

“Voters: Native Americans” from the Library of Congress

The Dawes Act had a disastrous effect on many tribes, destroying their culture and society as well as causing the loss of as much as two-thirds of their tribal land. The failure of the Dawes Act led to change in U.S. policy toward Native Americans. The drive to assimilate the Indians gave way to a more hands off policy of allowing them the choice of either enfranchisement or self-government.

The Snyder Act of 1924, admitted Native Americans born in the U.S. to full U.S. citizenship. Though the Fifteenth Amendment, passed in 1870, granted all U.S. citizens the right to vote regardless of race, it wasn't until the Snyder Act, signed during the Coolidge Administration, that America's native people could enjoy the rights granted by this amendment. The 1934 Reorganization Act ended land allotments and provided for return to tribal ownership of surplus lands. It also encouraged tribal self-government and tried to improve the economic conditions of Native Americans.

Even with the passing of this citizenship bill Native Americans were still prevented from participating in elections mainly due to the fact that the Constitution left it up to the states to decide who has the right to vote. The state of Maine offers a good example of this illegal disenfranchisement. Maine was one of the last states to comply with the Indian Citizenship Act, even though it had granted tax paying Native Americans the right to vote in its original 1819 state constitution. As reported by Henry Mitchell, a resident of that state, Native Americans were prevented from voting in Maine in the late 1930s.

...[T]he Indians aren't allowed to have a voice in state affairs because they aren't voters. Just why the Indians shouldn't vote is something I can't understand. One of the Indians went over to Old Town once to see some official in the city hall about voting. I don't know just what position that official had over there, but he said to the Indian, 'We don't want you people over here. You have your own elections over on the island, and if you want to vote, go over there.'

After the passage of the 1924 citizenship bill, it still took over forty years for all fifty states to allow Native Americans to vote. In 1948, the Arizona Supreme Court struck down a provision of its state constitution that kept Indians from voting. Other states eventually followed suit, concluding with New Mexico in 1962, the last state to enfranchise Native Americans.

Even with the lawful right to vote in every state, Native Americans suffered from the same mechanisms and strategies, such as poll taxes, literacy tests, fraud and intimidation, that kept African Americans from exercising that right. In 1965, with passage of the Voting Rights Act and subsequent legislation in 1970, 1975, and 1982, protections for non-English speakers and other citizen voters were reaffirmed and strengthened.



President Calvin Coolidge with four Osage Tribal members after Coolidge signed the bill granting Native Americans full citizenship, 1924.

Courtesy [Library of Congress](#), LC-USZ62-111409 DLC

\$2.00

1959 POLL TAX RECEIPT
LEFLORE COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI

Nº 2150

1-19 19 60

RECEIVED OF W R Criss

VOTING PRECINCT Gwd

TWO DOLLARS in payment of POLL TAX for year 1959

Keep this receipt for presentation at polls when you vote.

J E Cothran
SHERIFF & TAX COLLECTOR
By *[Signature]* Deputy

LAWRENCE GREENWOOD 42094



THE AMERICAN WALL, AS CONGRESSMAN BURNETT WOULD BUILD IT.
UNCLE SAM: You're welcome in—if you can climb it!



"By the way, what's the big word?"



March for the right for 18-year-olds to vote, Seattle 1969.

Post-Intelligencer Collection, Musium of History & Industry



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