### Native American History of Voting—Events and Experiences of Indigenous Women’s Voting

| **Pre Colonization** | **Lenape (Delaware)** were a matrilineal based society prior to European contact. The children born into the mother’s clan gained both their social identity and status through that system of kinship. Within their society, women made a large percentage of the decision making in affairs considering who was sent into battle and who stayed home, property rights, leadership for the community, etc. In stark contrast to westernized values, Europeans were mystified about the importance of women within the society and their ability to select male warriors for battle, grant permission of land rights, and electing male leaders of the tribe. Even though they worked much in the domestic sphere, the Lenape way of electing leadership was not in line with a patriarchal society. In the eyes of a patriarchal European society, which was not familiar with the customs of the Lenape, their understanding of the typical gender roles they associated with their own culture was much different than how the Lenape society actually functioned, from a matrilineal and matriarchal perspective. Kykew, S. (2016) Family, women, and children and gender roles in the Lenape tribe. Retrieved from [https://chaddsfordhistorical.wordpress.com/2016/07/22/family-women-and-children-and-gender-roles-in-the-lenape-tribe/](https://chaddsfordhistorical.wordpress.com/2016/07/22/family-women-and-children-and-gender-roles-in-the-lenape-tribe/). |
| **Pre Colonization** | **Hopi** valued matrilineal societies within their community by practicing matrilocal residency. This meant that households were built upon a core line of women whose husbands regularly resided with them. Women held a good deal of domestic authority, since they own the houses, land, and the basic crops that support and feed their families. However, Hopi men are allowed to claim ownership of any livestock they raise, and they also hold the most important ritual and judicial offices within the settlement. Several contexts require men to participate in matrilineal affairs. Schwimmer, B. (2003) Hopi Domestic Organization. Retrieved from [https://www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/anthropology/tutor/residence/hopi.html](https://www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/anthropology/tutor/residence/hopi.html) Department of Anthropology University of Manitoba. |
| **Pre Colonization** | **Iroquois** women had great influence in their communities. While Iroquois society was far from being a female dominated matriarchy, Iroquois women enjoyed social equality and respect that was not shared by colonial women. They were responsible for defining the political, social, spiritual and economic norms of the tribe. Iroquois society was matrilineal, meaning descent was traced through the mother rather than through the father, as it was in Colonial society. While Iroquois sachems (chiefs-leaders) were men, women nominated them for their leadership positions and made sure they fulfilled their responsibilities. Besides performing the normal household functions of producing, preserving and preparing food and clothing for the family and taking care of the children, Iroquois women participated in many activities commonly reserved for men. The women of the Iroquois tribes exercised great influence in the government of the people. Elderly women had the right to sit in the councils and the power to exercise a veto on a declaration of war. The women were also allowed to demand a cessation of hostilities. The Iroquois were an agricultural people and it was the women who owned the land and tended the crops. After marriage, an Iroquois man moved into the longhouse of his wife's family. Their children then became members of her clan (Claskey, 2001). The Iroquoian political structure prior to colonization was impressive to the Founding Fathers of America. So impressive, that the three branches of the United States government and system of checks and balances, as well as many of the freedoms now protected by the Bill of Rights, were inspired by the “Great Law of Peace: Kaianerekova of the Haudenosaunee Iroquois Confederacy” (Schlaff, 1988). Caskey, M. M., Rapida, T. J., & Wubbold, M. (2001) Iroquois woman. Retrieved from [http://web.pdx.edu/~caskeym/iroquois_web/html/iroquoiswoman.htm](http://web.pdx.edu/~caskeym/iroquois_web/html/iroquoiswoman.htm) Portland State University. Schaff, G. (1988) From the great law of peace to the constitution of the United States: a revision of America's democratic roots. American Indian Law Review, (14) (2), 323-331. |
**1492**

Christopher Columbus arrives to the shores of the Bahama Islands and encounters the Arawak Nation. He wrote in his journal:

“As soon as I arrived in the Indies, on the first Island which I found, I took some of the natives by force in order that they might learn and might give me information of whatever there is in these parts.”

During this point of contact, Spaniards were perplexed at the treatment and roles of Indigenous women within the Arawak society. Spaniard priest Bartolome de las Casas, who arrived after Columbus, made the following statement:

“Marriage laws are non-existent men and women alike choose their mates and leave them as they please, without offense, jealousy or anger. They multiply in great abundance; pregnant women work to the last minute and give birth almost painlessly; up the next day, they bathe in the river and are as clean and healthy as before giving birth. If they tire of their men, they give themselves abortions with herbs that force stillbirths, covering their shameful parts with leaves or cotton cloth; although on the whole, Indian men and women look upon total nakedness with as much casualness as we look upon a man’s head or at his hands.”


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**1817 Cherokee Treaty**

Declared the Cherokee Nation as the first Native Americans recognized as United States Citizens—assuming voting rights as a basic human right as an American citizen. At this time, it would have only been men who were allowed to vote.


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**1831 Cherokee Nation v. Georgia**

Court case finding concluded that the Cherokee Nation (thus all tribal nations), are considered a “domestic dependent nation” and are considered “wards” to the United States government. Under this finding and accepted definition, Native people did not have the right to vote.

Cherokee Nation v. Georgia, 30 U.S. 5 Pet. 1 1 (1831)

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**Civil Rights Act of 1866**

Further excluded Natives from full citizenship by claiming, “That all persons born in the United States, and not subject to any foreign power, excluding Indians not taxed, are hereby declared to be citizens of the United States”. (Article 1, Section 8).

Resisting the call to action for Native suffrage, political leaders such as Senator Jacob Howard were quoted as saying “I am not yet prepared to pass a sweeping act of naturalization by which all the Indian savages, wild or tame, belonging to a tribal relation, are to become my fellow-citizens and go to the polls and vote with me…”. (Congressional Globe, 1866). It could be concluded that the population of Natives at the time outnumbered settlers; therefore, more Native Americans would have outnumbered newfound American citizens at the voting polls.


Civil Rights Act, 14 Stat. 27-30, Section 8 (1866)
**General Allotment Act (Dawes Act)**

This federal law was passed by President Grover Cleveland, which authorized the government to survey Indian tribal land and divide the area into small allotments for individual Indians and families (National Archives, n.d.). As a result, the law was supposed to grant Native Americans citizens of the United States—which would theoretically give tribal citizens the right to vote. However, as a mechanism to further dissociate Natives from their tribe, they were faced with rejecting any ties to their tribal status in order to be eligible to vote in federal elections (Library of Congress, n.d.).

The policy also incentivized marriage between men and women. The belief at the time was that Native families would come to adopt westernized traits and values of American families, where men owned and worked the land and women were expected to become domesticated in their roles. University of Pennsylvania’s Professor of English, Amy Caplan states in her book “the discourse of domesticity was intimately intertwined with the discourse of Manifest Destiny in antebellum U.S.” In this case, citizenship and marriage became inextricably linked, “where citizenship comes along with being born on the nation’s soil,” so that “marriage policy underlies national belonging and the cohesion of the whole (Cott, 1998).

The Dawes Act awarded eventual U.S. citizenship status, often dependent on their marriage, which could then determine their eligibility for land ownership under these statues (Compton, 2009).

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**Susan La Fleshe Picotte**

Graduating the top of her class, Susan became the first Native American woman doctor in history. She provided critical health care to everyone, regardless of race, and opened a hospital near Walthill, Nebraska in 1913. The facility is now known as the Susan La Flesche Picotte Center and was named a National Historic Landmark in 1993.


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**Eliza Burton “Lyda” Conley**

Lyda was the first female Native American attorney that graduated from Kansas City School of Law in 1902 and was the first women admitted into the Kansas Bar Association. Lyda and her sisters fought to protect and preserve the Huron Cemetery in KC, which is where many of her ancestors were laid to rest. She became the third woman, second female attorney, and first Native American woman to argue a case in front of the Supreme Court. Although the court dismissed her case, Lyda’s work been foundational in the continual protection of Native American burial grounds. Even at this time as an attorney, Lyda did not have the right to vote.


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**Snyder Act (Indian Citizenship Act)**

This law admitted Native Americans born in the U.S. to full U.S. citizenship. Though the Fifteenth Amendment, passed in 1870, granted all U.S. citizens the right to vote regardless of race, it wasn’t until the Snyder Act that Native Americans could enjoy the rights granted by this amendment (Little, 2018).

It took over forty years for all fifty states to allow Native Americans the right to vote. Even with the passing of the Snyder Act, states affirmed their constitutional right to determine the voting rights of
their citizens. Some states aided in further disenfranchising Natives by not allowing them to vote. The only way that Natives were able to win the right to vote was fighting for it state by state. Like their African American counterparts, Native people were still prevented from voting with poll taxes, literacy tests and intimidation (Jackson, 2004).

Following the passing of this act, white Americans were unsettled with the change at the voting polls. By the late 1930’s, Henry Mitchell reported that “One of the Indians went over to Old Town once to see some official in the city hall about voting”, an “Indian Canoe Maker” in Maine. “He said to the Indian, ‘We don’t want you people over here. You have your own elections over on the island, and if you want to vote, go over there’” (Little, 2018).

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<th>Year</th>
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<td>1945</td>
<td><strong>Elizabeth Wamanaker Peratrovich (Tlingit)</strong>&lt;br&gt;Enraged at the blatant discrimination towards Alaskan Natives at this time, Elizabeth urged Alaskan Governor Ernest Gruening to pass the Anti-Discrimination Act of 1945. The transformational law prohibited discrimination in public places, and Elizabeth played a pivotal role in getting it signed into law. Finally, the Senate passed the Alaska Civil Rights Act with a vote of 11 to 5.</td>
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<td>1948</td>
<td><strong>Trujillo v. Garley &amp; Harrison v. Laveen</strong>&lt;br&gt;Miguel Trujillo, a Marine in WWII and member of the Isleta Pueblo in New Mexico, contended that he had the right to vote as a citizen and veteran. When the county registrar Eloy Garley refused to allow him to register, Trujillo sued Garley for the right to vote. Like several other states, New Mexico held that “Indians not taxed” could not vote.&lt;br&gt;Trujillo challenged this by pointing out that although he did not pay property taxes since he lived on pueblo lands, he still paid other forms of taxes like federal income tax, gasoline taxes, and sales tax. The three-judge panel in Albuquerque, NM ruled in Trujillo’s favor and found that the provisions in the New Mexico constitution violated both the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments.&lt;br&gt;Shortly after the Trujillo case, the state of Arizona, decided that “the term “persons under guardianship” has no application to the plaintiffs or to the Federal status of Indians in Arizona,” which removed the legal barrier preventing Native Americans in Arizona from voting.</td>
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<td>1965</td>
<td><strong>The Voting Rights Act (VRA)</strong>&lt;br&gt;The development of this law finally brought awareness and halted the individual states’ claims on whether or not Natives were allowed to vote through a federal law. Section 2 of the VRA states that, “No voting qualification or prerequisite to voting, or standard, practice, or procedure, shall be imposed or applied by any State or political subdivision to deny or abridge the right of any citizen of the United States to vote on account of race or color.” (Section 4(f)(2) of the Act).</td>
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<td>1971</td>
<td>Madonna Thunder Hawk</td>
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<td>1996</td>
<td>Elouise Cobell (Cobell v. Salazar)</td>
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<td>2002</td>
<td>Four Directions</td>
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<td>2013</td>
<td>Shelby County v. Holder</td>
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The changes in these foundational laws have had significant effects on marginalized communities and their right to vote. Both Alaska and Arizona, which are home to significant Native American populations, were among the nine states who were protected by the preclearance clause, as well as Oglala Lakota County and Todd County South Dakota, which contain the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Indian reservations. Following the Shelby County decision, which effectively ended preclearance, many previously covered jurisdictions have put new voting restrictions in place, such as Arizona, which recently made it a felony to collect and turn in another voter’s completed ballot, even with that voter’s permission (Dunphy, 2019).

LaDonna Brave Bull Allard (Standing Rock Sioux)

Is an activist and tribal historian who is a leader in the fight against the Dakota Access Pipeline. In April 2016, she founded the Sacred Stone Camp on her land, which was the first resistance camp of the #NoDAPL movement and some of the closest tribally owned land to the construction site. Since the founding of the Sacred Stone Camp, thousands of water protectors camped and organized to prevent the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. Because of activists like LaDonna, the #NoDAPL movement grew to be one of the most powerful and widely supported Indigenous rights movements in recent decades.


North Dakota Voter ID Law

New voting requirement that prevented hundreds of Native Americans from voting—must have a current street address on your ID. Residential roads within tribal communities, including the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation in Belcourt, North Dakota, do not have street names or number signs where their residents live.

Spirit Lake Tribe v. Jaeger (ND Voter ID). (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.narf.org/cases/spirit-lake-tribe-v-jaeger/?gclid=CjwKCAjw27jnBRBuEiwAdjQXDDR7xPkmom-FfEeExlo-F-IiDQxFKfm2NcSo1Jig1G5rfVF3K9IUbOCEVoQAvD_BwE

Patty Ferguson-Bohnee

As a citizen of the Pointe-au-Chien Indian tribe and as the Native Vote Election Protection Coordinator in the state of Arizona, Patty has substantial experience in Indian law, election law and policy matters, voting rights, and status clarification of tribes. She is a clinical professor of law, the faculty director of the Indian Legal Program and the director of the Indian Legal Clinic at ASU. She has assisted in complex voting rights litigation on behalf of tribes, and she has drafted state legislative and congressional testimony on behalf of tribes with respect to voting rights’ issues. Protection Coordinator for the State of Arizona.


In March, the Washington State Legislature passed a monumental state law that deepens bipartisan support for Native voting rights. The bill allows Native Americans to use nontraditional address if living on a reservation and permits tribes to request more election resources from the state. Additionally, it authorizes Indian tribes to request ballot drop boxes on reservations and designation of state facilities on reservations as voter registration sites, with legal enforcement for election officials’ failure to comply. There are several other provisions within the act that are monumental in contemporary state legislature that protects Native American tribes.

REFERENCES


Cherokee Nation v. Georgia, 30 U.S. 5 Pet. 1 1 (1831)

Civil Rights Act, 14 Stat. 27-30, Section 8 (1866)


National Archives Database, (n.d.) An act to provide for the allotment of lands in severalty to Indians on the Various reservations (General Allotment Act or Dawes Act), Statutes at Large 24, 388-91, NADP Document A1887.


Shelby County v. Holder, No. 12–96 slip op. at 1 (The United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit).

Spirit Lake Tribe v. Jaeger (ND Voter ID). (n.d.). Retrieved from [https://www.narf.org/cases/spirit-lake-tribe-v-jaeger/?gclid=CjwKCAjw27jnBRBuEiwAdjXQDDR7xPkmom-FfEeeExlo-F-iidQxFKfm2NCo1Jig1G5rfVF3K91UBoCEVoQAalD_BwE](https://www.narf.org/cases/spirit-lake-tribe-v-jaeger/?gclid=CjwKCAjw27jnBRBuEiwAdjXQDDR7xPkmom-FfEeeExlo-F-iidQxFKfm2NCo1Jig1G5rfVF3K91UBoCEVoQAalD_BwE) Voting Rights Act of 1965, P.L. 89-110 §§ 2

