

### Thanksgiving: A Shift of Consciousness

One of my favorite holidays has always been Thanksgiving. Of all of the major national holidays, it seems the least commercialized. Traditionally, Thanksgiving is a celebration of the *Mayflower* pilgrims arriving in the “New World” and sharing in a feast with the Indigenous people.

Author, Nikole Hannah-Jones, writes *“Four Hundred years ago, in 1620, a cargo ship lowered its anchor on the eastern shore of North America. It had spent sixty-six grueling days on the perilous Atlantic Ocean, and its 102 passengers fell into praise as they spotted land for the first time in more than two months.*

*These Puritans had fled England in search of religious freedom. We know all their names, names such as James Chilton, Frances Cook, and Mary Brewster. Their descendants proudly trace their lineage back to the group that established self-governance in the “New World” (that is, among the white population – Indigenous people were already governing themselves).*

*They arrived on the Mayflower, a vessel that has been called ‘one of the most important ships in American history.’ Every fall, regaled by stories of the courageous Pilgrims, elementary school children whose skin is peach, tan, and chestnut fashion black captain hats from paper to dress up like the passengers on the Mayflower. Our country has wrapped a national holiday around the Pilgrims’ story, ensuring the Mayflower’s mythical place in the American narrative.*

*But a year before the Mayflower, in 1619, another ship dropped anchor on the eastern shore of North America. Its name was the White Lion, and it, too, would become one of the most important ships in American history. And yet there is not ship manifest inscribed with the names of its passengers and not descendants’ society. These people’s arrival was deemed so insignificant, their humanity so inconsequential, that we do not know even how many of those packed into the White Lion’s hull came ashore, just some ‘20 and odd Negroes’ disembarked and joined the British colonists in Virginia.”....“This ‘cargo’, this group of twenty to thirty Angolans, sold from the deck of the White Lion by criminal English marauders in exchange for food and supplies, was also foundational to the American story. But while every American child learns about the Mayflower, virtually no American child learns about the White Lion.*

*And yet the story of the White Lion is classically American. It is a harrowing tale – one filled with all the things that this country would rather not remember, a taint on a nation that believes above all else in its exceptionality.*

*The Adams and Eves of Black America did not arrive here in search of freedom or a better life. They had been captured and stolen, forced into a ship,*

*shackled, writhing in filth as they suffered and starved. Some 40 percent of the Angolans who boarded that ghastly vessel did not make it across the Middle Passage. They embarked not as people but as property, sold to white colonists who just were beginning to birth democracy for themselves, commencing a four-hundred-year struggle between the two opposing ideas foundational to America.*

*And so the White Lion has been relegated to what (Lerone Bennett, Jr. in his sweeping history Before the Mayflower, published in 1962) called the ‘back alley of American history.’ There are no annual classroom commemorations of that moment in August, 1619. No children dress up as its occupants or perform classroom skits. No holiday honors it. The White Lion and the people on the ship have been expunged from our collective memory. This omission is intentional: when we are creating a shared history, what we [choose to] remember is just as revelatory as what we [choose to] forget. If the Mayflower was the advent of American freedom, then the White Lion was the advent of American slavery. And so while arriving just a year apart, one ship and its people have been immortalized, the other completely erased.”<sup>1</sup>*

This is just one example of the importance critical race theory can play in the healing of our nation’s racial division. I lift up to you the book “*Four Hundred Souls: A Community History of African America. 1619 -2019.*” to discover and learn more of our forgotten history. I also invite you to be part of the Racial Justice Team’s Advent offering, a book study of Dr. Drew Hart’s, “*Who Will Be A Witness*”. ([Register here.](#))

This Thanksgiving, I pray our celebrations include the recognition and honoring of the *White Lion* and its passengers. As we give thanks for our many blessings, may we commit ourselves to God’s justice, to all truth, and an end to racial violence and oppression.

Shalom,  
Anne Cormier

1 Hannah-Jones, Nikole “Arrival” in *Four Hundred Souls: A Community History of African America. 1619 -2019.* Ed by Ibram X. Kendi and Keisha N. Blain. One World, NY. 2021