

Report

Subject: Dr. Erica Joelle Moore
Title: President, Sinte Gleska University
Fraudulent Identity Claimed: “taino”
Determination: Zero American Indian ancestry
Date: December 2025

Introduction

For the past several years, numerous American Indians have raised concerns about **Dr. Erica Moore’s** public and repeated assertions that she is “indigenous taino.” These concerns intensified after Moore was appointed **President of Sinte Gleska University**, a tribal university on the reservation of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe in South Dakota. Accompanying these concerns were the claims of Tribal members that President Moore and her allies have been aggressively silencing their questions about whether Moore’s claims about having Indigenous ancestry are true. Tribal members have also informed TAAF that some of them have been unjustly fired as a result of their inquiries and that President Moore has created at the University a culture of fear and intimidation. In reaching out to TAAF, Tribal members requested, among other things, a review of Moore’s genealogy to determine whether President Moore’s claims to Indigenous ancestry can be substantiated.

TAAF endorses the Cherokee Scholars Statement on Sovereignty and Identity <https://www.thinktsalagi.org/blog/2020/2/13/-cherokee-scholars-statement-on-sovereignty-and-identity> . This statement asserts that, “in the context of higher education, falsely claiming a Cherokee [or other legitimate Indian] identity is academic dishonesty, falsification of a material fact, and expropriation of Indigenous peoples’ resources and opportunities.” These charges, and perhaps especially the charge of academic dishonesty, is of course, of the highest possible concern when the person alleged to be engaging in academic dishonesty is the president of a University.

Claiming to be Indigenous without in fact being Indigenous is a form of colonialism. It constitutes identity theft and causes measurable harm to Native Nations and Native students. To address this harm and to respond to the outcries of Rosebud Sioux Tribal Citizens, TAAF undertook a full investigation of President Moore’s genealogy, the results of which are presented below.

TAAF reached out to Moore one week prior to this case going public. Moore did not respond to TAAF’s invitation to meet and to share with us any documentation she may have of being Indigenous. Instead, she shared a letter that claimed that she is a member of two taino groups (see below section, “Taino: A Late-20th-Century Fabrication” for a discussion of tainos) and that a taino group from the Virgin Islands is recognized. No evidence of any such recognition of any taino group was provided, and TAAF found zero evidence of this so-called tribal recognition. Instead, TAAF found only a few proclamations issued about tainos. Proclamations do not constitute recognition of a Tribe as a sovereign Indigenous nation.

While Moore did not present DNA evidence as “proof” of being Indigenous, such use of DNA evidence is common among tainos and thus should be addressed. A commercial DNA test is

not a valid indicator of tribal identity. It is widely understood that such tests are unreliable, and in any valid way they cannot affirm Tribal identity or affiliation. These realities were fully made clear in the widely publicized case of Sen. Elizabeth Warren, who attempted unsuccessfully to use a commercial DNA test that she said affirmed her alleged Indigenous ancestry. No federally recognized Tribe in the United States uses DNA results to determine membership (only, in some cases, paternity), and the U.S. Department of the Interior also does not consider commercial DNA test percentages as proof of Tribal affiliation. As outlined in 25 CFR § 83.11(e), evidence of descent must be based on historical documentation, not genetic testing.

Methodology

TAAF's team of genealogists, supported by TAAF's team of research specialists, conducted an exhaustive investigation of President Moore's ancestry. TAAF's genealogy team reviewed more than a dozen different categories of documents or records pertaining to **more than one hundred** of President Moore's relatives across multiple generations of her family. The records that the team examined included:

- Birth and death records
- Census and civil records
- Marriage documentation
- Immigration and naturalization records
- Parish and church archives
- State and municipal databases
- Records on FamilySearch, Ancestry, and other genealogical platforms

In addition, TAAF cross-referenced President Moore's ancestors with:

- Federally-recognized Tribal nations in the U.S.
- Indigenous census rolls
- Known historical Caribbean tribal communities
- Records from Puerto Rico's Indigenous-era censuses (Spanish and American)

The findings were unambiguous.

Findings: Zero Indigenous Ancestry

TAAF's genealogical team determined that **none** of President Moore's ancestors—across multiple documented generations—were or are Indigenous. This includes both **American Indian** and **Caribbean Indigenous** ancestry.

Father's Line (Puerto Rico)

Every paternal ancestor of President Moore's is either European or of European extraction only.

TAAF's extensive investigation of numerous records revealed that every single paternal ancestor of President Moore originates from the **Utado, Hatillo, Santa Isabel, Fajardo, and San Sebastián** regions of Puerto Rico. Fortunately for this genealogical research project, these five regions are documented extensively in Spanish and American records. Following an examination of a voluminous amount of records, TAAF genealogists reached a conclusion that was indisputable: every single one of President Moore's ancestors in her paternal line are **Puerto Rican via Spain**. There is **no presence of any recognized Indigenous ancestry**, tribal affiliation, community membership, or Indigenous identifiers among any of Erica Moore's ancestors. Relatedly, none of Erica Moore's ancestors appears in any of the known Indigenous census categories in the 19th- or early 20th centuries.

Importantly, as was seen in the Sen. Elizabeth Warren case, DNA evidence is not valid evidence of being Indian or Indigenous. Not only is DNA evidence unreliable, but also it lacks any valid connection of that individual to a Tribe.

Mother's Line (New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Newfoundland, Italy)

Every maternal ancestor of President Moore is either European or of European extraction only:

- Irish (Currin, Burns, Mahoney)
- Italian (Cardinelli/Cardinale)
- English/Scottish from Newfoundland (O'Keefe, Driscoll, Laracy, etc.)

None have any documented Native ancestry.

None lived in Indigenous communities or appeared on any Tribal rolls.

Summary of Generational Findings

Spanning multiple generations, more than **120 direct-line ancestors**, and both the paternal and maternal lines of President Moore, the findings are as follows:

- **0 Indigenous ancestors**
- **0 tribal citizens**
- **0 ancestors living in Indigenous communities**
- **0 recognition by any Tribe**
- **0 appearance in any Indigenous census or record**

President Moore's genealogy is overwhelmingly **European** and Euro-American, which includes **Spanish Caribbean**. None of the ancestors in Moore's genealogy is Indigenous or "Indio".

Taino: A Late-20th-Century Fabrication

President Moore's claims rest on the ahistorical notion of a "taino identity." **The "taino identity" was invented in the late 20th century** in New York City as a pan-Caribbean identity movement (see link to taino archive below). **Taino claims have no basis in historical tribal continuity**, as is confirmed by, among other sources:

- Spanish colonial records
- The 1899 U.S. War Department Census (no “taíno” category exists)
- Puerto Rico’s 1800s–1900s demographic archives
- Historians and linguistic scholars

Contemporary claims to a “taíno” identity, which, again, date back only as far as the 1980s, do not constitute Indigenous belonging. The fact of the matter is that there is no documented pre-1980 taíno tribal structure, governance, community, or continuity. “Taíno” is not a historic Tribe or Indigenous sovereign Nation. Instead, it is a conglomerate of nonprofits established in the 1980s posing as Indigenous Nations, with no pre-1980s documented tribal governance, political structure, or historical continuity of taíno in ethnohistorical documentation from the Greater Antilles to Spain. No taíno group is a sovereign nation.

Members of taíno nonprofits typically rely solely on commercial DNA results to assert Indigenous identity. The US Department of the Interior, like federally recognized Tribal Nations in the U.S., do not accept DNA evidence as valid evidence of Indigenous ancestry. DNA evidence is widely regarded as unreliable and as lacking valid evidence of any kind about Tribal affiliation. Devotees to the conglomerate of nonprofits who identify their members as “taíno” fall back on commercial DNA tests because typically taínos have no documentation of Indian or Indigenous ancestry. The total absence of documentation of Indigenous ancestry in Moore’s case is thus typical of “taínos.” Furthermore, in many categories of the copious amount of records TAAF examined, all of Moore’s ancestors appear as unambiguously non-Indigenous.

Some non-taíno political factions have issued proclamations affirming taíno groups. Yet these symbolic gestures carry no legal weight. No taíno group has even been accorded recognition as an Indigenous Tribe or nation by any U.S. state. It goes without saying that no federal or state government has ever acknowledged the sovereignty of any taíno group.

When individuals make claims to being Indigenous or Indian, it is incumbent upon those individuals to prove that they have actual kinship connections to Indigenous people or Indians. In this case, it is incumbent upon Moore to prove that she has actual genealogical connections to Indians. At no point has Moore ever provided any document-based or other proof of any such connections. Such “proof” cannot come in the form of, as Moore has asserted, membership in two taíno nonprofits that are posing as indigenous nations. Anyone could manufacture such a group and membership in such a group; neither of these is valid evidence of Indigenous identity. **It is a truism that, in regards to Indigenous identity, the burden of proof always lies with the person making the claim, not the other way around.**

For more information on taíno, see: <https://www.tainoleadershipsommit.com/archive>

Moore’s False Claims and Public Misrepresentation

Despite having **no Indigenous ancestry**, President Moore has repeatedly represented herself as Indigenous in academic and leadership contexts, including:

- Public identification as “Indigenous taino”
- Positioning herself as an Indigenous voice within a Tribal university
- Leveraging Puerto Rican heritage as if it alone is “proof” of indigeneity, which is insufficient
- Participating in Indigenous-serving networks as a way to bolster her false claims

President Moore’s behavior constitutes identity appropriation and misrepresentation, which is especially harmful within a tribal college environment and in the context of an Indian reservation.

Implications for Sinte Gleska University

When a non-Indigenous person assumes Indigenous identity at a revered, tribal-elder-created Native institution such as SGU, the harm includes, among many other things:

- Misrepresentation of Indigenous perspectives
- Erosion of trust with tribal citizens
- Displacement of authentic Indigenous professionals
- Distortion of tribal academic integrity
- Undermining Indigenous sovereignty and governance

This is not a victimless act. It is an act that directly harms the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, its citizens, the Oceti Sakowin people in general, American Indian and other Indigenous peoples, and all Americans.

Requests for Remediation

TAAF recommends the following actions:

A public written statement from Erica Moore acknowledging that she has zero Indigenous ancestry.

A formal apology from President Moore to the Rosebud Sioux Tribe; SGU students, faculty, and staff; and the leaders and citizens of all other of the Oceti Sakowin Nations.

Full disclosure by President Moore of any grants, opportunities, positions, or honors obtained by her false claims to being Indigenous, and a return by her of all material resources obtained by those false claims.

Repayment by Moore of the salary she has received as SGU President and repayment by her of all other material benefits that she has received as SGU President. These monies and other resources should be paid directly to SGU and/or the Rosebud Sioux Tribe.

Conclusion

Dr. Erica Moore has **zero Indigenous ancestry**. Her claim to being “indigenous taino” is false, unfounded, and deeply harmful, especially within a tribal college setting and in the homeland of a federally recognized American Indian Nation. **Falsely claiming an Indigenous identity is anti-Indian hate speech.**