

NARRATIVE TEXTS

Native Americans

Native Americans are descended from the first humans who probably migrated from Asia to North America, arriving on the continent by perhaps 30,000 years ago. Direct evidence places them in Texas some 12,000 years before the present. They are not and never were a single culture; they were much more diverse than the peoples of Europe. The actual number of Indians in the Texas area was never great, estimated at 45,000 before written history to only a few thousand in the mid-19th century.

In Texas at least four cultural areas of the Indian met and, to some degree, blended: Western Gulf, Southeast, Southwest, and Plains. Within these huge categories defined by Europeans were groups with wide variety in cultural patterns and languages. All were linked by trade and competition, commonalities and conflicts. They were as diverse as the lands they occupied.

With the arrival of the Spanish and, later, the relatively immense number of Anglo-American settlers, the native story becomes one of reaction. European settlement, intentionally and unintentionally, literally exterminated native cultures. "European settlement" meant land ownership, more efficient forms of farming and hunting, large numbers of people, the introduction of new, often fatal diseases, and the ability to use technology and religion to their advantage in attempts to usurp the land—backed by the cavalry and Texas Rangers. Indians were neither technologically equipped nor numerous enough to oppose the Europeans. They tried.

The Spanish, never as effective as Anglos against Indians in a military sense, nevertheless brought in the mission system in an attempt to alter native cultures. To some degree, this succeeded. Anglos were more pure conquerors who pushed the



Kickapoo family in Nacimiento, Coahuila, Mexico, c. 1900



Lindsay and Sally Poncho's wedding, c. 1894, the first Christian wedding of Alabama-Coushattas

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Indians out or killed them. Many exceptions exist; the generality was the rule.

For a short time, Texas set up reservations under state jurisdiction because Texas retained all public land when joining the United States as an independent nation. The desirability of the land soon brought the effort to an end. Natives who remained in Texas were taken into Indian Territory (future Oklahoma), driven into northern Mexico, or killed. A few adopted a profile low enough for survival. Fewer still served as Army scouts and Ranger guides, but their allegiance made little difference in the long run.

Three small groups stayed in Texas, at first on private land, then on donated or purchased land later expanded into “reservations.” None originally lived in the area of modern Texas. Fragments of Alabama and Coushatta groups still live near Woodville, and a group of Tiguas live southeast of downtown El Paso in Ysleta. Remnants of the Kickapoo tribe have been recognized as a native group and have been granted land near the Rio Grande at El Indio.

Other dispersed groups and descendants remain in Texas, a few trying to carry on the traditions of their ancestors: black Seminoles can still be found, especially in South Texas; some Cherokees live in rural East Texas, descendants of those few who successfully hid for several generations; Caddos also live in East Texas; and Yaquis still live on both sides of the Rio Grande since an earlier deportation from northwestern Mexico.

In modern times the Federal Bureau of Indian Affairs brought Indians from all over the continent to Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio. Programs of the Field Employment Assistance Office, now discarded, placed them in urban centers with the goal of their entering the world that had surrounded them.

In Texas more than 18,000 people are listed as Native American; many of these are not “native” to the immediate area.