

American Indian Texans

Until recently, scientists thought that the first Americans followed herds of large animals as they migrated across the Bering Strait land bridge during the last Ice Age, about 12,000 years ago. But archaeologists have found new evidence that people likely migrated from East Asia much earlier than previously thought – maybe as early as 20,000 years ago. These peoples could have used the abundant coastal and ocean resources like fish, wales, seaweed, and shellfish on their travels to North and South America. As they and their descendants continued their journey, they adapted their culture to the diverse environments they encountered. Then, about 16,000 years ago, these American Indian peoples made it to the land that would be Texas.

But these people did not leave written histories for us to find. So how do we know when and how they reached Texas? There are many different ways of understanding the world and one's place in it. These are two ways to understand the past:

Native Histories

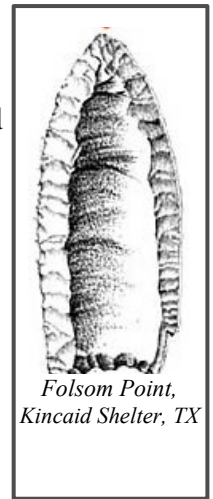
American Indian peoples pass down their knowledge of the world and their origins through oral histories, and through the art and iconography of their cultures. Many Native histories tell us that deities, spirits, or powerful animals created the first people. These powerful beings mold and create humans, who often emerge from caves or watery places within the Earth. These histories tell us that people were

Archaeology

Evidence gathered by archaeologists from sites across the Americas tells us that people were here thousands of years ago. Some of the newest clues come from sites right here in Texas! At the Gault site, just north of Austin, archaeologists have recovered hundreds of thousands of lithics (stone tools) that show Gault was an ancient American Indian camp, quarry, and workshop dating to around 16,000 years ago.



These first peoples were hunter-gatherers; they were experts at using the many resources provided by their environments to get food, clothing, and shelter. Mobile hunter-gatherer groups across Texas likely lived in extended family groups of about 100-200 people. When they arrived in the Americas, there were still large mammals like mammoths and large wild bison roaming the landscape. They created special stone tools to hunt these animals; called Clovis and Folsom points, these stone tools were hafted on to the end of a long wood spear or atlatl dart.



Throwing a dart with an atlatl. Illustration by Donald Monkman, 1996.

The Paleodiet – How do we know what they were eating?

Just like us, ancient people threw out their trash. Archaeologists today look at what was thrown out to understand what they were eating. At the Baker Cave site in west Texas, archaeologists discovered an ancient oven that preserved the remains of over **58** different species of plants and animals! By studying the remains, we know that Paleoindian people were eating a wide variety of food, including: fish, turtle, bison, birds, rabbit, camel, deer, alligator, mammoth, walnuts, prickly pear, acorns, and many more.

It is during this period that the earliest known art in North America was created. Many incised stones (where a design is cut or etched into the surface) have been found across Texas. While we cannot know for sure what these symbols meant to the ancient American Indians of Texas, this art represents a way that they expressed their identity and beliefs. This palm-sized stone (right) from the Kincaid Shelter site was carved with concentric circles, a design similar to more recent representations of the Spider Grandmother in some southwestern American Indian histories.

Over time, American Indian groups spread out across the continent – they created unique cultures, identities, and ways of life.

American Indian peoples developed new styles of tools, new food-processing technology like manos and metates (right), the bow-and-arrow, and pottery. Many groups also developed agriculture and systems of irrigation and land management. They grew maize (corn), sunflowers, beans, different types of squash and gourds, and others.

By about AD 1000, many American Indian groups were building permanent villages and cities across Texas. They developed distinct cultural traditions, including the Pueblos of far west Texas, the Caddo of east Texas, the Apache, Comanche, and Kiowa of the Great Plains region, and many more. There were hundreds of American Indian nations across the region speaking dozens of languages, with as many unique cultural identities!



Mano and Metate in Action
Crow Canyon Archaeological Center

It is important to remember that while we think of Texas with modern borders, Native American peoples are tied into much broader cultural traditions, networks, and language groups across the Americas.

In east Texas, the Caddo lived in large towns that had powerful leaders, astronomical observatories, priests, and craft specialists known for their fine pottery. They grew their own food, and were organized by kinship into three large confederacies: the Hasinai, Cadohadacho, and the Natchitoches.



The 'Grand kingdom of Texas', Map of a Caddo Town 1691

Becoming Texas

Caddo peoples, especially from the Hasinai tribe, referred to each other as *Táysha*, meaning 'friends' or 'allies'. The legend says that when the Spanish arrived, they wrote this Caddo word as *Tejas*, which eventually became the name of the state – Texas.

To the far west in the Pecos region, the Jornada Mogollon shared cultural traditions with groups in the Southwest, like the Pueblo. They built large adobe or stone houses with many attached rooms, like an apartment complex (below). They used both wild plants and grew crops of corn, chili peppers, beans, and other plants.



Other groups like the Native peoples of Antelope Creek on the plains of the Texas Panhandle constructed stone masonry structures and traded turquoise, shell, and pottery across the Southwest.

Then in the 1500s, groups like the Apache, Comanche, and other Plains Tribes began moving into the region. These tribes were nomadic, moving across the Great Plains that stretch from Canada to southern Texas following buffalo and other resources.



Along the Gulf Coast, the Karankawa and Atakapas were semi-nomadic hunter-gatherers who relied on both coastal and marine resources. Like the Caddo, the Karankawa were made up of multiple tribes that had similar customs. These groups used portable thatch structures and dugout canoes to travel up and down the coast.

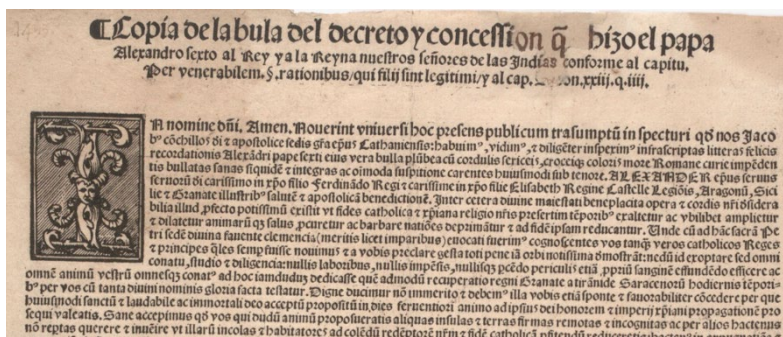


European Colonization

The first recorded encounter between American Indians and Europeans in Texas happened when Cabeza de Vaca and his crew washed up on the Galveston beach in 1528. The shipwrecked Spaniard eventually returned to Spain where he wrote a book about the people he encountered, including the Karankawa, and Tonkawan tribes.

Early Spanish conquistadores were mostly looking for gold and other precious resources. When they didn't find any in Texas, they moved on to other areas further west and south. Then, in the early 1700s the Spanish began building *presidios* (forts) and Catholic missions at strategic places across the state.

The Spanish did not just want to occupy the land, they wanted to integrate it and its people into their empire. To do this, missions were set up as a way to teach American Indian people to be Spaniards – this meant forcing Native communities to relocate and settle in permanent Spanish pueblos, submit to Spanish rule, and give up their language and religion for Spanish and Catholicism. Many Indigenous people left the missions if they could, but life in their former communities remained difficult as European colonizers continued to take over their lands.



Doctrine of Discovery

How do you claim land that people already live on? In 1493, the Catholic Pope issued a statement that said that any land not inhabited by 'Christian people' could be 'discovered,' claimed, and ruled by a Christian ruler. It also called for the active conversion of non-Christian peoples to Catholicism. European powers, and later the U.S. government, incorporated it into their laws, legalizing the theft of land from Native Americans, and their forced conversion or removal. It has since been condemned by the United Nations as a violation of human rights.

This law is still used to disenfranchise Native American communities in the U.S., and has been cited in court cases as recently as 2005.

By the 1800s, American Indian populations in Texas had dramatically declined because of European caused epidemics, famines, conflicts with other American Indian groups, as well as slavery, forced removals, and exploitation by European invaders. During this time, European colonizers thought it was their duty to change indigenous cultures – they forced Native Americans to give up their languages, religions, and customs.

But many Native American groups resisted and fought back. The Comanche were especially well known for their military prowess, raiding and attacking the invading settlements across the state. When Texas won its independence from Mexico in 1836, the new government went to war with the Comanche and Plains Tribes, and over the following decades forcibly removed and expelled most other groups – including the Cherokee, Kichai, Waco, Tonkawa, and Caddo, among others – to reservations in Oklahoma. This process of the U.S. government terminating American Indian cultures continued in earnest into the 1960s, and in many respects continues today.



Comanche Meeting the Dragons
George Catlin, 1834



Nine of the original seventeen 4th Signal Company Comanche Code Talkers
 Front row L-R: Forrest Kassanavoid, Charles Chibitty, Larry Saupitty, Roderick Red Elk
 Rear row L-R: Edward Nahquaddy, Haddon Codynah, Ralph Wahnee, Willis Yackeshi, Perry Noyobad

Speaking in Code

Many Native American languages, including Comanche and Apache, were used in World War I and World War II to send encoded messages to allies during combat. This code system was based on vocabulary from multiple languages – most famously Navajo – and were therefore unbreakable by European Axis forces. There were multiple, complex systems of coding in use during the World Wars and required quick thinking on the battlefield. Native-speaking service members known as “Code Talkers” were invaluable to the success of the Allies in both World Wars.

For more information, visit:

<https://americanindian.si.edu/static/education/codetalkers/html/chapter4.html>

Despite this history of conflict with European colonization and disenfranchisement, Native Americans play important roles in politics, the military, arts, and economy. For example, American Indians have served in the United States military since the Revolutionary War. In World War II alone, 44,000 Native American men and women served in the United States military. Native American service members have played integral roles in each war and have earned numerous honors. Today, more than 24,000 Native American veterans call Texas home.

Despite these contributions, American Indians were not legally recognized as U.S. citizens or allowed to vote until the 1924 Indian Citizenship Act. Like the wider Civil Rights Movement, the 1960s saw a renewed push for Native American Civil Rights. Founded in 1968, the American Indian Movement (AIM) was a national movement that fought for equal status and self-determination for Native American peoples. This movement fought for human rights, including economic independence, restoration of legal rights, and the protection and restoration of tribal lands, religions, and languages.



Native American activism continues today as groups fight for clean water, access to sacred land, and the protection of burial sites and sacred lands. Across Texas, indigenous groups are resisting the US-Mexico border wall, which would confiscate and desecrate Native lands and sacred sites, as well as severely impact water access and the environment.

There were more than 400 native groups living in what is now Texas at the time of Spanish contact. Descendants of these groups continue to practice and preserve their heritage today. Across the state, descendant groups participate in traditional ceremonies, speak and revitalize native languages, and teach all Texans the history of American Indian peoples of Texas, past and present.



Photo: Kin Man Hui, San Antonio Express News