The Truth About Cherokee Citizenship

- MYTH: You need to have a large degree of Cherokee blood to be eligible for citizenship. ◇ FACT : To be considered a Cherokee citizen, you need one Indian ancestor listed on the base roll of our people. The Cherokee Nation doesn't care what other heritage anyone has: if someone has an Indian ancestor on our base roll, they are part of our Cherokee family.

- MYTH: The Cherokee Nation is kicking African-Americans out of the tribe.
◇ FACT : The Cherokee Nation is among the most inclusive of Indian tribes. We embrace our mixed-race heritage and we are proud of our thousands of citizens who share African-American, Latino, Asian, white and other ancestry. To be a Cherokee, all you need is one Indian ancestor on the base roll. African-Americans with an Indian ancestor on our base roll have always been, and will continue to be, citizens of the Cherokee Nation.

- MYTH: The election allows adopted whites with no blood quantum listed on Cherokee rolls to remain citizens.
◇ FACT: The amendment to our Constitution affects the citizenship of all non-Indians who were granted citizenship rights under a tribal court ruling one year ago, regardless of their ethnic background.

- MYTH: Non-Indians who have long been Cherokee citizens are now being "disenrolled."
◇ FACT: The amendment to our Constitution only affects certain people who were granted tribal citizenship under a tribal court ruling just one year ago. This vote affirms the people's passionate belief that you need one Indian ancestor listed on the base roll to be a Cherokee.

- MYTH: It is unfair to rely on the Dawes Roll as the base roll of the Cherokees to prove Indian ancestry
◇ FACT: The Dawes Roll is not perfect, but we rely on it because it is the best, most authoritative historical document we have to determine who our Indian ancestors were, going back 100 years.

The Truth About Our History

- MYTH: Freedmen and other non-Indians have long been part of the Cherokee Nation.
◇ FACT: Freedmen and other non-Indians were granted tribal citizenship under a tribal court ruling just one year ago. Prior to that and following this vote, to be part of the Cherokee Nation you must have one Indian ancestor listed on the base roll of our people.

- MYTH: The Cherokee Nation is expelling the descendants of their former slaves.
◇ FACT: Slavery was a grave injustice and a painful chapter in our nation's history. With respect to citizenship, we have justly defined our own identity through the exercise of our cherished democratic freedoms. Our people voted, and they voted their passionate belief that you must be an Indian to be in an Indian tribe. Descendants of slaves who also have an Indian ancestor on our base rolls continue to be eligible for citizenship, as they always have been.

- MYTH: The Cherokee Nation broke the Treaty of 1866.
◇ FACT: The Cherokee Nation honored the treaty by giving former slaves and other non-Indians in our region the same rights as Cherokees to benefits that included land and cash payments. With all due respect to those who seek to join the Nation, citizenship in a sovereign nation is not determined by a treaty with another government. The Cherokee Nation re-asserted its sovereignty and self-determination in 1975, and our Constitution grants us the freedom to determine for ourselves who is a Cherokee.

The Truth About Legality

- MYTH: The special election that the Cherokee Nation held on March 3, 2007 was illegal.
◇ FACT: The Cherokee people cherish our democratic freedoms and we paid dearly for them. These include the right to vote and to determine for ourselves the meaning of our Indian identity. The record turnout for this constitutional vote proved that Cherokee identity is an issue that is close to the heart of the Cherokee people.

- MYTH: It is not legal for the Cherokee Nation to define citizenship except as it is defined in the Treaty of 1866.
◇ FACT: The treaty provided for non-Indians residing in Cherokee territory to be granted the same rights as Cherokees to benefits that included land and cash payments. The Cherokee Nation honored the treaty. However, citizenship in a sovereign nation is not determined by a treaty with another government. The Cherokee Nation's Constitution grants us the legal right to determine for ourselves the eligibility requirements for Cherokee citizenship.

- MYTH: Voter turnout for the special election was extremely low.
◇ FACT: More than 8,700 people voted, which was a higher turnout than the vote for the Cherokee Nation's constitution, four years ago.

The Truth About Our Motives

- MYTH: Cherokees are motivated by racism to only want full-blooded Indians in the tribe ◇ FACT: On the contrary, we welcome every eligible Cherokee citizen regardless of his or her other racial heritage. The Cherokee Nation embraces its thousands of citizens who share African-American, Latino, Asian, white and other ancestry. It doesn't matter what you look like. If you have one Indian ancestor on the base roll, you are a member of the Cherokee family.

- MYTH: The Cherokee Nation wants to keep more gaming revenues for itself.
◇ FACT: This is about weaving together a great, multi-ethnic nation through one common thread - a shared connection to our Indian ancestors. The Cherokees don't distribute gaming revenues to individuals. Gaming revenues benefit the entire community beyond the Cherokees, as we invest gaming revenues in services like health care and education.

The Truth About the Political Contest

- MYTH: Non-Indians are being "disenrolled" for failing to support the tribe's current administration.
◇ FACT: The Cherokee Nation passionately believes that citizenship in an Indian nation should belong to descendants of Indians. Our constitutional amendment reflects that belief. This vote came from the people as a grassroots effort to define Cherokee identity for ourselves.

- MYTH: The Cherokee Nation urged voters to support the amendment.
◇ FACT: The Cherokee Nation took no official position on either side of the vote. It never sought to influence anyone's vote. The people exercised their cherished democratic right to determine for themselves the meaning of their Indian identity.

- MYTH: The United States government has sided with the Freedmen descendants in this matter.
◇ FACT: The United States government through its courts has held time and again held that Indian tribes have the right to determine their own citizenship and is defending a lawsuit brought by some Freedmen descendants.