

Aspirational Descent and the Creation of Family Lore: Race Shifting among White French Descendants, 2003–2017 [Abstract]

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This article builds on work examining how hundreds of thousands of white French descendants in the northeastern part of the continent have been shifting into “Indigenous” identities in the past two decades or so. The first part of the paper explains the workings of “aspirational descent,” that is, when a French woman from the 1600s is turned into an “Indigenous” ancestor for the purpose of claiming indigeneity in the present. The second part of the paper explores the creation of “family lore” by several French descendants using aspirational descent in courtroom testimony. Overall, the author illustrates how stories about long-ago Indigenous ancestry in white settler families, such as that of Elizabeth Warren, often involve creative interpretations of childhood stories that rely on the logic of elimination inherent to settler colonialism.

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