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<https://www.soc.ucsb.edu/people/andrew-jolivette>

12 February 2026

To Whom it May Concern:

My name is Dr. Andrew Jolivette and I am enrolled tribal member of [the Atakapa-Ishak Nation](#) of Louisiana. My clan is the Opelousa/Tsikip of the Heron Peoples of Southwest, Louisiana through my Guidry, Higgins, Pierre-Auguste and Tessier family lines. Our tribe is neither state nor federally recognized at this time. We were recognized by the city of Lake Charles in the heart of our traditional territory, and we expect to be recognized by the State of Louisiana in 2026.2027. I am also a Kaskaskia descendant of the Illiniwek Confederation of Tribes through the Colon-Rochon and the Fontenot-Vidrine lines of my family; an Algonquin descendant through the Fontenot-Fafard lines of my family; and a Coahuiltecan descendant through the Perez-de La Zerda lines of my family. All these kinship lines circle through the French and Spanish colonial territories of Louisiana where my ancestors have lived since time immemorial. I am a Professor of Sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara and have worked in the field of American Indian and Indigenous Studies for the past 26 years. Prior to my role at UCSB, I was Department Chair of Ethnic Studies and Founding Director of Native American and Indigenous Studies at the University of California, San Diego (where I currently maintain an Adjunct appointment until 2028), and Professor and Department Chair of American Indian Studies at San Francisco State University.

I write today in support of my colleague and relative, Dr. Leila K. Blackbird who has been asked to provide the name of her biological mother as well as other supporting information to "prove" she is Indian by the [Tribal Alliance Against Frauds](#) (TAAF). Let me begin by stating that this organization does not regulate nor govern federal, state, or non-recognized tribal or Indigenous identity in the state of Louisiana or in the United States. They refuse to identify the members of their research team other than the Director of their organization. Much like ICE agents who conceal and hide their identities while violating the legal rights of others, TAAF is nothing more than a thug organization. They lack legal and cultural authority to ascertain Dr. Blackbird's place of belonging among the American

Indian and Indigenous Peoples of Louisiana or anywhere else for that matter. TAAF are a secretive, unidentified group of individuals who are attacking scholars who have produced outstanding and well-recognized bodies of work in the name of self-interest. They have doxed several scholars and some of their members and associates have been the [subject of litigation](#). I have known Dr. Blackbird for several years and their work on Louisiana Creole, Afro-Indigenous, and Indigenous American Peoples in the state of Louisiana is without question of the highest research and ethical standards. As a member of the newly formed, **Louisiana Afro-Indigenous Network (LAIN)** which is comprised of leading national and international scholars, community leaders, organizers, knowledge keepers, tribal members/citizens and practitioners of Louisiana history, Louisiana Creole, Louisiana Indigenous and Louisiana Afro-Indigenous Peoples I write to say that I/we stand in community and kinship with Dr. Blackbird and if anyone is to ascertain their belonging in our community it will be our network and tribal nations and communities, not an outside group with **NO qualification** to do so.

Dr. Blackbird is a leading and nationally recognized expert on Louisiana Native identity with family connections to several of our communities from the unceded Natchitoches, Opelousa, and Bvlbancha territories. Leila is recognized among us and other tribes across the state as kin. There is a longstanding history of Native erasure in the state of Louisiana, particularly when it comes to mixed-race Black-Indian identity, a field of study where Leila has [contributed a great deal](#). In fact, I believe the questions and invasions of privacy into Leila's life are being made precisely because of their work in this area.

We Louisiana Native scholars and community members, including LAIN accept Leila as part of our communities and respect their work and contributions. We also acknowledge that Dr. Blackbird has supplied plenty of information on their website should there be questions, but to write to a junior scholar and demand they reveal private information about themselves or they will be threatened with doxing and defamation is not only legally problematic it is inconsistent and incompatible with how we understand, articulate, and document lived indigeneity, community belonging, and tribal membership in Louisiana and our associated global territories. In our state and truly across all Indigenous communities in the United States, Canada, and Mexico Indian or Indigenous identity/membership prior to colonization was based on kinship and cultural engagement as members of specific clans, confederations, and nations, not through paper based "legal" citizenship. The sovereignty concept itself is an external invention and should not be used or weaponized to determine, Dr. Blackbird's ancestry or that of any other Native person with ties to Louisiana or to precolonial Louisiana/New France and New Spain. I want to conclude by reiterating that this organization has no member to my knowledge from our state and as such they have no business interfering in our affairs. We Native scholars and community members with familial roots in Louisiana look forward to Dr. Blackbird's continued good scholarship and positive community contributions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Jolivéte', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Andrew Jolivéte, Ph.D. (Ishak, Kaskaskia, and Coahuiltecan)  
Professor of Sociology, UC Santa Barbara  
Adjunct Professor Ethnic Studies, UC San Diego 2025-2028  
Ford Foundation, Senior Fellow



# TÁKAPŌ-ISHĀK YUKHÍTI

Atakapa-Ishak Nation of S.W. Louisiana and S.E. Texas  
P.O. Box 1532 Lake Charles, Louisiana 70601

13 February 2026

To Whom It May Concern,

On behalf of Chief Edward Chretien, Jr. and our Tribal Council, I am sending this letter of support for Dr. Leila Blackbird. We are an unrecognized group of very real people. Like the Bayou Lacombe Choctaw, we are a tribe for which the United States has produced scholarship, and like them, the descendants of those written about a century ago are still in the tribe. We are mixed in that we are of Indigenous, African, and European ancestry. We are Ishak in that our ancestors were. Recognition will not change who we are, only what some others think of us.

Dr. Blackbird is well known across the Indigenous community of Bulbancha, which you may know as “New Orleans,” where I reside. I have known them for about a decade, and their work has been seminal in helping various Indigenous Peoples of Louisiana to understand our peculiar status as Indigenous People for whom the United States is not even the first or second layer of colonization. I would place her in the same category as Elizabeth N. Ellis in that regard, as a top flight researcher who understands previously obscured nuances of Indian policy regionally, and who has close relationships with groups here.

Particularly, Dr. Blackbird has had a profound influence on the understanding of slavery in the region. Their work on the enslavement of Indigenous People by colonists, the deliberate misclassification of Native Peoples to maintain slavery (by reclassifying us as “mulatto,” “mulatto rouge,” “griffs,” etc.), and the legacy this has had for federal recognition have had a profound influence on understandings of Indian status in the state.

I realize it can be a bit confusing for researchers from outside of the area. Like California, another place with many non-federal tribes, Louisiana has a history regarding Indigenous People that is unique, leading to confusion for those who expect that history to mirror what is found in other places. In the past decades there has been progress in publishing on these fronts now that scholars from our own mixed backgrounds have been telling our stories from the inside, with the best in critical thinking about racial classification, which in Louisiana often mirrors what one might find, say, in Mexico or Honduras. The ethnic mixing that created Louisiana’s Creole populations predates the United States, but it does not predate colonization.

I am aware of Dr. Blackbird's background, and their genealogy from their biological parents contains enslaved Indigenous People of the area. They have helped our own people in recognition efforts by helping us to understand the legacies of discrimination thrust upon our ancestors enslaved on places such as the Chretien plantation.

I'd be happy to discuss this further with anyone. I realize the problem of pretendians is a serious one. Here in Louisiana, though, and for unrecognized tribes such as the Atakapa-Ishak and Bayou Lacombe Choctaw, to pretend that our ancestors are *not* Indian would be a lie in itself. I have no issues with Dr. Blackbird in that regard.

Regarding Native scholars from federal tribes who understand these issues well, I might recommend the aforementioned Dr. Elizabeth Ellis (Peoria) of Princeton University or Dr. John DePriest (Oklahoma Choctaw) of Tulane University. I hope these discussions will lead to a broader understanding of these unique issues.

Hiwéw, and best wishes,

Jeffery U. Darensbourg, Ph.D., M.L.I.S.

Tribal Councilperson

Atakapa-Ishak Nation

[jefferydarensbourg@gmail.com](mailto:jefferydarensbourg@gmail.com)

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cc: Edward Chretien, Jr.



To Whom it May Concern;

My name is Michael “T. Mayheart” Dardar, I am an enrolled citizen of the United Houma Nation (UNH) of Louisiana. I served 16 years on the UHN Tribal Council, and in that time held the positions of Vice-Principal Chief and Tribal Historian. I have authored several books and numerous articles on tribal history, cultural identity, and Indigenous issues.

I will speak today in support of Dr. Leila K. Blackbird, a fellow member of the greater Indigenous community of Louisiana. It has come to my attention that Dr. Blackbird has become a target of an organization called the Tribal Alliance Against Frauds (TAAF). TAAF has apparently taken upon itself the assignment of ascertaining the validity of Dr. Blackbird, and numerous other individuals’ identity. This organization, as far as I know, has no connection to any tribal community in the state of Louisiana. Nor do they possess any regulatory authority from the state or federal government giving them the right to make such determinations.

This faceless organization, that hides the identity of its members, demands a degree of exposure from its targets that it is unwilling to reveal of itself. And to be clear, the “proof” that it demands are colonial documents from a society that demanded one of two things from marginalized communities of color: assimilation or abolition. True Indigenous identity is invested in relationships between peoples and land. It may be attested to by government edict, but it is not dependent on such for validation.

Dr. Blackbird speaks with voice of the subaltern; she offers the perspectives from below, giving context to the thoughts and aspirations of real lived communities. Amid the current efforts to sanitize the histories of this nation and to hide centuries of atrocities beneath the banner of manifest destiny, it is that voice that must be



allowed to speak. It is by no means monolithic because its strength builds from its diversity. Dr. Blackbird is an important component of that mosaic of expression.

TAAF, it would seem, seeks to conform the Indigenous population of the United States to some uniform conception of identity that they have constructed themselves. As stated before, they have no connection to any tribal community in Louisiana and, therefore, to any ability or qualification to decide who or who does not belong. Dr. Blackbird is a recognized member of the Indigenous community with an interconnected web of relatives, colleagues, and co-workers that value her contributions and her humanity.

In *authentic* community we are drawn together by the things we say and do; that is the work. We are bound to each other, and we use our voices and abilities to lift up and project the voices of those not heard. We have a sense of responsibility for each other that those individuals behind organizations like TAAF would never understand or appreciate. Dr. Blackbird is one of us.

Sincerely,

T. Mayheart Dardar



February 17, 2026

To Whom it May Concern,

My name is Clara Villarreal Varner and I am a member of the Karankawa Tribe of Texas. I am from the Hawk Clan of Corpus Christi, Texas and I am a direct Karankawa descendant through my maternal lineage. While our tribe is neither state nor federally recognized, my ancestors have lived in our tribal lands along the Texas Gulf Coast from Galveston Bay to Corpus Christi Bay since before recorded history. I recently retired from 33.5 years of contributions to the safety of this land as an Aerospace Engineer focused on reconnaissance satellite technology.

I am compelled to express my unwavering support of my friend and relative, Dr. Leila K. Blackbird, who was asked by the Tribal Alliance Against Frauds (TAAF) to provide information to “prove” she is Indigenous. On TAAF’s website, they state they “focus on individuals, groups, and corporations posing as American Indian Nations who falsely represent American Indian cultures, histories, and spiritual practices and/or falsely claim American Indian identity as individuals for profit or fame.” First and foremost, they have committed a grave error in targeting Leila, a highly respected member among Indigenous relatives. Importantly, TAAF is a nonprofit entity founded in 2022 that has no authority to act in the role of the colonizer-sounding “blood quantum police.” Their request is also baseless and without reason.

I met Dr. Blackbird several years ago when she and my daughter served along with two other respected historians on a panel, which discussed our experiences as persistent people having survived an attempted genocide and as we revitalize our tribe in contemporary times. In preparing for the conference, I researched Leila’s work on Louisiana Creole, Afro-Indigenous, and Indigenous American Peoples and found it to be of the highest quality. She is recognized not only as an expert in her field of study, but also as kin to the very people she so passionately represents across her community and beyond. I’ve kept in touch with Leila over the years and am proud of all she has achieved. I am fortunate to have crossed paths with someone of her caliber, spirit, and heart. She is truly one of the great ones.

In closing, allow me to re-emphasize that I unequivocally stand with Dr. Leila K. Blackbird as my Indigenous relative especially as a member of a non-federally/state recognized tribe, whose mere existence is already targeted and discredited. We stand with our relatives in efforts to build and maintain a community regardless of colonial ideology and rhetoric. I look forward to a time when Leila may continue positively contributing to our extended community without the targeting that has unfairly come her way.

Sincerely,

Clara Villarreal Varner

Karankawa Tribe of Texas

Five Rivers Council Member



12 March 2026

Aaniin. Niiyokamigaabaw indizhinikaaz. Indanishinaabe; awazisii indoodem. Gaa-zagaskwaajimekaag indoonjiba, minawaa Gaakaabikaang indoonjiba.

Hello. My name is Niiyokamigaabaw, or Stands on Four Earths. My English name is Dr. Deondre Smiles. I am Ojibwe, of the Bullhead clan, from Leech Lake Nation. I grew up in Minneapolis, and among my family at Leech Lake are the Rock and Ryan families.

I am writing in support of Dr. Leila Blackbird in response to the report recently circulated by the Tribal Alliance Against Frauds (TAAF). I have read the report closely, and I have serious concerns about its methods, tone, and evidentiary standards.

The document reads less like a careful investigation than like an adversarial brief. It frequently moves beyond questions of verification into speculation about motive, intent, and character. That is especially troubling given the seriousness of the conclusions it draws and the potential professional and personal harm such accusations can cause.

I am also concerned by the lack of transparency in the report's process. It does not clearly identify its authors or investigators, explain what records were reviewed in a way that permits independent assessment, lay out a consistent evidentiary standard, or distinguish clearly between verified facts, inferences, and conclusions. In a matter this serious, those absences are significant.

More broadly, questions of Indigenous identity, kinship, and belonging are not matters that should be adjudicated through anonymous, rhetorically charged public campaigns. Across Indigenous communities, sovereignty and self-determination matter deeply. The authority to determine belonging rests with Indigenous peoples and communities themselves, not with outside organizations acting without clear accountability to those nations.

That does not mean that concerns about misrepresentation should never be raised. They can and should be, when warranted. But such concerns must be handled with rigor, humility, transparency, and care. In my view, the TAAF report does not meet that standard.

The harms caused by accusations of this kind are real. They can damage reputations, destabilize professional relationships, create division in community, and impose serious emotional and mental strain on those targeted. Institutions should be extremely cautious about treating such documents as settled fact when the underlying process is so opaque.

For these reasons, I stand in support of Dr. Blackbird and urge others to approach this matter with fairness, care, and respect for Indigenous sovereignty and due process.



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Miigwech / Thank you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Deondre". The signature is written in black ink and has a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Niiyokamigaabaw  
Dr. Deondre Smiles  
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe  
Adjunct Professor  
University of British Columbia