

## **The Use of Tribal Blood Quantum**

Tribal blood quantum is a measure used by some Native American tribes to determine an individual's degree of tribal ancestry and eligibility for tribal membership. It is typically expressed as a percentage that represents the proportion of a person's bloodline that can be traced to a specific tribe or tribes. The concept is rooted in historical attempts to quantify Native American identity for legal and administrative purposes.

Over time, Blood Quantum evolved into the standard measure for determining eligibility for land and treaty benefits. In 1934, Congress enacted the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), ostensibly aiming to reduce government interference in tribal affairs.

More than 260 tribes accepted the IRA and established membership requirements. Some based it on lineal descent from individuals listed on historic "base rolls," while others mandated a Blood Quantum of one-quarter or more. A few opted for a combination of lineal descent, residency, and/or Blood Quantum.

I predict that the utilization of Blood Quantum to determine Native American membership will carry severe consequences. Blood Quantum policies could potentially result in the Reduction of indigenous peoples. For instance, setting the blood quantum limit at one quarter for tribal enrollment, coupled with intermarriage, will eventually render natives nonexistent. Blood quantum undermines the principle of tribal sovereignty, as tribes are pressured to conform to external standards that may not align with their own cultural practices or historical methods of determining membership. Blood quantum does not account for individuals who may have a

strong cultural connection and active participation in tribal life. Blood quantum requirements can create divisions within indigenous communities. Families with varying degrees of ancestry may be treated differently based on these quantitative measures, leading to tensions and fractures within the community

In contrast to other ethnic groups, Native Americans face the unique burden of continuously proving their identity. Federal recognition as a native requires enrollment, a requirement not imposed on any other ethnicity. Unlike being White or African American, Native Americans must possess a Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood (CDIB) issued by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The question arises: what risks emerge when tribes and the federal government dictate the criteria for Native American identity?

I would personally suggest tribes use a type of holistic assessment taking into account Cultural affiliation, community engagement, and lineal descent, as an alternative to the use of blood quantum. This would provide the most flexibility when handling the various cases tribes face, while exercising our tribal sovereignty to govern as we see fit.

In summary, the criticism of blood quantum as a colonial and divisive concept stems from its historical origins, reductionist approach to identity, potential for internal divisions, exclusion of culturally connected individuals, and its impact on tribal sovereignty. I advocate for the use of a holistic assessment that takes into account various aspects of an individual's connection to the tribe as a means of determining eligibility for tribal membership.