



RevolutionNJ

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“A Bundle of Silences: Reimagining Interpretive Approaches to the Past”
FAQ and Additional Resources

Interpretive Theme: Exclusion and Inclusion

Webinar Title: Exclusion and Inclusion

Scholar: Dr. Alaina E. Roberts, University of Pittsburgh, Department of History

FAQ:

1. **Did most people vote in colonial elections?** Around 75% of the white adult males in most colonies qualified as voters because land was often given to indentured servants upon completion of their terms or could merely be squatted on and claimed, if one was willing to risk upsetting Native people who claimed it. But including women, enslaved people, and non-property holders, only about 10-10% of the total population in the colonies comprised the electorate. For more on colonial elections, listen to the *Ben Franklin's World* podcast episodes 285 and 287 (*episode 285 is listed in the suggested further reading list*).

2. **Did Native Americans have their own system of slavery before European contact?** Yes, almost every Native society was involved in a system of captivity much like that around the world: various groups of people fought over resources, land, or enmity, and the losing side was taken as captives, if they were not killed outright. Captives would be used for physical labor, but this was not a permanent status, nor was “captive” an inheritable status. Captives could marry into the tribe or be adopted. For more information, see Christina Snyder’s book, *Slavery in Indian Country: The Changing Face of Captivity in Early America* (*listed in the suggested further reading list*).

3. **Were the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Creek, Seminole, and Choctaw Nations the only tribes to own Black slaves?** Yes, these tribes were the only Indian nations to own Black women and men in the same manner as white Americans, treating them as chattel (less than human), and buying and selling them. There were other Indian nations, like the Comanches or Apaches, who sometimes kidnapped Black people from plantations to use them as labor, but this was not part of the same racial hierarchy and lack of recognition of humanity. For more information on slave-owning within the five Indian nations I mentioned, see my book, *I've Been Here All the While: Black Freedom on Native Land* (*listed in the suggested further reading list*).

4. **Why didn't some Native Americans want to vote?** From the 1700s to 1924, the majority of Native Americans could not take part in elections, though they paid taxes on goods and were affected by legislation. As Native nations were considered sovereign entities with their own governments and elections, Native people only considered themselves citizens of their own nations. But as they lost their

land to white settlement, they often no longer had operational governments and political leaders that were allowed to fully govern and make treaties with the United States. Thus, a movement for Native political rights within the United States was born in the late 1800s/early 1900s, culminating in the 1924 Indian Citizenship Act. However, Native people suffered from many of the same discriminatory tactics used to stop African Americans from voting during the Jim Crow Era and still, today, politicians use prejudicial legislation in states with significant Native populations like North Dakota and Arizona to target Native Americans.

Additional Resources:

William A. Blair, "Vagabond Voters and Racial Suffrage in Jacksonian-Era Pennsylvania," *Journal of the Civil War Era* vol. 9, no. 4 (December 2019): 569-587

Christina Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country: The Changing Face of Captivity in Early America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012)

Alaina E. Roberts, *I've Been Here All the While: Black Freedom on Native Land* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021)

Liz Covart, *Ben Franklin's World* podcast, <https://benfranklinworld.com/episode-285-elections-voting-in-the-early-republic/>

Cathleen Cahill, *Recasting the Vote: How Women of Color Transformed the Suffrage Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020)

Joseph Lee, "A Native American Tribe in Oklahoma Denied Black Citizens COVID-19 Vaccines and Financial Relief," *Buzzfeed*, March 16, 2021, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/josephvlee/seminole-oklahoma-black-freedmen-vaccines>