

Indigenous Indians Of Brazil

Europeans first hit on the country in 1500 when the Portuguese navigator Pedro Alvares Cabral sailed into what is now Porto Seguro. It is unknown how many Indians were in the territory at the time, but estimates vary from 1 million through 10 million, speaking 1.300 different languages (according to some linguistic experts). When the first colonizers landed in Brazil lots of native Brazilians died of what are considered today as banal diseases such as flu, measles and pertussis (whooping cough). Other diseases took their toll too, like tuberculosis and smallpox, which eradicated entire aboriginal communities.

The contact with "white man's culture" brought some important changes to their primitive habits but worse, the tribes which mainly lived on the east coast "the tupi language speakers" were killed, dominated or fled inland to avoid contact.

Today only the Funiôs in Pernambuco, the Maxakali in Minas Gerais and the Xokleng in Santa Catarina still preserve their own languages. It's important to realize they are not Tupi languages, (as mentioned above) but belong to three language families linked to the main language Macro-Jê.

The Guarani's who used to live in the south and southeastern parts of Brazil moved to the west and still preserve their original language too. Some other ethnic groups from the northeast and southeast lost their cultural languages altogether and today only speak Portuguese, preserving just a few words for rituals.

Today the aboriginal population is up to 460 thousand people from 225 different tribes but is only 0,25% of the Brazilian population. There are however other groups petitioning for recognition as Indians. This is in addition to 63 nomad Indian tribes (from differing groups) which are known but have no contact with white civilization. These groups are in the states of; Amazonas, Pará, Acre, Mato Grosso, Rondônia e Goiás.

And finally, Brazil now has its own law to protect the Indians "Estatuto do Índio (Law number 6.001, of 19.12.1973)"

The law is a welcome addition to the Brazilian Constitution — arguably a little late, but then again, on this occasion perhaps it's a case of better late than never!