



TRIBAL ALLIANCE AGAINST FRAUDS

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PRESS RELEASE:

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Cherokee Language instructor, Patrick Del Percio falsely claims Cherokee descent.

Patrick Del Percio, a Cherokee language instructor who currently teaches at Yale University and previously taught at the University of Oklahoma, has repeatedly and falsely claimed that they are of Cherokee descent.

Del Percio describes themselves as of “Cherokee/Italian/Irish descent” and as a “Indian/Italian boy.” They claim that they trace their Cherokee descent through their maternal grandmother. Del Percio has never provided evidence to support this claim. TAAF genealogists have carefully explored Del Percio’s ancestry and have found no evidence that they have ancestors who were Cherokee or were members of any other American Indian Tribe. Their putative Cherokee maternal grandmother descends from White settlers who were living in or near Illinois. Patrick Del Percio is White.

Del Percio has used this false claim to assert a native positionality and advance his career. This is revealed, for example, in his role as cofounder of the Center for Native Futures. This Center describes itself as “the only all-Native artist-led arts non-profit organization in Zhegagoynak [Chicago].” This statement is not true because Del Percio is not Native. Del Percio holds a lectureship at Yale University where they provide instruction in the Cherokee language. Cherokees consider the false appropriation of a Cherokee identity profoundly offensive. By continuing to falsely assert Cherokee descent Del Percio is actively fostering a hostile environment for Cherokee and other Native students at Yale University. Moreover, to paraphrase the Cherokee Scholars’ Statement on Sovereignty and Identity, Del Percio, by falsely claiming a Cherokee identity, is engaging in academic dishonesty, falsification of a material fact, and expropriation of Indigenous peoples’ resources and opportunities.

By all accounts Del Percio is a respected Cherokee speaker. They have the potential to become an ally to the Cherokee, and valued contributor to efforts to preserve the Cherokee language. This potential will never be realized if they fail to respect the truth about their ancestry and display respect for Cherokees. They have clarified that they are not a citizen of any of the three Cherokee Tribes. This is not enough, TAAF calls on

Del Percio to tell their truth about their ancestry and to desist from claiming to be of Cherokee or American Indian descent. Further, we call on Yale University to pursue disciplinary action against Patrick Del Perico for engaging in academic dishonesty by making this claim.

Why this matters: Non-Indians who pretend to be Indians (pretendians) violate the sovereign right of American Indian Tribes to determine their citizenry, they misrepresent American Indian experience by claiming to speak with an authentic American Indian voice, and they deprive American Indians of opportunity. Whenever the voice and the work of a pretendian is elevated, a real American Indian voice is silenced and ignored. Pretendians are not honoring American Indians. They are engaging in a fundamentally anti-Indian act and are explicitly engaging in the displacement and replacement of actual American Indians. Their actions further the settler colonial project of eliminating the American Indians from the North American continent. These genocidal acts must end.

The Tribal Alliance Against Frauds is an intertribal anti-fraud non-profit whistleblower organization comprised of allies and citizens of Tribes whose sovereignty has been formally acknowledged.

See the hard evidence on our website.
<https://tribalallianceagainstfrauds.org/>