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## Native American Population Estimates in Texas

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Below, you will find a chart showing the sizes of some of the larger Native American tribes in the area we now know as Texas. In general, all of North America was very sparsely populated at the time of contact with Europeans, but the area of Texas was especially so.

These are not the only tribes that existed in Texas around the time period of this lesson; these are simply a few of the larger ones as an example. Since these are the larger ones (and they're not very large), you can imagine that even if there were 20 more smaller ones, it would not increase the overall population that dramatically. In fact, many of the tribes in North America were very small because so many were nomadic hunter-gatherers, as opposed to Central and South America where almost all were farmers.

The numbers below are only estimates. Trying to get a handle on the true number of inhabitants in the Americas before the arrival of Europeans is a fool's errand. Why?

- Native Americans did not keep any records.
- Many tribes were nomadic hunter-gathers, which kept their numbers small.
- There were no written languages on the North American continent before contact with the Europeans.

The expert estimates may be completely accurate, or they may be off by millions. We'll never know for sure. However, even if the numbers below are under-estimated by 100x, the number of Native Americans at any given time living in the massive area that is now Texas was still relatively small. Which means there was a ton of unused land.

Pay particular attention to the years in the chart below. The time period we are talking about begins in 1821. Some of the larger numbers below are from centuries before that.

Finally, remember that these tribes were not all in Texas at the same time. The Comanche, Lipan Apache, Tonkawa, and Wichita were all not indigenous to that area. All of them arrived in Texas centuries after the Spanish. They were either forced there by warfare, naturally migrated, or came as colonizers to build an empire. In that respect, the Spanish had more of a claim on land in Texas than any of those tribes.

| Native American Population Estimates in Texas |   |                  |                     |
|---|---|------------------|---------------------|
| Tribe   | Location in Texas                         | Year             | Population Estimate |
| Jumano  | Rio Grande Valley                         | 1580             | 20,000 <sup>1</sup> |
|   |   | 1750             | Effectively zero    |
| Tigua   | Present day El Paso Texas                 | 1680             | 2000 <sup>2</sup>   |
|   |   | 1990             | 761                 |
| Lipan Apache                                  | West-central Texas                        | 1690             | 500                 |
|   |   | Today            | 4,300 <sup>3</sup>  |
| Tonkawa                                       | Plains of central and south-central Texas | 1690             | 1600 <sup>4</sup>   |
|   |   | 1884             | 92 <sup>5</sup>     |
| Comanche                                      | Texas Panhandle south to western Texas    | 1800             | 18,000 <sup>6</sup> |
|   |   | 1920             | 1,500 (U.S. Census) |
| Wichita                                       | Brazos River near present day Waco Texas  | 1600 (in Kansas) | 12,000 <sup>7</sup> |
|   |   | 1937             | 100 (U.S. Census)   |

<sup>1</sup> Anderson, *The Indiana Southwest*, p. 24

<sup>2</sup> Cannon, Cornelia James (1931) *Lazaro in the pueblos: the story of Antonio de Espejo's expedition into New Mexico* Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, OCLC 1965297

<sup>3</sup> The Official Website of the Lipan Apache Tribe <https://www.lipanapache.org/AboutUs.html>

<sup>4</sup> Texas State Historical Association <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/tonkawa-indians>

<sup>5</sup> Bolton, Herbert Eugene, ed., *Spanish Exploration in the Southwest, 1542–1706*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916, 250-267

<sup>6</sup> Britannica /<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Comanche-people>

<sup>7</sup> *Historical Atlas of Oklahoma*. By Charles Robert Goins, Danney Goble, John Wesley Morris