

Indian Act

The Indian Act was originally enacted to assimilate Indigenous Peoples and attempted to do so through paternalistic policies and bans on cultural practices. Some of the most egregious policies barring First Nation Peoples from hiring lawyers, and sexist rules which attached a woman's First Nations status to her husband's. In 1925, the Indian Act even outlawed dancing as a means to crush Indigenous culture. The Act controlled who was legally considered "Indian", removing status from people for reasons having nothing to do with how they identify or their heritage.

"For nearly a century, it was effectively illegal to be a First Nations person in a traditional sense, and impossible to interact with non-Indigenous society in any meaningful way without losing status."

– The Canadian Encyclopedia

The horrific realities of World War 2 lead to a change in attitude toward human and minority rights in Canada. As a result, the government made amendments to the Indian Act in 1951 to remove some of the most overtly discriminatory sections such as the ban on cultural practices and the prohibition against Indigenous People hiring lawyers. However, many discriminatory and paternalistic policies remained intact, including those that particularly disempowered First Nations women. Women would still lose their Indian Status by marrying a non-Indian man until 1985.

Many reforms and attempted reforms to the Indian Act have happened over the years but it remains a problematic instrument. Nevertheless, the debate goes on as to whether to get rid of the Act entirely, or continue with the reform process.

For an interesting discussion on what to do with the Indian Act, see [The Indian Act: What to do with it?](#)

https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/the_indian_act/

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/indian-act>