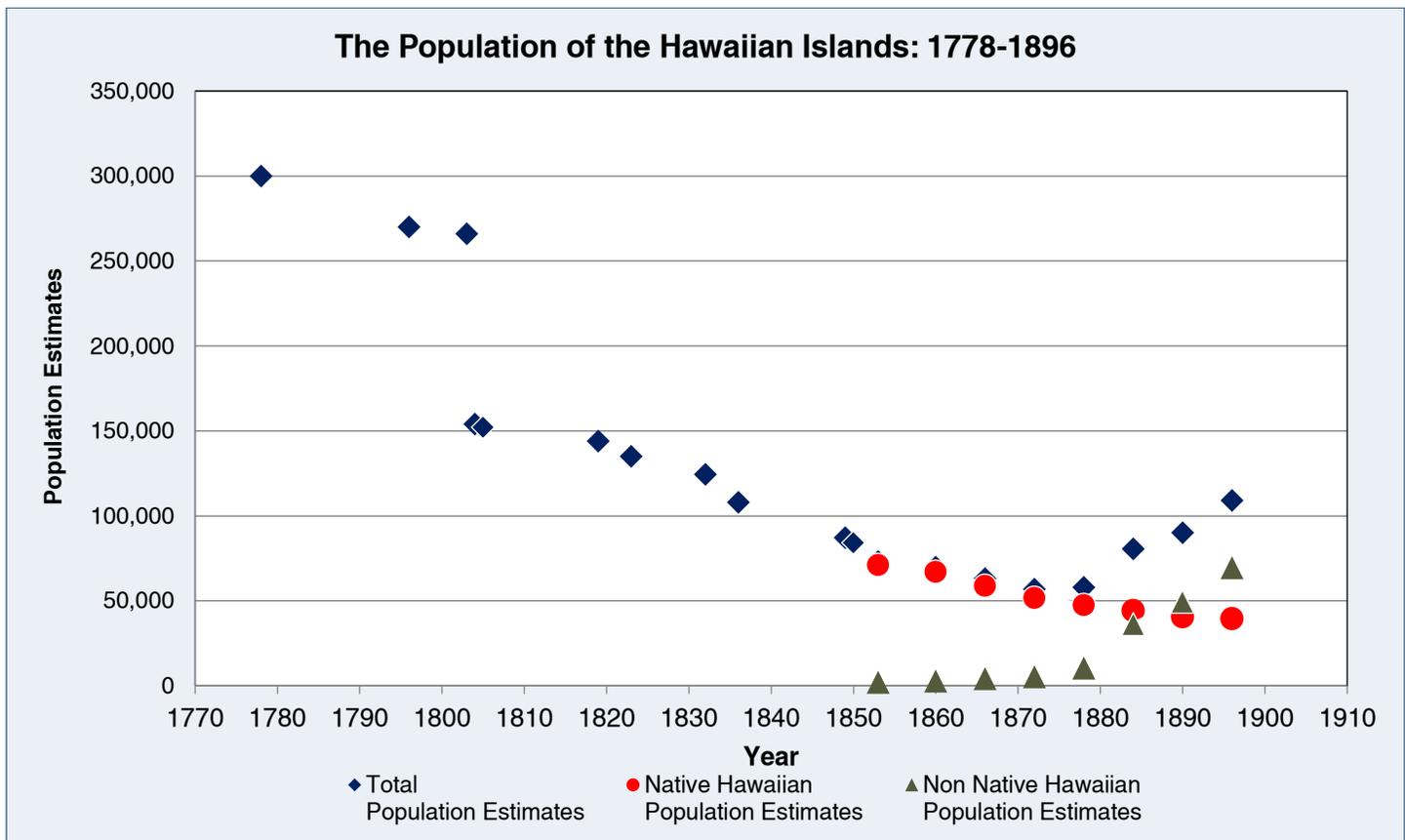


# TRENDS: Demography

## Estimated Population of the Hawaiian Islands: 1778-1896



**Source:** Robert C. Schmitt. *Demographic Statistics of Hawaii: 1778-1965*. (Honolulu, 1968). Robert C. Schmitt. *Historical Statistics of Hawaii*. (Honolulu, 1977).

It is not known when the first people arrived on the islands, one theory states that the first Polynesians arrived in Hawai'i sometime during the 4th century. What is known is that human habitation of what would one day be known as the Hawaiian Islands began with a small group of people who sailed there from the South Pacific. Over time the population increased as other Polynesians left their home islands and migrated north. They not only brought with them the necessities for survival, the skills, the abilities, the culture and the heritage to build the foundation of a society.

How many people inhabited the islands at the time of European contact is also not known. What is known that the Native Hawaiian people have endured numerous devastating hardships and catastrophic events that have shaped and reshaped Native Hawaiian society and culture.

The earliest account of a large-scale statistical census conducted in the islands comes from a *mo'olelo* (historical legend). According to accounts it occurred, circa 1500, on the "Plain of Numbering", located in the Kona area on the western coast of the island of Hawai'i. In one version of narrative, *ali'i* (chief) 'Umi-a-Li'loa had each person from the districts he conquered deposited a stone (the size and weight determined by the person's carrying capacity). While the one-stone-one-person methodology does not conform to contemporary

statistical design, modeling and analysis methods utilized by the US Census Bureau, it was a beginning. The first US Census would not occur until 1790, though the US Census Bureau would not be created until 1902.

With the arrival of missionaries from New England in the 1820s, came a series of enumerations, collectively known as the “Missionary census.” The missionaries had a need to count the population, in order to, measure the scope of the work that would be required to persuade or convert the “natives” to their faith.

By the late 1800s, Hawai‘i had a western style government, addressing the problems of the day in a western style manner. To that end they need data on their population, hence a census. As in contemporary times, a census is a procedure that acquires information about people in a given population, and the data collected is used to impact the design and implementation of policies and laws in governmental sectors including education, housing, economics and health.

With the overthrow of the Native Hawaiian Government in 1893, a new western style and controlled government, the Republic of Hawai‘i, emerged and continued in the enumeration of the people. In 1898, the islands were incorporated into the United States as the Territory of Hawai‘i. Two years later, Hawai‘i became a participant in the US Census.

Despite its limitations the past censuses of Hawai‘i’s population show that the population in Hawai‘i was steadily decreasing. The population increase during the end of the 1800s was largely due to the increasing non-Hawaiian population. During the same time, the Native population continued to decrease.

The increasing western influence in the Hawaiian Islands had a devastating effect on the Native population. The introduction of Western disease directly decimated the local population. There were waves of epidemics of Western diseases. Those who survived had to face the other impacts of westernization.

With a growing western style economy, a rapidly developing western style education system, and the adaptation of a western system of government, Native Hawaiians quickly lost the ability to continue their traditional practice of sustainability. As Native Hawaiians were drawn into a western life style, survival destined them to adapting the new western practices. Salary based employment and western housing are two of the major issues concerning economic self-sufficiency in contemporary Native Hawaiians.

The loss of traditional diet, lifestyle, and health care put Native Hawaiians at greater risk. This risk stems from high economic and cultural stress, lifestyle and risk behaviors, and late or lack of access to health care. Accordingly, Native Hawaiians a high incidence of diseases and ailments, early disability, and premature death

**For further information on Hawai‘i early population see Demography’s report, *Native Hawaiian Population Enumerations in Hawai‘i*, at [www.oha.org/research](http://www.oha.org/research).**

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For additional information visit the Native Hawaiian Data Book: [www.ohadatabook.com](http://www.ohadatabook.com)

For additional research reports see: [www.oha.org/research](http://www.oha.org/research)

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