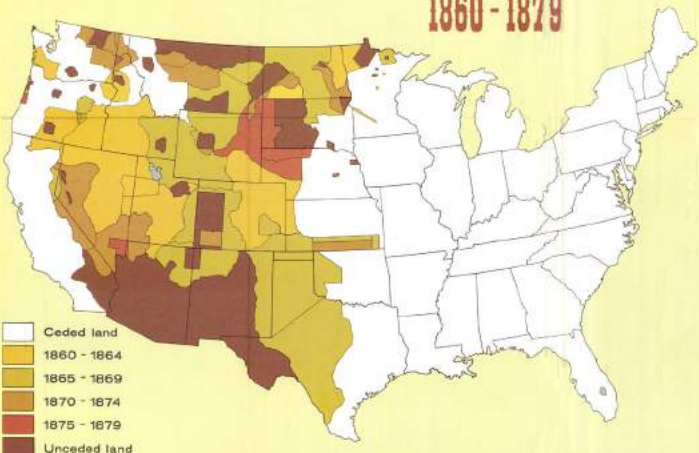


Ceded land  
 1840 - 1844  
 1845 - 1849  
 1850 - 1854  
 1855 - 1859  
 Unceded land

Present Indian Reservations

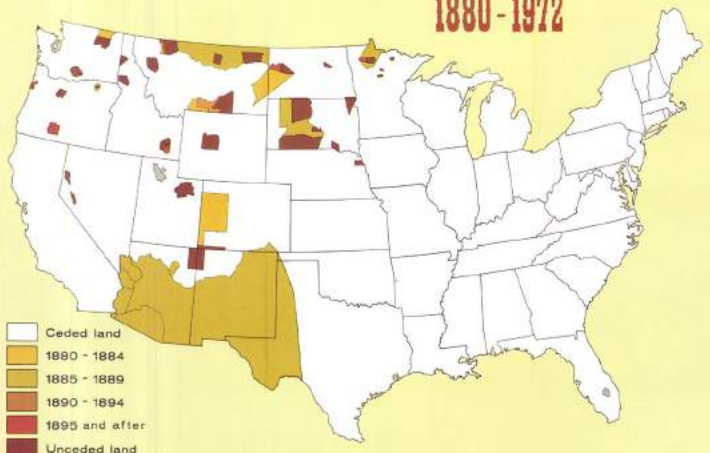


1860 - 1879



Ceded land  
 1860 - 1864  
 1865 - 1869  
 1870 - 1874  
 1875 - 1879  
 Unceded land

1880 - 1972



Ceded land  
 1880 - 1884  
 1885 - 1889  
 1890 - 1894  
 1895 and after  
 Unceded land



# Erasure of

# NATIVE AMERICANS

## "American Progress," by John Gast

Problematic for Native Americans, it embodies the deeply troubling concept of Manifest Destiny, which justified the forced displacement and dispossession of indigenous peoples from their ancestral lands. The portrayal of Native Americans as passive and receding in the face of "Progress" reinforces the harmful notion that they were



obstacles to civilization, while glorifying westward expansion and colonization, ignoring the suffering and injustices endured by indigenous communities. This one-dimensional representation perpetuates cultural insensitivity and erases the rich and diverse cultures and histories of Native Americans, making the painting a troubling symbol of the harmful ideologies that shaped their mistreatment and marginalization in American history.

In 19th-century American theater, American Indian characters maintained a consistent presence, despite the U.S. government's displacement of tribes and push for assimilation into white culture. Instruction acting manuals from the 1820s and 1830s even contained guidance on applying "red face" makeup and portraying Native American characters.

Playing the leading role in *Metamora*, or the Last of the Wampanoags, written by John Augustus Stone, **Edwin Forrest** (a white actor) portrayed a "noble savage." Regrettably, the play reinforced white supremacist ideologies that promoted the false idea of the inevitable decline of Native Americans.





**Lynn Riggs (Cherokee)** stands as the sole other Indigenous playwright recognized in Broadway's rich history. He made his debut in 1927, leaving an indelible mark with six plays gracing the Main Stem until his passing in 1954. Riggs is celebrated for his 1931 masterpiece, "Green Grow the Lilacs," which served as the foundation for Rodgers and Hammerstein's "Oklahoma!" Despite several instances of the musical adaptation's dialogue and scenes mirroring the original play verbatim, Riggs was not acknowledged as the book writer.



Audrey Hepburn in  
*The Unforgiven*, (1960)



Johnny Depp in  
*'The Lone Ranger'* (2013)

**Native  
American  
Appropriation  
in Pop Culture**



Pharrell Williams; *Elle Magazine*  
(2014)



Singer, 'JK' from the U.K. band,  
Jamiraqui



# FURTHER REFERENCES & READING

## Films

- ***Smoke Signals*** (1998) - Directed by Chris Eyre, this film is based on Sherman Alexie's short stories and follows the journey of two Coeur d'Alene Native Americans from Idaho.
- ***Reel Injun*** (2009) - Directed by Neil Diamond, this documentary examines the portrayal of Native Americans in Hollywood films and how these representations have shaped public perception.
- ***Rhymes for Young Ghouls*** (2013) - Directed by Jeff Barnaby, this film delves into the life of a young Mi'kmaq girl in Canada and her struggles with the Indian residential school system.
- ***Mankiller*** (2017)- Directed by Valerie Red-Horse Mohl, this documentary explores the life and legacy of Wilma Mankiller, a groundbreaking leader who played a significant role in the Cherokee Nation.
- ***In the Light of Reverence*** (2001) - Directed by Christopher McLeod, this documentary explores the spiritual and environmental significance of sacred sites in Native American cultures, focusing on the struggles to protect them.
- ***We Still Live Here: Âs Nutayuneân*** (2010)- Directed by Anne Makepeace, this film tells the story of the revival of the Wampanoag language, believed to be extinct for over a century.

## Books

- ***The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*** by Sherman Alexie - This novel, written by a Spokane/Coeur d'Alene author, follows the journey of a young Native American boy who leaves his reservation to attend an all-white high school.
- ***The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee*** by David Treuer - Growing up Ojibwe on a reservation in Minnesota, training as an anthropologist, and researching Native life past and present for his nonfiction and novels, Treuer has uncovered a different narrative. Because they did not disappear—and not despite but rather because of their intense struggles to preserve their language, their traditions, their families, and their very existence—the story of American Indians since the end of the nineteenth century to the present is one of unprecedented resourcefulness and reinvention.
- ***Ceremony*** by Leslie Marmon Silko - This novel tells the story of a Laguna Pueblo man who returns from World War II to confront his cultural and personal traumas.
- ***The Night Watchman*** by Louise Erdrich - Another powerful work by Erdrich, this novel is inspired by the life of her grandfather and highlights the fight against Native American dispossession in the 1950s.



# FURTHER REFERENCES & READING

## TV Shows

- **Reservation Dogs** (2021) - Created by Sterlin Harjo and Taika Waititi, this comedy series offers a fresh perspective on life on a reservation while exploring the lives of four Indigenous teenagers.
- **Rutherford Falls** (2021) - Co-created by Michael Schur, Ed Helms, and Sierra Teller Ornelas, this series features Native American characters and is known for its representation and humor.
- **Molly of Denali** (2019) - A children's animated series that centers on Molly, an Alaska Native girl, and her adventures in Alaska.
- **Trickster** (2020) - Based on the novels by Eden Robinson, this Canadian series follows the life of a young Indigenous man who discovers he has supernatural abilities.
- **Longmire** (2012-2017) - This series, based on the novels by Craig Johnson, features Lou Diamond Phillips as Henry Standing Bear, a Native American character who is the best friend of the main character, Walt Longmire.



**'Reservation Dogs' Season Three: D'Pharaoh Woon-A-Tai as Bear, Dallas Goldtooth as Spirit**



# EXERCISE:

## Physical Destination

*The Thanksgiving Play* revolves around the preparation for an elementary school play about Thanksgiving. Things go wrong rather quickly. Throughout the play, the characters face a series of humorous challenges and conflicts as they strive to create a Thanksgiving play that truly reflects the values of inclusivity and cultural sensitivity while addressing the historical issues surrounding the holiday.

Let's use Uta Hagen's "Three Entrances" exercise to explore the physical and emotional aspects of each character by making three different entrances into a scene.

This exercise allows you to experiment with variations in the character's physical and emotional states as they enter the scene, adding depth and complexity to the character portrayal.

### Instructions:

1. Choose a Scene: Select a scene from *The Thanksgiving Play*. We'd recommend the first scene as that is when most of the characters have their first entrance.
2. Character Preparation: Before starting the scene think about your character's objectives, emotions, and circumstances leading up to the scene. This includes their character's emotional state and any significant events or experiences that might influence their entrance.
3. First Entrance (A): In this round, make the first entrance into the scene following the script and the character's circumstances as closely as possible. Immerse yourself in the character's emotional and physical state leading up to this entrance.
4. Second Entrance (B): In this round, make the second entrance into the same scene. However, this time, make choices that are different from the first entrance. This may involve altering your character's emotional state, physicality, or approach to the scene based on their character's objectives and circumstances.
5. Third Entrance (C): For the third round, make the third entrance into the scene, once again varying your choices from the previous entrances. This could involve a significant shift in your character's emotional and physical state, or a different approach to the scene.
6. Explore how the different entrances affected the character's performance and the overall dynamics of the scene. This discussion can lead to valuable insights and adjustments for the final scene performance.



# EXERCISE:

## 9 Questions

**Uta Hagen's "Nine Questions"** are a set of fundamental questions that you can use as a guide to understand your character and their motivations more deeply. These questions help to create a well-rounded, fully realized characters by delving into the character's thoughts, emotions, and actions.

**As one of the characters in *The Thanksgiving Play***, answer the following questions using the play as a guide:

### **WHO AM I?**

Include all the details about your character like name, age, address, relatives, hobbies, career, description of physical traits, opinions, beliefs, religion, education, origins, enemies, loved ones, sociological influences, etc. How do I perceive myself?

### **WHAT TIME IS IT?**

Century, season, year, day, minute? What is the significance of time? Does it matter?

### **WHERE AM I?**

Country, city, neighborhood, home, room, area of room.

### **WHAT SURROUNDS ME?**

Think about the complete details of your environment. The immediate landscape? The weather? The condition of the place and the nature of the objects in it?

### **WHAT ARE THE GIVEN CIRCUMSTANCES?**

What has just happened and how is it affecting how I enter this new space or scene?

### **WHAT IS MY RELATIONSHIP?**

How do I stand in relationship to the circumstances, the place, the objects, and the other people related to my circumstances?

### **WHAT DO I WANT?**

My character's need - the immediate and main objective.

### **WHAT IS IN MY WAY?**

The obstacles which prevent my character from getting their ultimate need.

### **WHAT DO I DO TO GET WHAT I WANT?**

The action: physical and verbal. How can I achieve my objective? What's my behavior? What are my actions? How far am I willing to go?