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Elizabeth Warren Tells Native American Forum She Is Sorry for Claiming Indian Ancestry

“Before I go any further in this, I want to say this — like anyone who’s been honest with themselves I know I’ve made mistakes,” Democratic presidential hopeful Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) told the Frank LaMere Native American Presidential Forum in Sioux City on Monday. “I’m sorry for any harm I’ve caused,” Warren said, referencing her dubious assertion that she was of Indian heritage.



President Donald Trump jumped on Warren’s claim, dubbing her “Pocahontas” after the famous Powhatan Indian “princess” who befriended the English settlers, particularly John Smith, at Jamestown in the early 17th century. Pocahontas later married another leader of Jamestown, John Rolfe, and their marriage produced many prominent Americans, including the famed 19th century congressman John Randolph of Roanoke.

The issue of Warren’s alleged Native ancestry actually arose even before Trump was president, back when she ran against Republican Senator Scott Brown. At the time, Warren explained that she was “very proud” of her heritage, and “very proud of the stories that my grandparents told me that my grandparents told my parents and my parents told my brothers and me.” Brown and others questioned whether she had made up her Indian heritage in an effort to get an advantage in the academic world.

Among the stories that Warren said had led her to believe that she had Indian blood was, “I still have a picture on my mantel and it is a picture my mother had before that — a picture of my grandfather. And my Aunt Bea has walked by that picture at least a thousand times [and] remarked that he — her father, my Papaw — had high cheek bones like all of the Indians do.”

The ensuing ridicule after Trump called her Pocahontas spurred Warren to take a DNA test to prove her Native ancestry, but when the test revealed that she was less than one percent American Indian, the ridicule only intensified. Not only did President Trump make a joke of Warren’s claim, the tribe that she identified with — the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma (Warren was raised in Norman, Oklahoma) — denounced her efforts to assert tribal association on a DNA test. The Cherokee Nation only accepts tribal membership from persons who can trace their ancestry to an individual Cherokee on the 19th century “Dawes Roll.”

Warren continued her *mea culpa*, saying, “I have learned a lot and I am grateful for the many conversations that we’ve had together. It is a great honor to be able to partner with Indian country and that’s what I’ve tried to do as a senator, and that is what I promise to do as president of the United States.”

While Warren’s assertion that she was at least part American Indian provided some good laughs at the time, her effort to identify with an indigenous American tribe actually indicates some rather serious issues. First of all, this continued Balkanization of American politics, dividing Americans into this or that



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ethnic group for political purposes, is corrosive to American unity.

Taking pride in one's ethnic heritage has a long American tradition, and hardly anyone has a problem with that, but interjecting such divisions into American political life is unhealthy.

When Brown questioned Warren's assertion during the Senate race, noting that Warren had identified herself as a "minority" in the Association of American Law Schools (AALS) desk book during the 1980s and 1990s, Warren bristled and predictably used the "Woman Card" in response. She told reporters that Brown had "questioned Elena Kagan's qualifications to serve on the Supreme Court." Warren asked, "What is it he thinks it takes for a woman to be qualified?" with the obvious insinuation that the only reason that anyone could question Kagan was because she was a woman. (Perhaps if and when President Trump nominates conservative jurist Amy Comey Barrett to the High Court, and Warren predictably objects, the same question could be asked of her about her expected opposition).

Throughout her presidential campaign, Warren has pandered to a variety of "groups," such as college students, promising increased largesse from the federal government with taxpayers to pick up the tab. In her appearance before the Native American Forum, she continued to make promises, even floating the idea that a system needs to be established comparable to the Amber system — for children who go missing — which would send notifications for missing Native Americans.

This should be insulting to Americans of Indian ancestry — being compared to children — but such as been U.S. government policy toward indigenous peoples for over a century, producing large amounts of dependency on Indian reservations. Warren also proposed the legalization of marijuana on tribal property and improving access to electricity and clean drinking water.

Warren's paternalistic attitude toward American Indians is really no different from her attitude toward American citizens in general, in which she believes the federal government should effectively be a mother and father to every American.

That paternalistic attitude is what Warren should be apologizing for, not only to Native peoples, but to all Americans of whatever ethnic background.

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Steve Byas is a college history instructor and author of the book History's Greatest Libels. He can be contacted at byassteve@yahoo.com



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