Native Americans of 1770

California was once home to the largest and most diverse indigenous populations in the Americas. Most people lived where fish, wildlife, and wood were plentiful — along the coast, the Central Valley, the Sierra Nevada foothills, San Francisco Bay, and the coastal plains of Southern California. Smaller populations were found in arid and cold regions, such as northeast California, the Great Basin, and the southeastern deserts. Although groups living along the Colorado and Owens Rivers cultivated crops, most California Indians relied on hunting and gathering. The territory and trade routes for California Indians extended beyond the borders that exist today with the states of Oregon, Nevada, and Arizona, and the country of Mexico.

Image below: It is estimated that 300,000 Native Americans were living in California when the first Europeans arrived. This portrait of five Native Americans was made by a Russian artist in 1822.