

# Could You Have Voted?

The laws about who can vote have changed many times during North Carolina's history. Read below. Pick a year. Then see whether you would have been able to vote!

1776

North Carolina's first "state" constitution is written. It links voting to wealth and property ownership.

**WHITE MEN:** Maybe. If you pay taxes, you can vote for members of the state House of Commons (representatives). If you own 50 or more acres of land, you can vote for the state senate. (Members of the General Assembly elected the governor.)

**MEN OF COLOR:** That's a big maybe... If you are a free African American or American Indian AND if you pay taxes or own 50 or more acres of land. Enslaved people of color can't vote.

**WHITE WOMEN & WOMEN OF COLOR:** Nope.

1835

North Carolina's state constitution is greatly amended. Some men gain voting rights; others lose them.

**WHITE MEN:** Yes. All white men can vote for governor and for members of the state House of Commons (representatives). Only men who own 50 or more acres of land can vote for members of the state senate.

**MEN OF COLOR:** Not anymore. Free African American and American Indian men lose their voting rights. Enslaved people of color still can't vote.

**WHITE WOMEN & WOMEN OF COLOR:** Still nope.

1868

A new state constitution is needed before North Carolina can rejoin the Union after the Civil War. All adult males gain the right to vote and hold office.

**WHITE MEN:** Yep. There are no longer any voting restrictions based on wealth or property ownership.

**MEN OF COLOR:** Yes. There are no longer any voting restrictions based on race.

**WHITE WOMEN & WOMEN OF COLOR:** Still a big no. The new constitution defines a voter as a "male person."

1900

A "suffrage" amendment is added to the state constitution. It effectively eliminates voting rights for most men of color by imposing poll taxes, literacy tests, and other voter suppression tactics.

**WHITE MEN:** Probably. Poll taxes (a tax that must be paid before voting) discourage voting among some poor whites. But most white men can avoid being disqualified by literacy tests due to a "grandfather clause" that allows them to vote if they, or their direct ancestor, could vote on January 1, 1867.

**MEN OF COLOR:** Probably not. Poll taxes and intentionally unfair voter registration requirements stop most African American and American Indian men from voting.

**WHITE WOMEN & WOMEN OF COLOR:** More than a century of still no. The woman suffrage movement is barely on the radar in North Carolina.

1920

The 19th Amendment to the US Constitution grants voting rights to women. Jim Crow voter suppression methods continue to disenfranchise most women of color.

**WHITE MEN:** Yes. North Carolina repeals the law requiring payment of a poll tax for voting, so nothing limits the voting rights of white men.

**MEN OF COLOR:** Most likely not. Literacy tests are still unfairly applied to African American and American Indian men, severely limiting the number who can register to vote.

**WHITE WOMEN:** Finally, yes. The 19th Amendment, which is ratified without North Carolina's support, gives white women the right to vote for the first time.

**WOMEN OF COLOR:** Very unlikely. Literacy tests and other Jim Crow voter suppression methods stop most African American and American Indian women from voting.

1965

The US Congress passes the Voting Rights Act. This legislation ends literacy tests and allows the federal government to monitor voter registration policies in areas known to have suppressed voting access. It allows people of color to regain access to voter registration.

**WHITE MEN:** Yes. All white men age 21 or older can vote.

**MEN OF COLOR:** At last, yes. Men of color in North Carolina regain full access to voter registration.

**WHITE WOMEN:** Yep. All white women age 21 and older can vote.

**WOMEN OF COLOR:** At long last, yes. Women of color finally gain equal access to voting.

1971

The 26th Amendment to the US Constitution lowers the voting age from 21 to 18. All US citizens who are 18 years or older and who are not serving a felony sentence can vote.

**WHITE MEN:** Still good.

**MEN OF COLOR:** Yes.

**WHITE WOMEN:** You bet.

**WOMEN OF COLOR:** Yep.

## Words to Know

**SUFFRAGE:** the right to vote

**DISENFRANCHISE:** to deprive someone of the right to vote