

At the time of the first European settlements in North America, the Indian population of what is now Canada was, according to the best estimate of anthropologists, about 200,000. Shortly after the arrival of Europeans, the Indian population started to decline until it became a common belief that the Indians were a dying race. After dwindling for almost half a century, their numbers began to grow again, until today there is a total Indian population of more than 288,938.

There are 568 Indian communities, or "bands", in Canada. With the exception of certain nomadic groups inhabiting the outlying northern regions, these bands are located on 2,196 "reserves", varying in size from a few acres to more than 500 square miles, set aside by the Canadian Government for the use and benefit of Indians. About 30 per cent of the total Indian population have chosen to live off reserves as members of the general community. Successful farmers, ranchers, lumbermen, doctors, dentists, lawyers, teachers, nurses, clergymen, soldiers, industrial workers, stenographers, mechanics, salesmen and tradesmen are numbered in the Indian work force—both on and off reserves.

Although the origin of the Indians remains uncertain, anthropologists believe that they came to America in successive migrations in prehistoric times from Northern Asia, probably by way of the Bering Strait.

The Indians are not a single people. They are divided into ten basic linguistic groups, which are, in turn, subdivided into tribes with their own dialects. Four linguistic groups are found east of the Rocky Mountains—Algonkian, Athapaskan, Iroquoian and Siouan—and six in British Columbia—Kootenayan, Salishan, Wakashan, Tsimshian, Haida and Tlinkit. Some Athapaskan-speaking Indian bands also live in the interior of British Columbia.

Indians of Algonkian origin are the most numerous, occupying an area from the Atlantic Ocean to the Rockies; they include such well-known tribes as the Micmacs of Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, the Montagnais of Quebec, and the Ojibway, Cree and Blackfoot of Ontario and the Prairie Provinces.

Iroquoian peoples, including the Hurons, are found in Ontario and Quebec, Athapaskans inhabit the Yukon and Northwest Territories, while Siouan tribes inhabit parts of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta.