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

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

“An Intercultural Approach to North American History, Language and Culture”

“Native Americans and Thanksgiving”

The following statement was released in 1997 by the United American Indians of New England to explain why

they were holding the National Day of Mourning in Plymouth, Massachusetts. Police viciously attacked that demonstration and arrested 25 people.

Instructions: reconstruct the statement by putting the paragraphs back in the right order.

\_\_1\_\_ A. Every year since 1970, United American Indians of New England have organized the National Day of Mourning observance in Plymouth at noon on Thanksgiving Day. Every year, hundreds of Native people and our supporters from all four directions join us. Every year, including this year, Native people from throughout the Americas will speak the truth about our history and about current issues and struggles we are involved in.

\_\_2\_\_ B. Why do hundreds of people stand out in the cold rather than sit home eating turkey and watching football? Do we have something against a harvest festival?

\_\_\_\_\_ C. One of the very first things they did when they arrived on Cape Cod -- before they even made it to Plymouth -- was to rob Wampanoag graves at Corn Hill and steal as much of the Indians' winter provisions of corn and beans as they were able to carry. They were no better than any other group of Europeans when it came to their treatment of the Indigenous peoples here. And no, they did not even land at that sacred shrine called Plymouth Rock, a monument to racism and oppression.

\_\_\_\_\_ D. When we dare to stand up for our rights, we are considered unreasonable. When we speak the truth about the history of the European invasion, we are often told to "go back where we came from." Our roots are right here. They do not extend across any ocean.

\_\_\_\_\_ E. The truth is a sharp contrast to that mythology.

\_\_\_\_\_ F. The first official "Day of Thanksgiving" was proclaimed in 1637 by Gov. Winthrop. He did so to celebrate the safe return of men from the Massachusetts Bay Colony who had gone to Mystic, Connecticut, to participate in the massacre of over 700 Pequot women, children and men. About the only true thing in the whole mythology is that these pitiful European strangers would not have survived their first several years in "New England" were it not for the aid of Wampanoag people. What Native people got in return for this help was genocide, theft of our lands and never-ending repression. We are treated either as quaint relics from the past, or are, to most people, virtually invisible.

\_\_\_\_\_ G. According to this myth, the pilgrims arrived, the Native people fed them and welcomed them, the Indians promptly faded into the background and everyone lived happily ever after.

\_\_\_\_\_ H. National Day of Mourning began in 1970 when a Wampanoag man, Wamsutta Frank James, was asked to speak at a state dinner celebrating the 350th anniversary of the pilgrim landing. He refused to speak false words in praise of the white man for bringing civilization to us poor heathens. Native people from throughout the Americas came to Plymouth, where they mourned their forebears who had been sold into slavery, burned alive, massacred, cheated and mistreated since the arrival of the pilgrims in 1620.

\_\_\_\_\_ I. The myth of Thanksgiving, served up with dollops of European superiority and manifest destiny, just does not work for many people in this country. As Malcolm X once said about the African American experience in America, "We did not land on Plymouth Rock. Plymouth Rock landed on us." Exactly.

\_\_\_\_\_ J. The pilgrims -- who did not even call themselves pilgrims -- did not come here seeking religious freedom; they already had that in Holland. They came here as part of a commercial venture. They introduced sexism, racism, anti-lesbian and gay bigotry, jails, and the class system to these shores.

\_\_\_\_\_ K. Of course not. But Thanksgiving in this country -- particularly in Plymouth -- is much more than a harvest home festival. It is a celebration of the pilgrim mythology.

\_\_\_\_\_ L. The pilgrims are glorified and mythologized because the circumstances of the first English-speaking colony in Jamestown were frankly too ugly -- for example, they turned to cannibalism to survive -- to hold up as an effective national myth. The pilgrims did not find an empty land any more than Columbus "discovered" anything. Every inch of this land is Indian land.