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ICE harrasses Native & Somali communities

A federal law enforcement officer wears a vest bearing a POLICE patch and a Homeland Security badge while standing perimeter guard during an operation that drew protestors in St. Paul, on Nov. 25. (Photo by Kerem Yücel / MPR News.)

THE CIRCLE

Fears of immigration sweeps have intensified across Minneapolis and St. Paul as reports continue to surface of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers, some allegedly wearing masks, detaining individuals based on skin color. City leaders are urging residents to remain vigilant and to immediately report suspicious enforcement activity, particularly when officers refuse to identify themselves.

Concerns have been growing in the Twin Cities Somali community following news from *The Associated Press* and *The New York Times* that the Trump administration plans to deploy up to 100 additional ICE agents to Minnesota to seek individuals with final deportation orders. Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey said the reports are credible. "Obviously, this is a frightening moment for our Somali community," Frey said, describing the expected ICE surge as "terrorizing." He added, "That's not American. That's not what we are about," according to the article from MPR News.com.

Frey said he is worried that federal agents searching for undocumented individuals will mistakenly detain lawful residents and U.S. citizens. "They're gonna get the wrong people," he said. "They're gonna screw it up so badly," he added, noting that Minneapolis has more than 80,000 Somali American residents, the overwhelming majority of whom are legal residents or citizens.

Minneapolis Police Chief Brian O'Hara emphasized that the Minneapolis Police Department does not assist ICE with immigration enforcement. He told residents to call 911 if they encounter individuals claiming to be law enforcement who refuse to identify themselves. "That's something you should report, and we will immediately respond to and document," he said, urging peaceful protest if enforcement actions escalate.

The warnings come as Indigenous residents nationwide raise alarms that Native Americans are being detained by ICE despite being U.S. citizens and citizens of sovereign tribal nations. In Washington state, well-known Native American actor Elaine Miles, best known for her role in "Northern Exposure," reported being stopped by four masked men identifying as federal agents while she walked to a bus stop in Redmond. Miles told *The Guardian* that she showed the men her tribal identification from the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation in Oregon, but one officer told her "anyone can make that."

The ICE agents refused to verify the card by calling the tribe. Miles called the number herself, and when one officer tried to take her phone from her, she resisted. The men ultimately released her and drove away without explanation.

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Tribal colleges moved to Interior Department by Trump

BY THE CIRCLE

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of the Interior will assume administration of federal funding for tribal colleges, a responsibility long held by the U.S. Department of Education. The shift is causing worry among tribal higher education leaders who fear disruptions to funding stability and long-standing institutional relationships.

The reorganization follows efforts by Education Secretary Linda McMahon to shrink the agency's operational role and reassign implementation duties to other departments while retaining oversight and policy authority. Under the new agreement, the Interior Department will administer Title III tribal college funds that support academic programs, campus operations and student services.

Interior officials say the transition is logical because the department already oversees the Bureau of Indian Education, which manages tribal elementary and secondary schools along with two tribal colleges: Haskell Indian Nations University in Kansas and Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute in New Mexico. It also currently distributes scholarships and other financial aid to Native students.

Interior Secretary Doug Burgum said the department will work to "enhance Indian education programs, streamline operations and refocus efforts" to support Native communities across the country, including tribal college students.

The American Indian Higher Education Consortium said it would collaborate closely with federal officials to maintain continuity for the more than three dozen tribal colleges nationwide. In a statement, the organization emphasized that federal funding is rooted in treaty obligations and is essential to preserving tribal sovereignty and student success.

Still, the change has unsettled many leaders on tribal campuses who say they were not consulted. They worry the transition could weaken financial safeguards and threaten programs that have historically been managed by the Education Department.

At Tohono O'odham Community College in Arizona, President Stephen Schoonmaker said the Interior Department's competing priorities already raised concerns earlier this year, when the Trump administration proposed reducing tribal college funding by more than 80 percent, cutting allocations from roughly $127 million to about $22 million. That reduction was ultimately blocked by Congress.

Schoonmaker said focusing so much responsibility in one agency could increase the risk of severe consequences should political priorities shift again. "Putting everything under one basket" means "if something goes wrong, it all goes wrong," he said.

Leaders at College of Menominee Nation in Wisconsin expressed similar concerns. President Chris Caldwell said strong philanthropic support — including a $10 million gift from MacKenzie Scott — and a one-time influx of federal funds brought temporary relief this year but cannot replace predictable, ongoing support through the Education Department.

Caldwell said tribal colleges have experienced a "roller coaster" of financial uncertainty over the past several years. He worries that a poorly coordinated transition could delay resources or derail program development at colleges already operating with tight budgets.

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First all-Native American fire crew redefines what public safety looks like

BY SARAH THAMER/MPR NEWS

At Minneapolis Fire Station 6, Engine 10's A-shift recently renewed their commitment to stay together for two more years, continuing their work out of the city's busiest station.

Inside the station stands Capt. Michael Graves, fire motor operator Jesse Strong, and firefighters Johnny Crow and Bobby Headbird. Their all-Native American crew wasn't assigned. It wasn't a department directive.

"This was all us," Graves said. "It was important because we all have ties to the city, and we grew up not seeing police or fire that looked like us."

Representation, he says, has a real impact on trust and connection. The crew sees that impact every day.

On the job: Familiar calls, familiar histories

During a recent ride-along to a small house fire in south Minneapolis — a call resolved within minutes — the crew talked about the emergencies that dominate their work. Many of them reflect challenges disproportionately affecting Native communities.

Firefighter Johnny Crow described it candidly: "Calls that have to deal with overdose and opioid domestic violence, all these things that the Native community has dealt with, we have experienced firsthand in our families. So we come with a lot of compassion and understanding."

That shared lived experience shapes how they approach people in crisis. It also shapes how they see their role inside the city's emergency response system.

A different kind of impact

A few days later, on their day off, the crew visits Anishinabe Academy, where about 80 percent of students are Native American. The hallways fill as soon as the firefighters arrive. Students swarm them with questions, excitement and recognition.

"It's really nice to have Native superheroes in this city," one student says.

"I've never seen a Native fire group. It's, like, so amazing that they're here to see everyone and have the kids in my class sit in the truck," another student said.

Fire motor operator Jesse Strong says that connection is already reshaping who sees themselves in these uniforms.

"I always think back to myself when I was a kid, and there weren't many people in roles like we're in, to some people we're role models, and I think that we're really honored to be in those positions."

Strong said the students aren't just noticing the gear or uniforms — they're seeing firefighters who reflect their own community in a way that hasn't been present in Minneapolis firehouses until recently.

Influence beyond the station

Later that afternoon at Pow Wow Grounds coffee shop in the American Indian Cultural Corridor, firefighter Bobby Headbird runs into Derrick Yazzie, a 22-year-old who is also

to get representation and to get our voice and get seen," Crow said.

For the crew, being at Station 6 is part of a broader effort to increase visibility for Native people in institutions where they have often been underrepresented.

A team, and something more

Between calls, the crew trains, cooks, and works side-by-side like any other shift in the department. What sets them apart is the collective sense of purpose that forms the backbone of their work.

They'll keep responding to fires, overdoses, alarms, and medical calls across Downtown West, Loring Park, Loring Heights and Lowry Hill. But the four men say the job extends far beyond emergencies.

Opposite page top: the Engine 10, an all-Native American firefighter crew, from left to right: firefighter Johnny Crow, Capt. Michael Graves, firefighter Bobby Headbird, and fire motor operator Jesse Strong at Minneapolis Fire Station. (Photo by Kerem Yücel / MPR News.)

Opposite page bottom: Capt. Michael Graves speaks to students at Anishinabe Academy in Minneapolis. (Photo by Sarah Thamer / MPR News.)

This page top left: Capt. Michael Graves walks outside a home after a fire. (Photo by Kerem Yücel / MPR News.)

This page top right: Minneapolis firefighter Bobby Headbird demonstrates how to put on gear for students at Anishinabe Academy. (Photo by Sarah Thamer / MPR News.)

This page bottom left: Firefighter Johnny Crow sits at the back of Engine 10 after responding to a fire on Nov. 17 in Minneapolis. (Photo by Kerem Yücel / MPR News.)

Indigenous and working toward becoming a firefighter himself. Yazzie credits the crew for that decision.

"Native men being successful, that really inspires me to push myself to believe that I can do anything," Yazzie said. "These guys, they're strong warriors, they help people, just do a lot of good things. And that just inspires me to do good things."

Headbird remembers the first time Yazzie approached them — seeing the crew in full gear, stopping them to ask how to get started.

"It's really emotional right now because we met here at Pow Wow Grounds," Headbird said. "This is where we first met, he saw us in gear, came up here to get a coffee, he said he was interested in becoming a firefighter. So now he's working himself through the process and it's good to see him better himself. That's what it's all about, right there."

The four firefighters come from several tribal nations — Red Lake Nation, Bois Forte Band of Chippewa, Oglala Lakota Tribe and Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe. Their backgrounds differ, but their motivations quickly align.

"Over the past few months, we realized we are all cut from the same cloth and have the same shared beliefs and mindset for the city, for the community and everything," Graves said.

Being warriors, they say, is part of their lineage — but today that looks different than it did for their grandfathers.

"It's been a struggle to adjust from where we come from in surviving genocide and surviving the reservations, which were originally prison camps. And so us moving to the city here, we might have came 50 plus years ago. So it's been a struggle for our community

Indigenous mural debuted at MN Wild hockey game

BY DAN NINHAM

Artist Shawna Grapentine with her design of the mural titled, "Land of 10,000 Rinks." (Photo by James Grapentine.)

By day Shawna Grapentine works in the American Indian Education Department at Warroad Public Schools. Outside the day she has been an aspiring artist with a distinctive and unique art style that she expanded into a business. She has a website called "Moon and Back Custom Arts." See https://moonandbackcustomarts.com/

The NHL Minnesota Wild not only hosted the Colorado Avalanche in a recent game. The organization also hosted the Native American Heritage Day at the Grand Casino Arena in St. Paul.

A small-scale mural for the upcoming International Ice Hockey Federation's (IIHF) World Junior Championships was showcased during the Wild and Avalanche game and bridges the Native American and hockey communities. The artwork will be enlarged in the visitors village and throughout the venues.

Oji-Cree artist Shawna Grapentine is a member of the Hollow Water First Nation and she designed the artwork. The artwork is titled "Land of 10,000 Rinks."

The 2026 IIHF World Junior Championship will be held at the end of December and early January in St. Paul. The event will host several world class level hockey teams for under 20 year olds. The local organizing committee with Minnesota Sports and Events is called Assist 26 and is in partnership with USA Hockey.

The Assist 26 initiative aims to build equity, access and across the state of Minnesota.

In a press statement by Minnesota Sports and Events, the mural "brings together Indigenous teachings, Minnesota's hockey heritage, and the natural beauty of the State of Hockey."

Grapentine has a past connection with the IIHF. In April of 2023 she was one of four Indigenous artist's chosen from across Canada to design the "Player of the Game" Hockey sticks for the IIHF Womens World Championships.

DN: How and when did you develop your current artistic styles?

SG: My artwork style has evolved over the years. As a young girl, I always had a strong interest in the arts and being creative. The middle child of seven siblings, growing up in a large family, there were times when we had to go without certain things because my parents simply couldn't afford the extras. While it wasn't always easy, those experiences taught us to appreciate what we had and to be grateful for the little things.

My artistic style consists of bold, bright colours simply because I feel that the sight of bright colours is cheerful and brings me joy. It makes me happy, and this is what I hope others feel when they look at my artwork.

DN: Describe the processes of you being involved with the Wild's Native American Heritage Day with the art mural and hoodie design and the artwork of the 2026 IIHF World Junior Hockey Championship.

SG: The "Land of 10,000 Rinks" mural project interested me because of the challenge in connecting the Native American culture and what hockey means in the state of Minnesota. To create an art piece that complements the meaningful connection between my Anishinaabe culture and the strong rooted heritage of hockey and what it means to me and many others intrigued me.

I was truly proud to be a part of this art project because it allowed me to shine a spotlight on the beauty of my Anishinaabe culture and to share what hockey has meant to me over the years. The many men in my life have always loved the sport of hockey; my brothers played, as did my brother-in-law, my husband, and now my son and nephew. Hockey has truly become a family tradition; it's what we love to watch and what we live for.

DN: How does your Indigenous background influence your art?

SG: Much of my artwork is inspired by childhood memories: growing up by the lake, family traditions, and the simple joys of nature. Nothing resets me quite like being outdoors; nature has always been my greatest source of renewal. I feel a natural connection to the land; it's an integral part of who I am. Being surrounded by nature brings me a sense of renewal and belonging that's hard to describe. I believe that as Anishinaabe people, it's simply a part of who we are.

DN: How do you think about keeping indigenous traditions alive while also exploring contemporary forms and imagery?

SG: I strive to keep my Indigenous culture alive through my artwork, using it as a way to educate and inspire others. Each piece is an opportunity to share the beauty and traditions of my heritage, and to encourage understanding and appreciation.

The artwork

The sun at the center of the artwork is a symbol that everyone can relate to, it's a symbol of life, energy, balance and warmth. It's a sacred connection to all of creation.

The seven grandfather teachings are the core values that guide each of us towards living a good life in harmony with others. The braid is a symbol of strength, unity and a sacred symbol of connection and identity, family, community and Mother Earth. Also, a single strand of hair is fragile, but when braided with all the other strands of hair is strong, a symbol that we are much stronger together and united rather than standing alone.

The Wampum Belt is a huge symbol throughout the course of history. The Wampum Belt was the first peace agreement between nations. It was used to record the great laws of peace between the Indigenous peoples and the Europeans.

The good old-fashioned pond hockey is what all hockey lovers can relate to growing up. It's deeply rooted in our hockey heritage; it's a part of who we are.

The Grand Casino Arena is a childhood dream for any kid playing organized hockey in the state of Minnesota. The goal is to compete in the Minnesota high school hockey tournament.

By creating this artwork piece, I hoped to draw the audience in and shine a light on the beauty of my Indigenous culture, along with the sport of hockey, which has brought so much joy to many families.

This mural not only serves as a visual celebration but also as a bridge between generations, encouraging conversations about shared values and traditions. Through each element, from the vibrant sun to the iconic pond hockey scene, I aimed to honour both the past and present, inviting viewers to reflect on their own connections to culture and sport.

Info on the 2026 IIHF World Junior Championship can be found at; https://www.iihf.com/en/events/2026/wm20

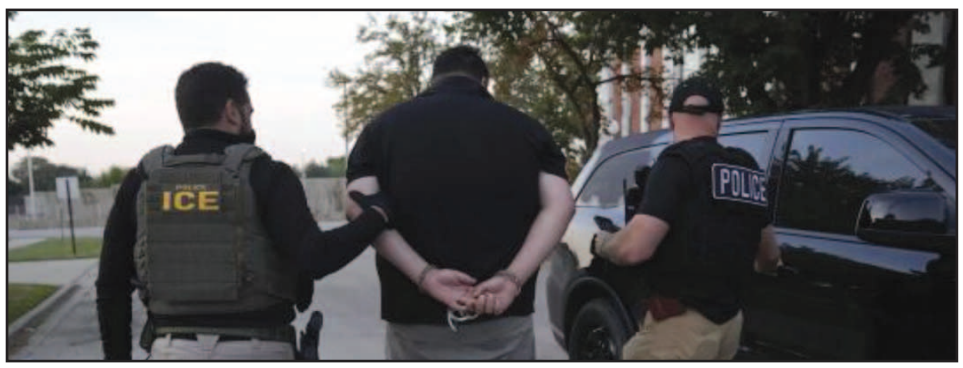
Mpls moves to strengthen its separation ordinance amid ICE raids

MINNEAPOLIS, MN – Minneapolis officials have advanced a proposal to strengthen the city's two-decade-old separation ordinance, reaffirming limits on local involvement in federal immigration enforcement as residents express growing concern about intensified federal actions.

The measure, approved in early December by a City Council committee, reinforces existing rules that prohibit city employees — including police officers — from enforcing federal immigration law. The updated language states that cooperation with federal immigration enforcement could "have a chilling effect on immigrant populations' willingness to report crime and cooperate with the city's public safety efforts."

Council Member Aurin Chowdhury, a sponsor of the proposal, said Minneapolis must not divert local resources to carry out federal duties.

"The city of Minneapolis will be prioritizing using its limited, finite resources to advance the health and safety of its residents," Chowdhury said. "And if our city personnel were to enforce federal immigration laws for the federal government, it would squander the limited municipal resources we have."



Minneapolis first adopted its separation ordinance in 2003, shortly after Congress created the Department of Homeland Security in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks. City leaders at the time raised concerns that the federal government would lean on local agencies to enforce immigration law.

The new measure would explicitly prohibit Minneapolis from entering into cooperation agreements with federal immigration agencies. More than a half-dozen Minnesota law enforcement agencies currently have formal partnerships with DHS and Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The proposed changes would prevent Minneapolis from doing the same.

Under the updated ordinance, any use of city public safety personnel during a federal immigration action must be documented in a report to the City Council, identifying what resources were used and to what extent. The measure would also require training on separation rules for newly hired city employees.

The ordinance does not block the Minneapolis Police Department from continuing its collaboration with federal law enforcement on other criminal investigations. MPD regularly works with agencies such as the FBI and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives on cases involving drug trafficking, human trafficking and gang activity. Those partnerships have included federal RICO prosecutions aimed at dismantling violent street gangs.

The proposal includes language criticizing federal agents for wearing masks and concealing badges during enforcement actions. City leaders say those tactics undermine public trust, but the policy does not attempt to restrict federal agents' conduct, noting the city lacks legal authority to impose such limits.

Dozens of residents testified at the meeting, urging the council to adopt the strongest protections possible. Many described fear in their neighborhoods as immigration enforcement escalates across Minneapolis and St. Paul.

"We need real and effective measures to protect us all," said Audrey Forticaux, a member of the Unidos social justice group. "I am scared for my daughter's day care workers. The majority of day cares in my area are all Hispanic people. And we've seen them being dragged out of daycares in other cities. It could happen here."

ICE DETAINS NATIVE ACTOR, QUESTIONS VALID TRIBAL ID

Redmond, WA – Elaine Miles, a Native American actress best known for her role on the television series "Northern Exposure," says she was detained by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents in late November while walking to a bus stop in Redmond, Wash. According to Miles, four masked agents approached her and demanded identification. She presented her official tribal ID issued by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation in Oregon.

Miles said the agents told her the ID "looked fake" and refused her offer to call the enrollment office number listed on the card for verification. When she attempted to make the call herself, one agent allegedly tried to take her phone. She was released without arrest after several minutes.

Advocates for tribal citizenship rights condemned the incident as racial profiling and a failure by federal authorities to recognize Indigenous sovereignty. Tribal IDs are recognized forms of legal identification under federal law.

Miles said the incident was frightening but not unique — her son and uncle have both reported similar encounters in the past. She expressed concern for Native people who might be detained longer or face legal consequences simply because officers do not understand tribal documentation. Civil rights groups have called for ICE to improve training on Native identity and tribal documentation standards.

NATIVE CHILDREN RETURNED HOME/CARLISLE CEMETERY

Carlisle, PA – Seventeen Native American children buried at the former Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania were returned to their tribal homelands in November, marking another step in nationwide efforts to repatriate children who died during the U.S. boarding school era.

The children — including some of the first enrolled at the school in 1879 — had been taken far from their families as part of federal assimilation policies intended to eliminate Indigenous culture and identity. They died of illnesses such as tuberculosis and meningitis and were buried on school grounds with minimal documentation.

Sixteen of the children were returned to the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma and laid to rest in Concho. One child from the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma was reburied in Wewoka. Tribal leaders said the homecomings bring long-needed closure for families who were deprived of the ability to mourn and maintain cultural burial traditions.

Since repatriation efforts began in 2017, more than 50 children have been returned from Carlisle. Over 100 graves remain, and many identities are still unconfirmed. Tribal governments and federal officials say the work will continue until every child is identified and returned home.

SHUTDOWN EXPOSED FRAGILE FUNDING FOR TRIBAL SERVICES

Washington DC – The 2025 federal government shutdown, which began October 1 and lasted for 6 weeks (the lonest in history), created immediate disruptions across Indian Country. Tribal governments rely heavily on federal funding for essential services including housing, policing, education, food programs and cultural preservation. When operations froze, those programs stalled.

Many tribes were forced to use emergency reserves to keep critical functions running. Others issued furloughs or delayed projects tied to federal grants. The shutdown did not interrupt Indian Health Service operations, but smaller programs — such as housing assistance and elder services — faced cuts or temporary closures.

Advocacy groups said the shutdown highlighted ongoing weaknesses in how the U.S. funds treaty and trust obligations. Most tribal programs are supported through discretionary appropriations, making them vulnerable to political standoffs. Tribal leaders and policy experts argue funding should be mandatory, not negotiable, to respect legal commitments made to Native nations.

The shutdown lasted weeks and left long-term concerns about preparedness for future political disruptions.

POLICY SHIFT RAISE CONCERNS AS FOOD AID TIGHTENS

Washington DC – Tribal nations expressed growing concern in November as federal food assistance programs faced reductions linked to the prolonged U.S. government budget fight. Many Native communities already experience food insecurity at higher-than-average rates, and cuts to programs such as SNAP and school nutrition services quickly translated into greater hardship.

At the same time, community development financial institutions that support Native-owned businesses struggled with the after-effects of the shutdown, including staffing shortages and lost grant opportunities.

One area of progress came through renewed congressional conversation around the Truth and Healing Commission bill, aimed at addressing the legacy of federal Indian boarding schools. Advocates said progress on long-term reforms cannot come at the expense of immediate needs such as food support and stable funding for tribal governance.

Policy watchdogs warned that without sustained federal attention — and recognition of tribal sovereignty — communities could face deeper inequity heading into 2026.

Family from Red Lake shares culture with international audience

BY LEAH LEMM/MPR NEWS

Selena Jourdain started jingle dress dancing when she was 3 years old. The jingle dress is a century-old Ojibwe cultural tradition with beginnings in Minnesota. In late November, Jourdain shared that tradition with an audience of millions.

The Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade drew a crowd of well over 3 million spectators to the streets of New York City, with more than ten times that number watching the broadcast.

For Jourdain, it was the second time she had shared her culture at the parade. She appeared in the parade in 2013, when she was 12 years old. This year, she brought attention to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women with her regalia.

"I decided to wear red to honor MMIW," Jourdain said.

According to Minnesota's Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives Office, Indigenous women and girls made up 10 percent of missing women in the state in 2024 — far exceeding the one percent population of Indigenous women.

"Most people probably wouldn't, but I think all the Natives would recognize it," Jourdain said.

The jingle dress is known for its healing. The sound of the jingle dress beats like rhythmic rain as dancers moved to the drum.

"Me and my daughter will be dancing what's called original style jingle dress, so it'll be a little bit different. We have a contemporary jingle dress dancer as well, so I'm excited that we'll get to showcase the two different versions of the jingle dress," Jourdain said before the performance.

Now a mother, Jourdain was joined in the parade by her daughter, Ivy Rosebear, in a jingle dress made by "mommy's friend."

"It's blue and pink," the first grader said.

Jourdain's father also participated in the event. Years earlier, Chris Jourdain brought his daughter to New York City for her first year in the parade. He said the parade was an opportunity to showcase Indigenous representation to a large audience.

"It is good to see us, as Indigenous people, on the big screen on this holiday, or however we want to frame that. It's that we're still here, and we're thriving and we're growing," Chris Jourdain said.

The Jourdain family is part of Native Pride Productions, an Indigenous performance company dedicated to preserving and sharing cultural traditions.

Larry Yazzie, the founder and artistic

Native Pride Productions performed during the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in late November. Selena Jourdain and daughter Ivy Rosebear, from the Red Lake Nation, are jingle dress dancers with the company.(Photo courtesy of Native Pride Productions.)

Selena Jourdain (right) and Ivy Rosebear (left) from Red Lake Nation will danced in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. (Photo c.)ourtesy of Chris Jourdain.)

director of Native Pride Productions, started dancing at a young age and went on to become a world champion fancy dancer, an actor and a cultural educator. The theme of the performance on Thursday focused on showcasing dancers across generations.

A news release from Native Pride Productions stated, "we bring three generations of dancers together to share the beauty, strength, and spirit of American Indian culture with millions across the nation."

This year marked the company's third appearance at the parade, with dancers from several tribal nations across the United States and Canada.

"I'm just as thrilled as the first time and the second time," Yazzie said.

For many Indigenous people, Thanksgiving has not been a day of celebration. Since 1970, National Day of Mourning has been recognized by Indigenous people and allies with a gathering in Plymouth, Mass., the same day as Thanksgiving. The United American Indians of New England organized the commemoration in response to the U.S. holiday, recognizing the centuries of suffering that followed settler contact.

Yazzie said the parade was an opportunity to focus on the mission of Native Pride Productions: education.

"I want the world to know that we still exist, we still are proud people, and historically, the U.S. government has always tried to take away our way of life because they didn't simply understand. And I want the world to understand our culture, that our culture is beautiful," Yazzie said. "We've always been here for thousands of years, and that's our mission — to inspire and motivate and, last but not least, to educate, to educate the world of who we are as Indigenous people."

Yazzie noted that the time of year has traditionally been one of feasting, gathering and celebration. He said he wanted to continue that tradition.

Yazzie's spouse, Shawna Yazzie, who managed logistics for Native Pride Productions, said, "Thanksgiving, even though our story is very different than what a lot of times is shown on television or taught, it's still a time to honor our ancestors that came before us, and a time for gathering and a time for celebration."

“ICE detaining Natives” continued from cover

Miles said this was not an isolated experience. She told the Lakota People’s Law Project that similar things have happened to her son and uncle. “Tribal IDs—the government issued those damn cards to us like a pedigree dog! It’s not fake!” she said.

Indigenous rights attorney Gabriel Galanda told *The Seattle Times* that these incidents reflect racial profiling. “People are getting pulled over or detained on the street because of the dark color of their skin,” he said. He added that the refusal to recognize tribal identification shows “a fair amount of ignorance about tribal citizenship generally in society and in government,” and said it is “deeply troubling that in 2025, the first people of this country have to essentially look over their shoulders.”

A similar case occurred in Des Moines, Iowa. An article in Native News Online reported that 24-year-old Leticia Jacobo, a member of the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community in Arizona, was nearly transferred into ICE custody after being booked for a suspended license. Jacobo, who was born in Phoenix, had been held at the Polk County Jail and was scheduled for release Nov. 11, but jail staff told her mother that she would instead be handed over to immigration agents.

The article described how Jacobo’s family rushed to the jail with her birth certificate and her tribal identification, but staff insisted she would still be deported. Her aunt, Maria Nunez said, “They’re going to go ahead and deport her to wherever they’re going to take her, but we have no information on that.” Jacobo was released only after her family kept watch outside the jail overnight to ensure ICE did not remove her.

Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey (left) and St. Paul Mayor Melvin Carter speak at a press conference in support of Minnesota's Somali community after the New York Times reported the Trump administration may target Somalis in an immigration enforcement operation in the Twin Cities region. (Photo by Matt Sepic / MPR News.)

“It’s racial profiling,” Nunez said. “She’s been there before, they have a rap sheet on her — why would they make a mistake with someone that’s constantly coming in?” Polk County officials later called it a “clerical mix-up,” but the ICE field office declined to explain how it verifies detainers or prevents Native citizens from being detained. Nunez said she fears others may not be as fortunate. “Not everyone has a family as involved in their welfare as Jacobo does,” she said.

These events have heightened fears across Native communities in the Twin Cities, especially among those who regularly carry tribal identification rather than state-issued IDs. Minneapolis Indigenous advocates say masked agents are a particular concern. When individuals wearing tactical gear refuse to show badges, residents feel they are being confronted by unknown actors with police-like authority.

The atmosphere of fear has also intensified for Somali Americans. Gov. Tim Walz said he expects “an increased presence of immigration folks in our city,” following Trump’s disparaging remarks

about Somali immigrants. Trump has claimed that Somali Americans are too reliant on welfare programs and add little to the United States. "I don't want them in our country," Trump said during a Cabinet meeting, according to the MPR News report. Trump also referred to Somalia as "barely a country" and said Somali people "just run around killing each other."

Walz criticized the remarks as a political strategy targeting immigrants. "This is a president in spiral doing nothing to make life cheaper for Minnesotans or Americans," Walz said. "We understand who he's targeting."

Indigenous advocates say both Native and Somali Americans are facing a common threat: enforcement actions that appear to rely on assumptions about who belongs in this country based on skin color rather than legal status. "Whether you come from Somalia or were born here as Native, we are facing the same fear from the same people," one Minneapolis Native community organizer said.

Tribal nations and community groups are working to prepare. Leaders are creating rapid-response communications networks and providing training on what to do if confronted by law enforcement officers who refuse to identify themselves.

Residents are being encouraged to keep proof of citizenship accessible, remain aware of their surroundings, and notify authorities if they feel unsafe. The message from Minneapolis officials is consistent: if someone claiming authority refuses to identify themselves, residents should question the interaction and call 911.

Leticia Jacobo was abducted by ICE even though she told them she was Native American. (Photo courtesy of the Jacobo family.)

Twin Cities residents are being encouraged to keep proof of citizenship accessible, remain aware of their surroundings, and notify authorities if they feel unsafe. The message from Minneapolis officials is: **if someone claiming authority refuses to identify themselves, residents should question the interaction and call 911.**

Frey insisted that the city will stand firm with immigrant and Indigenous residents. "The rights and dignity of immigrants — and all Americans — must be upheld," he said. Many community members fear that as winter sets in, the threat of masked agents detaining people without clear cause adds a chilling new layer of danger to neighborhoods already struggling with ice, cold and mobility challenges.

Federal officials have not commented publicly on the reports of increased ICE enforcement in Minnesota, nor have they responded to concerns about Native Americans being detained. Advocates worry that without strong oversight, masked arrests and identity challenges could escalate. An elder living near the Little Earth community in Minneapolis expressed frustration and disbelief that such precautions are necessary. "We are the first people of this land," she said. "Now we're treated like strangers in our own homelands."

Frey warned that any enforcement operation involving masked officers or unverified authority figures "can't go wrong." His concern remains that "people's lives and rights are at stake." Indigenous and Somali residents continue to hope that heightened awareness and community vigilance will prevent wrongful detentions and protect the rights of all who call the Twin Cities home.

Hamblin plays three sports for Minnetonka HS, ready for college

Kingston Hamblin is a senior at Minnetonka High School. He identifies as a part of the Northwestern Band of Shoshoni Nation.

"When I'm not doing football I wrestle in the winter and throw discus in the spring," said Kingston Hamblin.

"The thing I've always noticed about Kingston and his family is they are always ready to help out," said Mark Esch, Minnetonka HS head football coach. "Kingston is a servant leader and a consummate team player. That's what makes him special."

Hamblin's cultural background influenced his approach to his sports by being resilient that started with his ancestors. "There wasn't a physical native role model that I could look up to for this sport," said Hamblin. "I used my culture and focus on the resilience of my ancestors that were here and how they overcame multiple things and one day I hope I can be the role model of the young generation."

Many athletes overcome significant obstacles in their athletic careers and oftentimes their indigenous core value/s helped them deal with it in a positive way.

"My biggest obstacle in my athletic career would be the concussions I've had over these past few years and how much they set me back," said Hamblin.

Kingston Hamblin, #56, played football for the Minnetonka HS Skippers. Photo: Colin Beil]

"I've looked to the 7 grandfather teachings to help me get through it and deal with my concussions in a positive way."

Athletes have daily in season routines, training plans, and nutrition strategies to perform at a high level.

"My training plan consisted of weight training two times a week, speed training once a week and practice four times a week," said Hamblin. "Before every game or meet I sage to help clear my mind and for nutrition strategies I would meal prep food every Sunday night with protein and some carbs. I would drink water and some electrolyte here and there throughout the day as well as some snacks."

Hamblin had a major highlight and achievement in athletics. "My biggest highlight and achievement in my athletic career would be competing in state last year or placing seventh in a wrestling tournament that's considered harder than state."

Representing as an Indigenous athlete meant Hamblin had to spread himself out to his community. "It means I get to represent my tribe and my ancestors and I get to spread who I am as a native but also my culture and where come from," said Hamblin. "It also means to me that I have made my mark as an indigenous athlete in this world."

Hamblin shared advice to young Indigenous athletes that follow him. He said, "Don't hide your culture, be proud of who you are and be proud to represent your ancestors."

Hamblin shared what the future is going to be like for him after his athletic career is over. "I plan to be a teacher and teach the younger generations about the teachings our ancestors taught and to help connect our past," said Hamblin.

POLITICAL MATTERS: Native Issues in the Halls of Government – by Mordecai Specktor

editor@ajwnews.com

Leonard Peltier in Minneapolis

It was a surrealistic experience to enter the Minneapolis American Indian Center on Nov. 8 and see Leonard Peltier, the American Indian Movement (AIM) activist who served nearly 50 years in federal prison until his release in February, greeting friends and posing for pictures in a reception room near the front door.

Several hundred people were on hand to honor Peltier's sacrifice and to watch "Free Leonard Peliter," a new two-hour documentary about his case. The "AIM Song" was played several times. Prior to the film screening, several people spoke, including Darrell G. Seki, Sr., chairman of the Red Lake Nation, which was a sponsor of the Nov. 8 event.

It occurred to me that many of the people in the room were AIM activists, their children and grandchildren. AIM was created in 1968, in Minneapolis, as a street patrol monitoring the cops that frequently brutalized vulnerable Native residents along Franklin Avenue.

Peltier's sentence was commuted by outgoing Pres. Joe Biden, in one of his final acts as president. He is more or less under house arrest, living on his homeland, the reservation of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa (No. Dakota). There were previous efforts for a commutation of sentence for Peltier when the terms of Bill Clinton and Barack Obama were ending, but neither of them bothered to free Peltier. The FBI continually lobbied and demonstrated to keep Peltier locked up and it seemed that their desire to see him die in prison would prevail.

Most of Peltier's AIM comrades from the old days have gone on to the Spirit World. However, Dino Butler accompanied Peltier during his visit to Minneapolis. Butler was one of the AIM warriors present at the June 26, 1975, shootout at Oglala, on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation (So. Dakota), in which two FBI agents and Joe Stuntz, an Indian man, were killed. As the documentary depicted in an incredible sequence, Peltier, Butler and several other AIM activists escaped the barrage of gunfire by following the path of an eagle. The group passed through a culvert under a road where federal agents and BIA cops had gathered.

Butler and Bob Robideau, who was Leonard's cousin, were eventually arrested and tried for the murder of the FBI agents, in federal court in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Their attorneys argued that they had acted in self-defense, and they were acquitted by a jury.

That left Peltier as the lone Indian on whom to pin the murders of the FBI agents. He was extradited to the U.S. from Canada on the basis of three contradictory affidavits coerced from Myrtle Poor Bear, who variously claimed that she was Peltier's girlfriend and that she saw him shoot the FBI agents. In reality, the first time Peltier ever laid eyes on Poor Bear was at his trial in Fargo, No. Dakota — where she appeared as a witness for the defense. At the conclusion of a sham trial presided over by Judge Paul Benson, Peltier was convicted of aiding and abetting the murder of the FBI agents, in April 1977, and sentenced to two consecutive life terms.

At the Peltier honoring event in Minneapolis, I ran into a few friends. Kurt Seaberg reminded me that he traveled with the late Dick Bancroft and I to Peltier's 1984 evidentiary hearing in Bismarck, No Dakota. Bancroft photographed many of the significant AIM events going back to the early 1970s.

My recall of the trip to Bismarck is a little hazy. I do remember sitting across a café table from Peter Matthiessen, the acclaimed American writer who wrote a book about the Peltier case titled "In the Spirit of Crazy Horse." Matthiessen died in 2014. And I remember a conversation with an AIM activist who was at Oglala on the day of the shootout; he told me that Matthiessen's account of the firefight was wrong.

I had a brief chat with Leonard as he made his way to the gym at the Indian Center. I mentioned my two prison visits more than 40 years ago when he was locked up in the Marion, Illinois, and then the Springfield, Missouri, federal prisons. On both prison visits I was accompanied by Dick Bancroft.

I would like to have a longer conversation with Leonard one of these days. He doesn't see too well and is receiving medical care for a number of medical conditions that were not effectively treated during his decades behinds bars. He's 81 and has spent most of his life in federal prison.

Leonard has a greater measure of freedom in his home at Turtle Mountain than he did in the federal prison at Coleman, Florida. However, society is still a mess, riven with inequality, poverty and war. A degenerate criminal occupies the Oval Office, again. Anyway, I hope that Leonard can find moments of joy and beauty on the outside.

Oshki-Gakeyaa Strengthens Housing Stability for Native Families

BY MARYANN MARINO

On a crisp November day, community leaders, partners, and residents came together to celebrate the grand opening of Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center's Oshki-Gakeyaa, a 24-home permanent supportive housing community that represents hope and new beginnings for Native families in the East Phillips and Ventura Village neighborhoods of Minneapolis.

The community room was filled with pride and optimism as attendees participated in a traditional prayer, blessing, and song before cutting the ribbon on this transformative project. Elected officials and community partners praised the collaborative spirit that made this milestone possible, recognizing the impact it will have in addressing housing stability for Native Americans in Minneapolis.

"For too long, Native families have faced some of the greatest barriers to safe, stable housing. Projects like this change that story -- they create space for healing, opportunity, and hope," said Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey.

Ruth Buffalo, CEO of the Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center (MIWRC), spoke with heartfelt conviction about the project's impact on families beginning a new chapter. "Today marks an important milestone for our community and for the families beginning a new chapter," Buffalo said. "Every individual deserves the dignity of a safe home and the opportunity to live with purpose. Stable housing provides the foundation for families to grow stronger and more self-reliant."

The development, Oshki-Gakeyaa whose name means "New Way", offers safe, renovated homes paired with compassionate, trauma-informed support services designed to help individuals and families achieve lasting independence and wellness.

For Anthony LaBatte, one of the newly moved-in residents who proudly helped cut the ribbon during the ceremony, the impact is deeply personal and life-changing. "MIWRC has changed my life for the better," LaBatte said with gratitude. "Thank you all so much for giving me a life."

His words resonated throughout the gathering, underscoring the profound difference that stable housing makes in people's lives.

The $14.1 million development was made possible through a coalition of public and private partners, including the City of Minneapolis, Hennepin County, Minnesota Housing, UnitedHealth Group, Minnesota Equity Fund (MEF), Greater Minnesota Housing Fund (GMHF), and Cinnaire. UnitedHealth Group was the largest private investor, contributing $9.4 million in tax credit equity.

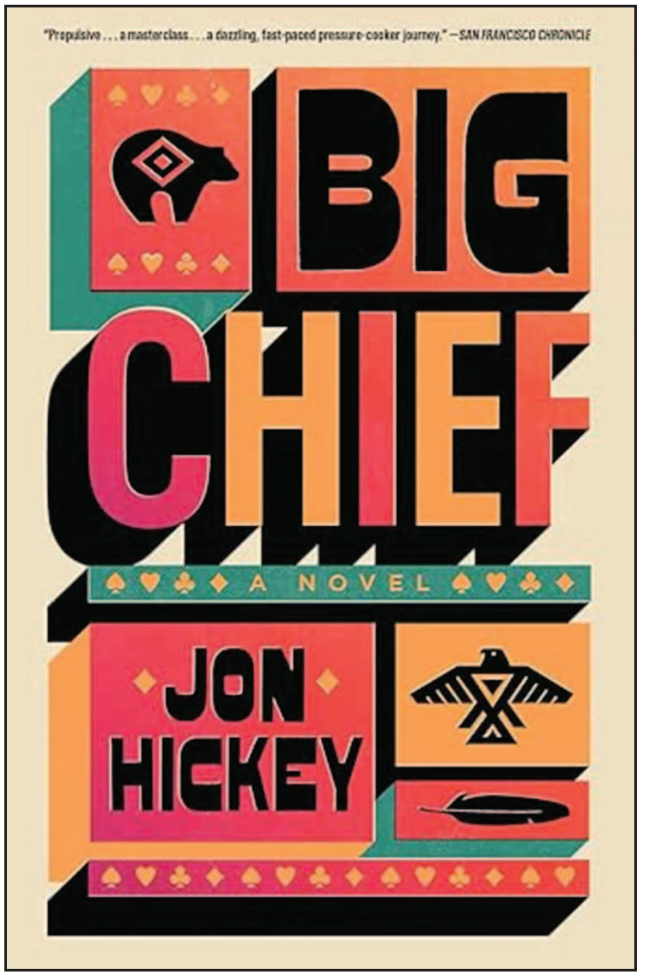
"At UnitedHealth Group, we understand the importance of connecting housing and health to improve lives," said Dr. Lisa Saul, chief medical officer for women's health at UnitedHealthcare, part of UnitedHealth Group, which has invested nearly $88.1 million in Minnesota and more than $1.2 billion across the country to create and preserve affordable housing.

Following the ribbon cutting, UnitedHealth Group donated welcome baskets brimming with household essentials and healthy foods for each newly moved-in resident. Employees from UnitedHealth Group joined MIWRC staff in a heartwarming display of community care, assembling and delivering the donated baskets to welcome families into their new homes. The gesture symbolized the spirit of the day — new beginnings, stability, and the power of people coming together to support one another.

Founded in 1984, MIWRC has served Native women and families for more than 40 years. For more information, see: https://www.miwrc.org.

Big Chief will compel you to make time for this book

BY DEBORAH LOCKE



Mitch Caddo, a tribal operations executive with a Wisconsin Ojibwe nation, is charged with ensuring that the tribal president, Mack Beck, wins his next election. The plot of "Big Chief" by Jon Hickey (Ojibwe) (Simon & Schuster 2025) evolves around that upcoming election and the corruption that ensues. Dirty politics reign, and they are all there: innuendo, social media manipulation, lies about tribal enrollment, reservation banishments, financial malfeasance, cruelty and finally, violence.

But the thread of most interest to me was Mitch Caddo's ambiguous status among the members of the fictitious Passage Rouge Nation in Wisconsin. He's enrolled, grew up on the rez and had a non-Indian mother, but lived away, and received a law degree from Cornell University. His family ties are tenuous, his relationship with his mother was fraught, he has few supporters, no family, and he's just not sure who he is, why he's there, and whose side he's on.

Mitch's job is to get the tribal president, Mack Beck, reelected by any means including spreading lies about the opponent's enrollment status. The opposition team is also preoccupied with throwing up dirt at Mack but not as much. There are a lot of bad actors on the stage, and it's tough at times to sympathize with any of the characters. The fight culminates in a large-scale band member takeover of a casino and an attempt on Mitch's life.

Two thoughts outweighed others as I made my way through this excellent book. First, some of Hickey's descriptions of rez political life ring true. Difficult decisions are made every day on tribal councils by people who genuinely wish to improve the lives of American Indians. However, like politics since the dawn of time, there are political operators who are in it for self-gratification, the abuse of power and greed. Mitch knows that Mack's motives are far from pure, but he constantly pushes on to return Mack to office, even when it places him in danger.

That's in part due to the history of the two men. Mack protected Mitch from bullies as they were growing up. Mack was the reservation Indian that Mitch wanted to be. Mitch says: "If only I had the ease and comfort of never having to doubt where I came from." Hickey credibly establishes Mitch's importance to the difficult tribal chief. Often Mitch is the only voice in the room speaking truth to power, but there's a consequence for that. He often refers to the unease he feels at work or home, described often as "shivers." But he also understands ways to wield his own power, and he enjoys that part of the job. "Instead of wishing away the poverty on this reservation, I make the decisions that keep people employed and fed," Mitch says.

In addition to portraying political conflict that grows increasingly personal and frightening, the book also displays effective layering and structure, with the right amount of suspense. And humanity. Chapters are arranged under sections named for days of the week, bringing the reader closer to the fateful election when scores of Ojibwe showed up to show support for Mack's opponent.

If all of the above sounds like a hodgepodge of fighting and nastiness, it is. Because democracy is often that hodgepodge -- an odd state forced upon tribal nations who lived for centuries with their own working governments. Mitch makes this point in the book, the way the "tools" used by the tribe to "self-govern" were imposed by colonizers. The tools still don't always work well.

A good size cast of characters races through the pages including a wealthy, powerful non-Indian with close ties to the band. The potential for romance between Mitch and another character is introduced vaguely but romance never blooms. Hickey does a nice job of portraying the reservation's natural environment, especially during a blizzard in the dead of winter. It's features like those, plus the overriding question of who wins the election, that will compel you to make time for this book. It's thought provoking and well done.

Hickey is an enrolled member of the Lac du Flambeau Band of Chippewa in Wisconsin. This is his first book

Indigenous authors bring fresh perspectives into the new year

BY THE CIRCLE

A surge of Native American authors helped reshape bookshelves in 2025, bringing new attention to Indigenous literature across the United States. As the calendar turns toward 2026, that momentum is expected to continue, with new releases in fiction, nonfiction, memoir, poetry and genre-blending works reaching wider audiences than ever before. Books from both emerging and established Indigenous writers are finding a place in major publishers' catalogs, library collections and recommended reading lists.

Readers searching for authentic representation, cultural knowledge and compelling storytelling are discovering more choices from Native authors than in previous years. Librarians and Indigenous literary advocates say that while attention often peaks during Native American Heritage Month, the demand for Indigenous voices is becoming steady and year-round. Many new works explore identity, history, trauma, family, survival, language and relationships to land. Others experiment with futurism, horror, romance and coming-of-age narratives.

One headline release this year is "The Buffalo Hunter Hunter," (No, that is not a typo) by Stephen Graham Jones, published in March by Simon & Schuster. Jones (Blackfeet Nation) has become one of the most recognized Indigenous voices in contemporary fiction. His work often merges elements of horror with lived history. The new novel takes readers into a fierce story of transformation and justice, told through a bold style that appeals to a wide range of readers. Booksellers report that Jones' growing audience has brought new readers toward Indigenous literature as a whole, particularly those seeking darker themes with cultural depth.

Also widely discussed in 2025 is "Sisters in the Wind," the latest young adult novel by Angeline Boulley, an enrolled member of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians. Boulley's earlier bestseller introduced many readers to Indigenous voices through the lens of crime fiction. Her newest title continues her focus on Native youth, identity and determination. Young adult librarians say Boulley has been critical in expanding representation for Native teenagers in mainstream publishing.

Indigenous nonfiction has also taken a more visible role in bookstores this year. One title already generating attention is "Theory of Water: Nishnaabe Maps to the Times Ahead," by Leanne Simpson, released in April. Simpson is Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg from Alderville First Nation in Canada. The author explores Indigenous relationships with land and water, weaving cultural knowledge with contemporary environmental reflection. Educators can use the book to fill the gaps in environmental literature by grounding ecological questions in community and memory rather than abstract theory.

Anthologies remain central to Indigenous publishing efforts as well. "My Life: Growing Up Native in America," edited by an Indigenous-led creative organization, offers essays, poetry and personal reflections from young Native writers. The collection examines what it means to navigate identity, belonging and future dreams while living within the United States. Teachers adopting the book in high school and college courses say that it is valuable for showing Native youth in their own voices rather than through an outside lens.

Another nonfiction title gaining attention is "The Indian Card: Who Gets to Be Native in America." The book tackles questions that have long stirred debate: tribal enrollment, cultural identity, legal designations and the lived consequences of defining who is and is not Native. Scholars say the work arrives at a moment when many Native people continue to confront stereotypes and misunderstandings about heritage and sovereignty. The author examines the tension between legal definitions and personal identity, and the social impact of identity policing inside and outside Native communities.

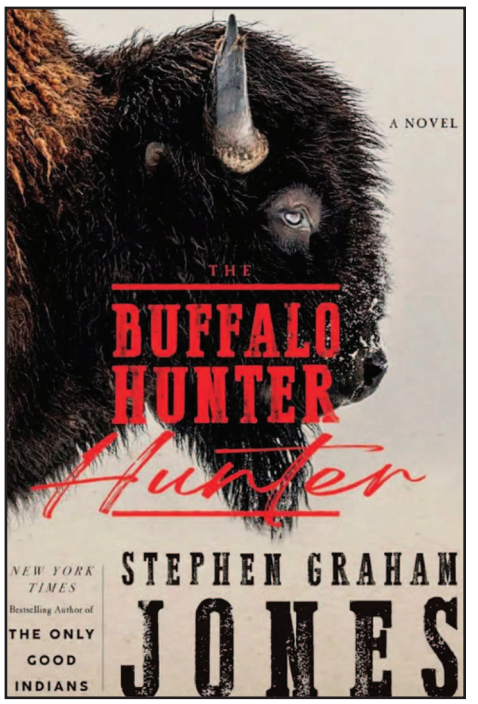
Publishers and retailers say the interest in nonfiction and critical Indigenous voices indicates that readers are not just looking for stories but also for context, history and answers. Books that confront policies, boarding school trauma, land disputes and erasure are finding new urgency among Native and non-Native audiences alike.

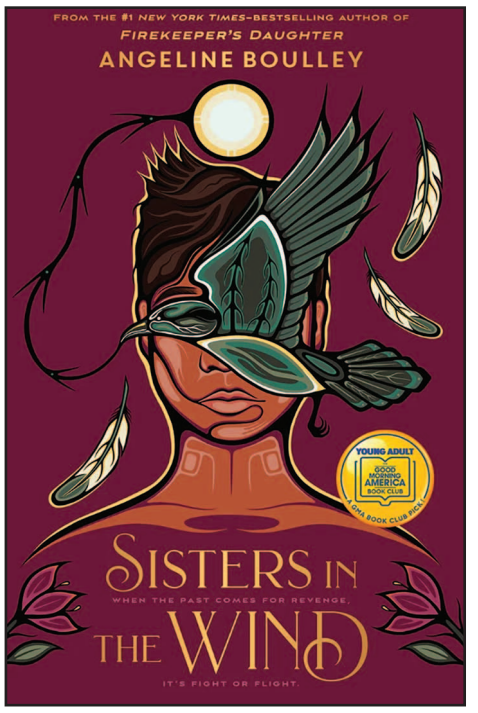
Books in 2026

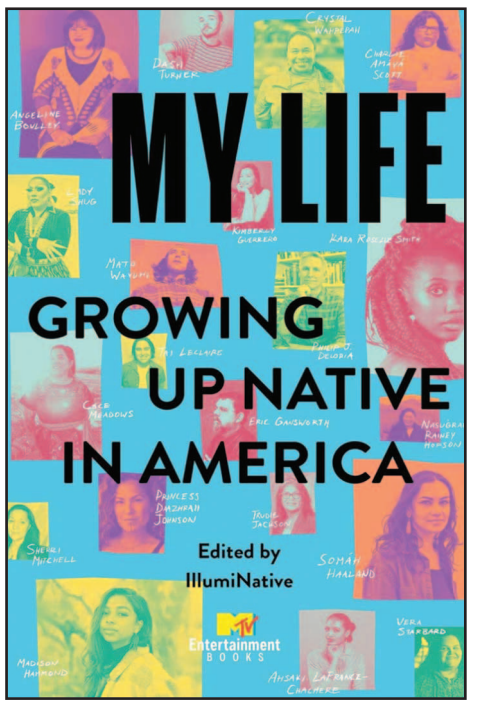
Looking ahead, several Indigenous-authored books are set to arrive in late 2025 and early 2026. One is "Beyond the Glittering World: An Anthology of Indigenous Feminisms and Futurisms," published in late November. The anthology collects poetry, short stories and essays from Indigenous women and gender-diverse writers. Literary critics say it highlights voices leading conversations about gender, sovereignty and the future of Indigenous communities. The book has been promoted as a chance to see how Indigenous storytelling continues to evolve while maintaining deep connection to culture and history.

Another group of releases expected in early 2026 includes titles such as "Stronger Than," scheduled for late January, and "We Can't Wait to Hold You," planned for February.

Book industry analysts point to several factors behind the rising interest in Native American books and literature. Library and school demand for inclusive literature has grown, and Indigenous authors are finding more opportunities with major publishers rather than relying solely on small presses. Additionally, social media communities built around Indigenous identity, book discussions and activism have helped readers discover Native writers more easily.







Native leaders in publishing also stress that the rise in Indigenous authors is not a sudden trend. Many point to decades of advocacy by Native writers, educators and cultural workers who pushed for space, recognition and the right to define their own narratives. Some of this year's new writers credit tribal college programs, community literary circles, and Indigenous-centered mentorship efforts as foundational to their careers.

In addition to adult fiction and nonfiction, children's and middle-grade literature are showing noticeable growth. Educators say younger readers are being introduced to Indigenous characters in ways that break from outdated storytelling stereotypes found in older books. New picture books feature Native children at the center of their own stories, participating in contemporary life while staying connected to cultural roots.

As book publishing gets easier and easier with "print-on-demand", also called POD, gets more widespread Native people are starting their own publishing companies to fill the void and control our own. stories. Literary advocates say expanding representation for children is vital for strengthening identity and countering harmful narratives early in life.

Poetry collections by Native authors also reflect the overall expansion. Several works published in 2025 feature themes of healing, ceremony, memory and survival. Poetry continues to serve as an accessible space for Indigenous expression, especially for emerging writers and communities revitalizing language and storytelling traditions.

Challenges still exist

Though many celebrate the progress in Indigenous publishing, writers and advocates say challenges remain. Some authors still face pressure to format stories in ways that fit non-Native expectations. Industry support can also be uneven, with marketing budgets often favoring a small number of high-profile books while others struggle for visibility.

There is also concern about ensuring that editing and publication processes respect cultural protocols. Native writers sometimes navigate expectations from publishers around content that touches on cultural knowledge or sacred topics. Advocates emphasize the importance of Indigenous editors, sensitivity readers and cultural consultants who can provide guidance and protect cultural integrity.

Despite the challenges, many in Indian Country say the current publishing environment feels more open and possible than in previous decades. Authors note that for a long time, Native stories were filtered, simplified or erased altogether. The opportunity for Indigenous people to write and publish their own experiences is seen as part of a broader movement for sovereignty, education and empowerment.

Librarians in Native communities say new releases are helping younger readers feel seen and valued. For older readers, especially those whose family histories intersect with traumatic policies like forced relocation or boarding schools, these books offer validation and space for healing. Some tribal programs have begun featuring book clubs and reading circles as part of community wellness initiatives.

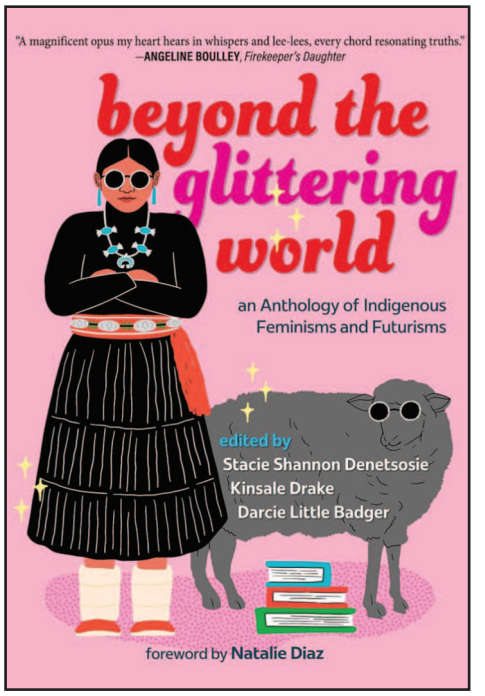
The growth in Indigenous nonfiction, especially works tied to policy, history and activism, is being welcomed by Native scholars and organizers. Books that examine issues like water rights, missing and murdered Indigenous women, climate change and treaty recognition are giving readers the means to understand ongoing struggles that news stories often overlook. Writers say that storytelling in these forms can build awareness and support for real-world change.

As 2026 approaches, publishers anticipate that more announcements from Indigenous authors will appear in the coming months. Literary organizations dedicated to Native writers have expanded their support programs, suggesting a continued rise in Indigenous voices entering the publishing world. Book critics say that if current trends continue, Indigenous literature will become a more permanent and prominent part of American reading habits, rather than a short-term spotlight.

Many Indigenous authors express hope that this moment will encourage young writers to pursue their own work. Some say they grew up without seeing Native authors in classrooms or libraries and now want to change that experience for the next generation. Their goal is not only to publish books, but also to build a literary landscape where Indigenous identity is understood as vibrant, diverse and evolving.

As this year's new releases reach readers and next year's titles appear on the horizon, Native-authored books are claiming a stronger position in the story of American literature. The shift is not only about artistic achievement, but also about representation and truth. In fiction and nonfiction alike, Indigenous writers are opening doors to stories that have long deserved to be heard.

Whether on the shelf of a tribal school, a rural public library or a major bookseller, these books signal a future where Native communities define their own narratives — and readers everywhere benefit from the voices rising to meet them.



Indigenous Publishers & Imprints

- Theytus Books (Canada): First Nations-owned, preserving culture through authentic literature.
- Native Realities: Specializes in Indigenous graphic novels and comics.
- Salina Bookshelf: In Navajo and English, focuses on cultural preservation.
- Kegedonce Press: Native-owned and operated in Canada.
- Inhabit Media (Canada): Inuit-owned, Nunavut-based.
- Pemmican Publications (Canada): Métis authors, stories, and culture.
- Native Voices & 7th Generation: Focus on Native history, culture, and children's books.
- Great Oak Press: Tribally-owned, amplifying Native voices.
- Abalone Mountain Press: Diné woman-owned, inclusive space for diverse Native voices.
- Kamehameha Publishing: Hawaiian language and culture.
- Black Bears and Blueberries Publishing: focuses on creating books written and illustrated by Native artists.
- Wigwassi Press: Owned by Birchbark Bookstore, it focuses on Native languages and works.

Major Publishers with Indigenous Focus

- HarperCollins/Heartdrum: Has a dedicated Indigenous imprint.
- Kokila: Penguin Random House imprint with a focus on diverse voices.
  University Presses & Other Resources
- UCLA American Indian Studies Publications: Academic and cultural books
- University of Arizona Press/Minnesota Press: Collaboration on Indigenous Studies.

Where to find more Indigenous publishers

- Indigenous Reads Rising: Lists many publishers and resources.
- UBC Library Research Guides: Lists of publishers and distributors.

– CONTINUED FROM COVER PAGE –

The lack of consultation has added to the anxiety. Twyla Baker, president of Nueta Hidatsa Sahnish College in North Dakota, said the interagency shift "came as a total surprise." She urged Interior and Education officials to involve tribal nations immediately and warned that colleges in small, rural communities cannot sustain disruptions to essential federal services.

Baker said that without structured communication and planning, administrators and faculty may be forced to divert attention from their core mission of educating Native students and supporting local economies. That would be "untenable," she said.

Many of the concerns stem from the troubled history of the Bureau of Indian Education. In recent years, Congress and Native leaders have scrutinized the bureau over oversight failures — including sexual-assault reporting problems at Haskell Indian Nations University — and over broader challenges in academic quality and facility management. Some lawmakers have even explored removing Haskell from federal oversight.

Criticism of the BIE is not new. A 2014 joint report issued by federal officials described the bureau as a "stain on our Nation's history," citing generations of Native students who were inadequately served by federal education systems. While Interior officials say reforms are underway, confidence remains fragile among tribal educators.

The Interior Department said it intends to strengthen engagement with tribes and college representatives as it coordinates Native higher-education programs. Officials said the goal is to deliver improved services and expanded academic opportunities across Indian Country.

Despite modest reassurance from Washington, tribal college leaders say they need more detailed plans and transparent timelines. Several institutions serve thousands of students in remote areas where colleges are among the largest employers and cultural anchors. Any instability could have far-reaching effects on both education and community well-being.

As the January transition draws closer, concerns remain unresolved. Tribal educators say that after years of incremental progress — and the recent financial bolstering from emergency relief and philanthropy — another major shift in oversight feels dangerous and exhausting. "I have been on roller coasters," Caldwell said. "But never a roller coaster like this."

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