



Pan-Tribal Identity: What Can We Learn From Canadians and the Quinault?

By: The Oneida Trust and Enrollment Committee

This series of articles is designed to inform Oneida citizens about enrollment issues. The total number of Oneida enrolled members is expected to decline within the next 10 years. The goal of these articles is to generate community conversations about citizenship and belonging so that we may explore our options.

So far we have discussed the consequences of Indian people and non-Indian people producing generations with 'diluted' Indian blood. But what about those individuals with multi-tribal ancestry? There are many Indians across the country who may have $\frac{1}{2}$ or greater amounts of Indian blood, but when it comes to enrolling in a specific tribe, they don't meet the requirement. Consider the child who is a full-blood Indian, but only an $\frac{1}{8}$ th of any tribe in particular. Where does that child belong? This article will explore how tribes in the U.S. and Canadian First Nations deal with this question.

As we have seen, blood quantum is a North American phenomenon and primarily, a U.S. one. Within tribes using blood quantum, several variations exist. Tribes may use blood quantum to measure *Indian* ancestry, *tribal* ancestry, indigeneity, or parentage. In other words, depending on the tribe, you may be required to have any combination of Indian blood, or you may need specific tribal blood (i.e., Oneida); you may need to be from a certain place, or you may need to prove that your ancestors were Indian. Confused yet? It is mind boggling to think about all the different ways someone may 'count' as Indian.

At the most basic level, there are two types of blood rules used in tribal constitutions:

- 1) those measuring *Indian* blood quantum
- 2) those measuring *tribal* blood quantum

Tribal blood rules may require a specified degree of 'Ho-Chunk blood' or 'Menominee blood,' making the person's other tribal affiliations irrelevant. Indian blood rules (also called pan-tribal rules) allow individuals with large amounts of multi-tribal blood quantum, who may lack tribe-specific blood, to enroll.

It is interesting to see how tribal governments have changed over time when it comes to enrollment requirements. Over the past 70 years, tribal constitutions have shown a huge increase in the use of tribal blood rules, from 44% of pre-1941 constitutions to 70% today. The U.S. federal government does not make a distinction between "Indian-ness" and tribal

affiliation in the same way that many tribes do. The federal government just wants to make sure that Indian tribes are composed of Indians. The tribes, however, have become more nit-picky about how tribal members are related (i.e., kinship or shared descent) and who belongs. Many tribes, in fact, insist that applicants show genealogical ties to the community. This shift toward favoring tribal specific blood shows that tribal governments have been gradually evolving in a more conservative direction when it comes to choosing who gets to be a member and who does not.

The most frequently used Indian blood quantum is $\frac{1}{4}$, which is used by the majority of tribes today, such as the Oneida. The majority of U.S. tribes (57%) do not allow multiple tribal membership. Some will even dis-enroll you if they find out you are enrolled in another tribe.

In contrast, Canadian blood quantum rules have a stronger pan-tribal character. The vast majority of Canadian groups using blood quantum rules use Indian blood rather than tribal blood. Registered Canadian Indians may move between Bands (tribes) without changing their status. In this way, Canadian First Nations are keeping the idea of “Indian-ness” as a quality shared in common by all First Nations. Some Canadian groups define blood quantum as ‘the quantum of Indian blood in those persons who are direct descendants of aboriginal people of North America.’ These tribes begin by designating each original member as a ‘full-blood’ so that a child who has at least ‘50%’ blood quantum, effectively has at least one Indian parent. This suggests that Canadian First Nations maintain a strong concept of pan-tribal “Indian-ness,” something that U.S. tribes may want to consider.

One tribe that takes a more flexible approach to multi-tribal identity is the Quinault Nation on the Pacific coast of Washington. The tribe recognizes any individual who can verify at least one - quarter combined heritage from seven tribes (Quinault, Queets, Quileute, Hoh, Chehalis, Cowlitz, and Chinook). Individuals, who do not meet the membership criteria may apply for adoption into the Quinault Nation.

Perhaps taking a closer look at multi-tribal membership criteria is the first stepping stone on the road to creating a broader definition of belonging.

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