

## **Native American Voting Rights**

By Erin Raux, Curator at the Mid-America All-Indian Center

*Originally Aired 10/1/2020*

Do U.S. citizenship and voting rights go hand and hand? For most of this country's history, the answer has been no. It's often overlooked that self-government in America was practiced by American Indians long before the formation of the United States government. Still, American Indians were denied the right to be U.S. citizens when the country ratified its Constitution in 1788 from stolen lands. When black Americans won citizenship with the 14th Amendment in 1868, the government specifically interpreted the law so that it wouldn't apply to Native peoples. They wouldn't win the right to be citizens for 136 years, finally winning citizenship through the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924. The struggle for voting rights lagged on decades after. It remains an issue today.

Did you know? All people weren't guaranteed the right to vote in every state until 1962. Even with the passing of this citizenship bill, American Indians were still prevented from participating in elections because the Constitution left it up to the states to decide who has the right to vote. It would take 40 years for a series of legal changes to make full citizenship a reality for all American Indians living in the United States, despite the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment's promise of equal protection and due process under the law for all Americans.

As late as 1948, two states (Arizona and New Mexico) had laws that barred many American Indians from voting until the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1965. American Indians were only able to win the right to vote by fighting for it state by state. The last state to fully guarantee voting rights for Native people was Utah in 1962. Despite these victories, Native people are still prevented from voting with poll taxes, literacy tests and intimidation.

Please join us at the Mid-America All-Indian Museum to learn more about American Indians and their right to vote!

*This transcript of "Native American Voting Rights" is part of the Humanities Kansas Hotline, a series of bite-sized micropresentations about Kansas stories – both serious and light-hearted – that are researched and presented by experts across the state. Humanities Hotline topics change monthly. For more information about Humanities Kansas and the Humanities Hotline, visit [humanitieskansas.org](http://humanitieskansas.org) or call 1-888-416-2018.*