

1924 Indian Citizenship Act

Until the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924, Indians occupied an unusual status under federal law. Some had acquired citizenship by marrying white men. Others received citizenship through military service, by receipt of allotments, or through special treaties or special statutes. But many were still not citizens, and they were barred from the ordinary processes of naturalization open to foreigners. Congress took what some saw as the final step on June 2, 1924 and granted citizenship to all Native Americans born in the United States.



President Calvin Coolidge with four Osage Indians after Coolidge signed the bill granting Indians full citizenship. Source — LOC, LC-USZ62-111409 DLC.

The granting of citizenship was not a response to some universal petition by American Indian groups. Rather, it was a move by the federal government to absorb Indians into the mainstream of American life. No doubt Indian participation in World War I accelerated the granting of citizenship to all Indians, but it seems more likely to have been the logical extension and culmination of the assimilation policy. After all, Native Americans had demonstrated their ability to assimilate into the general military society. There were no segregated Indian units as there were for African Americans. Some members of the white society declared that the Indians had successfully passed the assimilation test during wartime, and thus they deserved the rewards of citizenship.

Dr. Joseph K. Dixon, an active proponent of assimilating the "vanishing race" into white society, wrote:

"The Indian, though a man without a country, the Indian who has suffered a thousand wrongs considered the white man's burden and from mountains, plains and divides, the Indian threw himself into the struggle to help throttle the unthinkable tyranny of the Hun. The Indian helped to free Belgium, helped to free all the small nations, helped to give victory to the Stars and Stripes. The Indian went to France to help avenge the ravages of autocracy. Now, shall we not redeem ourselves by redeeming all the tribes?"

So, the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 proclaimed:

"BE IT ENACTED by the Senate and house of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That all non citizen Indians born within the territorial limits of the United States be, and they are hereby, declared to be citizens of the United States: Provided That the granting of such citizenship shall not in any manner impair or otherwise affect the right of any Indian to tribal or other property. (Approved June 2, 1924)"

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