##### Università di Firenze Dipartimento di Formazione, Lingue, Intercultura, Letterature e Psicologia

##### Corso in Lingua e Cultura degli U.S.A. John Gilbert

**Thanksgiving?**

Bartolomè de Las Casas (1474-1566), *Historia de las Indias: “What we committed in the Indies stands out among the most unpardonable offenses ever committed against God and mankind and this trade* (in Indian slaves) *as one of the most unjust, evil, and cruel among them.”*

English King James I (1566-1625) gave thanks to *“Almighty God in his great goodness and bounty towards us”* for sending *“this wonderful plague among the savages”* before the Mayflower sailed in 1620.

“Mather the Elder”, in a sermon delivered at Plymouth in 1623, gave special thanks to God for the devastating plague of smallpox which wiped out the majority of the Wampanoag Indians who had been the Pilgrims’ benefactors. He praised God for destroying *"chiefly young men and children, the very seeds of increase, thus clearing the forests to make way for a better growth.”*

In 1634, John Winthrop, Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, wrote: *“But for the Natives in these parts, God hath so pursued them, as for 300 miles space the greatest part of them are swept away by the smallpox which still continues among them. So as God hath thereby cleared our title to this place, …”*

In 1636, the colonialists unleashed all-out war on the Pequot nation, who occupied what is now Rhode Island and southern Connecticut. In one massacre alone, Puritan theologian Cotton Mather boasted, *"no less than 600 Pequot souls were brought down to hell that day."*

In 1637, 700 or so Pequot men (mostly elderly), women and children were burned alive when their village was set on fire. Those who tried to escape were shot down and those who could not burned alive. As the massacre took place, the Governor of Plymouth Colony, William Bradford commented:

*"It was a fearful sight to see them thus frying in the fire and the streams of blood quenching the same, and horrible was the stink and scent thereof; but the victory seemed a sweet sacrifice, and they gave praise thereof to God, who had wrought so wonderfully for them."*

In February of 1643, a rumor about a stolen pig set the Dutch colonists and soldiers on a blood rampage from northern New Jersey to Long Island. According to *The Narratives of New Netherlands* (a historic log of accounts and events kept by the Dutch in the 1600s) a series of raids took place over three days:

*"Young children, some of them snatched from their mothers, were cut in pieces before the eyes of their parents, and the pieces were thrown into the fire or into the water; other babes were bound on planks and then cut through, stabbed and miserably massacred, so that it would break a heart of stone; some were thrown into the river and when the fathers and mothers sought to save them, the soldiers would not suffer them to come ashore but caused both old and young to be drowned. Some children of from 5 to 6 years of age, as also some infirm persons, who had managed to hide themselves, but were all murdered in cold blood and thrown into the fire or the water. A few escaped to our settlers, some with loss of hand, others of a leg, others again holding in their bowels with their hands, and all so cut, hacked and maimed, that worse could not be imagined...."*

Malcolm X (1925-65) once quipped with reference to African Americans: *“We did not land on Plymouth Rock. Plymouth Rock landed on us.”*

James Baldwin (1924-87): *“American history is longer, larger, more various, more beautiful, and more terrible than anything anyone has ever said about it.”*