by Larissa Fasthorse directed by Dee covington

October 31 – December 15

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Dear Rainbow Room Parents,

This year, we have decided to change up our traditional preschool Thanksgiving curriculum! Rather than focusing on what the students are grateful for, we'll be using our circle storytime to highlight the ways America has marginalized and disenfranchised our native peoples! We've been learning all about the Keystone Pipeline and the Trail of Tears this week! Next week, we'll be spotlighting voter suppression laws and lack of healthcare on Reservations!

I know what you're thinking and you're right – it is impossible for us to cover the full depth of this systemic and generations-long oppression in our short storytime in class! So, we'll be sending home a few "fun topics" you can discuss with the whole family around your Thanksgiving tables this year! What a fun holiday activity!

Gobble, gobble!

Miss Julianne Miss Kiki

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

I'm thankful to once again be directing a play for the holiday slot. I'm thankful it's a play dealing with racial inequalities. I mean, who better to direct a play about cultural appropriation and co-opted narrative than a white woman wearing Buddhist prayer beads and sipping chai on the front porch of her little casa in Mexico. I certainly do have a cornucopia of advantages.

Such are the interesting times in which we live. Times where the act of examining white privilege, cultural differences, and bias has become not only important, but crucial to the momentum of social justice and the continuing fight for equality. Today is the day. White people must show up as more than allies. We must stand together and fight against the indignations unjustly placed upon people of color, people living with the label of 'other.' We have an elevated sense of responsibility in all aspects of our world- as artists, as neighbors, as global citizens.

So what happens when we white folx think we've got the conversation all figured out? When we confuse being 'woke' for being complete? Well, it appears *The Thanksgiving Play* happens. Sometimes it's just true that we have merely enough awareness to be dangerous, or at least comedic. Our best efforts at checking all the boxes become a ridiculous attempt to navigate terrain for which we have no map. We're just so dreadfully new at taking ourselves out of the center of the narrative. This is uncharted territory. The bravest among us have left the shore. But where do we go from here? Our best intentions become muddled with fear and anxiety that we will misstep or misspeak or, worst of all, offend. This play gives us the opportunity to watch as characters humorously get it all wrong while trying so desperately to do it all right. Indeed, that's what makes it so funny; someone else is slipping on the banana peel. Yet, perhaps while we watch them fall we find some way of seeing ourselves as both a part of the problem and the solution. In this place of 'bothness' we can laugh and learn. It's messy and scary and necessary for us to hold the dissonance. It's time we take a non-binary approach to solving delicate and complex problems. It's time to get comfortable being uncomfortable. May our humble, bumbling characters show us the way. Beyond what we think we know there is always more to discover. And that's something for which to truly be thankful.



Dee Covington Director



To learn more about *The Thanksgiving Play*, go to our Go Deeper section on the Curious website: **Curious Theatre.org/event/the-thanksgiving-play**

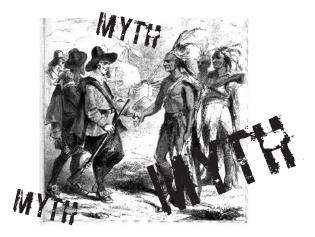
THE MYTHS AND COMPLEXITIES OF THANKSGIVING

If you grew up in the US, chances are you donned a Pilgrim hat or a construction paper headdress the fourth week of November each year in grade school. The idyllic image of Native Americans and Pilgrims coming together for a shared feast to celebrate the harvest is ingrained in our cultural norms; it's something we all feel warm and cozy about, right? Wrong. Thanksgiving is, in fact, a holiday rife with inaccurate, stereotypical, and whitewashed imagery and history. The tale that continues to perpetuate in our society and our schools is historically false and deeply troubling.

So what's the real story? What are we actually celebrating when we celebrate Thanksgiving?

In 1620, the pilgrims (a term not coined until two and a half centuries later) left the religious freedom of Holland seeking to establish a religious theocracy and make money in the New World. The Mayflower landed in Patuxet, an established Native village of the Wampanoag tribe. The pilgrims found a lovely place to settle with a village in place and fields already cleared. Smallpox brought from other Europeans had already wiped out the indigenous people who farmed this area.

Some historical documents suggest the colonists did hold a harvest celebration in 1621 after one year on the land. The leader of the Wampanoag tribe may have been in attendance with members of the tribe. Even if this is accurate, this feast did not mark a friendly turning point in colonist/Native relations nor become an annual event. Tensions between the groups escalated afterward into what is known as the Pequot war.



In 1637, six hundred Native people were massacred by the Massachusetts Bay and Plymouth colonies. The colonists celebrated this slaughtering with a day of thanksgiving and feasting.

It wasn't until the 1830s that these two feasts were looked back upon and collectively called "The First Thanksgiving." That title is doubly problematic as the Wampanoag people did participate in seasonal thanksgivings for thousands of years prior to the colonists' arrival. The holiday was made official in 1863 when President Abraham Lincoln declared it a national holiday.

In our school systems, Native American traditions and regalia represented in books and art about Thanksgiving are based on depictions of tribes from the Great Plains area, which were very different than those of the Wampanoag and tribes that lived on the northeast coast. These depictions are historically inaccurate and, even more offensive, the crafts often assigned to school children in celebration of the holiday use paper bags to create the ceremonial and sacred regalia of Native Americans. To many Native people, this season represents a celebration based on the genocide of their people, the theft of their lands, and the continued marginalization of their culture.

Knowing this, what do we do with the Thanksgiving holiday? There are a variety of approaches among Native people and many ways to incorporate truth into "traditional" Thanksgiving celebrations.

Some Native people choose to commemorate The National Day of Mourning, acknowledging the loss of so many indigenous people to war, disease, and slavery as well as to protest the way Thanksgiving has been misrepresented and glorified in our culture. Others choose to celebrate the contributions of the Wampanoag people and recognize their contributions to our country.

As many Native traditions include continuous giving of thanks or other specific celebrations, there are some groups that don't acknowledge the day at all. Others choose to combine some Western Thanksgiving practices with acknowledgment and gratitude that they still remain.

What is clear is that most Native people, if they choose to celebrate this holiday at all, do so in a revised way. Learning from that, many non-Native individuals and groups have adopted practices to dismantle the prevailing narrative and acknowledge the complex history of Thanksgiving. Want to take a cue from their learnings? Here's where to start.

- Recognize that it is not a day of Thanksgiving for all Americans and include that acknowledgement in your family traditions.
- Use the day to learn more about Native history. Remove and replace images that further stereotype or negate the sacred nature of indigenous people.
- November is Native American Heritage Month. The month is a time to celebrate rich and diverse cultures, traditions, and histories and to acknowledge the important contributions of Native people; partake in this celebration.
- Some choose to skip the holiday as a form of activism and call to action. Consider gathering at a site that acknowledges atrocities committed against Native people such as the site of the Sand Creek Massacre here in Colorado.
- Volunteer or donate to Native cultural and community groups, support organizations, or schools; understand their needs first.
- We were all indigenous somewhere; learn about your own cultural history and consider incorporating practices of the harvest, gratitude, and giving thanks from your own heritage in place of the dominant culture holiday.



To learn more about *The Thanksgiving Play*, go to our Go Deeper section on the Curious website: **CuriousTheatre.org/event/the-thanksgiving-play**

SURIOUS THEATRE SOMPANY

presents

THE THANKSGIVING PLAY

by Larissa FastHorse Directed by **Dee Covington***

CAST

Emily Ebertz, *Logan* **John Jurcheck***, *Jaxton* Adriane Leigh Robinson*, *Alicia* Matthew Schneck*, *Caden*

> SETTING High school drama room.

This play will be performed without an intermission.

PRODUCTION TEAM

Set Design by Charles Dean Packard Initial Costume Concept by **Kevin Brainerd**** Costume Design by Linda Morken Lighting Design by Willow McGinty Sound Design by Ashley Campbell Props Design by Donna Kanne Stage Manager, Stephanie M. Holmes* Assistant Stage Manager, Isaac Fowler Scenic Construction, You Want What Productions Board Operator, Lisa Tinker Run Crew, Frieda Celeste

The Thanksgiving Play is presented by special arrangement with SAMUEL FRENCH, INC. Playwrights Horizons, Inc., New York City, produced the World Premiere of *The Thanksgiving Play* in 2018

The Thanksgiving Play was commissioned and originally produced by Artists Repertory Theatre Damaso Rodriguez, Artistic Director; Sarah Horton, Managing Director Portland, Oregon

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> **Bold** = Curious Artistic Company Member *Member of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States. **Member of United Scenic Artists, Local USA 829 IATSE





Emily Ebertz (Logan) is making her Curious debut. She was most recently seen as Mrs. Lovett in Equinox Theatre Company's *Sweeney Todd*. Some of her other Denver acting credits include Hedy Lamarr in *Stand Still and Look Stupid*, June Cleveland in *The Mrs*. *Wheatland Pageant*, Mary Lane in *Reefer*

Madness: The Musical, Linda in *Evil Dead: The Musical*, and Don Pedro in *Much Ado About Nothing*. She was born and raised in Minnesota and is a graduate of Luther College in Decorah, IA.



John Jurcheck, (Jaxton) most recently played Rick in *Building The Wall* at Curious this summer, and has also appeared as David in *The Luckiest People* and *Your Best One*, Timothy in *Hand to God*, Sam in *The Flick*, Stevie in *Good People*, Big Stone in *Eurydice*, Wesley in *Curse of the Starving Class*,

Cuffs in *The Denver Project* and Shane Mungitt in *Take Me Out*. Other local credits include Idris Goodwin's *This Is Modern Art* (DCPA Off-Center), *Metamorphoses* (The Avenue Theater), *Bus Stop* (Paragon Theatre), *Wall of Water* (Hunger Artists) and several seasons with Stories on Stage. John has also performed at the Chance Theater in Los Angeles, at The Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and got his professional start acting, singing, dancing and flying for three seasons with the San Diego Children's Theatre. John has served in many capacities at Curious over the years; and has been a member of the Artistic Company for more than a decade. John and his wife Courtney founded Denver Collaborative Events.



Adriane Leigh Robinson (Alicia) is making her Curious debut in this production of *The Thanksgiving Play*. Adriane was last seen as Olivia in *Miss You Like Hell* at The Aurora Fox. Recent credits include: Casey in *First Date* (DCPA Theatre Company); Sally in *Cabaret* (Miner's Alley Playhouse); Anne in

Swing, Morticia in *The Addams Family Musical*, Louise in *Gypsy* (Little Theatre of the Rockies); and Mimi in *Rent* (VA Theatrix).



Matthew Schneck (Caden) was previously seen at Curious in *The Intelligent Homosexual's Guide...* Matthew made his Broadway debut in *London Assurance* (nominated for 4 Tony Awards) and since moving to Colorado in 2017, he has performed in: *Bite Size* (Denver Center Theatre Company – Off-Center);

The Rape of the Sabin Women (Local Theatre Company, Henry Award Nomination); Julius Caesar, The Taming of the Shrew, Love's Labour's Lost, Henry VI Part iii, and Cyrano de Bergerac (all at The Colorado Shakespeare Festival). Selected acting credits include: The Merchant of Venice (The Royal Shakespeare Company – featuring F. Murray Abraham); The Temperamentals (New World Stages – Drama Desk Award Winner); A 12lb. Discourse (SoHo Rep, co-wrote and co-performed); The Little Foxes (Shakespeare Theatre of D.C. – featuring Elizabeth Ashley); Noises Off (Playmakers Rep); and Major Barbara (San Jose Rep – Dean Goodman Choice Award for Best Supporting Performance). He is a graduate of Villanova University and The National Theatre Conservatory, is the author of twelve plays, and has held academic appointments at Southern Oregon University and The University of Kentucky. Matthew currently teaches Acting and Directing at University of Colorado-Denver and is a Teaching Artist at The Denver Center for The Performing Arts.

Larissa FastHorse (Playwright) is Sicangu Lakota and an award winning playwright. Larissa's produced plays include The Thanksgiving Play (Playwrights Horizons, Artists Rep), What Would Crazy Horse Do? (KCRep, Relative Theatrics), Urban Rez (Cornerstone Theater Company, ASU Gammage, NEFA National tour 2019-20), Landless and Cow Pie Bingo (AlterTheater), Average Family (Children's Theater Company of Minneapolis), Teaching Disco Squaredancing to Our Elders: a Class Presentation (Native Voices at the Autry), Vanishing Point (Eagle Project) and Cherokee Family Reunion (Mountainside Theater). Additional theaters that have commissioned or developed plays with Larissa include Yale Rep, History Theater, Kennedy Center TYA, Baltimore's Center Stage, Arizona Theater Company, Mixed Blood, Perseverance Theater Company, The Lark Playwrights Week, the Center Theatre Group Writer's Workshop and Berkeley Rep's Ground Floor. Larissa's awards include the PEN/Laura Pels Theater Award for an American Playwright, NEA Distinguished New Play Development Grant, Joe Dowling Annamaghkerrig Fellowship, AATE Distinguished Play Award, Inge Residency, Sundance/ Ford Foundation Fellowship, Aurand Harris Fellowship, the UCLA Native American Program Woman of the Year and numerous Creative Capital, Ford, Mellon and NEA Grants. Larissa is the vice chair of the board of directors of Theater Communications Group and represented by Jonathan Mills at Paradigm NY.

Dee Covington (Director) is a founding member of Curious Theatre Company. Dee's selected directing credits at Curious include *The Humans, Your Best One, Hand to God*, the three-part *The Brother/Sister Plays, Collapse, Dead Man's Cell Phone, Speech & Debate*, and *The Denver Project*. As an actor, Dee was last seen as Claire in *Sanctions*. Other noted Curious acting credits include Empty in *The Intelligent Homosexual's Guide...*,Toni in *Appropriate*, Roz in *White* *Guy on the Bus*, Margaret in *Good People*, Veronica in *God of Carnage*, Bev/Kathy in *Clybourne Park* (Denver Post Ovation Nominee, Supporting Actress in a Play), and The Homebody in *Homebody/Kabul* (Best of Westword, Best Contemporary Monologue). She is also the program director for Curious New Voices, our nationally recognized youth playwriting program, currently celebrating its 16th season.

Linda Morken (Costume Designer) is the resident designer for Boulder Dinner Theatre Stage. Linda has designed and worked on many regional as well as national productions including several that have won awards including three Colorado Theatre Guild Henry Awards, two Denver Post Ovation awards for continued excellence in costume design, Boulder Daily Camera's Best of Boulder, Marlow Awards as well as multiple award nominations. Linda previously designed Skeleton Crew at Curious. A longtime Colorado resident, Linda is originally from Minnesota and holds a Bachelor degree from North Dakota State University.

Ashley Campbell (Sound Design) is a Henry-nominated Sound Designer who is working on her first play with Curious. Her previous credits include *The Revolutionists* (BETC), *The Wolves* (BETC), *Tiny Beautiful Things* (BETC), *1984* (Benchmark) to name a few. She graduated from the University of Denver in 2017 with a major in theatre and plans to go back to school to get her MFA in Sound Design for Theatre & Immersive Entertainment next year.

Stephanie M. Holmes (Stage Manager) is joining Curious for her first production. Her most notable credits include Broadway: *Rodgers and Hammerstein's Cinderella;* Off-Broadway: *The Liar* (Classic Stage Company); Regional: *Mamma Mia!* (Lake Dillon Theatre Company), *Matilda, Shakespeare in Love* (Fine Arts Center Theatre Company),

The Black Clown, Waitress (American Repertory Theatre), and *Heartbreak House* (Hartford Stage Company). She has a BFA in Stage Management, Syracuse University.

Donna Kanne (Props Design) is back at Curious after designing for *Pass Over, Sanctions, Skeleton Crew, The Humans*, and *The Cake*. Her other designs include *The Spitfire Grill* and *The Oldest Boy* for Vintage Theatre. Donna received her BFA in Theatre from Metropolitan State University of Denver.

Willow McGinty (Lighting Designer) is a life-long resident of Colorado, who earned their BFA in Applied Theatre Technology and Design from MSU Denver in 2017. At Curious Theatre Company, Willow has contributed their skills as a designer to Curious New Voices and Denver Stories in addition to several full length productions as an electrician. Other design credits include *She Kills Monsters* and *The Country Wife* at MSU Denver, as well as *Firebringers* with Boulder Opera.

Charles Dean Packard (Scenic Design) was the Executive Producer at the Aurora Fox for many years. Notable productions include *Metamorphoses*, *The Color Purple*, and *Black Elk Speaks*. Over the past 20 years, Charles has provided designs for many area theaters including The Fox, Curious, Phamaly, and Magic Moments. He has been nominated for and won numerous awards including the Henry award for *Metamorphoses* and the True West Award for Phamaly's *The Wiz*. His work last appeared on the Curious stage for *Skeleton Crew*. One of his career favorites, *Bug*, was also here at Curious.

Chip Walton (Producing Artistic Director) co-founded Curious Theatre Company in 1997 and has served as Producing Artistic Director for the entire history of the organization. Named Denver's "2005 Theatre Person of the Year," he has directed 50 shows for Curious over the past 21 years and his work has garnered more than 100 local and national awards. In 2008, Curious was honored with the Mayor's Award for Excellence in the Arts. Chip has served as the President and Vice President of the National New Play Network, a network of professional, non-profit theatres across the country dedicated to the development and production of new plays for the American theatre. Chip was also selected in the inaugural class of the Bonfils-Stanton Foundation Livingston Fellows, recognizing exceptional non-profit leaders with significant potential for contribution, change and leadership in Colorado's nonprofit sector; additionally, he served on the Board of Directors of the Bonfils-Stanton Foundation as their first Community Trustee. Chip has participated in the Visiting Professionals program at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center, as well as serving on the Leadership Group for Imagine 2020: Creating a Future for Denver's Culture. He has directed in the National New Play Network Showcase of New Plays, the Kennedy Center's MFA Playwriting Festival in Washington, D.C., and accepted a National Theatre Company Award in New York for Curious from the prestigious American Theatre Wing. Most recently, Chip was honored to serve as a 2017 Aspen Ideas Festival Speaker.

Actors' Equity Association ("AEA" or "Actors' Equity"), founded in 1913, represents more than 49,000 actors and stage managers in the United States. Equity seeks to advance, promote and foster the art of live theatre as an essential component of our society. Equity negotiates wages and working conditions, providing a wide range of benefits, including health and pension plans. AEA is a member of the AFL-CIO, and is affiliated with FIA, an international organization of performing arts unions. The Equity emblem is our mark of excellence. www.actorsequity.org

Playwrights Horizons (World Premiere Venue for *The Thanksgiving Play*) is dedicated to cultivating the most important American playwrights, composers, and lyricists, as well as developing and producing their bold new plays and musicals. Tim Sanford became Artistic Director in 1996 and Leslie Marcus has been Managing Director since 1993. Under their decades of leadership, Playwrights builds upon its diverse and renowned body of work, counting 400 writers among its artistic roster. In addition to its onstage work each season, Playwrights' singular commitment to nurturing American theater artists guides all of the institution's multifaceted initiatives: our acclaimed New Works Lab, a robust commissioning program, an innovative curriculum at its Theater School, and more. Robert Moss founded Playwrights in 1971 and cemented the mission that continues to guide the institution today. André Bishop served as Artistic Director from 1981-1992. Don Scardino succeeded him and served until 1996. Over its 47-year history, Playwrights has been recognized with numerous awards and honors, including six Pulitzer Prizes, 13 Tony Awards, and 39 Obie Awards.

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WHEN IS SOCIAL JUSTICE FUNNY?

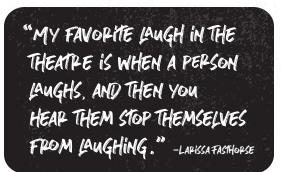
Is it okay to laugh? Is social justice ever funny? How can there possibly be humor in gun violence? Or racial oppression? Or LGBTQ+ rights? For this generation of playwrights and theatres, that has become a fundamental question of our art.

Yet...is there a better way to get people to pay attention than humor? Trevor Noah, John Stewart, and John Oliver have all made careers out of turning news – real, researched journalism! – into comedy that makes you both understand and dig in on issues. Viewers of John Oliver crashed the FCC's website after a segment on net neutrality urged them to act.

Television shows from *The Jeffersons* to *Black-ish* have used our desire to be entertained as a way to push an agenda and impart knowledge. And stand-up comedians have been putting forward issues since the dawn of the craft; Hannah Gadsby's recent Netflix special is a prime example of this medium's power.

Comedy is employed to make you think. To develop more attention for the topic and more empathy in the world. Comedy can offer a way into complicated social issues, encourage sharing, and catch people off guard. It can be an entertaining experience that delivers a meaningful call to action.

The American University in Washington has been studying "The Laughter Effect" and just how comedy works (or doesn't work) to create social change. They commissioned a comedy film called *Stand Up Planet* about global poverty from Hasan Minhaj and then screened it alongside a serious documentary about the same issue. "People learned more about the global development issues by watching the traditional somber documentary, but they felt more watching *Stand Up Planet*," says Caty Borum Chattoo, Director of the Center for Media and Social Impact. "That's meaningful, because if we want people to believe they're agents of change, an emotional response is actually more important in getting people engaged...it's because we see the human imperative."



At its core, humor depends on the audience empathizing with the characters on stage. "The comedy is the sugar to make the medicine go down," shared *The Thanksgiving Play* playwright Larissa FastHorse. "We get to all laugh at ourselves in this show. To me, that is really important. We get to have fun and enjoy being together and having that communal experience of theatre, but at the same time it doesn't let us off the hook. It makes all of us, hopefully, have to investigate why we believe the things we do and why we don't know any of these things."

Borum Chattoo says, "...our point is that comedy is actually a serious strategy, and maybe we're not taking it seriously enough."

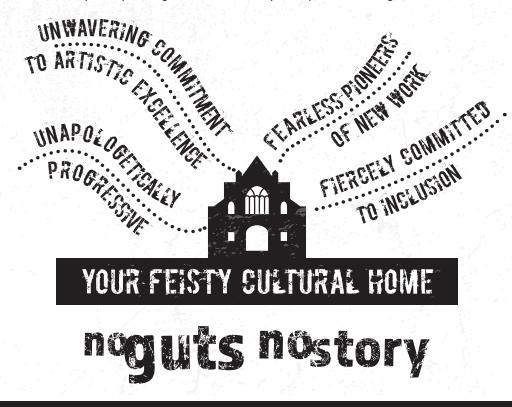
At Curious, we do take comedy seriously. So sit back and laugh during *The Thanksgiving Play*. Enjoy.

And then let's tackle the serious issues together.

ABOUT SURIOUS

WE ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY IN IMPORTANT CONTEMPORARY ISSUES THROUGH PROVOCATIVE MODERN THEATRE

Curious works at the intersection of art and social justice, using professional theatre to connect our community with pressing issues and social justice partners taking action in Colorado.



We acknowledge that Curious is on the traditional, ancestral lands of the Ute, Cheyenne, and Arapaho People and honor their stewardship of this land.

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DISCUSS



TAKE ACTION

WHAT NEXT?

At Curious, we're here to engage you in important issues. We use theatre as a catalyst for thinking about big, often uncomfortable topics and a way to connect you to vital steps forward to improving the world for everyone.



- How did you learn about Thanksgiving in school? What narrative did you hear? How does that differ from what your parents or children learned in their generation? Or differ from friends that grew up in other geographic regions? How do you think we should be talking about Thanksgiving in schools?
- 2. Do you think political correctness has gone too far in our society? Why or why not? Where is the line?
- 3. Native Americans are an oft-forgotten group in topics of race, yet have suffered systemic and ongoing marginalization for generations. What ways do you see Native Americans being minimized in our society? What ways are Native Americans celebrated or remembered?



For links to these resources and more, please check out the Go Deeper section of our website at: CuriousTheatre.org/events/the-thanksgiving-play



Seek perspectives of Native peoples.

Read books, listen to podcasts, and watch films created by Native artists and documentarians. Attend events and festivals that are open to the public. An excellent book about these issues and others is *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* by James Loewen. For local student voices, check out the podcast "Native American Education in DPS".

Check in with the schools in your area. See how they teach Thanksgiving and if needed, ask them to use historically accurate and culturally sensitive resources and activities. Share the report *"The Mountain West Brings Native American Lessons to the Classroom."*

Change up your holiday traditions to acknowledge and respect Native peoples. See article on page 5 for ideas.

Invest your time, talent, or treasure. Get involved with an organization that supports Native peoples, such as: City of Denver American Indian Commission, the Denver Indian Center, Indigenous Pop X, Indigenous Film Festival, Herbal Gardens Wellness, and the Native American Resource Fund.



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