



 Spotlight

NOVEMBER IS NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH





Native American Heritage Month (designated 1990) is observed in November to honor the history, cultures and contributions of American Indian and Alaska Native people. Each year, different departments of the federal government adopt a theme for the month, recognizing a specific commitment to tribal nations. One of this year's themes comes from the U.S. Department of Defense – “Affirming Native Voices: Visibility, Leadership, Service.” In the spirit of this theme, our spotlight features a variety of media recommendations from Native American creators, as well as local events honoring Indigenous cultures, and policy issues affecting these communities today.





LEGISLATION & POLICY



Recent policy initiatives – both by the federal government and Native American activists – have focused on the disproportionately high rates of violence faced by indigenous communities. Native Americans are substantially more likely than any other group to be victims of violence, homicide and human trafficking – especially women and two-spirit or nonbinary Native Americans. The National Congress of American Indians has released numerous [research reports and policy briefs](#) summarizing the data on justice and public safety issues like this.

The crisis of missing and murdered indigenous people (MMIP) became a policy priority at the Department of Justice and the Department of the Interior with the passage of the Not Invisible Act in October 2020. The law resulted in a 2022 commission to analyze issues surrounding MMIP cases and provide recommendations addressing them. The Commission released its findings and recommendations in November 2023; the DOI and DOJ issued a [joint response](#) in March 2024.

The Mitchell Museum of the American Indian in Evanston currently hosts an interdisciplinary exhibit on the MMIP crisis called [No Rest: The Epidemic of Stolen Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirits](#). The exhibit features 35 original works from 12 indigenous artists and combines data and statistics with stories honoring the lives of individuals lost to violence. Free admission will be offered at the museum on Wednesday, November 27.

The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign's Spurlock Museum also features a MMIP-focused exhibit: the [Red Regalia Project](#). The exhibit features regalia – traditional, handmade garments – crafted by impacted individuals in honor of their lost relatives. The garments will be displayed in the Laubin Gallery of American Indian Cultures through December 1.



Chicago hosts the First Nations Film and Video Festival (FNFVF) every November. This year, the festival will run from November 4 to November 11, showcasing short films and features from independent indigenous creators. Each screening takes place in a different location throughout the city of Chicago and surrounding suburbs. Check out the festival itinerary [here](#).

[Indigenous Chicago](#) is a collaborative project between the Newberry Library, the Chicago American Indian Center, and tribal nations with ancestral ties to the land we call Chicago. The project includes digital educational resources, recorded oral histories, curriculum suggestions, and a temporary physical exhibit at the Newberry Library.

As part of its performance series, Sequence Ch!cago has partnered with the American Indian Association of Illinois for a [Native American Heritage Celebration at Navy Pier](#) on Saturday, November 18 from 2:00-6:00 p.m. The event will feature a variety of music, storytelling and dance exhibitions. Admission is free.



EVENTS

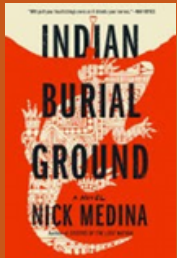
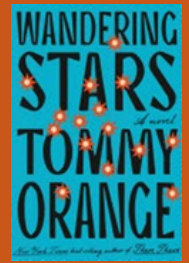




BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

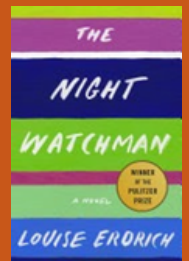


The eagerly awaited follow-up to the award-winning *There There*, [Wandering Stars](#) serves as both sequel and prequel to Tommy Orange's debut novel. It follows the Bear Shield/Red Feather family over 150 years, from their early struggles against colonization to the aftermath of a twenty-first century trauma. Orange (Cheyenne/Arapaho) examines the legacies of the Sand Creek Massacre of 1864 and the Carlisle Indian Industrial School and returns to his *There There* characters as they search for identity and healing. Fans of his first novel (and his keynote lecture at the Harold Washington Library last year) won't be disappointed.



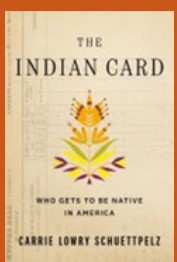
Chicago-born writer Nick Medina (Tunica-Biloxi) blends Gothic horror with Native American mythology in [Indian Burial Ground](#). Noemi Broussard was planning to leave the reservation for a new life, until her boyfriend's death tore her world apart. Roddy's death looks like an accident, or possibly a suicide, but something doesn't add up for Noemi. She can feel something lurking within their tribal lands, and she wants answers. Enlisting her Uncle Louie to help her solve the mystery, she discovers horrifying secrets of the past and the present – and begins to wonder if some things shouldn't stay buried after all.

Based on the life of the author's grandfather, [The Night Watchman](#) by Louise Erdrich (Ojibwe) won the Pulitzer Prize in 2021. The novel tells the story of Thomas Wazhashk, a Chippewa night watchman in 1950s North Dakota. When he discovers that the federal government is seeking to pass an “emancipation” law terminating Native American rights, he joins the fight to protect his tribe. Erdrich explores themes of family, identity, tradition and justice in this compelling window into the fight for tribal sovereignty in the mid-20th century.



The critically acclaimed [Indian Lake trilogy](#) by Stephen Graham Jones (Blackfeet) is a love letter to 1980s horror films. *My Heart is a Chainsaw*, the first novel in the series, won the Bram Stoker Award for Best Novel in 2021. Jones's final installment, *The Angel of Indian Lake*, was published in March 2024. The trilogy follows Jade Daniels, a half-Native American teen who uses her love of slasher movies to fight the injustices – and supernatural horrors – that besiege her hometown of Proofrock, Idaho.

In [By the Fire We Carry](#), Rebecca Nagle (Cherokee) examines the history of tribal sovereignty and land rights in Oklahoma. In the 1830s, the Muscogee (Creek) Nation were forcibly removed from the Southeastern U.S. to a reservation in Indian Territory. Nagle traces the history of this land from the 1833 treaty that created the reservation, through the creation of the state of Oklahoma, to *McGurt v. Oklahoma*, the 2020 Supreme Court ruling that returned nearly 3 million acres to the Muscogee.



The popularity of genetic testing services like 23andMe and Ancestry has resulted in an explosion of people identifying as American Indian/Alaska Native. But, while the federal government recognizes the over 500 Indian Nations, there are rules about who can access tribal enrollment. So, who is considered Native American, and how do they know? [The Indian Card: Who Gets to Be Native in America](#) by Carrie Lowry Schuettelpelz (Lumbee) seeks to navigate these questions and their complicated answers. Blending in-depth interviews and personal anecdotes with historical records and data, Booklist called this book “required reading for all who want to understand Native American life past and present.”

FILM/TELEVISION RECOMMENDATIONS



[Slash/Back](#) directed by Nyla Innuksuk

A ragtag group of Inuit girls discovers an alien invasion threatening their small Arctic village. Will their knowledge of traditional hunting methods and modern monster movies be enough to save them? Stream on Hulu.

[N. Scott Momaday: Words from a Bear](#) directed by Jeffrey Palmer

Author N. Scott Momaday was one of the giants of modern American literature and a father of the Native American Renaissance. His Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *House Made of Dawn*, pushed Native American literature and culture into the mainstream. This PBS documentary examines the life and work of the celebrated writer, who died earlier this year. Stream on Prime.

[Rez Ball](#) directed by Sydney Freeland

From the creators of *Reservation Dogs* comes a sports drama about a team of underdogs. A high school basketball team from a New Mexico reservation tries to keep their state championship hopes alive after losing their star player. Stream on Netflix.

[Echo](#) created by Marion Dayre

This spotlight series in the Marvel Cinematic Universe follows the events of the *Hawkeye* series. Maya Lopez, a deaf Choctaw woman, flees to her Oklahoma hometown, where she must reconnect with her roots and face her dark past to protect herself and her family. Stream on Disney Plus.

[Montford: The Chickasaw Rancher](#) directed by Nathan Frankowski

Produced by the Chickasaw Nation, this Western miniseries is based on the true story of Montford T. Johnson, a Chickasaw cattleman who established a ranching empire in Indian Territory (now Oklahoma) in the late 19th century. Stream on Netflix.

Sources

Chicago Public Library Native American Heritage Committee. (2024, October 3). *Native American Heritage Month Reads 2024*. Chicago Public Library. <https://chippublib.bibliocommons.com/v2/list/display/199702383/2614936209>.

Eby, D. (2024). *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives: Red Regalia Project*. Spurlock Museum of World Cultures. <https://www.spurlock.illinois.edu/exhibits/profiles/mmir.html>.

First Nations Film and Video Festival Inc. (2024, October 19). *Fall 2024 FNFVF*. <https://fnfvf.org/events/fall-2024-fnfvf>.

Indigenous Chicago. (n.d.). *Exhibition Overview: Indigenous Chicago*. <https://indigenous-chicago.org/exhibition-overview/>.

Mitchell Museum of the American Indian. (2024). *No Rest: The Epidemic of Stolen Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirits*. <https://mitchellmuseum.org/no-rest-exhibit/>.

National Congress of American Indians. (n.d.). *Policy Portfolios: Public Safety & Justice*. <https://www.ncai.org/section/policy/portfolios/public-safety-and-justice>.

Office of Tribal Justice. (2024, March 5). *Not Invisible Act*. U.S. Department of Justice. <https://www.justice.gov/tribal/not-invisible-act>.

Palmer, J. (Writer & Director). (2019, November 18). *N. Scott Momaday: Words from a Bear* (Season 33, Episode 12) [TV Series Episode]. In M. Kantor (Executive Producer), *American Masters*. Rainy Mountain Media LLC; Independent Television Service Inc.; Vision Maker Media; THIRTEEN Productions LLC.

The White House. (2024, October 31). *A Proclamation on National Native American Heritage Month, 2024* [Press release]. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2024/10/31/a-proclamation-on-national-native-american-heritage-month-2024/>.