

Listen to Indigenous People

Expand your understanding of Native history issues beyond the fourth Thursday of November. Here are some Indigenous podcasters recommending their favorite Native-made audio.

Phoebe Lett

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The Indigenous people of the land now called North America are often only brought up in the past tense in primary school classrooms. The fact is they are a growing population, an increasing demographic in the country and in Congress, yet most Americans are woefully uninformed about their histories and present-day struggles. Podcasts can help fill in the gaps, and there are plenty of shows made by Indigenous people. Don't know where to start? Native podcast-makers recommend their favorites.

Michael Kickingbear, an enrolled member of the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation and co-host of the current affairs show, "Native Opinion," recommends "Let's Talk Native, With John Kane." Each episode is mostly a monologue by the Mohawk activist and educator John Kane, always speaking "truth to power on political and social justice issues," Mr. Kickingbear said. To learn how young Indigenous people think about the world around them, Mr. Kickingbear turns to "The Red Nation Podcast," which he called "my weekly dose of 'Energy and Youthism' from Indian country."

Another show on Mr. Kickingbear's list is the mother-daughter podcast "Coffee With My Ma." The host, Kaniehtiio Horn, a First Nations actress, spends each episode interviewing her "Radical Activist Mother," Kahentinetha Horn, a prominent Mohawk activist and hilarious woman whose life has led her into some unbelievable adventures. "I love this podcast because of the experiences of her mother, and the loose playful format," Mr. Kickingbear said. "You truly feel like you are sitting in their living room as 'Ma' tells us stories of her life."

For an easily accessible primer on the history of land theft in Native America, Andi Murphy recommends "This Land," from Crooked Media. Murphy, a Diné (Navajo) writer who has her own podcast ("Toasted Sister," about Native American food), calls "This Land" an "intro course to Indian law and policy." The narrative series taps Indigenous legal experts and uses music to showcase how a 1999 murder case sparked a 2020 Supreme Court ruling on tribal sovereignty; listening to it made Murphy feel "indignant all over again about the atrocities committed against Cherokee, and other tribes, during colonization."

Connie Walker, who is Cree from the Okanese First Nation and a reporter for Spotify's Gimlet Media, loves "The Secret Life of Canada" by the CBC for the illusions it dispels about the country's reputation for progressive policy. "For a lot of people, especially Indigenous and other marginalized communities, the truth is much more complicated," she said. Ms. Walker, who hosted the acclaimed true crime series "Missing and Murdered: Finding Cleo," said the CBC show "shines a light on the history that we did not learn in school, and reveals important truths that, in this era of 'reconciliation,' are crucial to understand and acknowledge."

One of the hosts of "The Secret Life of Canada," Falen Johnson, finds inspiration for her own show in the true crime series "Return to Thunder Bay." Ms. Johnson, who is Mohawk and Tuscarora from Six Nations, the largest First Nations reserve in Canada, sees each episode of this series as a challenging but necessary call to action. "The show sheds a light on corruption, systematic racism and violence in this Northern Ontario town," she said.

Matika Wilbur, a photographer and member of the Swinomish and Tulalip Tribes, was kept company by “The Cuts” and its host Sterlin Harjo during a lonely time in her life: while she was on the road working on Project 562, a documentary series in which she set out to take a photograph of at least one person from each of the 562 federally recognized tribes in the United States. “I’d find myself playing the episodes when I was traveling on long, lonely roads or while walking through airports, as I was living in transit,” Ms. Wilbur said. “Sterlin’s jokes, and the Native folks that he had on the series, all offered great comfort. They made me feel like I was at home and less alone in spaces where I felt like the only Native person in the room.” Mr. Harjo’s work inspired her own much-recommended podcast, “All My Relations”: “I wanted our people to feel represented in the pod space, and to provide more opportunities for our people to hear about issues they care about.”

The Ted K Archive

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