

Distribution of Indians in Oklahoma¹

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Just how many Indians were living in Oklahoma in 1950 is hard to ascertain as the Bureau of the Census and the Bureau of Indian Affairs did not agree upon the total Indian population of the state. The figure released by the Bureau of Indian Affairs was considerably higher than that shown by the Bureau of the Census. Each Bureau has a different definition as to who is an Indian. For the purposes of this paper, however, the figures of the Bureau of the Census will be used. Indian, as defined by this Bureau, includes (1) fullblooded Indians, (2) persons of mixed white and Indian blood if they are enrolled on an Indian reservation or agency roll, (3) persons of mixed blood if the proportion of Indian blood is one-fourth or more, or (4) if they are regarded as Indian in the community in which they are living. In 1950, according to the Bureau of the Census, there were 53,769 Indians living in Oklahoma. With the exception of Arizona, this was a larger Indian population than that of any other state.

TABLE I. INDIAN POPULATIONS

Group	1950	1955*
Five Civilized Tribes	37,341	40,000
Osage	1,289	1,500
Southern Plains	14,748	16,300
Non-Agency Indians	391	400
Totals	53,769	58,200

* Estimate made by the Bureau of the Census.

Between 1940 and 1950, as recorded by the Bureau of the Census, the number of Indians in Oklahoma decreased from approximately 63,200 to 53,800, or a loss of 9,400 persons. Since 1950, however, it is believed that the Indian population in the state is increasing (Table I). In 1955 the Bureau of the Census estimated the Indian population of Oklahoma as 58,200, or an increase of about 4,400 in five years.

In 1950 Indians were living in sixty-seven of the seventy-seven counties of Oklahoma, the counties having no Indian population being in the north western or southwestern parts of the state. Indian population in the counties varied considerably, ranging from about twenty-five in Texas, Greer, Jackson, Tillman, and Logan counties to more than 2,500 in Seminole, Cherokee, Adair, and Delaware counties. Distribution within the counties, as well as within the various parts of the state, bears little, if any, relationship to the factors that usually determine population distribution. Many of the present day Indians of Oklahoma are living on land selected for, not by, their ancestors. Thus the areas occupied by the Indians are frequently places having poor soil and rough topography.

As shown on the map, there are three large and several smaller groupings of Indian population. The Cherokees are clustered in the Ozark Plateau section of Oklahoma, especially in Adair, Cherokee, and Delaware counties, which is a part of the original allotment given this nation. The

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second largest concentration is in Seminole County and a westward extension therefrom along the valley of the North Canadian River. The Seminole Indians dominate the Indian population of Seminole County, but the westward extension is made up largely of Kickapoo, Shawnee, and Indians of other smaller tribes. The third largest area of Indian concentration is in Caddo and Comanche counties. Here the Indians of the Southern Plains group — Kiowa, Comanche, Wichita, Kiowa-Apache — dominate since this area was a part of their former reservation.

Among the smaller areas having large numbers of Indians are (1) southern Tulsa County where there is a mixture of Creek, Cherokee, and others, (2) McIntosh County which is dominantly Creek, (3) the Ouachita Mountains of northern McCurtain and southern LeFlore counties in which many Choctaws live, (4) northeastern Kay County where many Kaws and a few members of smaller Indian tribes live, and (5) Rogers and Mayes counties that have many Cherokees. The county having the largest Indian population is Cherokee, but the county having the greatest number of Indians per square mile is Adair with an average of 4.4.

The movement of entire nations and tribes to restricted areas and reservations produced some unique settlement patterns. The term "Cultural Fault Line" as applied by Hewes is very apt. The common boundary between Oklahoma and Arkansas is a good example. Adair County, Oklahoma, in 1950, had an Indian population of 2,530, but Washington County, just across the state line in Arkansas, had only thirty-one Indians. A similar situation existed along the southern boundary of the old Cherokee Outlet where no tribes or nations were settled. Here, Major and Woodward counties have no Indians at all living in them but Dewey and Blaine counties, immediately to the south, have many Cheyennes in their population since they were a part of the original Cheyenne Reservation. Thus, even today, the boundaries of the former reservations form noticeable "Fault Lines."

The 1950 census classified 34.3 per cent of the Oklahoma Indians as rural, non-farm and 23.8 per cent as urban. This was a distinct change from the 1940 census which classified 65.0 per cent as rural, farm. Much of this shift was probably the result of war time conditions. Younger Indians going into the armed services, or moving to the cities for factory employment, sent money home to the older folks. The older Indians continued to live in the rural areas but no longer farmed since the money received from the younger ones, plus state or Federal old age assistance, gave them enough income to care for their meager needs.

Like their white neighbors the Indians are also moving from rural to urban areas. In 1940 less than 10 per cent of the Indians were classed as urban. In 1950 the number of Indians living in urban areas in Oklahoma was 12,808 or 23.8 per cent of the total. Indians are now living in all the major cities of Oklahoma and many of the smaller cities and towns of the state, and Oklahoma had a larger number of Indians, 7,399, living in cities than any other state. Oklahoma City and Tulsa each had over 1,000 Indians in 1950. Seventeen cities in Oklahoma had Indian populations in excess of 100. Durant, with 607 Indians, or 5.7 per cent of its population, had a higher percentage of Indian population than any other city in the United States. Present indications are that in the future the Indians will continue to move to the urban areas. A recent study of Anadarko showed approximately 300 Indians living in that city, which, in 1950, had less than 100. Perhaps, in a few generations, the "Cultural Fault Lines" will disappear and the Indian population will become more evenly distributed over the state.

