



NEWS FROM A NATIVE AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE

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Trump questions Native American birthright



President Calvin Coolidge at the White House with members of the Osage Nation in 1925. Inspired by the high rate of American Indian enlistment during World War I, President Coolidge signs the Indian Citizenship Act in 1924. American Indians were the last to receive citizenship. (Photo courtesy Library of Congress.)

Trump's long-standing desire to end birthright citizenship took a dramatic turn in late January with the issuance of an executive order aimed at eliminating the constitutional right that grants citizenship to anyone born on U.S. soil. This bold move, if successful, would overturn more than a century of established legal precedent rooted in the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. However, a federal judge quickly intervened, temporarily blocking the order after 22 states mounted a swift legal challenge.

The 14th Amendment, ratified in 1868, clearly states that "all persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States." This clause has been the foundation for countless legal battles that have gradually expanded citizenship rights to various marginalized and oppressed groups.

Trump's executive order, however, hinges on the interpretation of the phrase "subject to the jurisdiction thereof." Trump's Justice Department, in defending the order, has cited historical legal cases to argue that birth within the U.S. alone does not automatically confer citizenship if an individual is not fully subject to U.S. jurisdiction.

The Elk v. Wilkins Case

A key element of Trump's Justice Department's argument is the 1884 Supreme Court case *Elk v. Wilkins*. This case involved John Elk, a Ho-Chunk man who left his tribal nation and settled in Omaha, Nebraska, claiming birthright citizenship under the 14th Amendment. The Supreme Court ruled against Elk, stating that Native Americans, due to their allegiance to their tribes, were not "subject to the jurisdiction" of the United States and thus not entitled to citizenship.

Legal scholars and Native American advocates have criticized the use of this case as a precedent for Trump's executive order. Gerald L. Neuman, a professor at Harvard Law School, dismissed the argument as outdated and politically motivated, rooted in xenophobia and prejudice. "But it's got a bigger political movement behind it, and it's embedded in a degree of openly expressed xenophobia and prejudice" (Graham Lee Brewer and Janie Har, AP News).

Matthew Fletcher, a law professor at the University of Michigan and a member of the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, echoed this sentiment, stating, "They're digging into old, archaic Indian law cases, finding the most racist points they can in order to win" (Graham Lee Brewer and Janie Har, AP News).

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NATIFS buys historic Co-op Creamery Building on Franklin

BY LEE EGERSTROM

In January announcements, the North American Traditional Indigenous Food Systems (NATIFS) nonprofit group and the Seward Community Co-op announced NATIFS has purchased the separate Co-op Creamery Building on Franklin Ave. in south Minneapolis.

The Creamery, as it is called in the area, was owned by the nearby community grocery co-op. It will become a working headquarters for NATIFS' various operations.

Located at 2601 Franklin Ave. E., the building will be named NATIFS Wóyute Thiipi, meaning "food building" in the Dakota language. The transformation is targeted for mid-summer.

When it reopens, NATIFS plans to have a new counter service restaurant, called ŠHOTÁ Indigenous BBQ by Owamni. It will also house a commissary kitchen to supply Indigenous foods to public groups, and will have space to assist other Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) businesses.

Sean Sherman (Oglala Sioux), a NATIFS founder and internationally noted Indigenous chef, and Ray Williams, general manager of the nearby Seward Community Co-op, announced the sale in statements issued on January 8, 2025.

Seward Community Co-op, 2823 E. Franklin Ave. has used the site for administrative offices and as a coffee shop since it purchased the building in 2013. Williams said in an announcement to co-op members in August that discussions were underway to sell the building to a buyer "deeply aligned with our values..."

The Seward co-op is a gro-

cery open to the public but is owned by more than 2,400 family members in and around the Seward and Phillips neighborhoods in Minneapolis. Many customers and co-op members come from Native American homes and housing developments on and around Franklin Ave. area that is known as the American Indian Cultural Corridor.

Linkages between NATIFS and the co-op grocery and neighborhood were stressed in the announcements.

"It's very exciting to welcome Sean Sherman and NATIFS Wóyute Thiipi to East Franklin Avenue," said Robert Lilligren, president and chief executive at Native American Community Development Institute (NACDI) at 1414 E. Franklin Ave.

NACDI is the promoter of the American Indian Cultural Corridor for Native Americans and tourists to enjoy cultural foods, arts and opportunities. The corridor is home to or surrounded by magnet organizations, including the Minneapolis American Indian Center, All My Relations Arts Gallery, Little Earth Housing Corp., American Indian Industrial Opportunities Center, Indian Health Board, and urban tribal offices.

They are all parts of one of the largest concentrations of urban American Indians in the United States.

Lilligren said Sherman's work with Indigenous food "will enhance the strong Native presence on the American Indian Cultural Corridor."

In his announcement, Sherman said NATIFS was "drawn to this location" because of his group's needs and the cultural corridor.

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Solar heat and hempcrates a great combo

BY WINONA LADUKE

During one of the colder, iciest and foggiest days on the Lower Sioux Reservation in southwest Minnesota in mid-January, a team of four Anishinaabe men from the White Earth Nation in northwestern Minnesota created an ideal green marriage of hemp and solar. There, 8th Fire Solar brought a solar thermal panel to install on a recently built hempcrete house – perhaps the perfect housing material of the future.

According to Danny Dejarlais, the Project Manager for the Morton, Minnesota-based Lower Sioux Hemp Program and Housing Project, “Hempcrete is resilient, flame retardant, and energy efficient. And now with a newly installed solar thermal panel from 8th Fire Solar, it can be pretty toasty, too. That’s the dream.”

For the past few years, the crew at Lower Sioux have been putting up hempcrete houses in their community and are way finders for tribal sustainable housing. Their latest set of houses includes some tiny homes, and there’s a lot of interest in hemp mixed with lime to create the hempcrete product. Dejarlais says that “after some initial skepticism from tribal leaders, interest remains high in using the natural material for a number of reasons:

“First, the hemphouse can be energy efficient, at least with a 14-inch wall that can both keep a place warm and keep a place cool.

“Second, the house is for the most part, fireproof: Hempcrete doesn’t burn easily and in this day and age of raging fires, that’s a bonus.

“Third, the house can be grown and built in a year. Think of it this way, it takes 40 years for a tree to get big enough to harvest for timber framing, but it takes 100 days or so, for the fiber hemp to grow into something usable.



The two teams who married hempcrete home with solar thermal heating. Left to right: Will Sayers, Jon Martin, Nick Belrock, Gwekaanimad Gasco, Danny DeJarlais, and Larry Swan.

“Fourth, hemp sequesters carbon at the highest rate of any field crop, while concrete produces it. That means in a time when climate chaos is upon us, one of the main things we want to do is cut the amount of carbon we spew into the environment. Think of it this way, if concrete were a country, it would be the third largest source of CO2 emissions in the world!”

Dejarlais says the Lower Sioux folks have been looking forward to working with the 8th Fire Solar team “to make this dream happen on our reservation for a while. Some of the folks from 8th fire came down last year, and we thought about doing a hempcrete solar thermal place. I was looking at those guys when they came in, and it was like looking in a mirror: those guys

from 8th fire remind me of us and what we’re trying to do with naturally-made products for homes.”

Led by 8th Fire Solar Program Coordinator, Gwe Gasco, the four-man team installed two small base heaters where it was 64 degrees in the house. “The thermal solar and hempcrete are going to provide enough warmth with that new solar in there,” he says. “Hempcrete has its own thermal mass; those walls are going to hold that solar heat in. An electric heater might have to turn on in the middle of the night when it’s really cold, but that thermal mass is going to hold.”

Gasco noted that the project came to fruition when 8th Fire Solar discovered it had some funding left from a grant from the CERTS program and rural Development Sustainability Partnerships for some workforce development installation. “We had already installed and trained at our location in Pine Point and had done

an install at Battle Lake. But Danny had a hemphouse, and we checked it out to see if it was right for our solar thermal panels. It was.”

The visiting team picked the smallest house -- a simple one bedroom -- and did a simple installation of a 5-by-8-foot panel. It was a little different from our other installs,” Gasco said. “But those hempcrete walls were 14- inches thick, which makes for really good warming conditions. We had to take out some of the hempcrete for the panel, but we made it work.

“Next time, the best thing would be to provide the house with a pre-made set up for the solar panel. Overall though, we were really happy to be part of this project. For housing projects like this one on the Lower Sioux – or anywhere else for that matter – solar thermal and hempcrete are an efficient and cost-effective use of natural, sustainable products that are good for everyone and the environment.”

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5 LOCATIONS ACROSS MINNESOTA AND NORTHERN WISCONSIN

Indigenous nutritional gets a voice in Federal Dietary Guidelines

BY LEE EGERSTROM

A federal scientific panel formulating guidelines for nutrition programs for the next five years has reached out to include American Indian and Alaska Native voices in shaping those recommendations.

Under law since 1980, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) must conduct

a periodic review. This is to provide nutrition guidelines for federal food programs such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as Food Stamps, and the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR).

Leading health and nutrition experts have served on the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee over the years. But this past year, on the current committee, a Native American is actually

among the nationally recognized health and nutrition experts reviewing drafts and recommendations for the final report.

That person is Dr. Valarie Blue Bird Jernigan, a member of the Choctaw Nation and director of the Center for Indigenous Health Research and Policy at Oklahoma State University. While serving on the current dietary guidelines committee, she is also on another group examining how health care disparities have changed over the last 20 years.

A lot of similar work has been done by health and Native American groups within states that have large American Indian and Alaska Native populations, including here in Minnesota. But her appointment to the dietary guidelines committee “is a game-changer,” said Carly Griffith Hotvedt, (Cherokee Nation), executive director of the Indigenous Food and Agriculture Initiative housed at the University of Arkansas Law School.

“Until Dr. Jernigan, no one on the advisory committee has had a deep familiarity with Indigenous nutrition science or the nutrition-influenced public health-related impacts to Tribal communities,” Hotvedt said.

Guideline copies have been circulated. Final responses and suggestions are due by Feb. 10. A final report and guidelines will be released later this year.

It is a continuation of gradual by steady growing awareness within government units and by health groups about unique and logical aspects of food availability and nutritional value.

USDA does handle most food related programs. Other studies show about 25 percent of American Indians and Alaska Natives receive SNAP food services and more under various programs and treaty obligations.

The Indian Health Service (IHS) has helpful nutrition information for Native Americans on its Internet website for various subjects including Produce Prescription Programs, Food Sovereignty, Food and Nutrition Security, Nutrition in Life’s Vital Stages, Division of Diabetes Treatment and Prevention, and Special Diabetes Program for Indians.

HIS has programs helping Native Americans reconnect with their historic foods are building all across America, privately and with government support. It explained why:

“Tribal food sovereignty represents the right of Tribal Nations to control their food systems, including the cultivation, harvesting, production, and distribution of food. When colonial settlers arrived and forcibly relocated

Tribes from their ancestral lands, these traditional food systems were severely disrupted. Additionally, policies aimed at acculturation further impacted the availability of ancestral foods, contributing to today’s challenges in accessing healthy, affordable food.”

Resources identified as helping the federal departments include the Montana-based Indigikitchn (<https://www.indigikitchen.com/>), the Montana Indian Nations Plant Guide, and the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium that has a “Store Outside Your Door” site (<https://www.anthc.org/what-we-do/traditional-foods-and-nutrition/store-outside-your-door/>).

A fourth “resource” is well known in Minnesota. It is the North American Traditional Indigenous Food Systems (NATIFS) and its Indigenous Food Lab. (See accompanying article about NATIFS purchase of Co-op Creamery Building.)

NATIFS works with USDA’s Indigenous Food Sovereignty Initiative and with chefs from across the country to develop recipes and cooking videos on use of Indigenous and locally forageable foods to make healthier meals.

Not all such efforts are focused directly on tribal communities. A leading example of that is the Indigenous Food Network (IFN), with partners primarily in the Twin Cities, working on tribal sovereign food systems for the urban Indian population.

It explains its mission is to “rebuild sovereign food systems within the intertribal Native communities through collaboration,” and its mission is to “rebuild sovereign food systems within the intertribal Native communities through collaboration.”

With Minneapolis-based Dream of Wild Health and its farm in suburban Hugo, the IFN does reflect the wide Native diversity within Minnesota urban communities.

The IFN states, “We are creating a Naive American urban model for food sovereignty.”

It has “partners” to form a model for Minnesota and or urban dwelling Native Americans everywhere. They include: American Indian Community Housing Organization (AICHO), Duluth; American Indian Family Center, St. Paul; Ain Dah Yung Center, St. Paul; Department of Indian Work, Maplewood. And in Minneapolis: Anishinabe Academy, Bdote Learning Center, Division of Indian Work, Dream of Wild Health, East Phillips Neighborhood Institute, Four Sisters Farmers Market at NACDI, Mpls-Indian Health Board, Indigenous Food Lab (NATIFS), and Little Earth United Tribes.



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Tammy Fairbanks at bat. Photo by Mike Zerby.
From "Urban Indians," picture magazine, Minneapolis
Sunday Tribune, November 18, 1979.



Traditional healing gets boost from research study

BY LEE EGERSTROM

Minnesota and the federal Medicaid program need to recognize American Indian culture and practices with traditional healing and better define health and well-being to serve America's original citizens.

This is among findings and three important "Call to Action" recommendations emerging from an exhaustive study of health care services conducted by the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS).

The report, Pathways to Racial Equity in Medicaid: Improving the Health and Opportunity of American Indians in Minnesota, was released in December following 2022 research that found great racial inequalities in the delivery and accessibility of America's largest health care system.

Three calls for taking new action emerged after statewide meetings with tribal and urban American Indian health leaders and providers.

The first call identified a need for Minnesota to "Invest in Traditional Healing," recognizing its importance to the mental and overall health and well-being of the state's American Indian population. This means DHS will need to stay engaged with tribal nations, urban American Indian clinics and organizations, and the federal Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) to find ways to cover traditional healing costs under Medicaid.

Questions need to be resolved. These include how to set a monetary value to traditional healers' services, do they need a license or certification of some sort, and how will tribal data sovereignty be upheld?

A second "Call to Action" requires complex social, medical and political cooperation. It states its goal as "Reframe what defines health and well-being and the evidence used to make decisions."

To do so, the report said DHS will need to continue work with tribes and urban community clinics to define health and wellbeing for American Indians, to work with federal partners on Medicaid rules and regulations, and with other state officials and lawmakers to create, propose, implement and evaluate care and payments for related services.

This effort will interact with the federal Indian Health Service (IHS), which is described as often "underfunded" by Congress. The authors cite a painful old joke from Northern Minnesota that warns American Indians to get sick, if they must, by June before IHS' funds run out.

The third "Call to Action" is to "Create a Pathways to American Indian and



Tribal Health Integration Team" (PATH) at DHS.

This may need legislative approval or at least Legislature-approved funding, said Dr. Nathan Chomilo, the lead author of the Pathways report. The team is envisioned as a source of community information for DHS staff, and for sharing information about available Medicaid resources. The team would work with all involved state and community groups and Indian health systems to integrate cultural approaches to health and for Medicaid to lead or participate in systems integration.

Some of these goals could lead Minnesota to seek waivers from the federal Medicaid program to conduct experimental implementation programs. Within the past year, these so-called "1115 waivers" were granted for experimental programs in Arizona, California, New Mexico and Oregon.

"Improving how we administer Medicaid is crucial as we collectively work toward achieving health equity with American Indian communities in Minnesota," Chomilo told *The Circle*. "The time for action is now. There remains much DHS can learn from, and create together with, American Indian communities and Tribal Nations to realize a health care system that is truly responsive and culturally inclusive for all people in Minnesota."

Chomilo is the medical director for the state of Minnesota's Medicare program. He is also a pediatrician doctor and hospital internist, an adjunct professor of pediatrics at the University of Minnesota Medical School, was a founder and is a board of directors member for the Minnesota Doctors for Health Equity group. He also

holds other state and University positions in support of medical and childhood health and development.

An important colleague on the Pathways report was Takayla Lightfield, who was a perinatal program consultant on the Population Health Innovation team at DHS. Her main work at DHS has been co-managing the Integrated Care for High-Risk Pregnancies grant program. From the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, she has long been involved with relevant health care work and traditional healing.

Since the Pathways report was released in December, Lightfield has taken on a new job at DHS. "I am now the Tribal Policy Consultant in DHS' Office of Indian Policy (OIP)," she said. She will work with Dr. Chomilo to disseminate the report, assist in follow-up work and pursue the Calls to Action in seeking legislation and other governmental permissions.

With her work in perinatal programs at DSH, Lightfield has dealt with child health issues for the American Indian community. That includes gaining access to Medicaid, to the SNAP (formerly called Food Stamps) and TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) and other food and nutrition education benefits for families and for "doula" care.

Doulas are certified helpers for pregnancies and delivery. She is one herself. They, and medical professional midwives, may well serve as role makers for traditional healers in the months and years ahead.

"Doulas are already able to become registered providers and bill Medicaid for their

services," she said. But so far, she added, certifying traditional healers "is one of the main concerns we have heard from tribes regarding the 115 traditional services waiver."

Going forward, Lightfield said she will promote and help integrate the Pathways report into DHS actions. And she plans to continue gathering input from tribes, urban directors and community groups on how DHS can move this process forward together with its partners.

Although not cited here in this news report, the DHS Pathways report provides various studies and U.S. Census Bureau data showing problem Minnesota's American Indians, their families and communities face in accessing Medicaid and health care.

The Calls for Action were assembled from community-led efforts to identify ways others "can help us increase access to traditional healers, ceremonies, sacred medicines, Indigenous foods and teachings," she said.

"This is how we can save those Native babies."

Participants in the research and discovery for this project included:

Tribal agency staff from Fond du Lac, Lower Sioux, Red Lake and Bois Forte reservations. Urban American Indian clinics and organizations included the Native American Community Clinic, Indian Health Board of Minneapolis, Division of Indian Work, Metro Urban Indian Directors (MUID) and St. Paul Indians in Action.

Other American Indian and Tribal Affiliated Organizations participants included the Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Epidemiology Center, American Indian Cancer Foundation, Great Lakes Area Tribal Health Board and Johns Hopkins Center for Indigenous Health.

And other American Indian community members included Karina Forrest Perkins from the mental health and wellbeing group Vail Communities, and Dr. Deana Around Him from the Child Trends research organization with operations in Washington, D.C., Minnesota and North Carolina.

This massive research effort involved at least 382 people from across the state with virtual and in-person sessions in Bemidji, Duluth and Minneapolis.

1115 Waivers – The four states receiving 1115 waivers in the past year are launching demonstration projects.

The Oregon Health Plan waiver might be useful for what Minnesota might pursue. It seeks to provide reimbursement for tribal-based healing practices approved by Oregon's Tribal-Based Practice Review Panel that currently involves prevention, substance use, and mental health services.

The report is available online at: <https://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfsrserver/Public/DHS-8209C-ENG>.

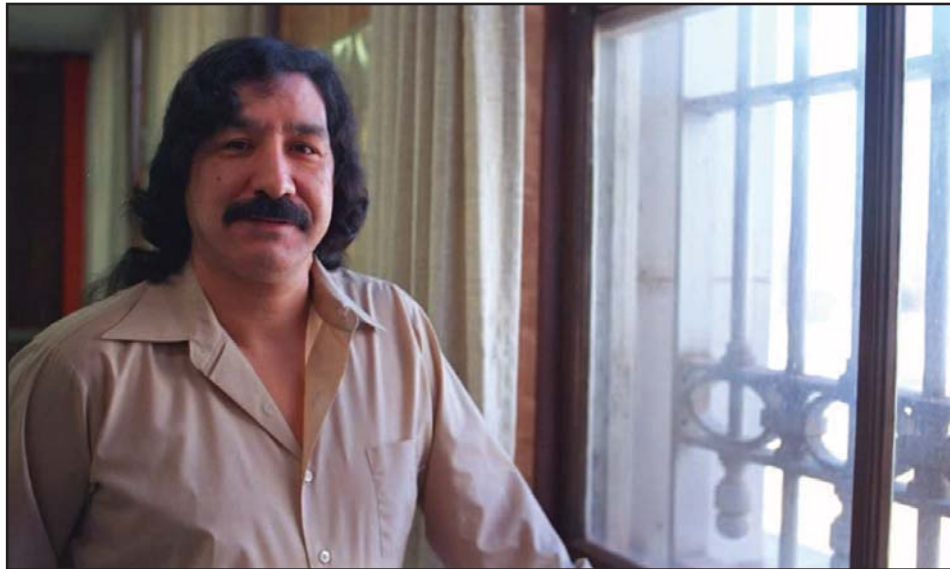
Leonard Peltier gets to go home, after decades in prison

Indigenous activist Leonard Peltier will return home nearly half a century after being imprisoned for the 1975 killings of two FBI agents. President Joe Biden commuted Peltier's sentence following decades of community-led advocacy. The White House stated that Peltier, 80 and in declining health, will transition to home confinement. The commutation is not a pardon, and Peltier has always maintained his innocence.

The National Congress of American Indians celebrated the decision, stating the case symbolized systemic injustices faced by Indigenous Peoples. Former FBI Director Christopher Wray opposed the commutation, calling Peltier a "remorseless killer" in a letter to Biden.

Peltier was active in the American Indian Movement (AIM), which addressed police brutality and discrimination against Native Americans. In 1973, AIM took over the village of Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, leading to a 71-day standoff with federal agents.

Peltier admitted he was present and firing during the June 26, 1975, confrontation with FBI agents at Pine Ridge. Agents Jack Coler and Ronald Williams were shot in the head at close range after



Leonard Peltier in 1986. (Photo by Cliff Schiappa / AP file.)

being injured in a shootout. AIM member Joseph Stuntz was also killed. Peltier fled to Canada but was extradited to the U.S. and convicted of two counts of first-degree murder. He was sentenced to life in prison in 1977, despite defense claims of falsified evidence. Co-defendants Robert Robideau and Dino Butler were acquitted.

Peltier was denied parole as recently as July and wasn't eligible again until 2026. His son, Chauncey Peltier,

expressed shock and joy at the news. Peltier's tribe, the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, has a home ready for him on the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation in Belcourt, North Dakota.

Bureau of Prisons spokesperson Emery Nelson said Peltier remained incarcerated at USP Coleman, a high-security prison in Florida. His lawyer indicated his release date was tentatively set for February 18th.

The commutation follows decades of

lobbying and protests by Native American leaders and others who argue Peltier was wrongfully convicted. Amnesty International considers him a political prisoner. Advocates for his release included Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Coretta Scott King, Robert Redford, Pete Seeger, Harry Belafonte, and Jackson Browne.

Law enforcement officers, former FBI agents, their families, and prosecutors opposed any reduction in Peltier's sentence. Presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama also rejected Peltier's clemency requests. He was denied parole in 1993, 2009, and 2024.

Biden issued a record number of pardons and commutations, including commuting the sentences of almost 2,500 people convicted of nonviolent drug offenses and issuing a broad pardon to his son Hunter.

Outgoing Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, the first Native American Cabinet member, posted that the commutation signified a measure of justice long evaded by Native Americans. "I am grateful that Leonard can now go home to his family," she said. "I applaud President Biden for this action and understanding what this means to Indian Country."

"Taking care of my heart means that I am taking care of the young girls that will come after." —angela

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Citizenship for Native Americans: A Hard-Won Right

Native Americans were not granted U.S. citizenship until 1924, with the passage of the Indian Citizenship Act. This milestone came after decades of legal and political struggles, underscoring the complexity of Native American sovereignty and their relationship with the federal government.

The Justice Department’s attempt to draw parallels between Native American citizenship and the broader issue of birthright citizenship for all individuals born in the U.S. has been widely criticized as both legally and morally flawed.

Leo Chavez, a professor at the University of California, Irvine, who specializes in international migration, pointed out the dangers of this comparison. “It’s using the heat of race to make a political argument rather than a legal argument,” Chavez said (Graham Lee Brewer and Janie Har, AP News).

Impact on Indigenous Communities

Trump’s executive order has sown confusion and fear among Indigenous communities, particularly in the Southwest. Reports have surfaced of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents targeting Native Americans during raids. In the Navajo Nation, which spans parts of Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah, citizens have reported being wrongly identified as undocumented immigrants.

Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren has voiced concerns over these incidents, stating, “My office has received multiple reports from Navajo citizens that they have had negative, and sometimes traumatizing, experiences with federal agents targeting undocumented immigrants in the Southwest” (Stephanie Cram, CBC News). In response, the Navajo Nation is advising its citizens to carry state-issued identification and, if available, a Certificate of Indian Blood to avoid harassment.

The Navajo Nation has also established a hotline under “Operation Rainbow Bridge” to assist those who encounter issues with federal immigration officials. “It’s best to be prepared, and we are advising Navajo citizens to carry state-issued identification such as a driver’s licence or other picture identification if available,” said Nygren (Stephanie Cram, CBC News).

The executive order also holds significant implications for descendants of Spanish and Mexican heritage, particularly in states like New Mexico. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed in 1848, ended the U.S.-Mexico War and granted U.S. citizenship to Mexican residents in the newly acquired territories. New Mexico’s 1912 Constitution explicitly guarantees equal access to public education for children of Spanish descent, regardless of immigration status.

As legal battles continue to unfold in courts across the nation, the stakes are high not only for immigrants but also for Indigenous communities and all Americans who cherish the foundational promise of citizenship by birth.

State Attorney General Raúl Torrez has emphasized these protections in his guidance to K-12 schools, advising them on how to respond to potential immigration enforcement actions. The guidance cites U.S. Supreme Court precedent affirming that children cannot be denied access to public education based on their immigration status (Graham Lee Brewer and Janie Har, AP News).

The Broader Implications

Legal experts argue that the Trump administration’s reliance on outdated legal cases like *Elk v. Wilkins* reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of American legal history and constitutional law. Gregory Ablavsky, a law professor at Stanford University, noted that the analogy is “unpersuasive and historically ignorant” (Stephanie Cram, CBC News). He pointed out that the U.S. government’s relationship with Native American tribes has always been complex, with unclear constitutional authority over tribal nations.

Moreover, Trump’s Justice Department’s arguments extend beyond Native American citizenship. They cite the Civil Rights Act of 1866, which predates the 14th Amendment and excludes “Indians not taxed” from citizenship. By interpreting the 14th Amendment’s phrase “subject to the jurisdiction thereof” in this narrow context, the Trump administration seeks to roll back established constitutional rights for millions of individuals born in the U.S.

Trump’s attempt to end birthright citizenship represents a direct challenge to over a century of legal precedent and constitutional rights. By invoking outdated and racially charged legal arguments, the administration risks undermining the very principles of equality and justice enshrined in the 14th Amendment.

As legal battles continue to unfold in courts across the nation, the stakes are high not only for immigrants but also for Indigenous communities and all Americans who cherish the foundational promise of citizenship by birth.

The temporary block by the federal judge is just the beginning of what promises to be a protracted legal fight, one that will test the resilience of constitutional protections and the nation’s commitment to upholding the rights of all people born on its soil.

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bell
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“We are thrilled to expand in this new direction as we continue to uplift Indigenous food systems and support our community,” he said.

“This will be the first space we own, and it will truly be the heart of everything we do.”

Meanwhile, NATIFS will continue operating its Indigenous Food Lab Market, education studio and production kitchen at Midtown Global Market at 920 E. Lake St., in Minneapolis, where the nonprofit organization’s headquarters is currently located.

NATIFS also owns Owamni Restaurant, 420 S. 1st St., in Minneapolis, more formally called Owamni Restaurant by the Sioux Chef. That made Sherman a James Beard award winning chef and Owamni named “Best New Restaurant” in the nation for Beard awards in 2022.

{Yes, it is a play on words. Sherman is a Sioux chef, a Lakota from the Pine Ridge. He is definitely not a French “sous chef,” or second in command in the kitchen.}

Looking ahead to opening ŠHOTÁ Indigenous BBQ by Owamni this summer, Sherman said it will be consistent with Owamni by prioritizing getting foods from Indigenous producers and eliminate use of “colonial” ingredients such as wheat flour, cane sugar and dairy products.

The name ŠHOTÁ means “smoke” or



“clouds” in Dakota and is essentially the same word as “Sota” in the Dakota name Mni Sóta Makocca (“Land where the waters reflect the skies”), the Dakota name for Minnesota.

Food for dining, takeout, delivery and catering will include smoked meats, fish and vegetables. Indigenous side dishes will include maple-baked beans, dirty wild rice, house-made hominy, braised greens and corn mush. Some unique entrees will include smoked salmon with huckleberries, alligator gumbo, three sisters’ bison stew and walleye stew.

The commissary kitchen, meanwhile, will allow NATIFS to produce large scale and healthy Indigenous foods for institutions such as public schools, universities and hospitals.

“Many Indigenous communities face high rates of Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, cancer, and other health issues due to a lack of access to traditional foods,” he said. Our goal is to provide a sustainable solution and improve overall health and well-being in these communities.”

The news release said ŠHOTÁ also plans to offer a drinks menu like at Owamni including beers and wines from BIPOC producers and teas and other beverages from Indigenous sources.

All this fits with the extremely diverse and welcoming community built around the Seward Community Co-op.

Williams, the general manager, said in his statement sent to co-op members that Seward and NATIFS have “partnered” over the year. Along with other local co-

ops, he said, Seward had recently participated in a program that raised \$139,000 for NATIFS.

Sherman served as the featured speaker at Seward’s 2018 annual membership meeting. “We have had the pleasure and honor of partnering over the years to uplift Native cultural and culinary traditions in a number of ways...,” Williams said.

He said NATIFS’ “mission is aligned with Seward Co-op and will provide food access to those in the community and surrounding areas. We warmly welcome Wóyute Thiipi to the neighborhood!”

The south side of Minneapolis has a wild and wooly history that created diverse surrounding neighborhoods and led to creating the American Indian Cultural Corridor. All this fits with the artsy interests of the neighborhood.

Competing private dairy companies battled for control of the milk delivering business, and not all had kindly relations with workers and milk delivery employees. Workers organized and formed the Franklin Cooperative Creamery Association, an employee-owned firm like Seward Community Co-op is member-owned.

Back in the day before dairy products became basket items at supermarkets and convenience stores, Franklin Creamery Co-op became the largest milk delivering company in the Twin Cities.

To learn more, see: <https://natifs.org>

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Nichols-VanNett plays basketball for NCAA DI at IU Indy

Shania Nichols-VanNett is from the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe. She is currently a basketball player for NCAA DI Indiana University Indianapolis (IU Indy).

Nichols-VanNett credentials are increasing at the college basketball level. She was named an NJCAA DI All-American Honorable Mention selection and a Mon-Dak First Team All-Conference member while at North Dakota State College of Science (NDSCS) her freshman season. She transferred to IU Indy the next season. Nichols-VanNett played six years of varsity basketball at Como Park HS in Saint Paul, MN. She reached her 1000 point as a senior.

Indigenous core values help ground athletes to live a good life. “As an Ojibwe woman who plays basketball, I carry my cultural values with me both on and off the court,” said Nichols-VanNett. “In practice and competition, I am guided by the teachings of respect, humility, and perseverance.”

“Respect means honoring my teammates, opponents, and the game itself by giving my full effort every time I step on the court. Humility reminds me to stay grounded, to celebrate victories with gratitude, and to learn from losses with grace. Perseverance pushes me to work hard.”

“I’m an athlete who has dealt with major injuries including two ACL and meniscus tears, causing me to catch up with the pace of the game, and not give up during the times I wanted to. Knowing that my dedication reflects not just my own strength but the strength of my community. Playing basketball isn’t just about



Shania Nichols-VanNett transferred to IU Indy to play college basketball. She played six years of varsity basketball at Como Park High School in Saint Paul. (Photo courtesy of Nichols-VanNett.)

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winning; it’s about representing where I come from and making my people and family proud.”

Ronnie Smith was one of Shania’s high school basketball coaches. Smith said, “My first year coaching Shania she had torn her ACL and we sat on the bench next to each other the entire season. I first noticed how much she was into the game and understood it. I was excited for the next season but she came back during the AAU season and tore her ACL again. We found ourselves in that same position on the bench. She was able to play her junior year. That’s when I knew she could physically play at the next level. She came back and helped us to a third place finish in State. She was ready physically and mentally her senior year.”

Brian Pearson is Shania’s older sisters’ high school coach and trainer. He is also their uncle. “After Shania’s sixth grade year of AAU she wanted and showed she wanted to be better. We started that summer to work out seriously. Shania took the bull by the horn and really worked hard to become known. She went from being unknown to one of the best guards in her grade.”

Lindsay Knight is the certified athletic trainer at Como Park Senior High School. She said, “Since I first met Shania, I always had a feeling she was going to do amazing things personally and in her athletic career. She not only displayed pinnacle athleticism, but also spread positivity and an incredible work ethic through her natural ability to lead. During her high school career she suffered two ACL injuries, which required surgical intervention and extensive rehabilitation. After the second injury she was frustrated, but her determination never faded. Shania continued to persevere through rigorous rehabilitative and strengthening exercises in order to get back to the court that she loved.”

Makayla VanNett, Shania’s older sister, also talked about her sister the basketball player. She said, “Shania and I are five years apart. I knew at a very young age that Shania was going to be special. I myself played basketball at the collegiate level. Shania was always there to watch and absorb everything I did growing up. She kept a basketball in her hands at all times. She would come to my practices to watch and learn and sometimes my coach would throw her in and she could always handle her own.”

Nichols VanNett said, “During my senior year of high school, I was halfway through the basketball season and anxiously waiting for a Division I offer.” “I felt frustrated with myself because, before tearing my ACL and meniscus, I had major Division I schools interested in me, and I was hoping they might reconsider and give me a chance.”

“However, as many know, by that point most Division I programs had already finalized their rosters,” added Nichols-VanNett.

“I decided to follow in my older sister’s footsteps and take the JUCO route,” said Nichols-VanNett. “Unfortunately, the first JUCO I planned to attend rescinded their offer because I committed too late. By then, it was very late in my senior season, and I was nervous I wouldn’t find a school.”

“Thankfully, a family friend connected me to another JUCO, and I ended up at NDSCS, where I had a great season that led me to where I am now. Looking back, I believe everything happens for a reason,” added Nichols VanNett.

“No matter what challenges arise, I’ve learned to keep working hard and never give up,” said Nichols VanNett. “I truly believe it was God’s/Creator’s plan all along.”

Biden commutes Peltier’s sentence

In one of his last official acts, on Jan. 20, Pres. Joe Biden commuted the prison sentence of Leonard Peltier, who has been serving two consecutive life terms for the murder of two FBI agents on June 26, 1975, during a shootout at Oglala, on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation (So. Dakota).

Peltier and those working for his release over the past five decades hailed the decision to move the American Indian Movement (AIM) activist from prison to home confinement. Peltier is suffering from a number of medical conditions that have worsened in recent years. He will leave prison on Feb. 18, according to press reports.

My correspondence with Leonard, starting in 1978, spurred my involvement in Indian issues. I helped organize a Twin Cities chapter of the Leonard Peltier Defense Committee and wrote a history of the case that was published as a pamphlet by the national office.

In 1980, I traveled with the late Dick Bancroft, photographic chronicler of significant AIM events, to the federal prison near Marion, Illinois. The prison tucked away in the hills of southern Illinois resembled a research laboratory. At the time, it was dubbed the “new Alcatraz,” the top-level prison in the federal system. A guard watching the driveway to the

prison asked over a squawk box if Robert Redford was with us; the famed actor had visited Peltier a few months earlier. Redford narrated the 1992 documentary “Incident at Oglala,” directed by Michael Apted.

That was my first visit with Leonard, who seemed like many of the AIM activists I’d met previously; but through a gross miscarriage of justice, his case had become an international cause célèbre. Apart from Redford, other Hollywood and rock world stars supported his case. Officials in the Soviet Union gathered 10 million signatures on petitions seeking Peltier’s freedom, as his imprisonment became a gambit in Cold War politics. Amnesty International and other human rights groups pointed to FBI and prosecutorial misconduct in the legal proceedings.

I again saw Peltier in 1984, when he was present at an evidentiary hearing in Bismarck, North Dakota. Famed civil rights lawyer William Kunstler argued Leonard’s case, regarding a dispute over firearms evidence that purportedly tied Leonard to a rifle, the “murder weapon,” that had been recovered from a burned up car on the Wichita turnpike.

The Peltier case has taken numerous twists and turns since he fled Oglala after the shootout, and was arrested by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police at a

camp in Alberta, Canada, in 1976. The FBI used perjured affidavits from an Indian woman, Myrtle Poor Bear, to gain Peltier’s extradition from Canada. While locked up in California, another inmate warned Peltier of a murder plot against him, which prompted a prison escape. He was out for a few days and then recaptured.

In 1985, I traveled again with Dick Bancroft for another prison interview with Leonard, this time at the federal medical center in Springfield, Missouri. Leonard was relaxed and talkative, and grateful for the press attention to his case. I have written about Leonard’s case in this column over the years. Truthfully, I expected that the FBI would get its way and Leonard would die in prison.

In a statement released by the NDN Collective in January, Leonard said, “It’s finally over — I’m going home. I want to show the world I’m a good person with a good heart. I want to help the people, just like my grandmother taught me.”

Leonard will return to his home reservation, Turtle Mountain (No. Dakota), according to reports.

And in a phone call with members of the NDN Collective, who gathered outside the federal prison at Coleman, Florida, where Leonard has been confined, he thanked his supporters in Indian Country and around the world. He said

that “home confinement is going to be a million times better than what I’m living in.”

Finally, Leonard is going home.

Cruelty and chaos with Trump 2.0 regime

Since Jan. 20, the second presidential inauguration of Trump, the news has been flooded with one crazy thing after another. It’s difficult to focus on what will emerge from the chaos in Washington. It looks like Trump and his oligarchs, Musk, et al., are attempting to capture the state, as Viktor Orban, the authoritarian leader of Hungary, has done.

The mass deportation scheme has frightened millions of undocumented residents of the U.S. And as I expected, U.S. citizens are being detained by ICE police. Navajo tribal officials have complained that some of their citizens have been detained and questioned by ICE agents.

I found a similar situation, in 1982, on a visit to the Mexican border, where members of the Tohono O’odham Nation, on the U.S. side of the border, told me that they had been hassled by border patrol agents, accused of being illegal aliens.

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Waziya Winter-Wind Celebration honors the winter months

BY K.E. MACPHIE

January is called Witehi Wi or “The Time of Hardship Moon” in the Dakota language. So what a bright and wonderful idea it was to offer people some space for connection and celebration for the season at the Waziya Winter-Wind Celebration at Battle Creek Recreation Center on Saturday, January 11 in St. Paul. This event brought together Dakota ancestral teachings, modern Indigenous artistry, and community-building activities to honor winter’s beauty and cultural significance.

Tanağidaŋ To Wiŋ (Tara Perron), coordinated the event alongside Dakota artist, Marlena Myles, as a way to honor the four seasons and traditional Dakota culture in a way that seamlessly brought together our ancestral teachings, modern Indigenous artists, and community-building activities that celebrated winter and what it means to people who have called this area home for thousands of years.

Tara and Marlena not only coordinated, but also participated in the day as local artisans. Tara owns and operates Blue Hummingbird Woman, an Indigenous gift shop with real estate in the skyways of St. Paul (30 7th St. Ste. 285) and a regular community presence at Eagle and Condor Native Wellness Center (790 7th St. E.) and throughout the community at events like this. She is best known for her teas, but sells other items and at the event, she featured the book *The Seed Keeper* by Diane Wilson, who also attended and read a chapter of her book.

Marlena, a local mixed-media artist, provided coloring sheets for kids and adults alike to interact and learn about the seasonal celebration in both low-tech and she debuted her latest augmented reality experience: Discover the power of Waziya, the Dakota Winter Wind.

Walking into the space, we were greeted by the smell of bison stew, provided by Tara’s son as a fundraiser for the urban homeless Native encampment, Camp Nenookaasi. The hearty soup



Top: Speaking on left is Tara Perron, Diane Wilson is in the background on right, and Fern Renville is seated at the table. Bottom: Dawí Westerman teaches people how to construct traditional Dakota snowshoes. (Photos by K.E. MacPhie.)

served as a great complement to the winter theme.

Around the gym space were many of the Native vendors selling jewelry, soap, art, candles, clothes, and everything in between. Native and non-Native visitors perused the vendors and purchased local items. I bought a candle, a card, and some new earrings.

Outside, the fun spilled over. Heather Friedli created one of her iconic snow

sculptures live, showcasing winter’s stunning beauty, just outside the window of the vendor area, between the indoors and the cross country skiing area. Trickster Tacos showed up in the parking lot to serve all visitors of the center, as I saw some come into the event, but others grab a taco and go skiing! And the Battle Creek Rec Director generously allowed guests of the Waziya Winter-Wind Celebration free rentals for skis, sleds, kicksleds, snowshoes, and other rec gear.

Dawí Westerman occupied a space in the vendor area to construct traditional Dakota snowshoes. He talked through his process and answered questions from the crowd about how the old ways and new snowshoe engineering can combine to create durable, traditional, and beautiful snowshoes for weather like this.

Plants were also front and center at the event. Fern Renville explored the wisdom of Dakota winter plants through craft and storytelling. She had a large table near the front to discuss Native plants and various care and uses for them using traditional ecological knowledge. Diane Wilson also took time during the introduction to read a chapter from her

new book, *The Seed Keeper*, a novel that showcases the strength of Dakota women and their connection to the land.

But the most exciting development from the event was learning that they are planning more events like this throughout the year. Every season will have their own Dakota celebration thanks to a pilot initiative called the Minnesota Parks Artist-in-Residence (MNPaiR) program, launched in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Parks and Trails Division, the Metropolitan Council, Metropolitan Regional Parks, the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission, and Forecast Public Art. Battle Creek Park, in partnership with Ramsey County Parks & Recreation, will host Marlena and Tara throughout the year as they continue to develop contemporary Indigenous artistry with the Dakota seasonal ways of life.

For information on their spring event, follow Blue Hummingbird Woman (bluehummingbirdwoman.com) and Marlena Myles (marlenamyl.es), or Forecast Public Art (forecastpubliart.org).

Do you or someone you know need a place to warm-up overnight?

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RAMSEY COUNTY



**Ongoing
Grief Support Group**

An open group that provides space for community members to connect with one another, share their experiences, learn new coping skills, gain insights into their grief, and find mutual support. Hosted via Zoom every Tuesday from 3 pm to 4 pm by Aimee Morano, LGSW, at the Indian Health Board. New participants are welcome. Call 612-843-5981.

MAIC Events

See events at the Mpls American Indian Center on their updated website. MAIC events listings: Sewing Circle, Running Club, Drum and Dance, Pickup Basketball, Volleyball, Congregate Dining and more. MAIC, 1530 E Franklin Ave, Minneapolis. See more at: <https://www.maicnet.org/upcoming-events>.

**Feb 8
Community Connections Conf: Participation is Power**

The City of Minneapolis is organizing this year's event around the power of participating in your community and local decision-making. Our theme this year will be "Participation is Power: Speak, Act, Grow." You're invited to join the City of Minneapolis and over 150 organizations to connect, share resources and get involved in local decision-making. This year's free event will have workshops, music and dance, fun activities for kids, a scavenger hunt, jobs and internships, an expo and a community conversation on health. Lunch included. The Community Connections Conference is an annual free event that connects residents of Minneapolis, community groups, neighborhoods and local government. We invite people to: Speak: Voice your opinion about important upcoming projects and decision-making. Act: Take action by voting, joining a neighborhood organization board or a City appointed board. Grow:

Learn skills and information you can use to improve your neighborhood, community and life. 9am to 4pm. Minneapolis Convention Center, first floor, Hall E, Minneapolis. For info: minneapolismn.gov/cc.

**Feb 14
Free Valentine's Day weddings**

Couples hoping for a Valentine's Day wedding will get help from the Minnesota Judicial Branch, as judges throughout the state offer free marriages. Couples wishing to have a judge marry them on Valentine's Day should check the website and follow the directions for registering for a free wedding. Each courthouse has a limited number of wedding ceremony times, so appointments are required—no walk-ins. Couples do not need to reside in the county in which they plan to marry, but they must have a valid marriage license in that county before a wedding can be performed. See info: <https://www.mncourts.gov/About-The-Courts/NewsAndAnnouncements/ItemDetail.aspx?id=2437>.

**Feb 14
MMIW Relatives Day of Action and Remembrance**

There will be rallies and gatherings across the state to honor Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives. A march will take place at the Minneapolis American Indian Center from 11am to 2pm. MAIC, 1530 E Franklin Ave, Minneapolis. For more info, see: <https://miwsac.co/2025MMIR>.

**Feb 15
Robert Desjarlait Exhibit**

Watermark Art Center will hold an opening reception for Robert Desjarlait (Red Lake Nation) on Feb 15 from 5 to 7pm. The reception will open with a hand drum ceremony featuring Desjarlait's son Miziway Migizi. Desjarlait's exhibit Inaaband Mitigwaki or "Woodland Vision" depicts, documents, and defines the life of

the Ojibwe people as he perceives it visually. His work engages the viewer in a visual language through which cultural diversity is the message. **Exhibit runs thru April 11, 2025.** Watermark Art Center, 505 Bemidji Ave N, Bemidji, MN. For more info, see: watermarkartcenter.org.

**Feb 18
Twin Cities EATSS**

The American Indian College Fund will host an evening of live entertainment, learning, and a concert by Rufus Wainwright at the Guthrie Theater. The event will feature Indigenous chefs and food, and all proceeds will benefit the American Indian College Fund. All proceeds from this event benefit the American Indian College. Concert-only seating: \$100. EATSS event and concert seating: \$195. Guthrie Theater, 818 S 2nd St, Minneapolis. See website for schedule. <https://www.guthrietheater.org/shows-and-tickets/special-events/eatss-event>.

**Feb 20
Watermark Art Center's first slam of 2025**

Get your poems ready for the Watermark Art Center's first slam of 2025. The slam is FREE to participate and FREE to watch. Cash prizes will be given to the top three performers. A poetry slam is a competitive art event in which poets perform spoken word poetry before a live audience and a panel of judges pulled from the audience. Poets are not required to memorize their poems and are welcome to use notes. Live music will begin at 6pm. Performances begin at 7pm. Poets may call Watermark to pre-register 218-444-7570. Registration is also available at the venue if space allows. Fozzie's Smokin' BBQ at 114 3rd St NW, Bemidji. For info: watermarkartcenter.org/poetry-slam-news.

**Feb 20
Smart Wars: Many Shields Exhibit**

All My Relations Arts: Many Shields, a solo exhibition from multimedia artist Rory Wakemup (Ojibwe). Smart Wars is a flip-the-script, satirical exhibition featuring works that assert Native identity, resilience, resistance and coexistence with our planet from multimedia artist Rory Wakemup. A continuation of his series, Divest or Die, Wakemup's work is a tongue-in-cheek exploration of culture vs controversy through the use of sculpture and installation. His exquisitely designed outfits are meant to subvert and amuse while commenting on social, political, and climate issues. Infusing traditional methods and materials, Wakemup's regalia is designed for 21st-century Indian warriors. This exhibition marks the artist's first solo exhibition at the gallery. Opening reception and Artist Talk will be held February 20th from 6-8pm, Artist talk begins at 7pm. **Exhibit runs thru April 5.** For info, see: allmyrelationsarts.org.

**Feb 26 (deadline)
2025 Widoookodaadiwag (Helping Others) Scholarship**

The application for Ain Dah Yung Center's 2025

Widoookodaadiwag (Helping Others) Scholarship is now available. All applicants who have been participants in any of ADYC's housing or other programs (current or past) are encouraged to apply if they meet the criteria. This annual scholarship fund is made possible because of a generous donor. Depending on the number of applicants, awards will range from \$250 - \$2500. The Scholarship Fund application is due no later than February 26th. Awards will be announced on or before March 28. Please return application with requested documentation to angie.deegan@adycenter.org. The application and eligibility requirements are at: <https://www.adycenter.org/about/scholarship>.

**March 3 - 4
4th Annual Dakota and Ojibwe Languages Symposium**

The Minnesota Indian Affairs Council's Language Revitalization Working Group, partnering with the Minnesota Humanities Center, is hosting the 4th Annual Dakota and Ojibwe Languages Symposium. The goal of the symposium is to bring people working in Dakota and Ojibwe languages revitalization together. We will use this time to celebrate successes, highlight the current

state of the field, shape future language revitalization efforts, and elevate the visibility of Indigenous languages throughout the state of Minnesota. By bringing people together, we hope this symposium serves as an opportunity for individuals to network with other Dakota and Ojibwe language professionals. This year the symposium will be held at Black Bear Casino Resort, 1785 MN-210, Carlton, MN. For more info, see: <https://www.mnhum.org/event/dakota-ojibwe-languages-symposium-2025>.

**March 15 (deadline)
Native Youth Grant**

We are awarding \$1,000 grants to Native youth aged 13 to 17 living in the Twin Cities Metro. Applicants must reside in the seven-county metropolitan area of Minnesota: Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Scott, Ramsey, and Washington counties. Youth applicants are required to: Attend the AIFEP Workshop on Feb 11. (RSVP by emailing tony@tiwahefoundation.org.) And participate in the AIFEP Youth Mentorship Program, a year-long journey of guidance and support. For info: <https://tiwahefoundation.org/aifep>.



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The Fry Bread Band has tremendous talent

BY DAN NINHAM

For the past three years Joe Covert has been the social studies and music teacher at Nay Ah Shing School on the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe Reservation. By night for the past two years he and his select students have been performing rock and roll music with their band called Fry Bread. The band is gaining a following quickly and is filling up their performance schedule.

Covert started teaching at Nay Ah Shing in April of 2022 although his teaching career spans 30 years and he's held several jobs during that time.

"I have been a professional musician my entire adult life ... I come from a musical family," said Covert. "Money was tight, but music was a priority at my house. My parents made sure that all six of their children received piano lessons. My grandfather was a professional musician. My earliest memories are of him singing and playing guitar."

"I have always believed I can teach anybody how to play," said Covert. "Tremendous credit should be given to the administration at Nay Ah Shing. I told them I could do this. They believed me and cut me loose to do the job. It has been a labor of love."

Covert recruited students to play specific instruments or to become vocalists.

He said, "From the day I arrived, I told the students I could teach them how to play and sing. I worked hard to cultivate interest because I thought if I could get them started, it would be successful."

"We have played all over," said Covert. "I had students warm up my professional band for a sold out show in Saint Michael, Minnesota. We have played for a packed house in the main ballroom at Grand Casino Mille Lacs and



The Fry Bread Band from left: Mercedes Anderson, Joe Covert, Cayleigh Nickaboine, Cass Sam, Amelya Pacheco-Leecy, Hayden Nickaboine, and Bryce Cash. (Photo by Chad Germann.)

Grand Casino Hinckley."

"The kids have tremendous talent, and the sky is the limit. I am optimistic about my students and their abilities. I am recruiting new students to play every day. Giving the gift of music to young people is something I really love about my job."

On a recent school morning, Joe Covert was leading his band students down the

hall toward the locker room. The locker room is where the band practices and there is minimal room to roam around the instruments and their stations.

They were all beginners two years ago when the band members were being recruited. The lead vocalists take turns with Patsy Cline's 'Walking After Midnight,' Roy Orbison's 'Pretty Woman,' and the Beatles' 'Day Tripper'.

Mercedes Garbow is in the eighth grade. She said, "I drum. I started playing in the band in 2022 and practiced the drums, when I joined I got better. I feel good about being in the band and I hope to become better at singing. I want to continue playing instruments and become better and start my own band."

Cayleigh Nickaboine is in the eighth grade. She talked about her role in the band. She said, "I play bass. I got the role in 2022 when Joe started the band. I'm more experienced and confident in myself at playing in front of a crowd. I would like to keep playing the bass and my hopes and dreams is to become a bass player and have my own band."

Hayden Nickaboine is in the tenth grade and she is from the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe. She said, "I play bass and how I got the role is Joe taught me some songs and I wanted to learn more. When I first joined the band I was nervous but it was fun. It still is fun and how I feel now is I'm still nervous. I don't know what my music goals are ... maybe

learn more songs and other instruments. I joined The Frybread Band back in 2022 and it was the best decision of my life."

Amelya Pacheco-Leecy is in the ninth grade. She talked about her role and where she is going with band music, "I am the main bass player for the band but share that role with my friends and we are a team of bass players. I've been in the band for two years now and I started out as a singer in the band and juggled trying out and playing drums and piano but was just way better at bass and stayed on as main bass player. I am also teaching myself to play guitar with a guitar I was gifted from my grandmother who passed away."

Pacheco-Leecy said, "At first I thought it would be really fun and cool to try out and I just kept going on. Now it's still fun and stressful at times when we have big performances but it all works out at the end of the day."

"I also like to suggest songs that I listen to with my mom and ask if we could play them or try them out like I watched La Bamba and it was so sad and so inspiring. I wanted to learn the songs and told our teacher we had to watch the movie with my classmates," added Pacheco-Leecy.

"My mom also showed me the live performance by Redbone called 'Come and Get Your Love' and seeing them dressed in powwow regalia blew my mind," said Pacheco-Leecy. "I wanted us to do that song and talked my classmates into all of us doing the song together and all of us sing it together like they do at the live performance. We are learning the song now."

"I am connected and enjoy it (band music) as a hobby," said Pacheco-Leecy. "I enjoy playing with my friends and us growing up bonding and having trips together outside of the school setting (and) we are a very mature bunch of kids just enjoy the music and our talents and the freedom it feels. Also the money and tips we've earned while playing is so amazing."

Cass Sam is in the seventh grade. "I am the lead singer, Joe auditioned students," said Cass Sam. "I love being the lead singer. I was 11 years old the first time I performed with the band and was super nervous! It was in front of our band elders. Now I'm a little less nervous. I love to perform! I am currently learning to play guitar and I am experimenting with writing."

Bryce Cash is in the eighth grade. "My mother got me a drum set and I wanted to audition," said Bryce Cash. "When I first started, I was looking at all these drummers and thought I'm going to do that, and now the band is doing good and its cool being a part of the band."

People walking past the locker room/band room will soon be hearing Redbone "Come and Get Your Love." It will be The Fry Bread Band working on their beats.

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A memoir that will make readers reflect and grow

There is this saying that when a student is ready, a teacher will appear. With “Whiskey Tender A Memoir” by Deborah Jackson Taffa (HarperCollins 2024), when the right book appears with new perspectives for the reader, the reader will reflect, and grow.

Jackson Taffa (Quechan/Laguna Pueblo) takes us through the seasons of her youth from age 3 to 18, starting with family poverty on the Quechan (Yuma) reservation in southeastern California where her father, Edmond Jackson, worked three jobs to make ends meet. He attended welding school in Phoenix with assistance from the Bureau of Indian Affairs Indian Relocation Act, and finally took a welding job in Farmington, New Mexico, located on the border of the Navajo Nation.

The family of five uproots from their home with its supportive family, cultural and historical ties to move to Navajo country and schools with mostly non-Indians. It’s here that Taffa’s mixed race identification is heightened, to a point where as a young elementary student in a Catholic school, she strives to gain acceptance from teachers by passing as white and burying her native heritage. Light-complected like her Latina mother, and academically gifted, the little girl excels at school to please the adults in her life.

The story goes on to reveal often painfully detailed highlights from Taffa’s elementary and middle school years. Woven throughout the book is a lot of American Indian history on assimilation campaigns by the U.S. government, the effects of boarding schools, generational trauma, and identification.

As a child, Taffa exists on a racial merry-go-round where in the course of a single day, she is accepted by classmates as white, by teachers as Latina or Native, and by her family as an enigma. Her parents do not understand why their intelligent, talented child grows to lose interest in sports, school activities and making good grades. She ages out of the Catholic school, starts a public school, and is attracted to the class rebels, the angry kids who only seem confident and assured. She wants to be cool, like the cool kids.

It’s here in the story that I offer a warning: if you have sublimated any painful years of your middle and early high school existence, this book will bring them back. Taffa cites example after example of mean kid activities like shunning, cruelty, violence, name calling and trips to the principal’s office.

In my view, she could have left some of that detail out. I didn’t need to know every thoughtless and stupid adolescent act. The early school years are followed by high school with the awkwardness of

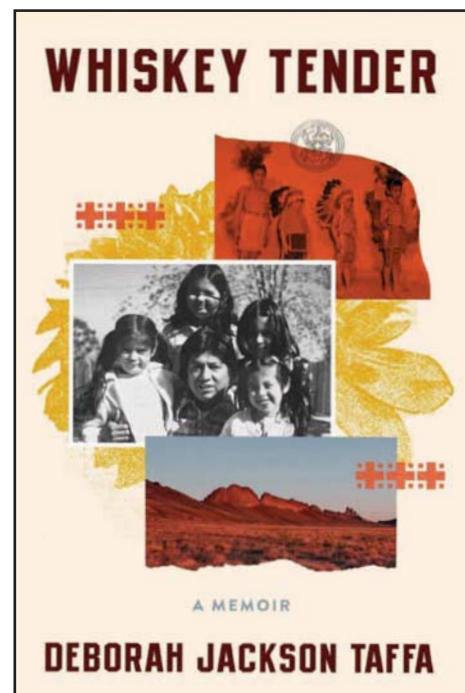
adolescent attraction to boys, beer, cars driven too fast, and late nights—all occurring under the eyes of her watchful and worried parents.

It’s the parents, mostly the dad, who bring grounding and sense to Taffa’s tumultuous life. In fact, Edmond Jackson, though flawed, is one of the best Native men you will ever learn from. No, he doesn’t present to his daughter a detailed litany of Indian history and culture. Much of what she learns about her people happens later through her own efforts. But he has a warm common sense, a deep protective love for his family, and a strong impulse to lift them from poverty. Jackson is the first Indian foreman at the plant where he started as a welder, and he is resented by some of the Navajo who work with him.

Still, he doesn’t care what others think of him. Taffa, on the other hand, seems to obsess about what everyone thinks. Jackson says to his daughter:

“If you’ve got one problem, that’s it. You worry too damn much about pleasing everyone. You never make choices for yourself. You’ve got to learn to stand alone. Have the courage to become an individual.”

That’s a pretty good summary of one of the book’s key points. Taffa is on a path to her authentic self, to a place where her opinion of who she is matters more than the opinion of anyone else.



Whiskey Tender, A Memoir
By Deborah Jackson Taffa
Harper Perennial
December 2024
304 pages

Earlier I wrote that the book helps you to see further and wider, the way a good teacher expands a student’s vision. I have reviewed a lot of books for *The Circle* over the years. This is the only book that made me cry. The ending chapters are that profound.

IT AIN’T EASY BEING INDIAN

BY RICEY WILD



What about the price of eggs?! I hate to admit that I need laying chickens because I love eating their young. I’ve just taken out three white eggs to warm up and eat with my turkey chorizo. And tortillas. Good source of protein but I digress.

The current rabid rodent in The White House has said that Native Americans are not Native to what we call ‘America’. Somebody slap me with a moose nose. It has reportedly used ICE to remove some Dine’ people from lands they have

occupied since time immemorial. I am beyond rageful, on my way to Wash. D.C. to prove my bloodline.

We Indigenous people have always been here. Our DNA proves it so much that WE are The Original People as our name for ourselves declare. I can’t even get my head around Peestain’s statement. I admit I did laugh but not in agreement, but because he’s angry he bankrupted several casinos where we succeeded.

And exactly where is IT going to deport us to? I already live in the west of what our original homelands were. My people used to live on beaches where warmth and fish and critters were plentiful. Then the Pink Ones came and claimed it all and destroyed the lands. I live in Minnesota so it’s not too far from Canada, same ecosystem.

Puking. I hate puking but I am holding off until this nasty administration is out of power. I’m talking about Trumpa The Hut, who is gross, vile and only has one thing on his tiny mind – revenge. Be sure to keep your tribal cards everywhere you go on your own lands.

Propane, electric blankets and deer
Propane just showed up. Your girl here

bought an electric blanket because I was soo cold!!! Tha Bugg has a fur coat but I don’t. (Sigh of relief) So do the cats. I kid you not, last week I got advice to “get another cat”. Yeah that’s awwright, but I still need propane. We elderly have slow circulation so.... Miigwech whomever, yanno I voted for you.

Also I bought my Unk two pair of thermal socks because he is a outdoor man and hunts and shares the bounty with myself and others. I really like venison round steak. Ya, marinate it with teriyaki and soy sauce. Serve with saliva.

Hey now, I’m still mad. I’m going through a lot and I deserve some kinda peace. It gets sadder when I live alone and don’t have anyone else to blame for my misery. I have to own it. I’ve never married (Oh the horror!) so I’ve never been divorced but in my isolation I feel like I’m divorced from life; my disabilities, my depression, the anxiety and PTSD. All diagnosed by professionals.

So what is an oldish Kwe (woman) to do?! I live to outlive the haters who wished me ill. I laugh and try not to fall on the floor cuz then I have to push the little button on my necklace that alerts the EMT’s that I have fallen and can’t

reach my wine. Heaven help me should I fall when washing dishes. Or cleaning.

Against my better instincts I do follow the news of the day. That keeps me up to the latest horrors that may or may not affect me directly but it does on my receipts. I miss Roger Buffalohead. He was my Unk. So yeah, I continue to piss people off who have been planning and wishing for my untimely demise. Ayy! I’ll go when the time is right and not before.

That book I’ve been threatening?! It’s coming. It is all I have left but for a few more columns now. You think you know me? Naw, I know yooz better. Anyhoo—it’s been a strange life that not just anyone can survive. I have and so can you.

I’m smoking the last menthol store bought cig that cost 13.17 dollars a pack. I know, I know! I know just how wasteful it is. I have a lot of bad habits I need to rid myself of given how ancient I have become. I’m still not used to it. In my mind, I’m the younger version of me until I stand up and groan at the effort.

Much Love to you all, I am and always will be Ricey Wild.

riceywild@hotmail.com

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