

Report

Subject: Dr. Claudette Grinnell-Davis

Title: Associate Professor of Social Work, University of Oklahoma

Indigenous Identities falsely claimed: "Ojibwe," "Anishinaabeg," "Métis" or "métis," and "Apache"

Determination: Zero Indigenous ancestry

Date: March 30, 2026

Overview

For years, actual American Indians have seen proverbial red flags in Dr. Claudette Grinnell-Davis's presentations of herself as Ojibwe; as a descendant of the broader category, Anishinaabeg; as Métis or métis; and/or, most recently, as Apache. Eventually these Indians reached out to TAAF for assistance. Specifically, they asked TAAF to conduct genealogical research to either confirm or refute Grinnell-Davis's claims.

In an effort to help provide the Indigenous scholars in Grinnell-Davis's orbit with support and redress while also advancing the Indian-led movement to end the theft of our Indian identities, scholars at TAAF researched and analyzed the claims and other aspects of the biography of Grinnell-Davis while TAAF's team of genealogists investigated and analyzed Grinnell-Davis's genealogy. TAAF's genealogical investigation into hundreds of Grinnell-Davis's ancestors, the results of which are discussed in this report, revealed that Grinnell-Davis has zero American Indian ancestry from what is now the US or Indigenous heritage from what is now Canada. More specifically, TAAF's genealogical team found that all of Grinnell-Davis's ancestors have their origins in Europe, especially in England, Ireland, France, and Germany. Europeans are the progenitors of all of the North American family branches of Grinnell-Davis's tree. Significantly, these North American ancestors of Grinnell-Davis's span the settler-imposed artificial boundary that divides the US and Canada.

Upon completing their investigation, and prior to releasing their findings and posting to their website their press release and report of their findings on the Grinnell-Davis case, TAAF approached Dr. Grinnell-Davis, privately and respectfully. Specifically, TAAF asked Grinnell-Davis to identify the basis of her claims to having "Ojibwe," "Anishinaabeg," "Métis" or "métis," and/or "Apache" ancestry and her additional claims that she is "culturally Indigenous" and was "raised with traditional Indigenous teachings." One of this report's sections documents the numerous times and the many contexts in which Grinnell-Davis has made such claims and leveraged such claims for profit, as well as for non-material advantages such as increased power and influence. Indeed, Grinnell-Davis has leveraged her false claims for power and influence to decide, for example, which scholars will win grants to conduct research about Indigenous people and which scholars may present papers in the "Indigenous cluster" of papers delivered in one of her discipline's most important annual conferences.

Despite being provided ample time, specifically two weeks, to respond to TAAF's inquiries, Grinnell-Davis chose not to respond at all to TAAF reaching out to her. As it has done with numerous individuals, TAAF would have been happy to meet with Grinnell-Davis and/or seriously consider any information she chose to provide to TAAF researchers. TAAF's extensive

experience with pretendians indicates that those who do not respond at all to TAAF's inquiries are often well aware that their claims to being Indian or to having Indian ancestry are spurious.

Background on Grinnell-Davis

Grinnell-Davis was born in the 1960s in Michigan. During a twenty-five-year period in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, she earned four degrees at Michigan universities: a Bachelor of Science from the University of Michigan in 1992, a Master's in Social Work from Western Michigan University in 2003, and a Master's of Science in Psychology and a joint Ph.D. in Social Work and Psychology from the University of Michigan in 2012 and 2014 respectively. The title of her doctoral dissertation was "Toward an Etiology of Child Maltreatment: An Ecological Study of Primary Caregivers at Risk of Child Welfare System Involvement." About her dissertation, Grinnell-Davis has remarked, "My early research identified pathways of parental child welfare system entry to support parents and shrink the foster care system to keep children safely at home."¹

In the years after receiving her doctorate, Grinnell-Davis began combining her expertise in child welfare with her unverified, unsubstantiated claims to being Indigenous as she entered the arena of Indian/Indigenous child welfare. (Her research also extends into other racialized contexts, including those of African American and Asian American child welfare issues.) In Indian child welfare, she began crafting for herself a professional identity, which she maintains to this day, as an expert on Indian/Indigenous child welfare with a focus on the adoption and foster care systems. Indeed, on her website, Grinnell-Davis identifies her research specialty as "Indian/Indigenous child welfare, including ICWA."² As nearly all Indians in what is now the US are aware, ICWA is an acronym for the Indian Child Welfare Act. After a stint as an Assistant Professor at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, in 2017 Grinnell-Davis was hired as Assistant Professor of Social Work at the Anne and Henry Zarrow School of Social Work at the University of Oklahoma. It appears that Grinnell-Davis has since been promoted to Associate Professor.

Grinnell-Davis's claims to being American Indian or having Indigenous heritage from Canada have no basis at all in reality, as this report's section on her genealogy shows. Grinnell-Davis, our team of genealogists found, has zero Indigenous ancestry. Importantly, it is nothing less than anti-Indian hate speech to claim an Indigenous identity without actually being Indigenous. It is equally if not more reprehensibly anti-Indigenous and unethical for a person with no Indigenous ancestry to claim to be Indigenous while pursuing, as does Grinnell-Davis, a research agenda that not only focuses on Indigenous people but also intrudes into extremely vulnerable spaces like Indian/Indigenous child welfare, where the mistreatment and abuse of Indigenous people have been profound.

Grinnell-Davis's acts of staking a claim in the area of Indian/Indigenous child welfare and capturing a highly-competitive tenure-track academic position while falsely claiming to be Indigenous are deeply unsettling. Such acts are particularly reprehensible given that Indian/Indigenous child welfare is such a painful, fraught area for American Indian and Indigenous people due to the long, sinister history of the ways the adoption and foster care systems have been weaponized against us and our Tribal Nations. In US states like Oklahoma with comparatively large Indian populations, during the era just prior to the late 1970s,

researchers found that between one-quarter and just over one-third of our Indian children were being snatched from their homes, often involuntarily and often with the assistance of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.³ At least ninety percent of the removed Indian children were placed in non-Indian homes.⁴ The cumulative effect of these actions has been deeply disturbing: during this period, our Tribal Nations were rapidly and progressively drained of our future generations, which created an existential threat to our survivance as Indian peoples. Indians responded to these acts by mobilizing and protesting, to which Congress responded in 1978 by passing the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). This act restored to Tribes control over most Indian child welfare cases. Yet in the late 2010s, non-Indians and white supremacist evangelical organizations greatly stepped up their efforts to formally challenge the then forty-year-old ICWA law and the principle that Indian children should be reared in Indian homes.⁵ Despite the fact that the 2023 Supreme Court decision in *Haaland v. Brackeen* upheld the constitutionality of ICWA, non-Indian individuals and groups have continued to challenge this law, stoking fear in Indian Country that large-scale removals and assimilative transfers of our children may one day resume.⁶

This history of cruelty toward Indian children and families, a thinly disguised and heinous attempt (among many others) to destroy our Indian Nations, necessitates that those who specialize in Indian/Indigenous child welfare, especially in the adoption and foster care systems, create safe spaces for affected Indigenous children and their caregivers. A safe space for Indigenous people, however, cannot exist when a pretendian also inhabits that space and exercises authority and controls access to resources. Pretendians necessarily create a hostile environment for actual Indigenous people. They claim an identity that is not theirs to claim. They claim an Indigenous perspective they do not have. They seize for themselves opportunities and funding, including but not limited to opportunities and funding that are meant for actual Indigenous people. And most importantly and problematically, pretendians brazenly disrespect the exclusive jurisdiction over and sovereign right of legitimate Indian Tribes or First Nations to determine who is Indigenous. Pretendians do not belong in any spaces at all, but they especially do not belong in spaces involving Indian/Indigenous child welfare, where Indigenous children and their caregivers tend to be at their most vulnerable.

It is also meaningful and important that Grinnell-Davis secured a tenure-track position as a professor at the University of Oklahoma (OU). Located near the geographic center of a state that was created from two regions, one of which was termed Indian Territory throughout the nineteenth century, OU is the flagship university of a state with more than three dozen Indian tribes. More than 1,000 of the University's students are American Indian. American Indian students, faculty, and staff have mobilized extensively toward the goal of making the University a productive, generative space for American Indians. For example, Native American Studies offers three degree programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels, as well as two graduate certificate programs. In 2015, the Native Nations Center at OU was established, then bolstered with a \$1.4 million gift from the Chickasaw Nation in 2018.⁷ In 2020, the Horizons Foundation of Dallas bequeathed to OU \$4.8 million so that the University might become "the premier center for Native American research and teaching."⁸ As a final example, numerous faculty, staff, and students at OU have invested considerable time and attention partnering and collaborating with Tribes. Especially given the efforts of some of its faculty, staff, and students to develop for OU a brand that substantiates the proposition that the University is Indian-friendly and tribal-

friendly, OU has a solemn obligation and responsibility to ensure that it does not hire pretendians, who enact harm on American Indians both individually and on our Tribal Nations.

Grinnell-Davis's Claims to Being Indigenous

There is ample evidence that Grinnell-Davis has made and continues to make public claims to being Indigenous. On the website of the organization, Policies for Action, for example, she states that she is "descended from Anishinaabeg métis peoples of the Great Lakes," adding that she also identifies "as Indigenous by culture."⁹ On the website of the Healthy Teen Network, she asserts that she is "a non-status descendant of Anishinaabeg peoples of the Canadian Great Lakes region and identifies culturally as Indigenous."¹⁰ The website of the American Indian/ Alaska Native Content Committee of the National Training and Development Curriculum lists the members of its influential committee individually on its website. On that site, Grinnell-Davis identifies as Indigenous, claiming the tribal affiliation of "Michigan Ojibwe," which, like the umbrella terms "Ojibwe" and "Anishinaabeg," is not a Tribe but rather a group of related tribes.¹¹ As for the term, "métis," it means only "mixed" but is frequently used by those falsely claiming an Indigenous identity. Additionally, from one of the whistleblowers in this case, TAAF was provided oral evidence that Grinnell-Davis has recently been adding "Apache" to the list of Indigenous identifiers she has been amassing.

There is other evidence, which is also ample, that Grinnell-Davis identifies as Indigenous in her scholarship and at academic and other conferences. In 2023, Grinnell-Davis was the lead author of a scholarly article she co-authored with two other non-Indigenous scholars: Dr. Allison Dunnigan and Ms. Bailey B. Stevens. In that article, Grinnell-Davis asserts, "The lead author [Grinnell-Davis] was raised with Indigenous cultural teachings while still investigating their genealogy for evidence of lineal descendancy from a tribal community."¹² The following year in 2024, Grinnell-Davis attended a conference in Kansas City in which she wore a ribbon skirt. Ribbon skirts mark their wearers as Indigenous. During this conference, the Indigenous attendees were asked to stand at the front of the room. Grinnell-Davis sauntered up to the front of the room, positioning herself front and center of the Indigenous attendees. In so doing, Grinnell-Davis continued a pattern of centering herself as an Indigenous person at academic conferences and in other spaces. Over a period of several years, Grinnell-Davis told a real Indian that she was Ojibwe while they were attending an event. Later, Grinnell-Davis orally identified herself to the same person as Métis or métis. Grinnell-Davis's false claims to being Indigenous continue to the present. More recently, Grinnell-Davis attended a meeting in which she identified as Indigenous to another attendee of that meeting; this individual's colleague reported this incident to TAAF.

During the period since at least 2021 (and likely for several years prior to 2021) during which Grinnell-Davis has been identifying as an Indigenous scholar, she has appropriated a number of opportunities and won several accolades under the false pretense that she is an Indigenous woman. The most significant such event occurred in 2021, when the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation awarded Grinnell-Davis \$442,000 as Principal Investigator of the "Honoring Indigenous Families Project," a project has been and continues to be erroneously characterized as "Indigenous-led."¹³ Grinnell-Davis's appropriation of this very sizeable grant is a potent example of the way Grinnell-Davis leverages her false claims to being Indigenous to appropriate for herself resources that are meant for scholars who are actually Indigenous. Despite the fact that this project is headed by a person, Grinnell-Davis, who falsely claims to be Indigenous, Grinnell-

Davis asserts that the project she heads aspires to "restor[e] balance within [Indigenous] communities and generat[e] collaborative strategies to heal the historical trauma that has disrupted tribal communities . . . for over 150 years."¹⁴

Another honor Grinnell-Davis has received under the false pretense that she is Indigenous involves her co-authored 2023 article that is referenced above, an article in which Grinnell-Davis not only strongly suggests that she has Indigenous ancestry but also brazenly asserts that she was "raised with Indigenous cultural teachings." With her fellow non-Indigenous co-authors of the article, Grinnell-Davis won the Distinguished Paper of the Year Award from the Journal of Public Child Welfare.¹⁵ It is not a stretch to conclude that the recognition Grinnell-Davis received for her work in Indian/Indigenous child welfare derives in part from her spurious claims to being Indigenous.

Among the many ways scholars who falsely claim to be Indigenous do harm to actual Indigenous people is by serving as gatekeepers in arenas in which Indigenous people are the objects of scholarly research, ensuring that it is they and not real Indigenous people who control, to the greatest extent possible, opportunities and resources set aside for real Indigenous people. This monstrous maneuver bolsters fake-Indigenous scholars' own false claims to being Indigenous while making real Indigenous people beholden to them, rather than to real Indigenous people, for opportunities and resources that are critical to their research. Further, when fake Indigenous people instantiate themselves as gatekeepers of both research and other professional opportunities for scholars who study real Indigenous people—a phenomenon that is increasingly common—it greatly dampens real Indigenous people's inclination to call out these fake Indigenous people for who they really are. To have any chance of acquiring the crumbs to fund the research that will help determine the success of their careers as Indigenous scholars, real Indigenous scholars are put in a position that is heartbreaking: they must tacitly accept the gatekeepers who are fake Indigenous people as real Indigenous people or they must try to pretend as though they accept them as Indigenous people. This is soul crushing and is a leading reason why TAAF was formed. TAAF protects and defends real Indigenous people from the potentially career-killing consequences of having to take a significant hit—simply for defending the exclusive jurisdiction over and sovereign right of Tribal Nations to determine who is Indigenous.

Grinnell-Davis has wheedled her way into at least two positions in which she controls the professional and research opportunities of scholars who conduct research with and about Indigenous people. In 2025, Grinnell-Davis moved into a leadership position in the Society of Social Work and Research (SSWR). Specifically, Grinnell-Davis was made one of two co-chairs for abstracts classed in the "Indigenous cluster" of the research presented at its annual conference.¹⁶ The "Indigenous cluster" encompasses all research involving "American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and Global Indigenous populations." For its annual conference, the SSWR awarded these two co-chairs control of abstract review and the development of all abstract-based program content involving Indigenous peoples. Grinnell-Davis's fellow co-chair was Dr. Shanondora Billiot. Billiot is a member of a group that calls itself the United Houma Nation. In 1994, following an extensive and exhaustive investigation, the Bureau of Indian Affairs' (BIA's) proposed finding about the United Houma Nation is that there exists "no evidence of any social, political, or genealogical connections between [this group of Billiot's] and the historical Houma Indian tribe."¹⁷ Almost to a person, the ancestors of this group were

found to be people of French, Acadian, German, and African ancestry.¹⁸ After failing to meet the mandatory federal acknowledgment criterion of "ancestry," which requires that a substantial portion of the petitioning group descends from an historical American Tribe, as well as after failing to meet other mandatory federal acknowledgment criteria, the BIA ruled against the federal acknowledgment of Billiot's group as an Indian Tribe. Even so, this group is submitting its petition to be re-reviewed under the criteria, as is the group's prerogative under the new acknowledgment regulations.

The point is worth highlighting that both of the two co-chairs of the SSWR's "Indigenous cluster" falsely claim to be Indigenous. TAAF researchers find it stunning that these two women hold such powerful positions in determining which scholars and which scholarship are granted access to the privilege of presenting their work at what appears to be the most important annual conference in their field.

Also during the past one or two years, Grinnell-Davis has captured a position as a reviewer of E4A grants co-administered by Partners for Advancing Health Equity and Evidence for Action. Significantly, a requirement for receiving one of these grants is that the grant be Indigenous-led. TAAF found no evidence that Partners for Advancing Health Equity and Evidence for Action have any process at all for vetting the claims of scholars who self-identify as Indigenous. This helps explain why and how Grinnell-Davis, who has solely European ancestry, was able to win one of these grants, then later move into the position as a reviewer of these grants. During a webinar posted online that is, as of the release of this report, less than a year old and is entitled "Indigenous-led Solutions to Advance Health Equity & Wellbeing," Grinnell-Davis is identified not only as a reviewer of these grants but also as a scholar who helped the two organizations shape their call for proposals for these grants.¹⁹ From the webinar, it is patent that Grinnell-Davis has been accorded the job of helping decide who will be awarded these grants. It is also patent that the leadership and staff of these organizations are under the mistaken impression, due no doubt to the false claims that Grinnell-Davis has made to them, that Grinnell-Davis is herself Indigenous. During the webinar, Grinnell-Davis introduced herself in the Ojibwe language, specifically with the Ojibwe greeting, "Boozhoo."²⁰ Then, at the webinar's conclusion, one of the webinar's organizers thanked "*Claudette and other Indigenous community members* who are reviewers and are working closely with us to issue this call for proposal and award these grants (emphasis ours)."²¹

No discussion of Grinnell-Davis's false claims would be complete without mentioning a curious feature of her biography that is posted on the website of Evidence for Action, one of the two organizations that hosted the above-referenced webinar. This biography, which Grinnell-Davis herself almost certainly wrote, is conflicting. On the one hand, Grinnell-Davis claims that she is "a descendant of country marriages between French fur traders and Indigenous women in the Great Lakes region" and that she "appl[ies] the traditional values with which they were raised to be an advocate in policy spaces for Indigenous people." These assertions are definitive. They are statements of fact. On the other hand, Grinnell-Davis attaches to this self-description a quasi-disclaimer: she writes that she "is working to establish lineal descendancy" with a Tribe.²² This last statement sounded an alarm for TAAF researchers, as it no doubt has for other Indigenous people: it is appalling that Grinnell-Davis would choose to make a claim to being Indigenous before investigating and substantiating that claim, especially given that proceeding in this way violates and significantly disrespects Tribal protocols.

One cannot help but conclude that Grinnell-Davis's relatively new claim that she is in the process of investigating her genealogical tree is an effort to try to shield herself from being called out for her false claims. By adding a quasi-disclaimer to two of her biographies posted online, Grinnell-Davis appears to be trying to avoid being held accountable for her false claims, even as she continues to reap significant benefits from those claims. Grinnell-Davis's quasi-disclaimer begs several questions. First, why has Grinnell-Davis not approached Tribes to ask whether she is a so-called "lost relative" of theirs? Second, to more pointedly address the question raised above, why is Grinnell-Davis identifying as Indigenous without first establishing, at the very least, that she has Indigenous ancestry? Relatedly, how can a scholar build an entire career as an Indigenous scholar before they choose to try to confirm the veracity of that claim? It is inappropriate and offensive to first claim to be Indigenous and only later to embark on an investigation—at a snail's pace, we might add—into whether one's claim to being Indigenous is true or false. Not only does this methodology make little sense, but also it is anathema to ethical research practices.

It is also relevant and important that Grinnell-Davis's claims are to "Ojibwe," "Anishinaabeg," "Métis" or "métis," and/or "Apache" Indigenous entities. None of these identifiers is a Tribal identifier. Instead, with the exception of métis meaning "mixed," all are categories of related Tribes. Several encompass many dozens of Indian Tribes, First Nations, or other Indigenous polities. From TAAF's extensive experience of engaging with pretendians, we have learned that it is not uncommon for a pretendian to identify a category of Tribal Nations rather than an actual American Indian Tribe or First Nation as their "Tribal affiliation." This maneuver can be understood as an effort to eschew accountability: a general claim means that there is no community and no relatives to which an individual is accountable for their behavior. Relatedly, claiming a category of Tribal Nations aids the pretendian in eschewing detection as a fake Native. If a pretendian identifies their tribal affiliation as, for example, the Red Rock Indian Band, which is an Ojibwe First Nation in northwestern Ontario, Canada, they run the risk of encountering a member of that Nation. Given that the Red Rock Indian Band has a membership of only about 2,000, it would become patently obvious to any Red Rock Indian Band member whom the pretendian may encounter—and probably patently obvious right there on the spot—that the pretendian's claims to having a Red Rock Indian Band affiliation are false.

A related issue that is not to be overlooked is Grinnell-Davis's claims to being "raised with traditional Indigenous teachings." TAAF rues the fact that Grinnell-Davis did not respond to its request that she explain this claim. Such claims, which Grinnell-Davis has made frequently, are puzzling in light of the history of colonialism in North America, as well as our deep knowledge of the present-day lived experience of our peoples. Emerging in full force in the nineteenth century, the US and Canadian governments engaged in brutal, soul-crushing campaigns to culturally and socially assimilate our people, even to the point of forcing hundreds of thousands of our children to attend federal Indian boarding schools or federal Indigenous residential schools or both. Extending the boarding/residential school effects are decades of child removals into white foster care, practices that continue to the present. Depending upon how one defines "traditional Indigenous teachings," one of the consequences of these nefarious efforts to destroy our Nations is that a majority of Indigenous people born in the late-twentieth or early-twenty-first centuries in the US have not been and are not now being raised with the traditional teachings of our people. (Many Indigenous people in both the US and Canada are working to change this.) Given this historical and contemporary reality, how is it that Grinnell-Davis was raised with

these teachings? And how is it that she was allegedly raised with these teachings while at the same time apparently having zero idea of which particular Tribe she allegedly descends from? Such characterizations by Grinnell-Davis of her own background strike us as far from credible.

Relatedly, numerous times Grinnell-Davis has claimed to be "culturally Indian." This makes no sense, as there is no single "Indian culture." Each Tribe has its own culture or cultures, and those culture(s) consist not of what anthropologists or other scholars exogenously declare to be our/their cultures but rather of what only our/their tribal members decide which of our/their practices and beliefs to put into the category of, for example, "Ho-Chunk culture." This claim of Grinnell-Davis's about her cultural upbringing is more than implausible; it is nonsensical.

Two Features of Grinnell-Davis's Claims Relating to her Ancestry

As was mentioned in this report's opening section, Grinnell-Davis did not respond to TAAF's invitation to share with us the Indian ancestor(s) or the specific family line or lines of her tree in which she alleges that she has an Ojibwe, Anishinaabe, Métis or métis, and/or Apache ancestor(s). Nor do there exist any clues in the available digital or other materials of which particular family line or lines from which Grinnell-Davis claims to derive her Indigenous ancestry. This is quite striking, as many and perhaps most pretendians identify, at the very least, whether their alleged Indigenous ancestry originates in their maternal or paternal line. Relatedly, because Grinnell-Davis does not identify a specific Tribe or Tribes from which she claims she descends, TAAF was unable to focus its investigation on a particular family line or branch, and it was unable to home in on any specific Tribe or Tribes, as TAAF often does when investigating cases.

The Ancestral Family Branches of Grinnell-Davis's Genealogical Tree

Despite these two unfortunate realities of this case, the results of TAAF's genealogical research into Grinnell-Davis's claims were definitive: Grinnell-Davis does not descend from any Indigenous people.

TAAF's lead genealogist investigated this case with their team of genealogists, thoroughly researching Grinnell-Davis's genealogy. The team researched, reviewed, and evaluated hundreds of Grinnell-Davis's relatives, both lineal and lateral kin in both her maternal and paternal lines. Team members meticulously consulted numerous rolls and records, both tribal and non-tribal. They used multiple search databases. As part of the team's comprehensive genealogical methodology and other research protocols, TAAF and its associates consulted, among other records, death certificates, military records, federal records, tribal records, state records, county records, and city records. Grinnell-Davis's genealogical tree, which is available on TAAF's website, identifies well over one hundred of Grinnell-Davis's direct lineal ancestors by name, together with their birth and death dates. It is worth noting that the genealogical tree that is posted on TAAF's website does not include the hundreds of Grinnell-Davis's lateral kin whom TAAF also investigated.

When inspected with large numbers of public records, an individual's genealogical tree is highly revealing—to the point of being determinative—of whether that individual has Indigenous ancestry. Necessarily, such trees encompass multiple family lines or branches that are nested within an overarching bifurcation of kin into the paternal and maternal lines. Given that Grinnell-Davis chose not to disclose to TAAF the particular family branch that she contends contains an Indigenous ancestor or ancestors, the following discussion briefly describes more than a half-dozen of the family branches of Grinnell-Davis's tree. Family branches can be productively conceptualized as multi-generational clusters of kin.

TAAF found that all of the hundreds of Grinnell-Davis's ancestors in her genealogical tree have their origins in Europe. Numerous Europeans show up in Grinnell-Davis's tree as progenitors of the North American family branches that define her tree, all of which consist only of Euro-Americans or Euro-Canadians. Grinnell-Davis's paternal great grandmother, Lena May Piper, for example, was 100% German, the child of two Germany-born parents Frederick Piper and Charlotte Herman, whose own parents were also born in Germany. The members of this branch of Grinnell-Davis's tree migrated to the United States, specifically to Michigan. Grinnell-Davis's maternal line, too, contains at least one ancestor who was born in Germany, Henry Seegar. Like the Pipers, Henry also emigrated to the United States; he died in Illinois in 1922. In the same way that Grinnell-Davis's paternal great grandmother was 100% German, her maternal great grandmother, Susannah Victoria Leatherdale, was 100% English: Ms. Leatherdale's grandparents and all four of her great grandparents were born in England. The members of this branch of Grinnell-Davis's family emigrated from England to Canada.

Various members of different clusters of relatives in Grinnell-Davis's tree have their origins in Ireland. In Grinnell-Davis's maternal line, Grinnell-Davis's great-great-great-great grandparents, Bernard and Catherine Cassidy, together with their daughter, Maggie, who was Grinnell-Davis's great-great-great grandmother, were born in Ireland. Maggie emigrated from Ireland to the United States, likely with her two parents. On Grinnell-Davis's paternal side, her great-great-great-great grandparents, Cornelius Fitzpatrick and Margaret Lanihan, were also born in Ireland. Cornelius and Margaret emigrated not to the United States but rather to Canada, where their daughter, Harriett Fitzpatrick, married Leonard Lee. Both of Leonard's parents, Agnes Howson and Edward Lee, were born in England. Like the parents of their daughter-in-law, Agnes and Edward also emigrated to Canada from Europe. Significantly, Grinnell-Davis's claims to being Métis involve locations that have no connection to actual Métis people from the Canadian prairies.

TAAF found that the patronym with which Grinnell-Davis was born, "Grinnell," can be traced to a man of solely European descent, Benjamin Smith Grennell. Unlike later generations of his family, this progenitor of the Grinnell branch of Grinnell-Davis's family tree used an 'e' instead of an 'i' as the first vowel of his surname. Like his wife Surviah "Sophia" Shepardson, Mr. Grennell was born in New England, specifically in Leydon, Massachusetts, which is near the Massachusetts-Vermont border. Not only were he and his wife, who were Grinnell-Davis's great-great-great-great grandparents, New Englanders, but also the other six great grandparents of Grinnell-Davis's paternal great grandfather, Sidney Velorous Grinnell, were New Englanders. In fact, half of the eight persons in this branch of Grinnell-Davis's family were born in Massachusetts nowhere near any Indian Tribe. Of the remaining four, three were born in New Hampshire, a

state from which settlers drove out Indians as early as the seventeenth century, with the result that today New Hampshire has no federally- or even state-recognized Tribes. One of the cluster of relatives in this branch of Grinnell-Davis's tree, Grinnell-Davis's great-great-great-great grandfather Deacon William Pierce, was born in Connecticut near the Mohegan Tribe. Public records confirm, however, that Deacon was not himself Mohegan. Similarly, another of Grinnell-Davis's ancestors in that family branch, Grinnell-Davis's great-great-great-great grandmother, Sally Lewis, was born about thirty miles west of the Narragansett Tribe, but public records show that she was not herself Narragansett. Half of Grinnell-Davis's eight great-great-great-great grandparents died in New York; another, in Ohio. All but the two referenced above lived in areas that were nowhere near American Indians, and none of the eight appears on any Tribal rolls. Using, among other records, birth and death certificates, military records, federal records, tribal records, state records, county records, and city records, TAAF confirmed that every individual in this branch of Grinnell-Davis's tree was of only European descent.

In Grinnell-Davis's maternal line, TAAF traced the branch of Grinnell-Davis's family into which Grinnell-Davis's great grandmother, Florence Kay Barneyfield, was born. Four of Florence's great grandparents, who were Grinnell-Davis's great-great-great-great grandparents, were Pharris Roberts, Anna Asher, James J. Lewis, and Hannah Nance. Pharris and Anna were husband and wife, as was James and Hannah. Pharris was born near Asheville, North Carolina, dozens of miles east of where Cherokees lived at the time. Public records establish conclusively that Pharris was not himself Cherokee. James, Hannah, and Anna were born in Kentucky, also nowhere near any Indians. There are no legitimate Indian Tribes in Kentucky; Indians were driven out of Kentucky by the early nineteenth century, just prior to when James, Hannah, and Anna, who were Grinnell-Davis's great-great-great-great grandparents, were born. Two of these three of Grinnell-Davis's ancestors, James and Hannah, migrated to and died in Texas in an area that was nowhere near Indians. By the time Grinnell-Davis's two great-great grandparents in that branch, Andrew Jackson Barneyfield and Ada Lewis, became adults, this branch of Grinnell-Davis's family was living in Missouri. In fact, Grinnell-Davis's maternal great grandmother Florence Kay Burneyfield, mentioned above, was born in and died in Missouri. Significantly, Missouri is a state with no legitimate Indian tribes: the Osage Nation, the Otoe-Missouria Tribe, and several other Tribes who are Indigenous to what is now Missouri were expelled from what is now Missouri by the 1830s, a half-century before these of Grinnell-Davis's ancestors migrated there. Indeed, the US federal policy of Indian removal helped make possible the migration of Grinnell-Davis's ancestors to Missouri. Using a wide array of public records, TAAF confirmed that every person in this branch of Grinnell-Davis's family tree was of only European ancestry.

Two additional branches of Grinnell-Davis's genealogical tree have yet to be addressed. One is the family branch into which Grinnell-Davis's maternal grandfather, Daniel Marle Bradd, was born. This individual, Mr. Bradd, was born in Canada. At least three of his four great-great grandparents on his father's side were born in the United States. Two of those, Myndert Minor Bradt and Catharina Van Alstyne, were born in Albany, New York, at a distance from Indian Tribes. Public records attest that neither was Indian. After Myndert and Catharina married, they emigrated to Niagara, Ontario, Canada, which is near the Seneca and Tuscarora Nations, albeit on the other side of the international border between the US and Canada, and the Six Nations of the Grand River reserve in what is now Canada. The Indian Tribes near Niagara where this couple emigrated are hundreds of miles from the city of Albany where both Myndert and

Catharina were born, adding to the great wealth of evidence that neither was Indian. Another of the four great grandparents in the paternal line of Grinnell-Davis's maternal grandfather, Mr. Daniel Bradd, is Jonathan Austin. Jonathan was born in Orange County, North Carolina, which is nowhere near where Cherokees or any other legitimate Indian Tribe was then living. Like Jonathan's future in-laws Myndert and Catharina, Jonathan migrated to Canada. There he married Hannah Potts. A wealth of public records establishes conclusively that, like her husband Jonathan, Hannah was of solely European ancestry.

The remaining branch of Grinnell-Davis's family is the branch into which one of Grinnell-Davis's paternal great grandmothers, Emma Ezilda Bourassa, was born. Virtually every member of this branch of Grinnell-Davis's family has their origins in France. Likely from the southwestern and northern regions of France, the ancestors who compose this branch of Grinnell-Davis's family emigrated from France to what was then New France, a French colony that was established in the sixteenth century in what is now Canada. These migrants settled in the Québec region, a region widely known as the cradle of French-Canadian civilization.

By the late 1700s, at least five of the eight great-grandparents of Emma Bourassa, Grinnell-Davis's great-grandmother, were living in Yamachiche, a farming area in the Québec region that abuts the banks of the St. Lawrence River between Québec City and Montréal. This area is part of the Trois-Rivières region of what is now Canada. These ancestors included Jean Baptiste Bourassa, Rosalie Doucet, Marie Muriner, Marie Gérin Lajoie, and Laurant Charles Lemieux. Others of Grinnell-Davis's ancestors who were born into this branch of her family lived in the nearby Deshambeault and Louiseville settlements of the Trois-Rivières region. They included François Xavier Rivard Loranger, Charles Chevalier, and Josephte Perron.

The Loranger family in this branch of Grinnell-Davis's family was quite prominent in the province of Québec during the nineteenth century. Another surname of note in this branch of Grinnell-Davis's family tree is Chevalier, which is a French language word for knight or horseperson. Grinnell-Davis's great-great-great-great grandfather had the surname Chevalier and the given name Charles. One researcher estimated that, as recently as just a few decades ago, ninety percent of the Chevalier families in Canada resided in Québec, with many of the remaining ten percent living in Montréal and Minnesota.

Most of Grinnell-Davis's great-great-great-great grandparents who lived in Yamachiche appear to have been mainstream Québécois, especially Jean Baptiste Bourassa and Laurant Charles Lemieux. In contrast, possibly as many as three of Grinnell-Davis's ancestors who were living either in Yamachiche or in the larger Trois-Rivières region at the time may have been Acadian. Today Yamachiche is a key Acadian heritage site, a legacy of the arrival in Québec of as many as 4,000 Acadian refugees during the Seven Years' War (1755-1763) alone. Acadians, who are mostly descendants of poor French-speaking Catholic peasants from the southwestern regions of France, settled in a number of parishes in, around, and near Québec during the 1700s. They were often characterized as suspicious of outsiders, and many organized themselves into large extended families who labored collectively to grow their own food and to build houses and barns for one another. Given that the surname, Doucet, is heavily linked to Acadians in both Canada and the US, one of Grinnell-Davis's great-great-great-great grandmothers, Rosalie Doucet of the Trois-Rivières region, may have been Acadian. Additionally, TAAF found the surname Rivard

(the name of several of Grinnell-Davis's ancestors) on an informal list of Acadian surnames. A third example of an ancestor of Grinnell-Davis's who may have been Acadian issues from the fact that Josephine Perron, one of Grinnell-Davis's great-great-great-great grandmothers, was born in Deschambeault. Like Yamachiche, this settlement in the Trois-Rivières region near Yamachiche was known to be home to many Acadians. As such, it is possible that Josephine Perron was Acadian.

By the late nineteenth century, Grinnell-Davis's great-great grandparents in that branch, Matilda Loranger and Felix Bourassa, had emigrated to Wisconsin. Their daughter Emma Bourassa married Sidney Velourous Grinnell. This couple, who were Grinnell-Davis's great grandparents, raised their family in Michigan, where later in the 1960s Grinnell-Davis was born.

While there are many French Canadians, including Québécois and Acadians, who reproduced with Indigenous people, there is zero evidence that any of Grinnell-Davis's ancestors in this French Canadian branch of her family was Indigenous. Rather, all of the many documents and records of these ancestors indicate with certainty that all of the ancestors in this branch of Grinnell-Davis's family were Euro-Canadian.

Conclusions About Grinnell-Davis's Ancestry

TAAF's investigation of Grinnell-Davis's genealogical tree, which involved close inspection and analysis of numerous documents and records, revealed that every single one of Grinnell-Davis's ancestors is white. All engaged extensively with non-Indigenous governments, and all were taxed. None was ever listed on any American Indian, First Nation, or other Indigenous Nation rolls, and all were listed as white on all of the available records that identified an individual's race.

There is no evidence that Grinnell-Davis has even the most distant of relations by blood to Indigenous people. Anyone who claims an Indigenous identity has a responsibility to factually substantiate that claim before asserting a professional identity as an Indigenous person. Moreover, discussions of genealogical descent obfuscate the fact that citizenship in a sovereign Indigenous Nation is core to the identity of American Indian Tribes, First Nations, or other Indigenous Nations.

Implications of This Case

The implications of the results of the Grinnell-Davis investigation are serious. Among other things, they reveal that Grinnell-Davis's teaching and scholarship are foundationally flawed. Grinnell-Davis purports to teach, speak, and write from an Indigenous perspective. The reality is that she has never had and will never have an Indigenous perspective. Disturbingly, her work is about the foster care and adoption systems that serve the most vulnerable members of the Indigenous population, and she teaches courses about Native Americans at a university with one of the largest American Indian student populations in the country. Given the public nature of Grinnell-Davis's false claims to being Indigenous, it is almost certain that students are led to believe that she provides them with an Indigenous perspective in the classroom.

In light of the results of this investigation, the practices and policies at the University of Oklahoma with respect to Indians deserve scrutiny. TAAF endorses the Cherokee Scholars Statement's position that "in the context of higher education, falsely claiming a Cherokee [or other legitimate Indigenous] identity is academic dishonesty, falsification of a material fact, and expropriation of Indigenous peoples' resources and opportunities." Unlike many universities that are developing Indigenous verification policies, TAAF found zero evidence that the University of Oklahoma has *any vetting process at all* for determining whether those who claim that their scholarship is authored from an American Indian perspective are in fact American Indian. By enabling Grinnell-Davis's false claims to being American Indian, the University of Oklahoma is failing to support American Indians, American Indian Nations, First Nations, and non-Indians. In so doing, the University of Oklahoma has once again contributed to the erasure and replacement of actual Indigenous people, and the misrepresentation of Indigenous experience and perspectives. We strongly recommend that the University of Oklahoma take immediate action to rebuild and repair its relationships with American Indians and American Indian Nations rather than continuing to perpetrate harm on Indian people by legitimizing fake Indian claimants like Grinnell-Davis, who falsely claims to speak from an Indigenous perspective.

Mention should also be made of a related complaint that a whistleblower brought to TAAF about Grinnell-Davis. This complaint is that Grinnell-Davis has stolen the ideas and research of at least one Indigenous scholar. TAAF researchers did not investigate this particular claim, but they did note a resemblance between this complaint of plagiarism and a prior TAAF case. The prior case involves pretendian Dr. John Lowe of the University of Texas at Austin, a white man with no Indian ancestry who has stolen multiple tribal identities. It is an open secret that Lowe plagiarized the work of Dr. Cynthia Greywolf, a citizen of the Cherokee Nation. TAAF recommends that OU, perhaps in conjunction with other organizations and professional groups, take very seriously the claim that Grinnell-Davis may have plagiarized the work of Indigenous scholars and that an investigation be undertaken into this very serious matter.

It is deeply disappointing that OU appears not to have learned from three mistakes it has made. First, in 1997, it hired onto the faculty assistant professor of anthropology Circe Sturm, who falsely claims to be a Mississippi Choctaw descendant. (Sturm left OU in 2003 for the University of Texas - Austin, and recently Sturm was the subject of a TAAF report which found that Sturm has zero Indian ancestry.) Then, in the late 2010s, OU made two additional mistakes. It hired onto the faculty assistant professor of Native Studies Dr. Stuart-Richard, who also falsely claims to have Mississippi Choctaw ancestry. Genealogists unconnected with TAAF found that Stuart-Richard has no such Choctaw ancestry. Further, they found that, like Grinnell-Davis, Stuart-Richard has no Indian ancestry at all. Posts made on Indianz.com and FakeIndians.com in 2017 contended that Stuart-Richard "falsely used Native American ancestry to gain academic funding and work her way to a position with OU."²³ Widespread recognition of the harm that pretendians exact upon actual Indian people, together with campus protests by Indians and others at OU who demanded that OU do better, instigated Stuart-Richard's departure from the University and seemingly, from academia.

Yet in the aftermath of this scandal at OU, OU made yet another mistake: there is no evidence that the University has developed an Indigenous verification policy or that it has put in place any measures to vet the claims of professors or other persons on campus who claim to be Indigenous. In so doing, OU continues to provide an open door to pretendians seeking academic and other

positions at the University and access to American Indian communities through the institution. At the same time, the University continues to give the impression that it endorses the installation of people in positions of authority who do harm to Indigenous people. This is unacceptable, and it represents a grievous betrayal of Indigenous people—both those in Oklahoma and those outside the state.

TAAF would like to also censure other organizations for bolstering the false claims of Claudette Grinnell-Davis. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation needs to cease the practice of awarding sizable grants to scholars who falsely claim to be Indigenous. Additionally, the Society of Social Work and Research (SSWR) must implement significant structural guardrails to ensure that only legitimate Indigenous scholars are able to vet submissions or serve as authorities on any relevant topics that require Indigenous leadership. Other funding agencies and organization, too, need to make sure that their awardees are not claiming to be Indigenous without being an enrolled citizen of a legitimate Indian Tribe, First Nation, or other legitimate Indigenous Nation. Regarding the practice of failing to verify claims to being Indigenous, Partners for Advancing Health Equity, Evidence for Action, and these organizations' E4A Indigenous-led grants need to stop harming actual Indigenous people by bolstering and rewarding pretendians for falsely claiming to be Indigenous.

Many people now obviously consider Claudette Grinnell-Davis to be an American Indian woman. Therefore, it is very important that she clearly correct this misinformation. Many pretendians never correct the record after their false claims have been revealed. They let people continue to assume that they are Indigenous. Hence, we request that Grinnell-Davis let the world know in writing that she is not, in fact, Indigenous. Additionally, Grinnell-Davis needs to apologize to Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people at length, explain her past actions in full, acknowledge the harm she has done, and find ways to redress that harm.

Grinnell-Davis may be clinging to the hope that she may appear innocent due to the fact that she has never claimed to be a citizen of an American Indian Tribe, First Nation, or other legitimate Indigenous Nation. She should know better than that. The vast majority of the non-Indigenous public does not know the importance of tribal enrollment and federal recognition because they know so little about American Indian or Indigenous identity, let alone sovereignty, and they do not question these claims because they have little idea of how to properly vet such claims. This is why the onus is upon individuals like Grinnell-Davis to behave with integrity. As an educator, Grinnell-Davis should have known better. She should have taken her genealogy to Tribes or First Nations and asked them to determine whether she has a blood-based kin connection to one of these Tribes or First Nations before she ever claimed to be Indigenous.

Our Determination

Dr. Claudette Grinnell-Davis has zero Indigenous ancestry. It was her responsibility to verify her genealogy *before* making an Indigenous identity part of her academic identity. It is worth reiterating that TAAF agrees with the Cherokee Scholars' Statement that "in the context of higher education, falsely claiming a Cherokee [or other legitimate Indigenous] identity is academic dishonesty, [and] falsification of a material fact." Based on this standard, Grinnell-Davis has engaged in academic dishonesty by misleading her colleagues and students into

believing that she is Indigenous and implying that her scholarship is informed by an Indigenous positionality.

The University of Oklahoma and social work communities need to redress this situation. Among other things, the University of Oklahoma and social work communities need to institute policies that require scholars who claim or imply that their scholarship is informed by an Indigenous positionality produce documentation that they are enrolled citizens of legitimate Indigenous nations. These policies will protect the scholarly community from academic misrepresentation of fact. By taking no action, the University of Oklahoma and social work communities can expect to continue to enable pretendians who inflict harm and trauma on actual Indigenous people, and undermine the academic mission of the university and of academic fields of study.

Falsely claiming an Indigenous identity is anti-Indigenous hate speech.

¹ <https://www.linkedin.com/in/claudette-grinnell-davis-3a426a30/>

² <https://www.ou.edu/cas/socialwork/about/faculty-and-staff/claudette-grinnell-davis>

³ H.R. Rep. No. 95-1386, p. 9 (1978), which can be found at <http://www.narf.org/nill/documents/icwa/federal/lh/hr1386.pdf>; Fletcher, Matthew L.M., Wenona T. Singel, and Kathryn E. Fort, *Facing the Future: The Indian Child Welfare Act at 30*, East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University, 2009.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ Rebecca Nagle (host), *This Land* (podcast). Los Angeles, CA: Crooked Media and Cadence 13, 2019; Gaffney, Julia. "The Gold Standard of Child Welfare: Under Attack," *Family Law Quarterly* 56, 2023, 231-50.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ <https://www.ou.edu/nativenationscenter/About/History>.

⁸ <https://nativenewsonline.net/education/university-of-oklahoma-receives-4-8-million-gift-launches-native-peoples-initiative/>, [https://www.ou.edu/news/articles/2023/march/ou-elevates-native-nations-center-to-enhance-indigenous-research-and-tribal-](https://www.ou.edu/news/articles/2023/march/ou-elevates-native-nations-center-to-enhance-indigenous-research-and-tribal-relationships#:~:text=The%20University%20of%20Oklahoma's%20(OU)%20Native%20Nations,Connect%20tribes%20with%20faculty%2C%20programs%2C%20and%20resources)

[relationships#:~:text=The%20University%20of%20Oklahoma's%20\(OU\)%20Native%20Nations,Connect%20tribes%20with%20faculty%2C%20programs%2C%20and%20resources](https://www.ou.edu/news/articles/2023/march/ou-elevates-native-nations-center-to-enhance-indigenous-research-and-tribal-relationships#:~:text=The%20University%20of%20Oklahoma's%20(OU)%20Native%20Nations,Connect%20tribes%20with%20faculty%2C%20programs%2C%20and%20resources)

⁹ <https://policiesforaction.org/person/claudette-grinnell-davis>

¹⁰ <https://www.healthyteennetwork.org/reshaping/members/grinnell-davis/>

¹¹ <https://ntdctraining.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/AI-AN-Content-Committee-List-AS-OF-6-16-20.pdf>

¹² Claudette Grinnell Davis, Allison Dunnigan & Bailey B. Stevens (2023) Indigenous-centered racial disproportionality in American foster care: a national population study, *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 17:2, 280-304, DOI: 10.1080/15548732.2021.2022565. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15548732.2021.2022565>.

¹³ <https://www.ou.edu/tulsa/news/2021/ou-tulsa-faculty-member-receives-robert-wood-johnson-foundation->

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/OUSWK/posts/-exciting-news-zarrow-school-of-social-work-faculty-and-graduate-win-prestigious/1173572270860305/>

¹⁶ <https://sswr.org/2025-conference-home/2025-conference-cluster-chairs/>

¹⁷ Summary under the criteria and Evidence for Proposed Finding Against Federal Acknowledgment of the United Houma Nation, Inc. December 13, 1994. https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/dup/assets/as-ia/ofa/petition/056_uhouma_LA/056_pf.pdf, p. 6.

¹⁸ Federal Register, Volume 59, No. 245. December 22, 1994. https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/dup/assets/as-ia/ofa/petition/056_uhouma_LA/056_pf_fr.pdf

¹⁹ <https://evidenceforaction.org/indigenous-led-solutions-advance-health-equity-wellbeing-webinar-transcrip>

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ *ibid.*

²² <https://evidenceforaction.org/indigenous-led-solutions-technical-assistance-cohort>

²³ https://www.normantranscript.com/news/university_of_oklahoma/ou-professor-faces-accusations-of-falsifying-info-about-native-roots/article_e7b09b7c-d88b-5ef2-9209-4eac7b763861.html