



ILLUMINATIVE

**CHANGE THE STORY,
CHANGE THE FUTURE**

IMPACT REPORT 2018–2024

Credit: Cara Romero (Chemehuevi)



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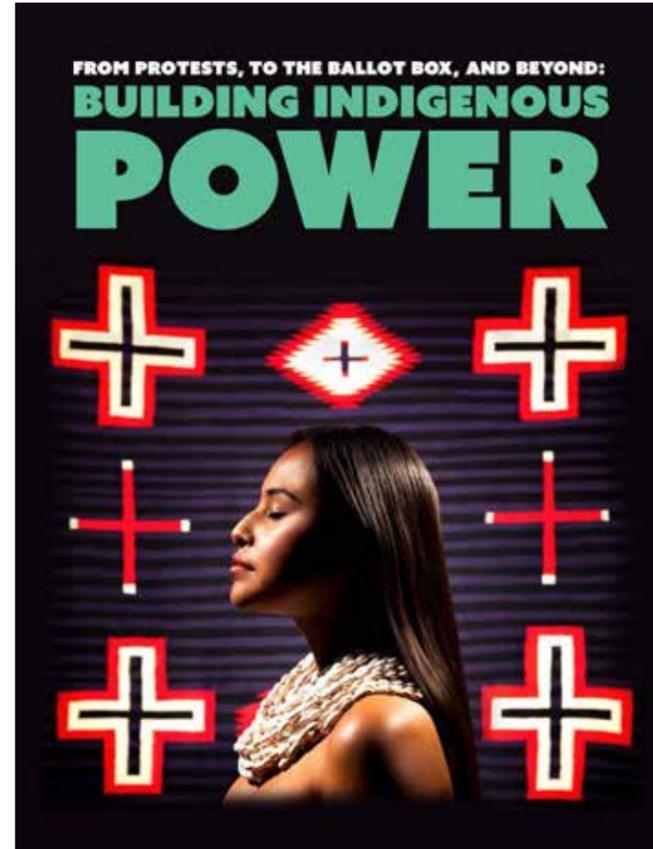
Credit: Karalyn Radford (Oglala Lakota)



Credit: Shepard Fairey / Amplifier



Credit: Fancy Dance / Confidential Films and Significant Productions/ AUM Group



Credit: Josué Rivas (Mexico/Otomi) / INDÍGENA



Credit: Aly McKnight (Shoshone-Bannock)



Credit: Tekpatl (P'urhepecha)



LETTER FROM THE FOUNDER AND CEO

**CRYSTAL ECHO HAWK
(PAWNEE)**



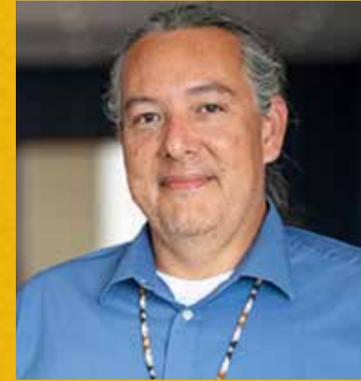
As we look back on the journey to create IllumiNative, I am filled with immense pride and gratitude. What began as a vision to amplify the voices of Indigenous peoples has evolved into a powerful movement that has reshaped the way we think and talk about Native communities, representation, and power. This journey has been nothing short of transformative, not only for me personally, but for Indian Country and our many allies.

Together, with the support of our board, staff, funders, and partners, we have challenged the dominant narratives that have long silenced Native peoples. Through this collective effort, we have made lasting strides in visibility, power-building, and advocacy. Our work has not only amplified the voices of Native communities but has also created a platform for contemporary Indigenous storytelling that continues to shape public perceptions and drive change.

We are proud of the work IllumiNative has achieved, and we are determined to ensure that the mission we set forth to achieve continues. We are deeply grateful to our staff, funders, partners, and collaborators who have worked tirelessly to increase the visibility of Native peoples.

The movement we've built is far from over, and looking to the future, I am filled with excitement for the next phase. Our mission to elevate Native voices and challenge stereotypes has never been more relevant, and our commitment to this cause remains unwavering as the work continues to grow, evolve, and empower future generations.

With deep gratitude,
Crystal Echo Hawk (Pawnee)
Founder and CEO, IllumiNative



LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

**MICHAEL JOHNSON (NUXBAAGA/
SAHNISH/ ANISHINAABE)**



Having been part of the original Reclaiming Native Truth research and convening in 2016, it has been an honor to join my sister Crystal and the IllumiNative team since 2023, supporting the incredible work that's taken shape.

At the heart of this work, I've seen the power of centering the movement of many movements, and how people, when united and working together, can do great things. As practitioners, organizers, and community members, our strength is found in the collective. As Native people, we know from our teachings that this is true. When we come together in intentional and supportive ways, good things happen. The efforts of this organization have always placed emphasis on amplifying and celebrating this collective we and all that we encompass with our shared vision, responsibility, and strength as a community. It has always been a place where dialogue flows freely, where learning and connection happen towards a greater good.

As we continue to reflect on the evolution of this work, I'm reminded of the early successes that came from connecting participatory action research with narrative strategy and movement partners. These early gains were instrumental in setting the foundation for the work IllumiNative has led, and I'm excited to see how we adapt and grow in this ever-changing landscape in support of Tribal Nations and Native peoples. The media landscape is constantly shifting, but our commitment to advancing equity, dignity, and justice remains as strong as ever.

Looking ahead, I'm energized by the possibilities. As these new evolutions of thought and strategy unfold, I'm confident we will continue to have an impact not only for our community, but for all.

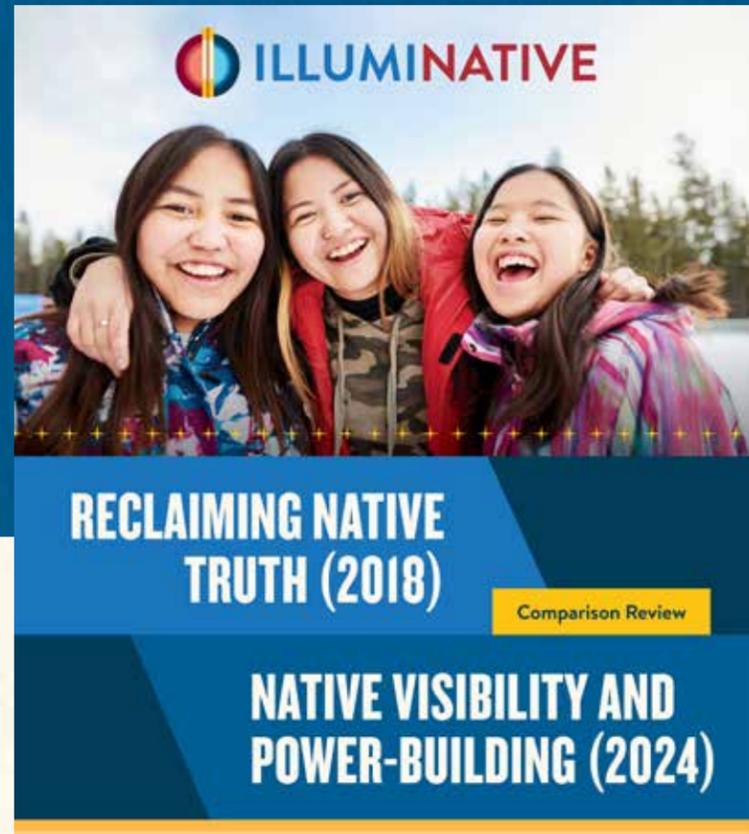
Thank you,
Michael Johnson (Nuxbaaga/Sahnish/Anishinaabe)
President, IllumiNative

FOUNDED IN RESEARCH

In February 2018, nearly two dozen Native artists, creatives, thought leaders, nonprofit leaders, journalists, and others came together to review and discuss the early insights from the Reclaiming Native Truth (RNT) project—the largest public opinion research and strategy-setting project ever conducted by, for, and about Native peoples.

Founded and co-led by IllumiNative’s CEO, Crystal Echo Hawk (Pawnee), RNT identified invisibility as the modern manifestation of systemic racism and one of the greatest threats to Native lives and livelihoods.

The creation of IllumiNative was fueled by this finding and the need to establish an organization that worked at the intersection of politics, culture, research, and organizing to advance narrative change and power building for Native peoples across society.



Credit: Cara Romero (Chemehuevi)



Credit: Cara Romero (Chemehuevi)



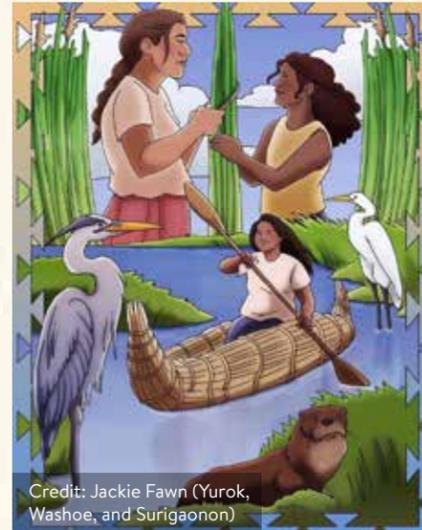
Credit: Cara Romero (Chemehuevi)

BUILDING THE NATIVE POWER MOVEMENT

These systems of erasure, including the perpetuation of false narratives and stereotypes, are embedded deeply within our society. From policy and governance structures to media and entertainment, the presence of harmful narratives and stereotypes have had lasting impacts across generations, including Native youth today.

As an organization whose mission was grounded in contemporary, accurate, and authentic representation, IllumiNative worked to disrupt and interrupt the erasure of Native peoples by dismantling harmful stereotypes, educating and engaging Americans and key institutions, and activating contemporary and authentic narratives about Native peoples.

In partnership with other Native thought leaders, Native-led organizations, and in solidarity with non-Native allies, we worked to reclaim our power, build movements, and contribute to systems and narrative change. Together, we advanced justice, equity, self-determination, and power-building and influenced the hearts and minds of everyday Americans.



Credit: Jackie Fawn (Yurok, Washoe, and Surigaonon)



Credit: Cara Romero (Chemehuevi)



THE STORY OF OUR BRAND

IllumiNative's brand wove traditional and contemporary storytelling together so that community and the importance of shining a light on our Indigenous contributions and stories were at the core of who we are.

ROOTED IN CORE VALUES

The name IllumiNative represents the organization's mission, but our brand was more than just a play on words. Our name and our work were grounded in core values, responsibilities, and stories passed down through generations.

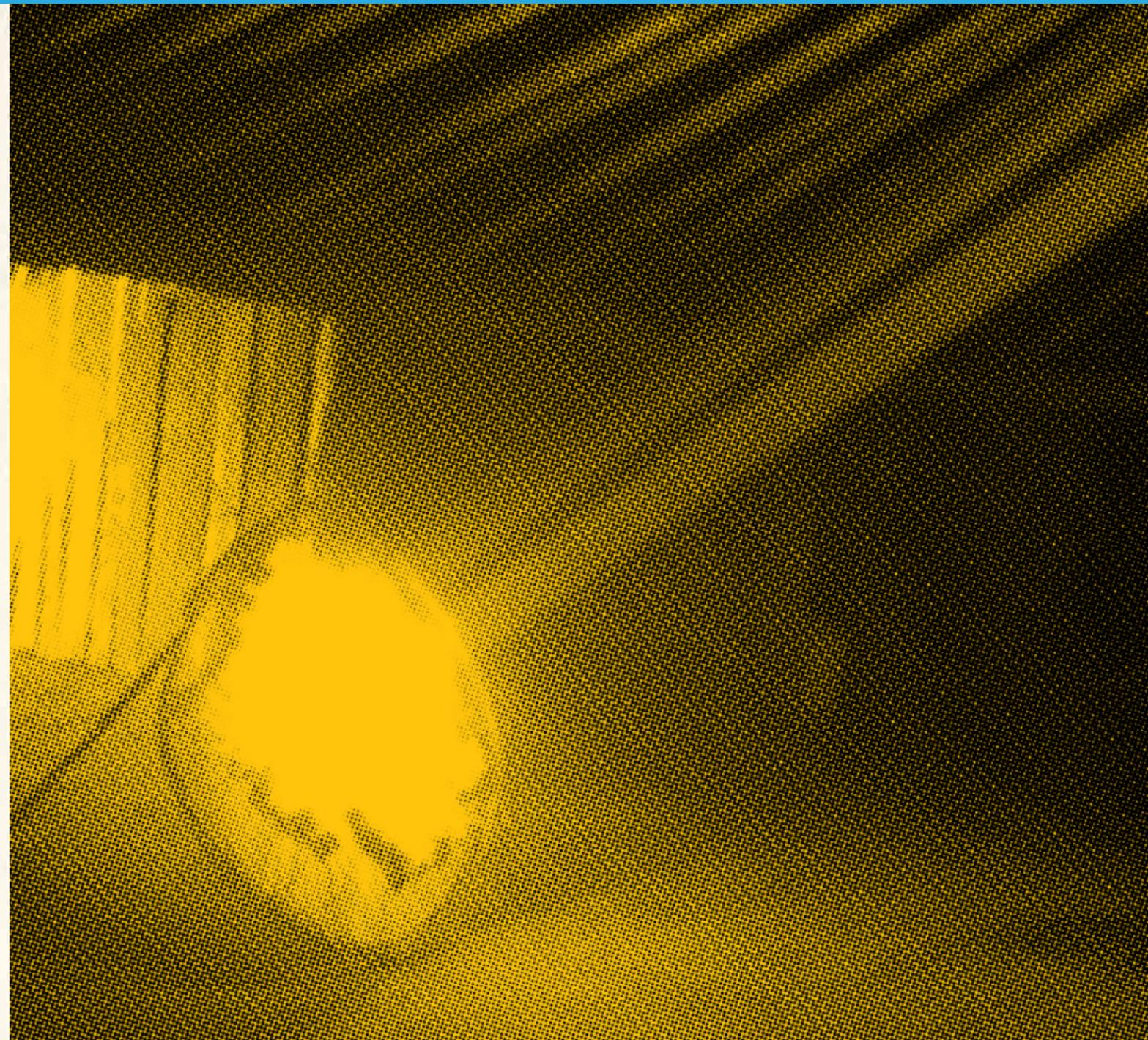
The direction for our brand came not only from the findings of RNT but the meaning behind Crystal Echo Hawk's Pawnee name, Skee Haru Hatawa, which means "lights in the room woman."

This name comes from a time when the Pawnee people lived in vast earth lodges, where 40 to 50 members of an extended family would live together. Each earth lodge had a hole at the top where smoke could escape and sunlight would come through. A young woman would be tasked to hold up a well-cleaned and tanned deer hide stretched over a circular frame where the sunlight came in. Because of the bright white hide, a tremendous beam of light would bounce off of the frame and into the room. The woman would then move around the room, casting a light where it was needed to help her family do the work needed to care for one another and the community.

TRADITION MEETS CONTEMPORARY STORYTELLING

With this direction for the brand identity in mind, we began brainstorming ideas for the name. In January 2018, Supaman, an Apsáalooke hip-hop music artist, released an album titled *Illuminatives*. The name of this album perfectly summed up our vision for the organization's brand. We reached out to Supaman who approved the use of the name.

With a name in hand, we worked with Ryan RedCorn (Osage) to bring the brand to life.

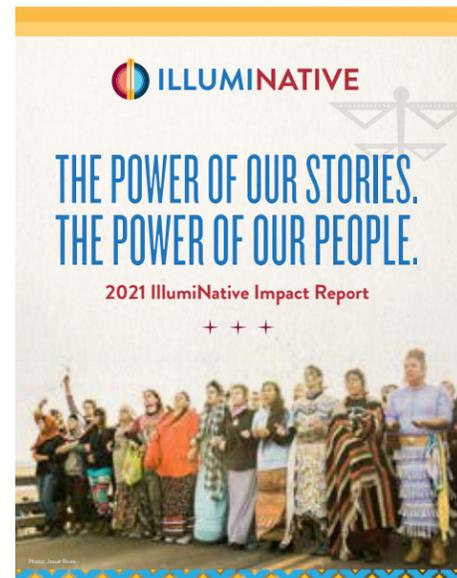
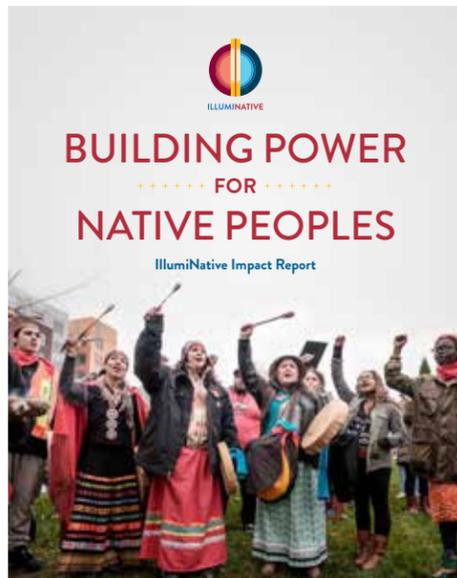
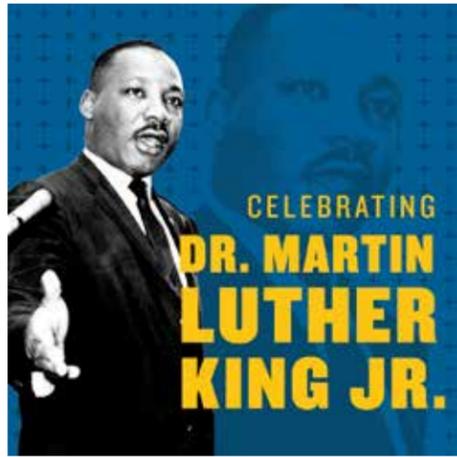


MISSION

Our mission was to build power for Native peoples by amplifying contemporary Native voices, stories, and issues to advance justice, equity, and self-determination.

VISION

We envisioned a future where the self-determination and sovereignty of Native peoples are respected and supported; where our children see themselves reflected in the world around them; and where Native peoples author our own stories and future.



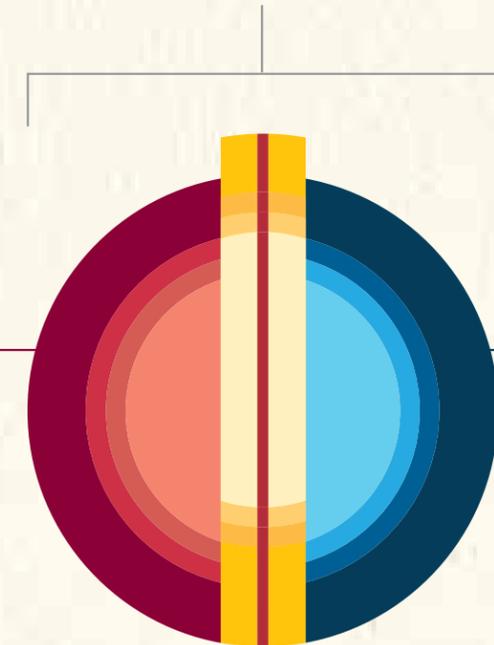
ABOUT ILLUMINATIVE

THE STORY OF OUR BRAND

Circle-shaped logo: represents the circular frame and the deer hide used to shine light throughout the traditional Pawnee earth lodges.

Red gradient: represents the diversity of Native peoples.

Blue gradient: represents the diversity of our allies who help turn up the volume and support our efforts to change narratives, shift culture, and create transformative change.



Yellow beam: represents the light, energy, movement, truth, change, and impact that happens when Native and non-Native peoples come together.

BY THE NUMBERS

\$20+ Million invested back into community (grants, artist commissions and licensing, donations)

96 Billion earned media impressions

291 Million impressions via social media and other digital platforms

380,000 social media followers

14 town halls and events

279 total partnerships with artists, funders, and Native-led and allied movements and organizations

BY THE HEADLINES

yahoo/entertainment

How shows like 'Reservation Dogs' flipped the script on Native representation on TV

A new report shines a light on representation in front of and behind the camera.

By Laura Clark, Editor
Fri, September 15, 2023 at 5:00 AM PDT
3 min read

Reservation Dogs earned four Emmy nominations for its third and final season. (FX Networks/Courtesy of Everett Collection)

TOWN&COUNTRY LUXURY STYLE TRAVEL LEISURE SOCIETY

LEISURE Arts & Culture

Uncovering the Terrible Legacy of Native American Boarding Schools

A new podcast chronicles a search for justice at one of the over 400 residential schools for Native Americans that were opened in the U.S. starting in the 1800s.

By NORMAN VANAMEE PUBLISHED: APR 26, 2023 9:01 AM EDT

DEADLINE

HOME / BUSINESS / NEWS

Illuminative And Nielsen Unveil New Data On The Growth And Impact Of Native Content At The 2023 Sundance Film Festival

By Valerie Compton
January 21, 2023 11:45am

NATIVE NEWS ONLINE
Warrior Journalism Defending Tribal Sovereignty

HOME CURRENTS OPINION SOVEREIGNTY EDUCATION A & E

Native Organizations Announce National Day of Action and Reflection on Citizenship Centennial

teenVOGUE

NEWSLETTER STYLE POLITICS CULTURE IDENTITY VIDEO SUMMIT SHOPPING

How This Indigenous Nonprofit Aims to Reach Vaccine-Hesitant Native Communities

Native American vaccination rates are currently the highest in the country, but there is still more work to be done.

Got a Tip? Newsletters U.S. Edition

VARIETY

Home > Film > Opinion Oct 11, 2021 2:41pm PT

Indigenous Representation Is Still Scarce in Hollywood: 'We Need More Native Stories' (Guest Column)

By Crystal Echo Hawk

BANFF

INDEPENDENT

Voices

How we're building power for Native People at the ballot box

As the US marks Indigenous Peoples Day, Native Americans are working to make sure our voices are heard at the polls

By Crystal Echo Hawk Monday 10 October 2022 20:33 BST

People SUBSCRIBE

Activist Crystal Echo Hawk Is Taking on Racist Mascots: 'We Still Have a Long Way to Go'

Washington Commanders NEWS SCHEDULE STATS DEPTH CHART SCORES

Native American Group Responds to Washington 'Commanders'

Long critical of "Redskins", the Illuminative group gives its blessing to new name

By Richie Whitt | Feb 2, 2022

Richie Whitt and Bri Amaranthus
@RichieWhitt @BriAmaranthus

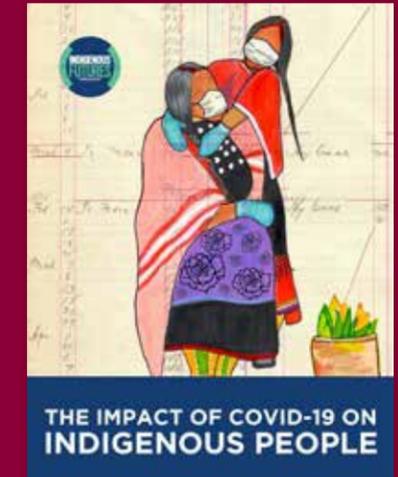
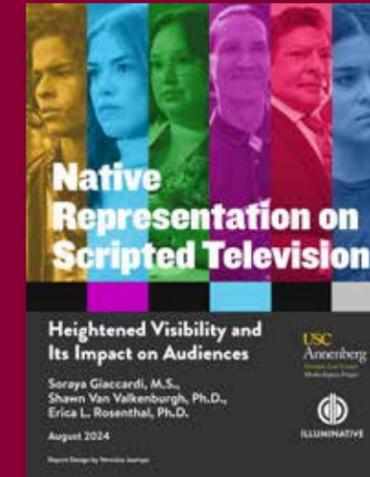
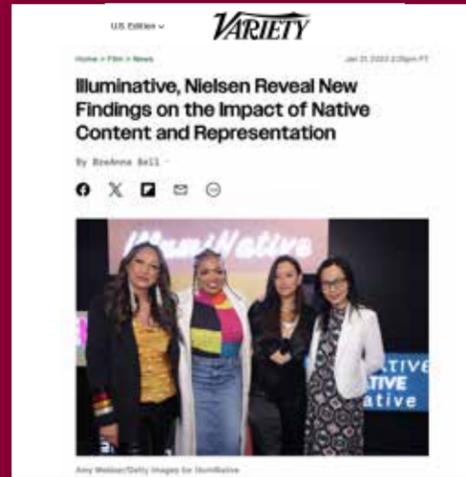
VANITY FAIR

POLITICS HOLLYWOOD BEATLES OTHER CULTURE

American Genocide: The Crimes of Native American Boarding Schools Embarks on a Quest for Truth and Healing

"This is an angry quest. We have all Americans that we have not only the true history of what happened, but what can be done today." -Crystal Echo Hawk, co-author of the documentary

DATA-DRIVEN NARRATIVE CHANGE



Research was always fundamental to how IllumiNative built power and shifted narratives. For too long, research about Native peoples was conducted without us, producing research that erased Indigenous voices and histories and reinforced ineffective solutions. IllumiNative worked to reverse this trend, leading some of the largest research projects created by, for, and about Native peoples in collaboration with our partners.

We collaborated with grassroots organizers, social scientists, and data analysts to uncover critical insights and create evidence and practice-based strategies for achieving narrative and policy change. Being equipped with research that truly reflects Indigenous communities allowed us to build more impactful and effective campaigns.

INDIGENOUS FUTURES SURVEY

The Indigenous Futures Survey (IFS), created in 2020 in partnership with the Native Organizers Alliance, and researchers from the University of Washington and University of Michigan (RISE), and Kauffmann and Associates, was designed to illuminate the authentic experiences, systemic challenges, and priority issues of Native peoples today.

This multi-year survey is the largest research project ever conducted in Indian Country, with more than 19,000 responses received across surveys conducted in 2020, 2021, 2023, and 2025. IFS findings have informed policymakers on key issues, identified the major priorities for Indian Country during election years, and provided insight into a spectrum of topics, including civic engagement, identity, and culture.

NATIVE VISIBILITY + POWER-BUILDING PROJECT

Conducted in 2023 and 2024, the Native Visibility + Power-Building Project (NVP) sought to assess how perceptions about Native people had changed since RNT. This project encompassed qualitative and quantitative analyses across eight different categories and sectors: visibility, mascots, discrimination and stereotypes, TV, film and media, K-12 education, judicial and political institutions, social media, and allies. NVP culminated in a gathering of Native organizations, community leaders, researchers, and allies in June 2024 to review the preliminary findings and strategize around the next phase of movement building in Indian Country.

MEDIA + ENTERTAINMENT RESEARCH

Over the years, we partnered with groundbreaking entertainment researchers, including Nielsen and USC Annenberg Norman Lear Center, to examine and evaluate Native representation in the industry. Our research has shown that when Native talent leads both on screen and behind the camera, authentic and accurate representation is possible. This authentic representation has a profound impact, extending beyond Indian Country by resonating more deeply with audiences, fostering a greater understanding of Native issues, and invigorating viewership.

FROM INSIGHTS TO ACTION

With the data in hand, we organized the work around two main focus areas— Narrative Change + Organizing and Pop Culture + Media. This approach allowed us to challenge misconceptions and stereotypes at all levels, from grassroots efforts and community organizing to representation in TV, film, and media.

NARRATIVE CHANGE + ORGANIZING

By shifting narratives—and ensuring Native peoples are the authors—we shifted culture and public perceptions, built Indigenous power, and helped create a more just and equitable world.

Our Narrative Change + Organizing work included research-informed storytelling, digital and grassroots organizing, cultural strategy, rapid response, and inclusive campaigns that built narrative power and mobilized action to drive transformational change.

POP CULTURE + MEDIA

By having a voice in the entertainment and media industries, we held companies accountable, advanced institutional equity in entertainment and media, and supported authentic and Native-authored stories.

Through our Pop Culture + Media work, we established strategic partnerships with studios, executives, filmmakers, and Native storytellers to increase Native-authored stories, authentic and accurate representation, and opportunities for Native creatives in front of and behind the camera.

Some of our major partnerships included:

- | | | | |
|-------------|----------------|------------------|------------------------|
| Amazon | CAA Foundation | Netflix | Walt Disney Company |
| Apple | Comcast | Simon & Schuster | Warner Bros. Discovery |
| Delta | Lionsgate | Spotify | |
| Disney RISE | NBC Universal | Viacom | |

HISTORIC REPRESENTATION AT THE 2019 ACADEMY AWARDS

In 2019, Wes Studi (Cherokee) received a Governors Award, an honorary award for lifetime achievement, from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. This was a historic moment for Indigenous representation as it marked the first time a Native American received an Oscar. To celebrate this significant moment, IllumiNative was commissioned to produce a history-making tribute film celebrating Studi's career, including his credits in *Dances with Wolves*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, and *Avatar*, and his impact on Indigenous representation in entertainment. This film was screened in front of influential A-list attendees at the 2019 Governors Awards where Studi was presented with his Oscar.



Credit: Shane Brown / Reservation Dogs / FX



Credit: Spirit Rangers / Netflix



Credit: VALERIE MACON/AFP via Getty Images



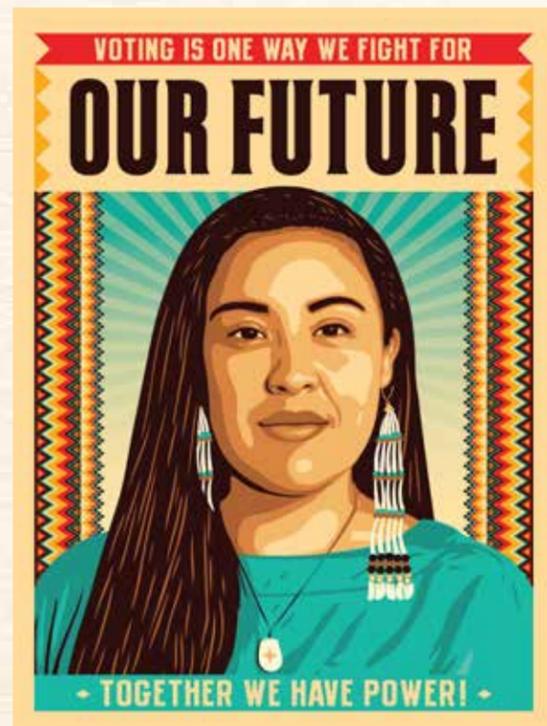
 NARRATIVE CHANGE + ORGANIZING

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' DAY

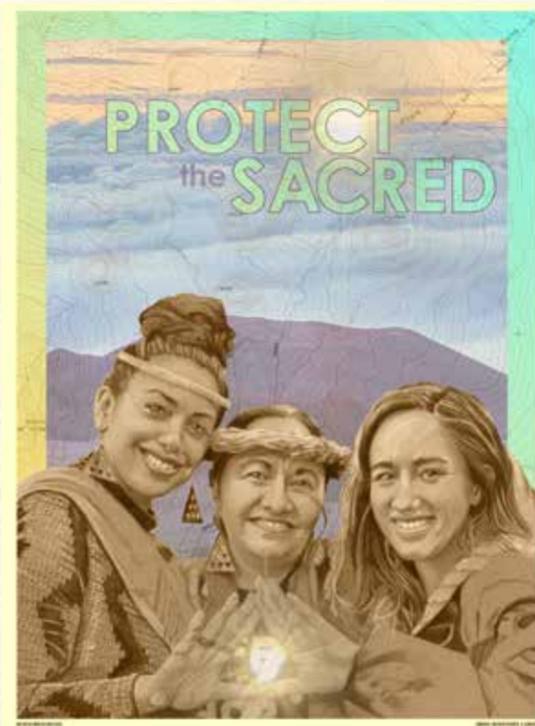
Indigenous Peoples' Day is a holiday celebrated on the second Monday of October in the United States in lieu of or in addition to Columbus Day. At its core, Indigenous Peoples' Day aims to move beyond the narrative of oppression and honor the histories, cultures, contributions, and resilience of contemporary Native peoples.

When IllumiNative first began, only about four states and 57 cities celebrated Indigenous Peoples' Day. In 2024, the numbers grew to 17 states, plus Washington, DC, and more than 200 cities. Expanding the recognition and awareness of Indigenous Peoples' Day was one way we shifted historically inaccurate narratives by replacing them with accurate and authentic stories.

Over the years, IllumiNative celebrated Indigenous Peoples' Day and increased visibility around the importance of this holiday by developing guides, messaging, and artist collaborations.



Credit: Ernesto Yerena (Yaqui/Xicano)



Credit: LMNOPI / Amplifier

2019: "ONE WORLD (WE ARE ONE)" OFFICIAL MUSIC VIDEO

We partnered with Taboo and Mag 7 around the release of "We Are One" to show the richness, diversity, and beauty of Indian Country.

2020: "FOR OUR FUTURE" GUIDE

This guide provides an overview of Indigenous Peoples' Day, how different states and cities made the shift, and the actions allies can take to advocate for the adoption of Indigenous Peoples' Day nationwide.

2020: "OUR FUTURE" ART DROP

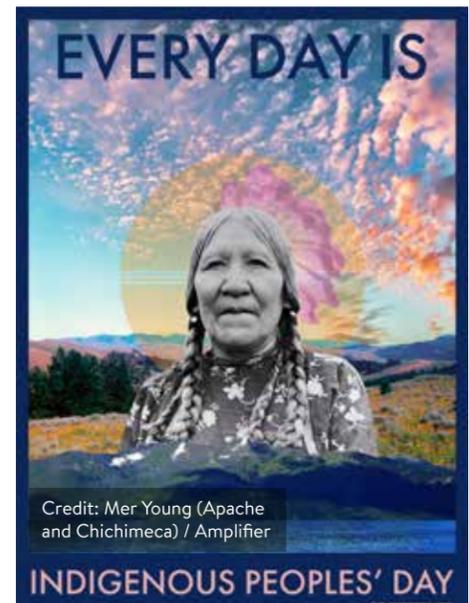
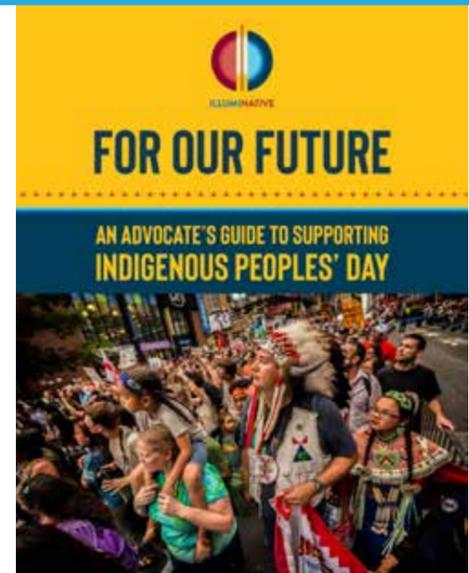
We collaborated with Ernesto Yereno, Arlene Mejorado, and Shalene Joseph (A'aniih/Athabaskan) to create the "Our Future" poster and communicate the power voting has in shaping our collective future.

2020: AMPLIFIER ART CAMPAIGN

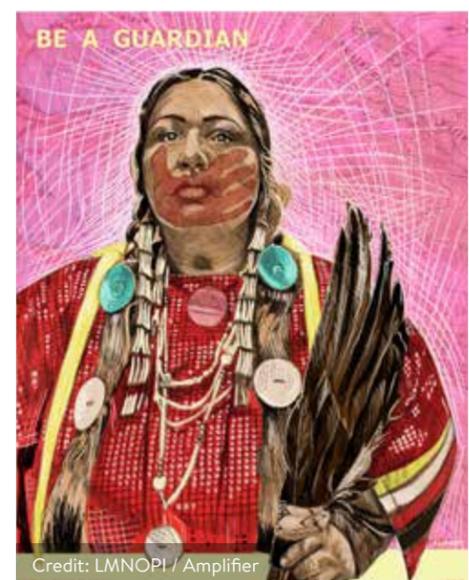
We teamed up with Amplifier and Nia Tero to launch a public art campaign that elevated Indigenous land stewardship and the relationship between Indigenous sovereignty and Black liberation. We collaborated with several artists, including Gregg Deal (Pyramid Lake Paiute), Mer Young (Hidalgo Otomi and Mescarelo-Chiricahua Apache), Weshoyot Alvitre (Tongva), and LMNOPI, to bring this art to life.

2021: INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' DAY SPOTIFY PLAYLIST

We curated a playlist of 62 songs by Indigenous artists to celebrate their creative expression and encourage listeners to Indigenize their own playlists.



Credit: Mer Young (Apache and Chichimeca) / Amplifier



Credit: LMNOPI / Amplifier

 NARRATIVE CHANGE + ORGANIZING

CHANGE THE NAME CAMPAIGN

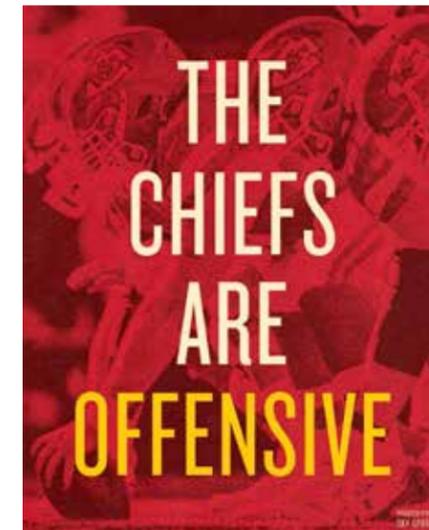
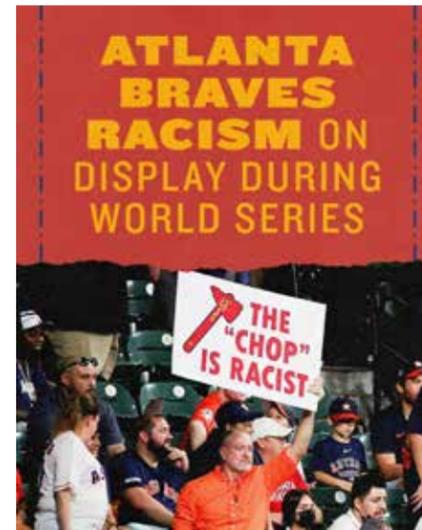
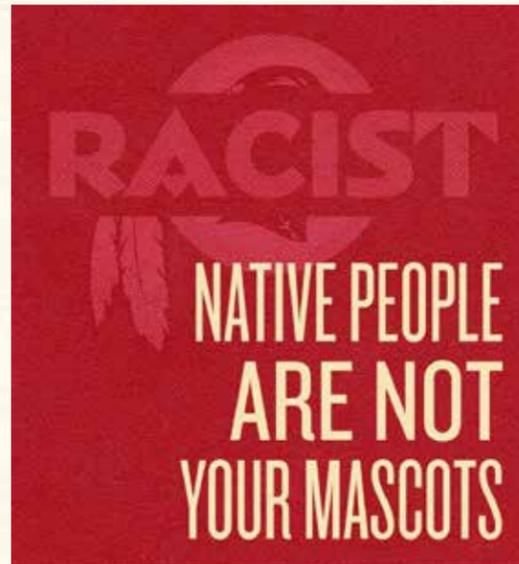
For more than 40 years, community leaders and activists in Indian Country, including Suzane Harjo (Cheyenne and Hodulgee Muscogee) and Amanda Blackhorse (Diné), have fought to bring light to the issue of racist mascots and the lasting impacts these stereotypical depictions have on Native youth and communities.

In 2020, America's reckoning with systemic racism sparked important dialogue around the way racism and stereotypes shape our society and inform our policies. We amplified the call to eliminate racist sports mascots nationwide.

Building on the momentum created by the decades of work in Indian Country, IllumiNative joined forces with First Peoples Worldwide and Native advocates and organizations to launch the #TheTimelsNow campaign to end the Washington football team's use of a racial slur as its name. Through a coordinated effort with our partners to put pressure on the NFL and other sports franchises, we ignited a firestorm and pushed the Washington team name to the forefront of the national debate on racism.

On July 13, 2020, the Washington football team announced it would retire its racist name and logo.

Following the success of the #TheTimelsNow campaign, we continued to support other grassroots organizations' and activists' calls to eliminate other racist team names, mascots, and fan behavior, including the Kansas City Chiefs, and the Atlanta Braves, and at public schools across the country.



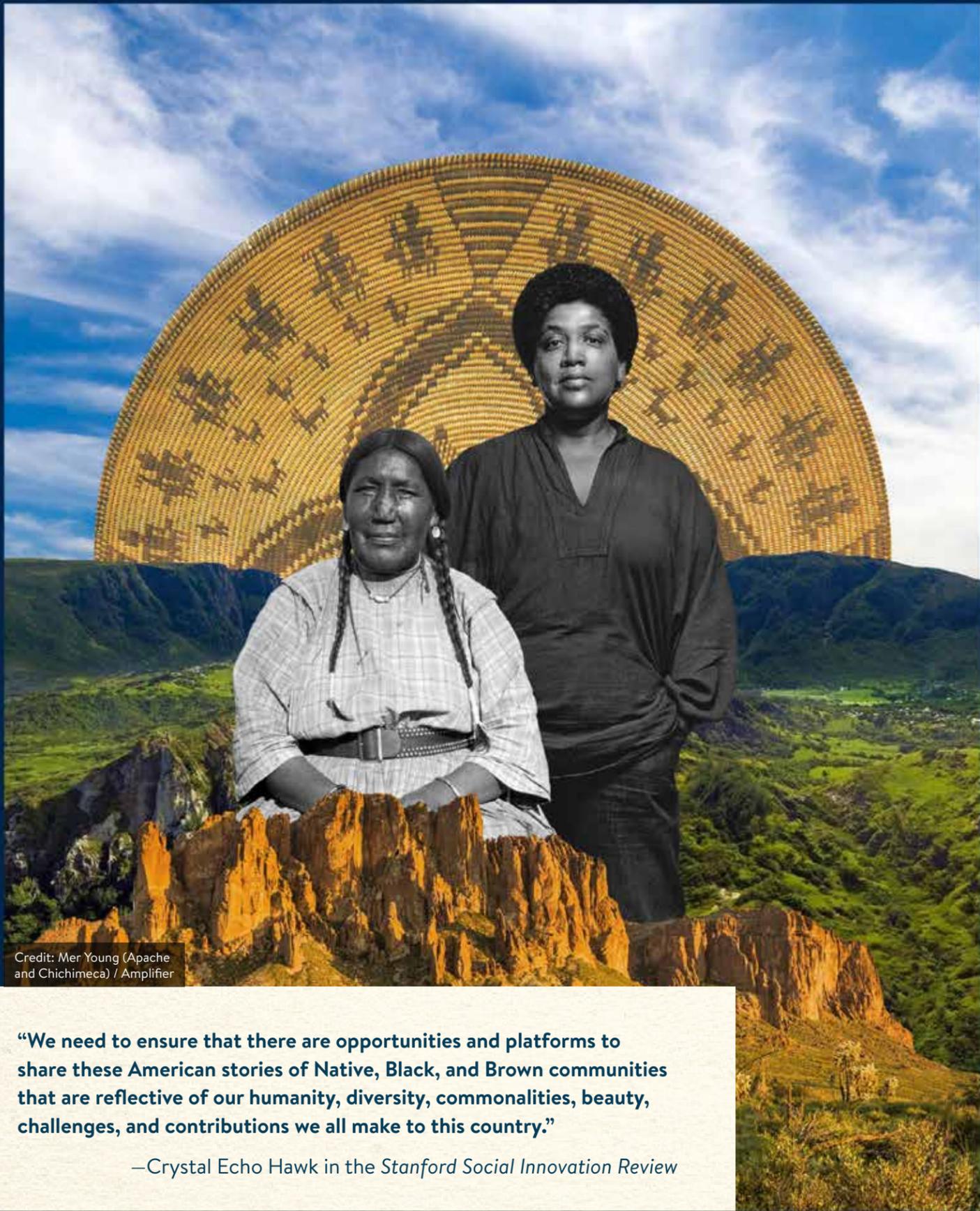
OUR IMPACT

73 Million
social media impressions

42 Billion
earned media impressions

131
articles and interviews

\$620 Billion
in assets represented in a letter signed by investor groups and foundations sent to NIKE, PepsiCo, and FedEx



Credit: Mer Young (Apache and Chichimeca) / Amplifier

“We need to ensure that there are opportunities and platforms to share these American stories of Native, Black, and Brown communities that are reflective of our humanity, diversity, commonalities, beauty, challenges, and contributions we all make to this country.”

—Crystal Echo Hawk in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*

@YOUNG.MER - AMPLIFIER.ORG FOR @WITERS @ @_ILLUMINATIVE

OUR WORK



NARRATIVE CHANGE + ORGANIZING

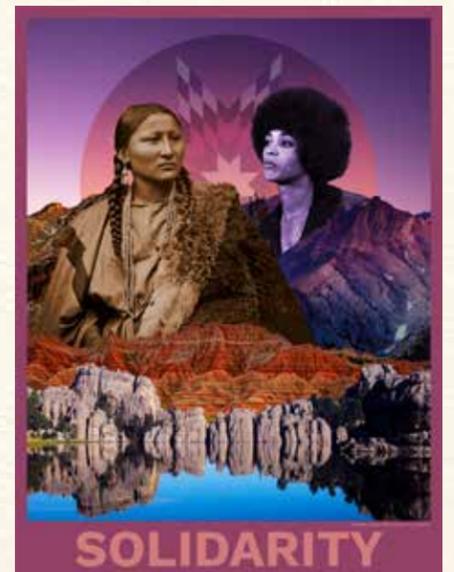
MULTIRACIAL MOVEMENT FOR JUSTICE AND DEMOCRACY

We know that true justice cannot be achieved without achieving justice for all. In 2020, the critical conversations happening around institutionalized bias, race, and justice fueled many people and organizations to deepen their relational organizing and advocacy efforts.

As narrative disrupters, IllumiNative partnered with our Native and non-Native relatives to challenge dominant narratives and shift culture, policies, institutions, and power in meaningful ways. Together, we built a multiracial movement for justice and democracy by leaning into the shared struggles and stories of Black, Indigenous, and communities of color and our collective power for transformational change, including the influence our votes and civic engagement can have on systemic change.

TOGETHER WITH ARTISTS AND CREATIVES, WE:

- Commissioned a short film, *Together We Are Stronger*, with acclaimed Native filmmakers Sterlin Harjo (Seminole/Muscogee) and Kyle Bell (Thlopthlocco Tribal Town/Creek) and multidisciplinary Black artist Kalup Linzy.
- Commissioned four works by Mer Young (Apache and Chichimeca) to illustrate how standing together builds collective power in the fight for racial justice.
- Supported the work of Indigenous filmmaker Josué Rivas, *Coyotlalli Techpanoltih (The Border Crossed Us)*, to connect the movement for undocumented immigrants and Indigenous solidarity.



Credit: Mer Young (Apache and Chichimeca) / Amplifier



NARRATIVE CHANGE + ORGANIZING

NATIVES VOTE

The right to vote has not always been a guarantee for Native peoples. Despite being Indigenous to the lands that make up the US, Native peoples were not granted US citizenship until the Indian Citizenship Act was passed in 1924, and the right to vote was not secured in all 50 states until 40 years after that.

Voting is one way we build Native power and mobilize for our shared future. To demonstrate the importance of the Native vote, IllumiNative executed get-out-the-vote campaigns around the 2020, 2022, and 2024 presidential and midterm congressional elections. These campaigns aimed to deepen Native voter participation, address common barriers to voting, enhance digital and grassroots mobilization, and create lasting infrastructure for Native civic engagement.

Equipped with the findings from the Indigenous Futures Surveys and in partnership with Native Organizers Alliance, First Peoples Worldwide, and other Native-led organizations, Native artists, influencers, and community leaders, we launched data-driven strategies and messaging that activated Native voters and ensured Native voices were heard at the ballot box.



Credit: Gregg Deal (Pyramid Lake Paiute)



Credit: Aly McKnight (Shoshone-Bannock)

2020 HIGHLIGHTS

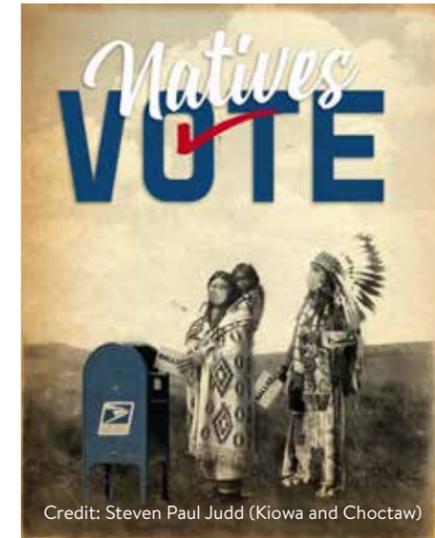
- More than 97,000 people tuned in to two virtual election-related town halls.
- In 2020, Native voters turned out in historic numbers, helping to shift perceptions about the impact and power of the Native vote.

2022 HIGHLIGHTS

- Used comedy as a tool to engage young and first-time voters.
 - » Ran ads featuring actor Dallas Goldtooth (Bdewakantunwan Dakota and Diné) as his *Reservation Dogs* character, Spirit, on 35 Tribal radio stations across five states as part of a comprehensive strategy to use humor to reach target audiences, including Native youth.
- Partnered with actor Benjamin Bratt to develop a PSA-style video encouraging people to vote as one way to shape our futures.
- \$180,000 in grants and 34,000 swag items were distributed to support on-the-ground efforts.
- 19.4 million impressions were generated through paid media, banner ads, and storytelling efforts.

2024 HIGHLIGHTS

- Partnered with Native American Rights Fund on a series of voting advocacy events in Washington, DC, to recognize the 100th anniversary of the Indian Citizenship Act and the ongoing fight to protect voting rights throughout Indian Country.
- Continued to leverage humor to encourage civic engagement around the key issues identified in Indigenous Futures Survey 3.0.
- Hosted the GoodLaugh workshop that brought together artists, influencers, writers, graphic designers, and comedians to brainstorm, ideate, and create a variety of creative assets for the campaign.
- 4.3 million impressions were generated through social media and content.



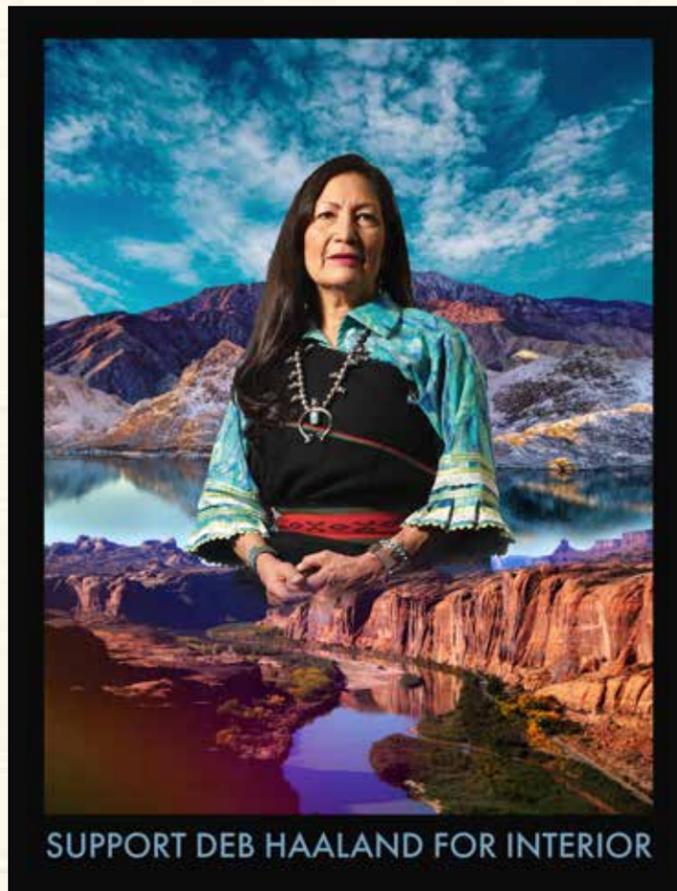


DEB HAALAND CONFIRMATION AS SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR

The unprecedented Native voter turnout in the 2020 election made it clear that Native peoples are essential to shaping and creating a more representative democracy. We built upon this momentum and launched a campaign in support of the nomination and confirmation of Deb Haaland (Pueblo Laguna) as the 54th US Secretary of Interior.

In partnership with Native Organizers Alliance and a dozen other Native and non-Native organizations and advocates, we organized the #DebForInterior campaign to generate a strong foundation of public support and political pressure to confirm Deb Haaland as the first Native Cabinet member in US history.

This campaign utilized narrative strategy across social media, earned media, grassroots organizing, and creative activism to shift perspectives and demonstrate the power and influence of Native peoples.



Credit: Mer Young (Apache and Chichimeca)

OUR IMPACT

2.3 Million

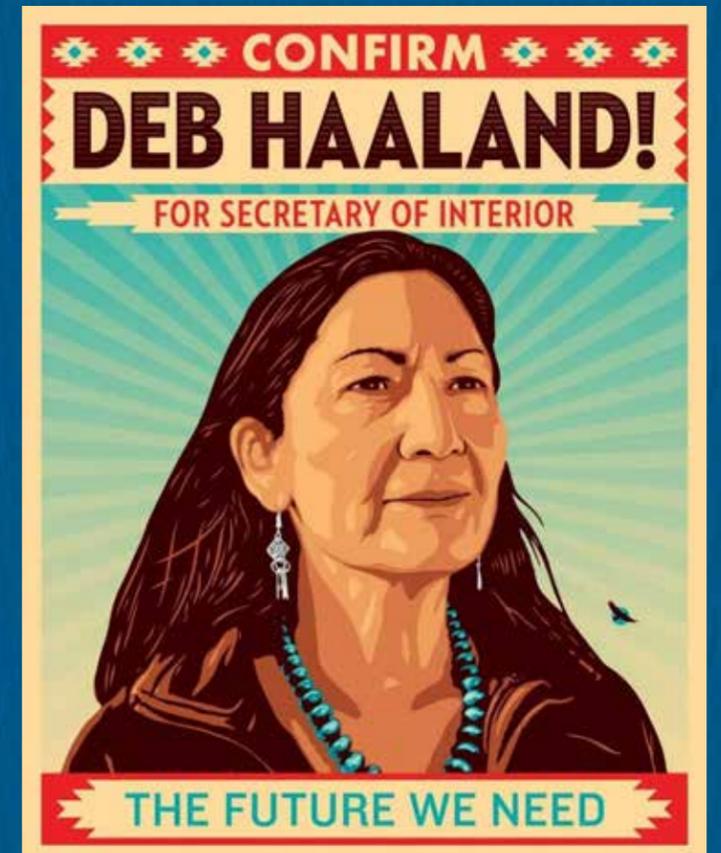
people reached on social media

101,688

people watched our #DebForInterior town hall live stream

34,900

people saw the Deb Haaland projections on the Department of Interior building in DC



Credit: Ernesto Yerena (Yaqui/Xicano)



Credit: Sipa USA

 NARRATIVE CHANGE + ORGANIZING

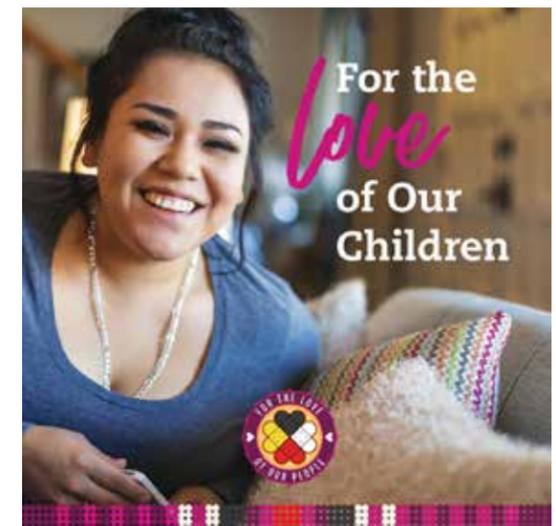
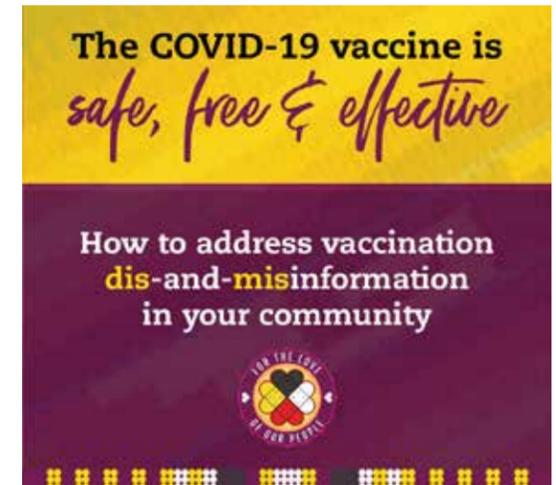
PROTECTING OUR COMMUNITIES FROM COVID-19

When the world shut down in 2020 to protect people from the COVID-19 virus, Native communities were once again ignored in the media, policy decisions, and early funding opportunities. It wasn't a surprise when the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention then released a report that showed that Native peoples were three times more likely to die from COVID-19 than white people. This invisibility was truly a matter of life or death.

To bring attention to the impacts of COVID-19 and funnel philanthropic resources to Native communities, IllumiNative launched two campaigns: "Warrior Up" and "For the Love of Our People" in 2020 and 2021. We partnered with celebrities, political and Tribal leaders, Native influencers, artists, and more to execute a variety of narrative and culture change strategies to provide people with key information and resources to stop the spread.

FOR THE LOVE OF OUR PEOPLE (2021) ACTIVITIES AND IMPACT

- Launched in partnership with the Urban Indian Health Institute and Seattle Indian Health Board.
- "Auntie Bodies with Antibodies" video series used humor to encourage Native youth to get vaccinated. This series featured Cecelia Firethunder (Oglala Lakota), Rep. Sharice Davids (Ho-Chunk), and Tonia Jo Hall (Lakota/Dakota/Hidatsa) as "Auntie Beachress."
- \$415,000 distributed in grants to grassroots and health organizations in COVID-19 hot spots in Indian Country to encourage vaccinations.



WARRIOR UP (2020) ACTIVITIES AND IMPACT

- #StayAwayTogether PSA featuring Native and non-Native celebrities and influencers.
- The first of its kind town hall with Native leaders and health experts, allied leaders, and entertainers that received more than 250,000 views.
- Digital art commissioned to promote COVID-19 public health education.
- Lesson plans and resources to more than one million at-home educators, students, and families.
- 12.5 million social media impressions.
- Media coverage that resulted in corrective federal action.



“Protecting

our babies, our sons, our daughters and our future generations—this has always been our way. Get vaccinated for the love of our people.”

—LT. GOVERNOR PEGGY FLANAGAN



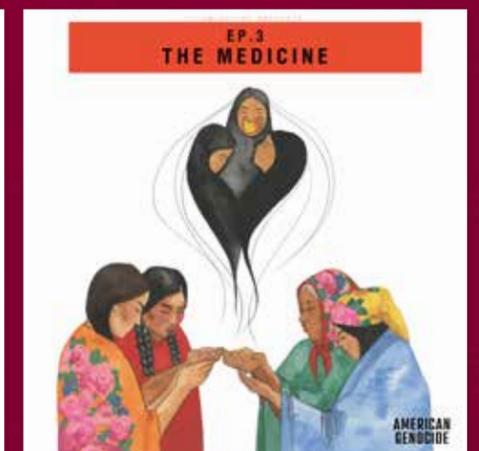
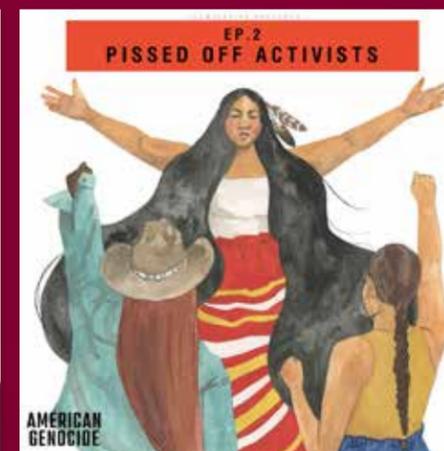
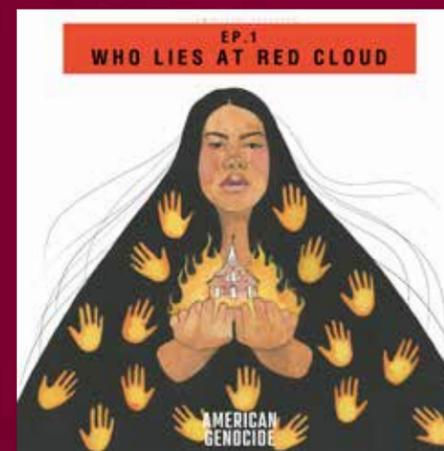
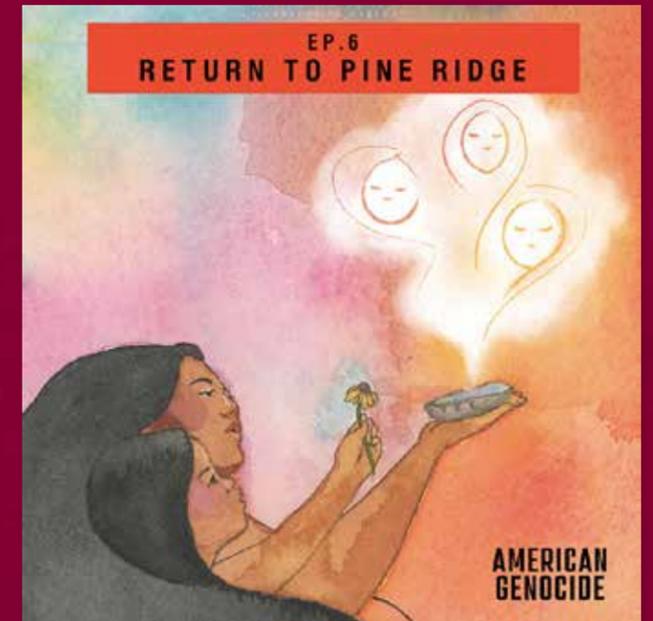
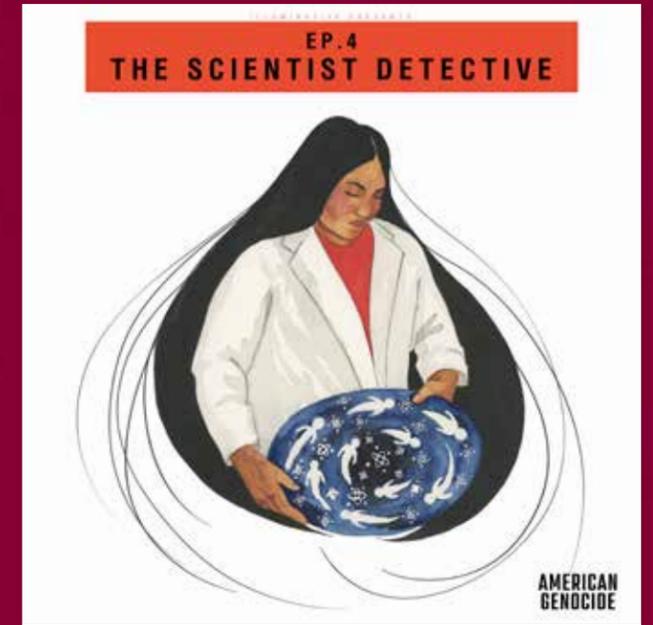
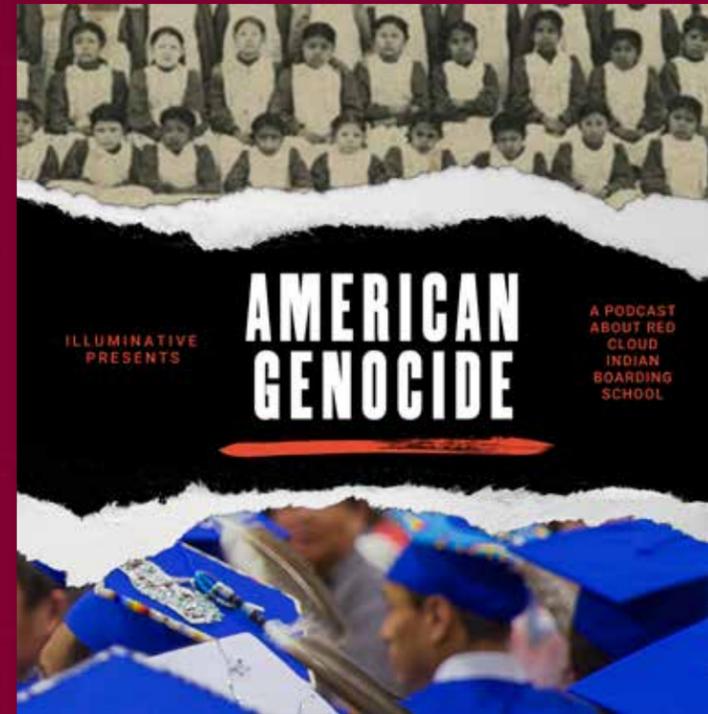
“AMERICAN GENOCIDE” PODCAST

In 2021, former Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland announced an unprecedented federal investigation into the US federal Indian boarding school system’s centuries-long policies and practices of forcibly separating Native children from their families and communities. Within volumes one and two of the Federal Boarding School Initiative investigative report, 417 federal Indian boarding schools were identified across 37 states and territories operated in the United States and often in partnership with churches and religious organizations between 1819 and 1969. With this federal investigation underway, IllumiNative set out to tell America’s hidden story.

In April 2023, IllumiNative launched the *American Genocide* podcast to tell the story of one school at the epicenter of our country’s dark history, the Red Cloud Indian School on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. This podcast takes listeners on a journey through the then-developing situation and the story of compounding intergenerational pain of Indian boarding schools and the community’s search for truth, healing, and reconciliation.

We partnered with a host of community-based and national Native organizations, including Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation, the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition, and Decolonizing Wealth, to bring this story to life and reach audiences far and wide.

This podcast and the multipronged activation campaign that followed its release aimed to not only educate and inform new, non-Native audiences about the atrocities and forced assimilation that took place at these schools and the present-day impacts to Native communities, but also uplift the Oglala Lakota community’s search for truth, healing, and reconciliation and the actions people can take to support the call for justice.

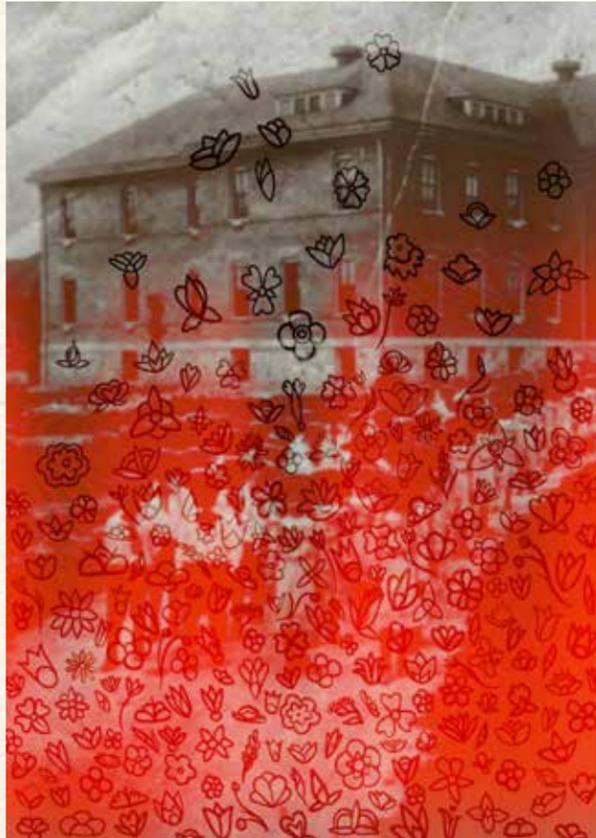


All episode art: Aly McKnight (Shoshone-Bannock)

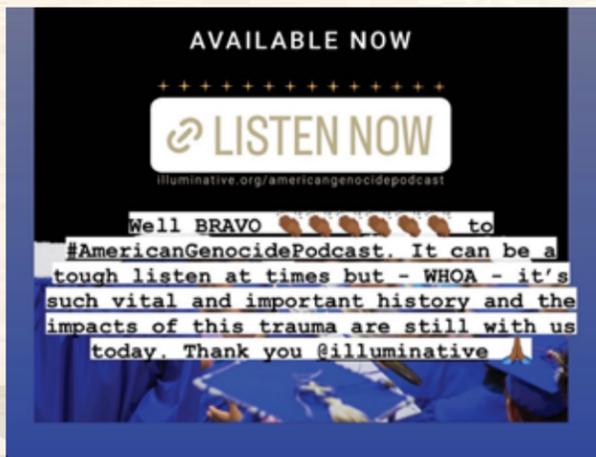
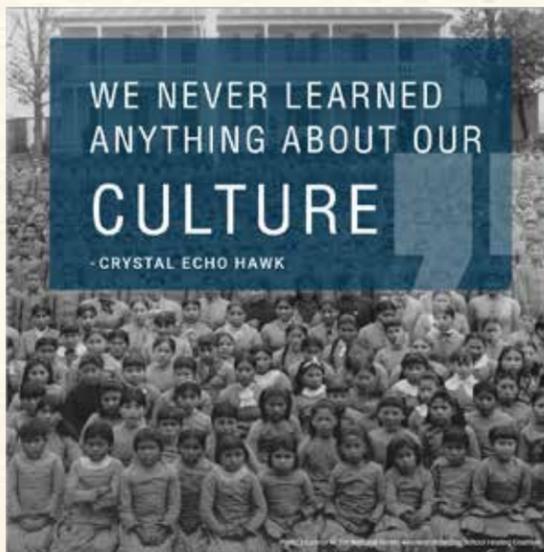


NARRATIVE CHANGE + ORGANIZING

“AMERICAN GENOCIDE” PODCAST



Credit: Cameron Mukwa (Anishinaabe)



500+ Million

reached via earned media, including stories and interviews in *Variety*, *CNN*, *Vanity Fair*, *ELLE*, *Glamour*, *Town & Country*, and *People*.

21.5 Million

paid social, influencer, and partnership impressions.

48.5 Million

reached via earned talent.

#36

peaked at #36 on Apple Podcast's true crime genre.

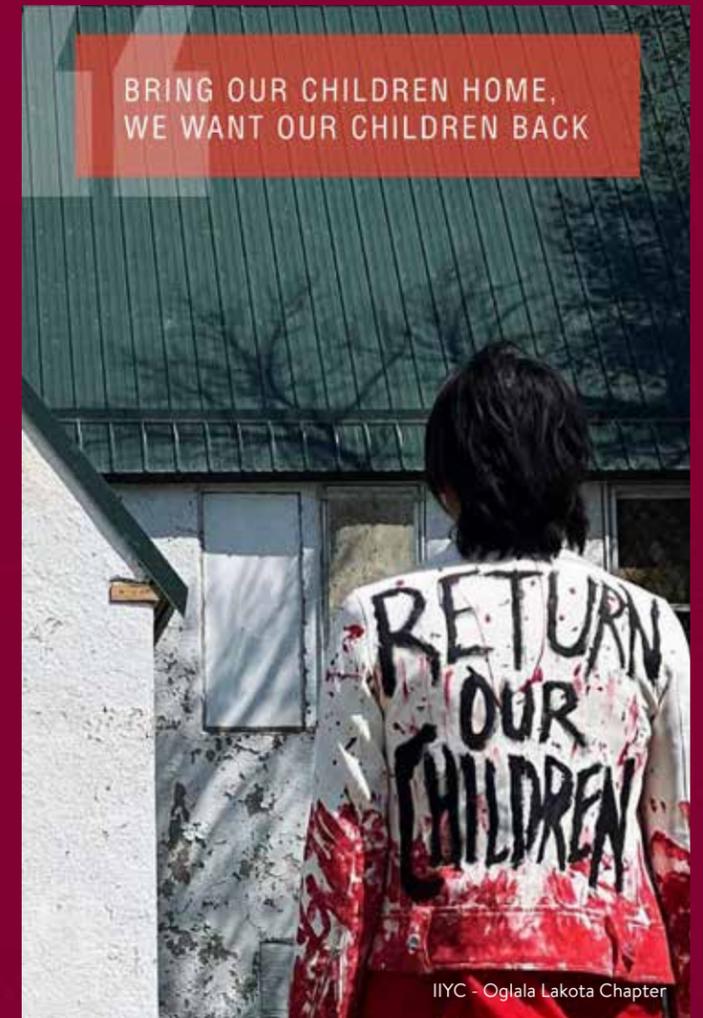
AWARD WINNING

Received the Webby Awards' Gold Anthem Award for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, Podcast or Audio category and the DIGIDAY Media Award for Best Podcast.



“Only by acknowledging the past can we work toward a future that we’re all proud to embrace.”

—Secretary of the Interior, Deb Haaland (Laguna)



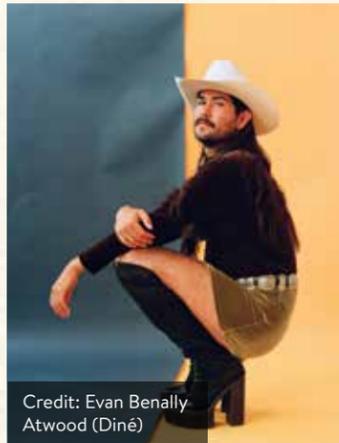
 NARRATIVE CHANGE + ORGANIZING

UPLIFTING TWO-SPIRIT AND LGBTQ+ RELATIVES

Celebrating the diversity and complexity of Native identity was central in our work to shift narratives and strengthen the representation of Native peoples today, including our Two-Spirit and LGBTQ+ relatives. Over the years, we partnered with Two-Spirit and LGBTQ+ Native artists, performers, and storytellers to celebrate queer Indigenous joy and challenge the colonial constructs of Native identity.



Credit: Carmen Selam (Yakama/Namunə)



Credit: Evan Benally Atwood (Diné)



Credit: Evan Benally Atwood (Diné)



Credit: Nate Lemuel (Diné)



Credit: Kali Spitzer (Kaska Dena from Daylu/Jewish from Transylvania, Romania)



Credit: Carmen Selam (Yakama/Namunə)



Credit: Karalyn Radford (Oglala Lakota)

PRIDE MONTH DIGITAL ART SERIES

In June 2022, we launched a digital art series to amplify the voices, issues, histories, and current experiences and stories of Two-Spirit and LGBTQ+ Native peoples. We commissioned four Native artists to produce digital art to celebrate Pride Month and educate audiences about what Two-Spirit means. The commissions reached more than 300,000 people across IllumiNative’s social media channels.



Credit: Evan Benally Atwood (Diné)

“WAGON BURNERS” DRAG SHOW

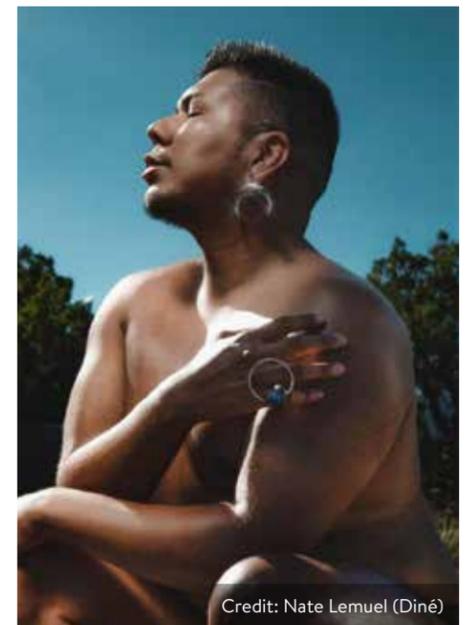
In 2022, we organized “Wagon Burners,” an all-Indigenous drag show in Denver, Colorado, to uplift the diversity of Native identity and our Two-Spirit relatives. The show was co-hosted by iconic drag artists Landa Lakes (Chickasaw) and Lady Shug (Diné) and featured five additional Indigenous drag performers. Along with the in-person audience, the show reached about 121,000 people across social media.



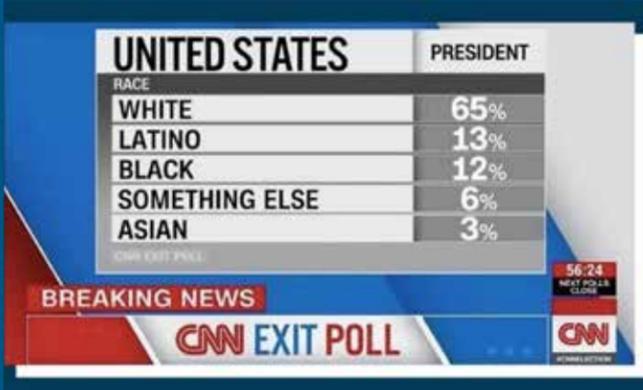
Credit: Karalyn Radford (Oglala Lakota)

“INDIGENOUS QUEER INTIMACIES” DIGITAL ART GALLERY

In 2023, we launched the “Indigenous Queer Intimacies” digital art gallery in partnership with three queer Indigenous photographers: Kali Spitzer (Kaska Dena from Daylu/Jewish from Transylvania, Romania), Nate Lemuel (Diné), and Evan Benally Atwood (Diné). This gallery celebrated the vast interpretations of intimacy through the lens of Indigeneity and queerness, from generational kinship to the adoration and intricacy of nature and ourselves. As of this report, the digital gallery was viewed more than 2,000 times.



Credit: Nate Lemuel (Diné)



illumiNative
@_illumiNatives

.@CNNPolitics says we are "something else". This is what "something else" looks like.

Native voters with record turnouts in key states and volunteers helping get first-time voters and elders to the polls. #NativesVote @CNN #SomethingElse



illumiNative
@_illumiNatives

Sign the petition to call on @CNN to fire Rick Santorum and increase Native representation in their news coverage and analysis. #RemoveRick

actionnetwork.org/petitions/remo...

11:37 AM · Apr 27, 2021 · Twitter for iPhone



OUR WORK



NARRATIVE CHANGE CAMPAIGNS IN CRITICAL MOMENTS IN TIME

Executing rapid response campaigns is a key component of disrupting invisibility and driving narrative change. Over the years, there were several media and political events that required immediate response and activation to call out systemic issues and racism, educate audiences, and inspire action for change. IllumiNative led or participated in several of these moments in partnership with the PR firm Sunshine Sachs Morgan & Lylis to help bring these stories and issues to mainstream media.

CNN & #REMOVERICK DAY OF ACTION

Major news networks have long ignored and misrepresented the stories of Native peoples, which has contributed greatly to misinformed policy decisions and public perception. In 2020 and 2021, CNN made several missteps that required immediate action.

During CNN's live coverage of the 2020 election night, the network displayed a graphic breakdown of voter participation by race, categorizing Native peoples as "Something Else." Despite the groundbreaking Native voter turnout in this election, CNN still erased us from the narrative. In response, IllumiNative and other organizations launched a digital campaign to demonstrate our collective anger and frustration. Within two days, CNN issued an apology.

In 2021, during a speech to young conservatives, CNN political analyst Rick Santorum said, "We birthed a nation from nothing... There isn't much Native American culture in American culture." In response, IllumiNative, along with NDN Collective, Native Organizers Alliance, Advance Native Political Leadership, Protect the Sacred, and First Peoples Worldwide, published an open letter to CNN executives with more than 120 signatures in support of CNN firing Rick Santorum and instituting policies to develop meaningful Native inclusion in the network. To amplify the calls to action on a larger scale, we organized the #RemoveRick Day of Action, a digital activation campaign that reached more than 3.68 million people across social media, leading CNN to fire Santorum.

 NARRATIVE CHANGE + ORGANIZING

NARRATIVE CHANGE CAMPAIGNS IN CRITICAL MOMENTS IN TIME

OVERRULING OF “ROE V. WADE”

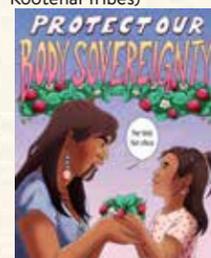
In 2022, we moved quickly to respond to the US Supreme Court’s decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson*, which eliminated the constitutional protection for abortion originally established in *Roe v. Wade* almost 50 years prior. Indigenous women’s voices have historically been erased from the national reproductive justice debate and that remained the case in the aftermath of this Supreme Court decision. To bring attention to the disproportionate impact on Native communities and uplift the voices of Native women and peoples in the national conversation, IllumiNative turned to earned and digital media. IllumiNative CEO and founder Crystal Echo Hawk penned a powerful op-ed, “Women’s Bodies Are No Longer Their Own. For Native People, They Never Have Been,” for *Elle* magazine, which was also picked up by CNN, *USA Today*, *The Guardian*, *The Washington Post*, and other local and statewide media outlets. We also commissioned four Native women-identified artists to tell the story of Native women’s fight for bodily autonomy and reproductive justice. These efforts reached an estimated combined audience of more than 825 million people.



Credit: Paige Pettibon (Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes)



Credit: Steph Littlebird (Chinook and Kalapuya)



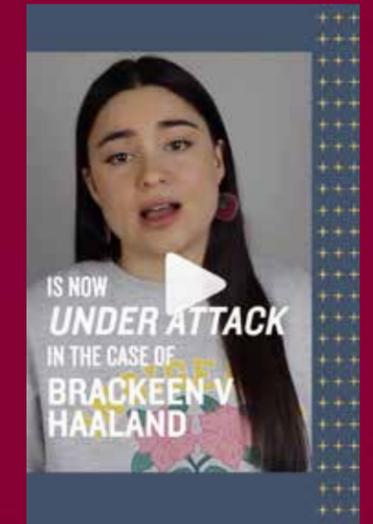
Credit: Jackie Fawn (Yurok, Washoe, and Surigaonon)



Credit: Aly McKnight (Shoshone-Bannock)



Credit: Gregg Deal (Pyramid Lake Paiute)



Credit: Gregg Deal (Pyramid Lake Paiute)



PROTECT ICWA

In 2022, the US Supreme Court heard oral arguments in the case *Brackeen v. Haaland*. This case sought to declare the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) unconstitutional, posing a major threat to Tribal sovereignty and the welfare of Native children, families, and Tribal nations. ICWA is a federal Indian law that was passed in 1978 as a direct response to the crisis of forced removal of Native children by the US government. To this day, ICWA keeps Native kids connected to their families, communities, and cultures and is considered the gold standard in child welfare policy. In partnership with the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA), other Native-led organizations, and attorneys, IllumiNative organized a targeted media and digital advocacy campaign to mobilize audiences to protect Native children and communities and Tribal nations’ right to self-govern. We worked closely with Native artists and celebrities to create engaging assets that inspired action, including a PSA-style video featuring Devery Jacobs (Mohawk), Sarah Podemski (Anishinaabe, Ashkenazi), and Jana Schmieding (Cheyenne River Lakota) and digital art by Gregg Deal (Pyramid Lake Paiute). More than 2.4 million people were reached through earned media and digital efforts. On June 15, 2023, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of ICWA—a monumental win for Indian Country.



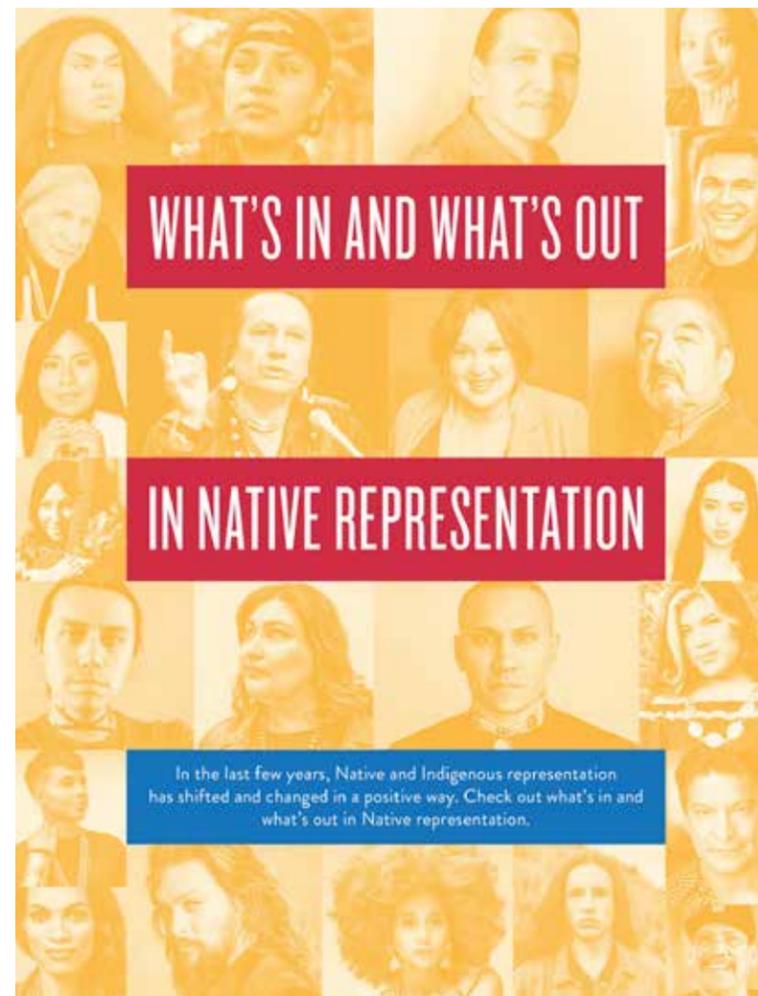
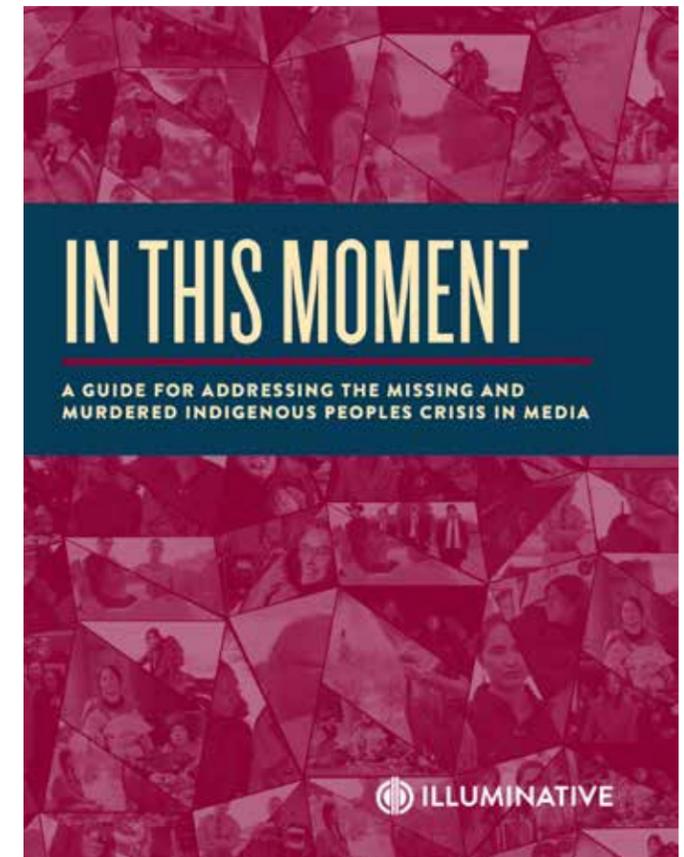
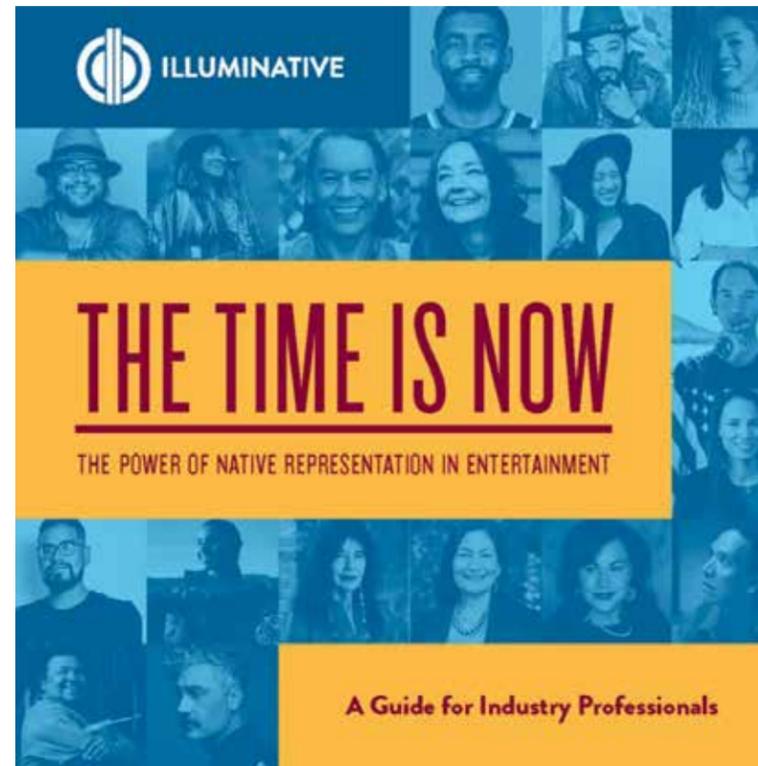
ENTERTAINMENT PARTNERSHIPS AND CULTURAL ADVISING

False narratives, stereotypes, and inaccurate representations of Native peoples are far too prevalent across all sectors of society. We worked to address these misrepresentations at the source. Since our founding, we've developed strategic partnerships and provided trainings and advised almost 150 Hollywood industry professionals, corporations, media, museums, sports teams, schools and universities, philanthropic leaders, grassroots organizations, Tribal leaders, and Native organizations.

We presented strategies and shared actionable materials to educate industry partners and stakeholders on the benefits of authentic representation and the steps to take to do so. We also provided resources to Tribal nations, Native organizations, and creatives to support them in owning the telling of their stories.

SOME OF THE ACTIONABLE MATERIALS WE DEVELOPED INCLUDE:

- “The Time is Now,” a guide for industry professionals who seek to develop accurate stories and characters by and about Native peoples.
- “In This Moment,” a guide for addressing the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples crisis in media.



Credit: Josué Rivas (Mexico/Otomi) / INDÍGENA



INDIGENOUS REPRESENTATION AT SUNDANCE

SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL

Transforming how the entertainment industry engages with and supports Native storytellers was a core pillar of IllumiNative’s work. Building on the success of the Sundance Indigenous Program, IllumiNative produced an official Indigenous House at the Sundance Film Festival in 2020, 2023, and 2024. This curated, culturally immersive event took place during the festival’s opening weekend each year.

Through panel discussions, networking opportunities, and multicultural gatherings, we celebrated the breakthrough achievements of Native creatives and built a movement of narrative sovereignty in Hollywood and beyond.

These events also provided opportunities for us to share groundbreaking reports and research and uplift the importance of accurate and authentic representation of Native peoples, including “The Time is Now: A Guide for Industry Professionals” and the Nielsen Seen on Screen case studies on the economic impact of Native-led and Native-created content.



Credit: Tekpatl (P’urhepecha)

THE INDIGENOUS LIST

In partnership with The Black List and the Sundance Institute’s Indigenous Program, IllumiNative launched The Indigenous List to showcase the talent of Native film and TV screenwriters and create pathways within the industry. Some of The Indigenous List alumni successes include:

- Erica Tremblay and Miciana Alise’s *Fancy Dance* went on to premiere at the 2023 Sundance Film Festival and was distributed by Apple TV+.
- Joey Clift’s *Bunker Boss* and its placement on the inaugural The Indigenous List led directly to meetings and writing opportunities on Nickelodeon and PBS projects.
- Alika Maikau’s script *Moloka’i Bound* was selected to receive a \$500,000 production grant from Google and Array to further foster its path towards the big screen.
- Kathryn Machi’s script, *Firebird*, was optioned by Endeavor Content as a result of her placement on The Indigenous List.



Credit: Josué Rivas (Mexico/Otomi) / INDÍGENA



Credit: Gilberto Terrazas / INDÍGENA



Credit: Josué Rivas (Mexico/Otomi) / INDÍGENA



Credit: Josué Rivas (Mexico/Otomi) / INDÍGENA



Credit: Gilberto Terrazas / INDÍGENA



Credit: Getty



Credit: Getty



Credit: Josué Rivas (Mexica/Otomi) / INDÍGENA



Credit: Josué Rivas (Mexica/Otomi) / INDÍGENA



Credit: Getty



Credit: Gilberto Terrazas / INDÍGENA

OUR WORK



NARRATIVE CHANGE + ORGANIZING

INDIGENOUS HOUSE LA



To celebrate Native excellence, innovation, and joy, in October 2023 IllumiNative hosted Indigenous House LA, an Indigenous pop-up market filled with food, music, art, and powerful conversations hosted by acclaimed writers, actors, and comedians Jana Schmieding (Cheyenne River Lakota) and Bobby Wilson (Sisseton-Wahpeton Dakota).

The event featured the IllumiNative Power Building Awards to honor those on the front lines of storytelling, representation, and power building who work to ensure that our stories are told by us.

Award recipients included:

Jhane Myers
(Comanche, Blackfeet)
Prey producer

Jade Begay
(Diné, Tesuque Pueblo)
climate justice leader

Rep. Sharice Davids
(Ho-Chunk)
US representative

Sterlin Harjo
(Seminole, Muscogee)
Reservation Dogs creator

San Manuel Band of Mission Indians

Credit: Gilberto Terrazas / INDÍGENA





CAREER SUPPORT PROGRAMS

The entertainment industry has historically excluded Native peoples from its creative processes, typically only bringing us in to portray inaccurate characterizations and harmful stereotypes.

In recent years, we've seen a significant shift in the desire and demand for Native-led and Native-authored stories. To build and maintain this momentum, IllumiNative worked with several industry leaders to create career pathways for Native writers, directors, and producers by providing them with the resources and opportunities to succeed.

“Over the past few years, we have seen the huge success of Native content on streaming platforms—the demand for the nuance and complexity that Native-led shows bring to the screen is undeniable.”

—Crystal Echo Hawk, IllumiNative CEO and founder

Credit: Tecpatl Kuauhtzin (Nawa from the original pueblo of Kwawximalpan)



NETFLIX PRODUCERS PROGRAM

In partnership with Netflix, IllumiNative created the first of its kind year-long training program to support a cohort of Native producers in advancing their careers. Eight producers were selected from a pool of nearly 400 applicants, and they worked on developing a current project by attending monthly workshops with industry experts and accessing network-building opportunities with mentors and leaders in the industry. Each fellow received a \$25,000 fellowship to support their work.

◀ Cohort participants included:

- Ashley Browning (Pueblos of Pojoaque)
- Taylor Hensel (Cherokee)
- Princess Daazhrai Johnson (Neets'aii Gwich'in)
- Ivan MacDonald (Blackfeet)
- Coyote Park (Yurok)
- Blake Pickens (Chickasaw)
- Mato Standing Soldier (Oglala Lakota)
- Scott W. Kekama Amona (Kanaka Maoli)

AMAZON EPISODIC DIRECTORS PROGRAM

In partnership with Amazon Studios, a cohort of early and mid-career Native filmmakers shadowed directors on set in Santa Fe, New Mexico, for the second season of the neo-Western series, *Outer Range*, which includes an Indigenous character among its cast. Cohort participants included:



Christopher Cegielski
(Navajo)



Daniel Edward Hyde
(Navajo, Belizean)



Peshawn Bread
(Comanche)



Razelle Benally
(Oglala Lakota, Diné)

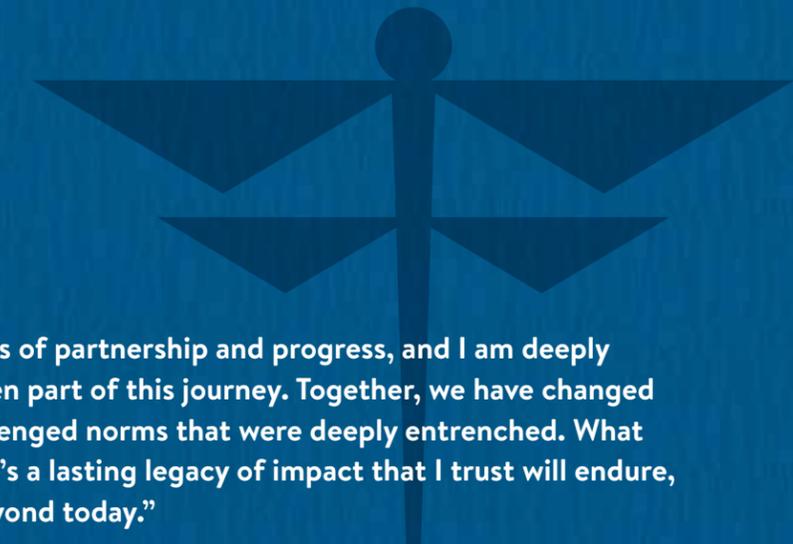
THE POWER OF REPRESENTATION

Since IllumiNative’s founding in 2018, we’ve seen significant shifts in Native representation and in turn, in non-Native peoples’ perceptions of our identities, cultures, and priorities.

From political representation across all levels of government to increased representation in film, TV, and entertainment, we witnessed a surge in Native power. Our research found that there was growing interest from broad audiences to learn more about Native peoples and communities.

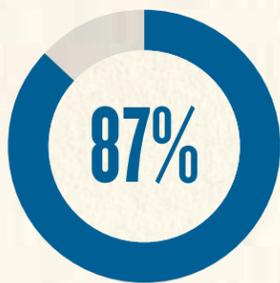
But the work of narrative change did not happen in a silo. Together with Native-led nonprofits, elected officials, influencers, creatives, and non-Native allies, we demonstrated our collective power across all sectors of society.

The systems of our society were built to silence and erase us. Still, through narrative change and increased representation, we interrupted those systemic acts of erasure to tell our stories and make our voices heard.

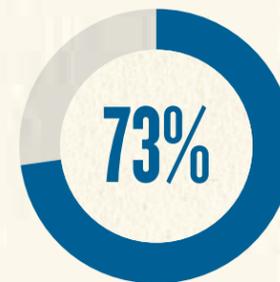


“It has been an extraordinary five years of partnership and progress, and I am deeply grateful for every person who has been part of this journey. Together, we have changed narratives, shifted thinking, and challenged norms that were deeply entrenched. What we’ve built is more than a moment—it’s a lasting legacy of impact that I trust will endure, inspire, and continue to grow well beyond today.”

—Shawn Sachs, CEO, Sunshine Sachs Morgan & Lylis



of participants expressed interest in seeing more TV and film programs featuring people outside of their identity group.



of participants affirmed that Tribes have legal rights to manage their own resources, laws, etc., based on treaty agreements with the US government.

From the Native Visibility and Power-Building project research.



Credit: Josué Rivas (Mexico/Otomi) / INDÍGENA



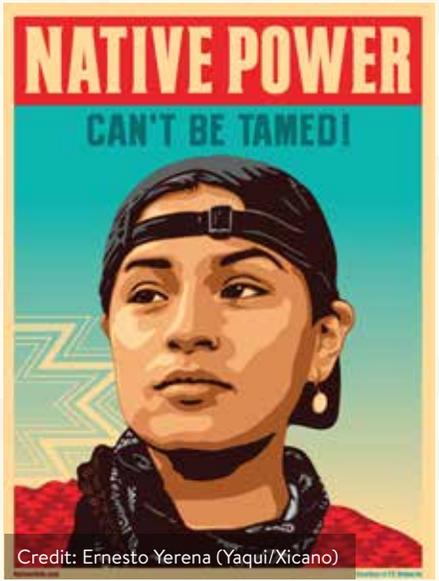
Credit: Nate Lemuel (Diné)



Credit: Josué Rivas (Mexico/Otomi) / INDÍGENA



Credit: Kali Spitzer (Kaska Dena from Daylu/Jewish from Transylvania, Romania)

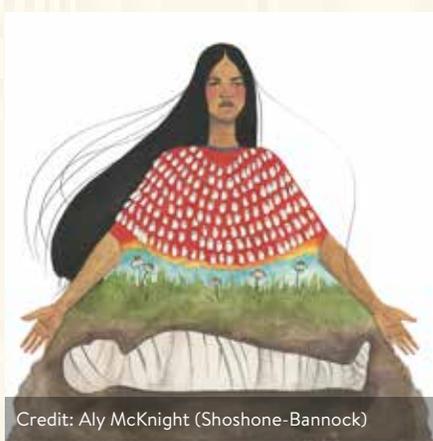


Credit: Ernesto Yerena (Yaqui/Xicano)

**NATIVE PEOPLE
ARE NOT YOUR MASCOT
NATIVE PEOPLE
ARE NOT YOUR MASCOT
NATIVE PEOPLE**



Credit: Evan Benally Atwood (Diné)



Credit: Aly McKnight (Shoshone-Bannock)



Credit: Josué Rivas (Mexico/Otomi) / INDÍGENA



Visit illuminative.org to learn more.