

Oklahoma Statehood and American Dream: Brought Together or Forced Apart?

November 16, 1907, Oklahoma officially became the 46th state of the United States of America. Many groups of people were forced to live under one set of laws, but did everyone agree? Were they able to achieve the American Dream?

Unfortunately, the first law passed after Oklahoma became a state, involved segregation. The bill was known as the coach bill, and it was mandated that all public transportation must provide and enforce separate coaches, and waiting rooms for black and white patrons. This forced citizens apart rather than together.

Another law passed that involved segregation was the Grandfather Clause Act, which passed in 1901. This clause based a man's right to vote on whether or not his father and grandfather could vote. It was another way to make sure only whites could vote, because their grandfather couldn't legally vote before or on January 1, 1866, if they were African-American. In 1915, during the Supreme Court case *Guinn v. United States*, it was ruled that the Grandfather Clause was considered unconstitutional, as it went against the 15th amendment.

The African-Americans weren't the only ones facing discrimination. Native Americans had been discriminated against before Oklahoma Statehood, and still continued after. The most notable act that happened to the Indians was the Indian Removal Act of 1830, signed by President Jackson. They were forcibly removed from the land, just to make room for white settlers. This event caused the famous Trail of Tears, where many Indians died while being relocated.

Barely 60 years after the Trail of Tears, the U.S. Congress created the Dawes Commission, in 1893, to aid the drive toward statehood, and to fully assimilate the Indian population. Five years later, an act called the Curtis Act, was passed to weaken and end the Indian Territory tribal government by abolishing the tribal courts. It was a major blow to the government autonomy of the Five Tribes.

The Native Americans did get support eventually. The Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act of 1936, was meant to allow them to strengthen their governments by adopting constitutions, and electing officers, empowering them to govern themselves. It also aimed to address issues such as land ownership, without forcing the Native Americans onto reservations.

There were also several civil rights movements that happened in Oklahoma, to help give people a better chance at the American dream. Women had been fighting for suffrage and putting in effort since 1890. Their first attempt at proposing suffrage to the House was voted "no" but it did grant women the right to vote in school elections. They had a setback in 1901, when the Grandfather clause passed. Suffragists saw the 1918

state constitutional vote, as the next big opportunity to get women's suffrage as a part of Oklahoma. An anti-suffragist tried to rig the vote and only print half of the number of ballots, but the efforts were exposed as voter fraud. The Oklahoma House and Senate finally voted for women's suffrage in 1918, two years before the 19th amendment was ratified in 1920!

The Oklahoma Constitution was actually considered progressive for its time. It involved eight-hour workdays, child labor laws, worker safety, mandatory education, etc. All of these seem as if they would help the American dream, when in all actuality, it made it harder to achieve. The segregation, discrimination toward Indians, and not allowing women suffrage really affected many people in Oklahoma. It was simply making it harder and harder to achieve what they really wanted.

Were Oklahomans able to achieve the American dream? After all the hardships they faced, it was definitely a struggle to earn what they wanted. There was no equality in the state, as whites had more freedom to do a variety of things, whereas the African-Americans, Indians, and women were all still having to fight for their rights, and the laws didn't help. Inequality still happens in Oklahoma today, and people of color and women are still fighting for their American dream.

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