

1915

# Why Most of Our Indians are Dependent and Non-Citizen

Richard Henry Pratt

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digicom.bpl.lib.me.us/books\\_pubs](https://digicom.bpl.lib.me.us/books_pubs)

---

## Recommended Citation

Pratt, Richard Henry, "Why Most of Our Indians are Dependent and Non-Citizen" (1915). *Books and Publications*. 90.  
[https://digicom.bpl.lib.me.us/books\\_pubs/90](https://digicom.bpl.lib.me.us/books_pubs/90)

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Special Collections at Bangor Community: Digital Commons@bpl. It has been accepted for inclusion in Books and Publications by an authorized administrator of Bangor Community: Digital Commons@bpl. For more information, please contact [ccoombs@bpl.lib.me.us](mailto:ccoombs@bpl.lib.me.us).

See also "Joint Congressional Hearings Black Feet Indian Reservation"  
Mailed separate.

## WHY MOST OF OUR INDIANS ARE DEPENDENT AND NON-CITIZEN

ADDRESS BY BRIG. GEN. R. H. PRATT, LL.D.

In the three hundred years since European civilization began grasping what is now the United States, the hunting resources sustaining three hundred thousand natives have disappeared and a development of the soil and other resources bountifully maintaining a hundred millions of civilized people has been substituted. The civilized people have increasingly advanced the country and themselves into marvellous prosperity and foremost nationality, among other accomplishments importing, civilizing and absorbing into citizenship ten millions of black aborigines from the Torrid Zone of another continent. During this same period and under the same control of the civilized people the native aborigines have been segregated from the other population and so abominably treated as to become helpless, wasted by disease, and even abject, and so dependent as to lead the civilized people to give ten millions of dollars annually to keep up the separation.

These fortunate and unfortunate and most contradictory results and conditions have a perfectly logical explanation, showing that the praise in the one case and the blame in the other is due absolutely and wholly to the contrivances of the civilized people and not to any lacks of the native people.

If ten millions of less capable black aborigines can be transported across a great ocean and from a more enervating zone and life and lifted into the language of the country and its industries and on these and without the education and intelligence given by schools be admitted to its freedom and the privileges of its citizenship, why in all reason has it been so impossible in the same years to accomplish the same and even higher results for the three hundred thousand native and more hardy and active Temperate Zone aborigines?

The only reasonable answer is found in the exactly opposite systems and control used in the two cases. One people was harshly compelled to come and live with and adopt the language and industries of the civilized people, and the other was harshly compelled to keep away from these inestimable privileges and to continue their many languages and in a maimed substitute for their old life.

Unity of language and industry are first essentials to the unity of peoples.

Using the great law of necessity, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread," in one case enforced activity, health and pro-

ductiveness among the millions, and setting aside of that law in the other case bred idleness and disease and all their ills among the thousands at vast Government expense for support and care.

The people directed and managed the black aborigine as an individual, and most profitably made the man by his labor pay his way, including his transportation into the country, while the system manages the red aborigine and by expensive segregating in tribal masses makes our citizens pay vast money for all the spectacularity, folly and failure of it.

The system and reservation are essentially coordinated in one great function to keep the Indian from merging into the national life, which merging would in itself have utilized and saved him. The same system of management and reservation for the negro, when he began to come to America, would have been his doom, and he barely escaped ruin when the Freedman's Bureau was abolished almost in its inception.

Reservating and segregating the Indian in tribal masses away from civilization not only continued his old life and kept him a burden, but it enabled his exploitation as a bugaboo, to the profit of notorious interests.

"Comparisons are odious," but how can we make plain the odiousness of a system except by multiplying and urging comparison? The black man was brought here and the ten millions of him made useful and citizen. The red man, always here, only three hundred thousand of him, continued a non-citizen, made a pauper at a total Government cost of more than five hundred million dollars and a present annual outlay of more than ten million dollars—thirty-three negroes for every Indian. Men of all nations and every quality invited into the national family and promptly utilized and clothed with its freedom and citizenship until the influx reaches a million a year, more than three times as many in one year as all of our Indians, always here and yet denied these privileges. Did ever "straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel" have a more perfect illustration of inconsistency?

There is a tap-root somewhere in the Indian's case which is responsible for the inane monstrosity of his treatment and its resulting forlorn condition. That tap-root is the system adopted for his management. Placed in supreme control, every influence reaching the Indians must kow-tow to the system's over-lording. Its supremacy and importance hinges on thorough segregation and its ability to dominate every tribe and every individual Indian and to control all legislation and all administration to that end.

Slavery never more harshly grasped the negro as a race or compelled its intentions as relentlessly. To enforce our decrees we used the whip on the negro but the gun on the Indian.

Whether tribally conspicuous, numerous and noted, or few, remote and unnoted, or whether individually obscure or risen to the

dignity of national legislators, the system with frequent army helps has in one way or another brought every Indian into subservience to the system's administration.

If it is his land, the system suggests, engineers and concludes the metes and bounds of that and the freedom of its uses, always to the last degree, however, maintaining the system's grip.

If through the system's methods he has large funds, they fall under the system's absolutism and are doled to him at the system's option and oftener to the Indian's ruin than to his benefit, because the Indian has not been taught the wisdom of its uses and is easily led to pass it over to the greedy white man for a song or that which depraves.

If it is his education, the system concludes, that, both in its where and its quality, always, however, with reference to such limitations as insure continued dominance by the system, never with reference to full preparation for and individual escape from that dominance into the freedom of citizenship.

If it is his industries, the system contrives the kind, quality and quantity and the where and how he shall learn, and mainly where and how the industry is to be used, mostly under the system's direction, and much of it under the system's pay.

If it is the Indian's health, there the system has been preeminently supreme in working the Indian's ruin through using the despair of isolation, idleness, insufficient feeding, hovel housing, neglect of sanitation, scant medical attention and ignoring all the facts of the growth of disease and death and the causes. Through these the system has brought the Indians into such physical degeneracy and fatal disease as to make necessary its appeal to Congress to appropriate vast sums to build many hospitals to care for the scourges its methods produced and which these same methods still incite on a scale so vast that no hospital resources can compass, cure or atone for them. Do you want proofs? Go with me to dozens of Indian reservations and I will show you right now the disease-breeding methods of housing and the vile conditions under which the Indians are forced to live and give you amplest proof of the inefficient care and scantiness of and disease-breeding food provided, and the harmful methods of issue. These alone are full warrant for the deplorable health conditions among our Indians, which conditions are not paralleled in the history of the world for prolonged, unconcerned and infamous cruelty.

We made the negro work, and he increased in numbers and health. Egypt made the Israelites work and they became a vast horde.

Forced, hired and persuaded tribally onto reservations and to come under the care of the system, the Indians by its methods have been deprived of all their old-time initiative and manly self-support. Their case has never been thoroughly and intelligently in-

vestigated by any discerning body directed thereto with a view to the adoption of a humane and supreme general course of action to which administration must conform. (Applause.) Here is where a wise, capable and heroic Board of Indian Commissioners would have been invaluable. (Applause.) Each system's chief has been largely a law unto himself, but he oftener fell under the system's devious methods than dominated them. If what he proposed looked to the system's perpetuity it passed. If system tenure was threatened, the system's machine used embargo and elimination, and this course was applied to beneficent projects suggested or instituted in the field service by worthy employees working under the system.

I said "forced." The Indian was forced into treaties and onto the resulting reservations. Government officials wrote the treaties, and army presence compelled acceptance. Were the treaties then kept? Gen. Sherman, who headed the greatest of all Indian treaty commissions, said, "The Government has made hundreds of treaties with the Indians, and never kept one."

→ Can't you see that being hindered from going outside the reservation into civilization for his development in civilization compels the Indian to accept the totally inadequate opportunity for civilization doled to him on the reservation?

I said "hired." Can't you see that rations is hire; that annuities is hire; that tribal home schools is hire; that all the reservation machinery is hire to remain on reservations in tribal masses; that even allotment of lands contiguously in each tribe is hire to stick together, and that all these hires are hires to remain tribally under the system's supervision, assuming that the system will do for them all that is necessary and that the Indians not being allowed to know any better became inevitably subservient to it? Can't you see that if the Indian could escape from the system and get out among civilized people, his eyes would open and he would then apprehend things as they are and be stirred to become a healthy factor in the country's affairs?

Can't you see that if out of the millions of dollars appropriated annually we pay at the rate of forty-nine dollars for the support of purely Indian schools to every one dollar we pay to enable them to get into our general schools with the other children of the country, that the purely Indian schools become a hire to continue racially separate under the system?

Can't you see that if we reversed the order and paid forty-nine dollars for educating Indian youth in our own schools and among our people to every one dollar we pay for purely Indian schools, that our civilization would get into them forty-nine times faster, and that the same principle applies to all they must learn in order to become acceptable citizens? Does not every dollar we pay to educate emigrant children force them into our amalgamating common schools?

Can't you see that all schemes to improve the Indian's stock and enlarge and manage its quantity and all their other resources tribally under the scheme's supervision become a hire to remain in tribal masses subordinate to the scheme?

Can't you see that all these contrivances mean the system's enlargement and continuance and little or nothing towards any escape of the Indian from that control out into real citizenship?

Can't you hear the system's pleading voice for prolonged control in the enunciations urged on the public attention, "He is the original inhabitant and is so picturesque;" "He has such beautiful art;" "such enchanting music;" "We must improve but not transform;" "He loves his children, we must not break up families;" "His property must be protected," and many others of like quality? Are his picturesqueness, his art, his music, his Indian identity, his family relations, his property more important to be preserved than those of other men or the man himself? If in preserving these we destroy the man, where is the gain? When have we hesitated to encourage the breaking up of the families of Europe, Asia, Africa and the Islands of the Sea or to promote the abandonment of their race qualities in order that we might gain and develop men of all races into our vast and unique body of citizens?

Is not all change of every sort transformation? Is there an Indian anywhere in the United States that is not being transformed by his constantly changing environment?

Was it not stupidity of administration to adopt as a government purpose in Indian management the doctrine of "Improvement but not transformation?"

Is it hard to see that if the same fraternity, brotherhood and merging we used to unify the other races had been adopted in our relations with the Indians, the Indians would long ago easily have become a useful and contented part of our population?

Did we start right? Are we trying to get right?

Will any good come from polishing up and improving a system that destroys instead of saves; that continually invents adroit ways to keep up separation rather than adopts well-proven and common-sense methods to bring about merging?

Can't you see that Indian civilization and real independent citizenship means death to the Indian *system*?

Don't you know that about the hardest thing in this world to get rid of is a system of any kind organized to handle somebody and their money and property so long as the money and property hold out?

The so-called "Indian Problem" has always been the Indian *system*, never the Indian. (Applause.)