

Syllabus: Elizabeth Warren, Cherokee Citizenship, and DNA Testing

Preface

In October 2018, US Senator Elizabeth Warren released the results of a DNA test in an effort to prove her claims to Native American ancestry. Far from resolving the question of her supposed Cherokee and Delaware heritage, her actions distracted from urgent issues facing Indigenous communities and undermined Indigenous sovereignty by equating “biology” with culture, “race” with citizenship. In response, Indigenous scholars, activists, and the Cherokee Nation itself, rebuked the dangerous connection between DNA testing and Indigeneity.

The syllabus project aims to contextualize the history of colonialism erasing and assimilating Indigenous populations through the regulation of blood--found in the contemporary iteration of DNA testing. It collects some of the responses from Indian Country in the wake of Warren’s misguided political gamble, and fills in historical gaps with important scholarship about Cherokee citizenship, blood quantum, DNA and genetic testing, and tribal sovereignty.

The following texts have been compiled by three citizens of the Cherokee Nation, Adrienne Keene (@nativeapprops), Rebecca Nagle (@rebeccanagle), and Joseph M. Pierce (@pepepierce).

Key Words

DNA and Genetic Testing
Indigenous Citizenship
Cherokee History
Erasure
Cultural Appropriation
Blood
Tribal Sovereignty

Readings by Theme and Topic

DNA and Genetic Testing

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