Thanksgiving: A Celebration of Harvest and History

Thanksgiving is a holiday that stems from a combination of Native American harvest festivals and English customs. Native American tribes throughout North America observed various ceremonies to express gratitude for their prosperous harvests, often marked with feasting and merrymaking. In England, "Harvest Home" or "Harvest Festival" had been a long-standing tradition dating back to medieval times, dedicated to giving thanks for a successful harvest. However, the most notable "First Thanksgiving" took place in 1621, when Pilgrims in Plymouth, Massachusetts celebrated a bountiful harvest with a three-day feast, together with the Wampanoag Native Americans.

Sarah Josepha Hale, a renowned 19th-century writer, played a vital role in advocating for a national Thanksgiving holiday by writing numerous letters to American leaders. Abraham Lincoln eventually declared Thanksgiving a national holiday in 1863 during the Civil War, fostering unity during a tumultuous period. Since then, Thanksgiving has become an essential aspect of American culture, a day to reflect, express gratitude, and bond with loved ones.

However, Thanksgiving's history is complicated and has been associated with the mass genocide of Native Americans and the theft of their land. Thanksgiving is often linked with the arrival of European settlers, which led to the colonization of Native American lands, forced removals, and a history of exploitation. This history can evoke painful memories and feelings of injustice, in part due to the lack of awareness and education on the actual history behind this day. Although some Native Americans have opted to reject the holiday entirely, many have decided to put aside the complex history and celebrate the positive messages.