

News Release

Investigation Finds American Indian Heritage Claims of Brown University Postdoctoral Fellow Leila K. Blackbird are Unsubstantiated and Lack Transparency.

Subject: Dr. Leila K. Blackbird

Title: Presidential Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of History at Brown University

Indigenous Identity falsely claimed: Cherokee and Apache

Determination: Claims are neither substantiated nor transparent.

Cherokee, NC— February **, 2026 —

Responding to complaints from Native people, the Tribal Alliance Against Frauds (TAAF) conducted an extensive investigation into Dr. Leila Blackbird's claims to an American Indian and Indigenous identity. It was alleged that she had made unsubstantiated claims to descent and "community" with "Cherokee," "Apache," and several other groups.

Leila K. Blackbird (aka Leila Blackbird/Leila Garces/Leila McRaven/Lisa-Marie Ricca/Lisa-Marie L. Garces Ricca) is currently the Presidential Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of History at Brown University and is an increasingly prominent representative of Indigenous perspectives in academic and community spaces.

The investigation into Dr. Blackbird's background reveals a pattern of shifting identity claims that have evolved throughout her academic career. These shifting claims appear to be part of a strategy designed to obfuscate and shield herself from accountability. While she has identified herself at various times as being of Apache and Eastern Cherokee descent, and as an "unenrolled adoptee," TAAF found no evidence to support these assertions. TAAF notes that while Dr. Blackbird claims to have "verifiable family ties" and previously offered to share primary documentation with, as she puts it, "Cherokee scholars or representatives of Cherokee tribal organizations," she failed to respond to TAAF's direct requests for such information. She then edited her website to "move the goalposts" on transparency.

The report released by the Tribal Alliance Against Frauds (TAAF) concludes that Dr. Leila K. Blackbird's American Indian identity claims are neither substantiated nor transparent. TAAF recommends that Dr. Blackbird cease identifying as American Indian and publicly disavow language implying genealogical or community connections to Indigenous peoples.

The report also calls for institutional accountability at Brown University. TAAF urges the administration to implement policies requiring scholars who claim Indigenous positionality to provide documentation of enrollment in legitimate Indigenous nations. This is particularly urgent since this is the second recent case of identity fraud at the University. In 2023 former Brown University professor Elizabeth Hoover acknowledged the harm that her longstanding false claims to Mohawk and Mi'kmaq descent have caused.

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