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# **Native Americans and the U.S. Census: A Brief Historical Survey**

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## **Abstract**

This article traces the history of the enumeration of American Indians by the U.S. Census Bureau and its predecessors. It considers the social and political background of the census and the reasons that Native Americans were not counted by the census until 1890. It also examines the changes in the enumeration and definition of Native Americans—key concepts needed to provide effective reference service for users of Census Bureau data.

## **Introduction**

When the Census Bureau (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000a) released the first results of Census 2000, it billed itself as “The Longest Continuous Scientific Project in American Democracy.” In many respects, it is indeed a scientific project. It began, however, as a political project. Since 1790, when the United States made the first official count of its population, the very act of quantifying the population has conferred an air of scientific accuracy and objectivity on what was and continues to be a political process. Although a high value is placed on seemingly objective numbers, it is important that data users understand that census publications are artifacts of changing social and political values rather than objective statements of reality. Particularly in the early years of the census, the data on the racial composition of the population are severely limited and flawed by social, political, and cultural conceptions. Most social scientists maintain that race is an ill-defined attribute that has been inconsistently applied. Race is a social construct, a fluid concept that is shaped and reshaped by current events and history. In a recent article, Eschbach, Supple and Snipp (1999) stated that, “To the degree that racial boundaries are fluid, membership in a racial category is the outcome of a social process of identification—race is no longer a fixed attribute” (p. 35). A close examination of the history of Native Americans (herein after referred to as Indians)<sup>1</sup> and the U.S. Census supports that assertion.

## **The constitution and origin of the census**

In 1787, the framers of the constitution met in Philadelphia to revise the Articles of Confederation. They produced a document, the Constitution of the United States, which has seen little revision—and much interpretation—since its ratification. The constitution is, in many ways, a model of brevity and simplicity; it established three branches of government: the legislative, executive, and judicial—and laid out the powers and duties of each branch. Although the document is brief, whole institutions have developed from a few sentences and even from a few words. The U.S. Census Bureau is one such institution. Although the Bureau was not established

as a permanent office until 1902, the constitution required that the federal government conduct a census of population every 10 years. Article I, Section 2 of the constitution states:

Representatives and direct taxes shall be apportioned among the several states which may be included within this union, according to their respective numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole number of free persons, including those bound to service for a term of years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other Persons. The actual Enumeration shall be made within three years after the first meeting of the Congress of the United States, and within every subsequent term of ten years, in such manner as they shall by law direct.

In its history of population and housing questions, the Census Bureau provides a one-paragraph explanation of the enormous social and political changes that have occurred in the United States since these 94 words were written:

In subsequent decades, the practice of “Service for a Term of Years” died out. “Indians not taxed” were those not living in settled areas and paying taxes; by the 1940's, all American Indians were considered to be taxed. The Civil War of 1861–65 ended slavery (abolished legally through the 13th Amendment in 1865), and the 14th Amendment to the constitution, ratified in 1868, officially ended Article I's three-fifths rule. Thus, the original census requirements were modified. Direct taxation based on the census never became practical (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1989, p. 1).

To understand the data (or lack thereof) on American Indians, it is important to understand the history of these changes. In a history of the U.S. Census, Anderson (1988) observed that the constitution provided for a “completely new, theoretically complex, and breathtakingly innovative national governmental structure” (p. 1). The creation of the census was one such innovation: It apportioned political power and taxation among the states. With the ratification of the constitution, the United States became the first nation to institute a census and to use it to apportion political representation. Anderson states that although this was a new concept, it was, unlike other ideas embodied in the constitution, a comparatively uncontroversial innovation. According to historians Cassedy, 1969, and Cohen, 1982, the United States was formed as a new idea was taking hold in Western thought—that mathematics could be applied to questions of policy<sup>2</sup>. Although counting and numbers were first applied to science and then to commercial transactions, seventeenth-century thinkers began to develop new uses for numeric information.

Gradually, an idea emerged that numbers were inherently more objective, and thus truer, than qualitative descriptions of people and events. Since many colonies were primarily commercial enterprises, they were early adopters of numeric methods. From the earliest settlements, the European colonizers of America used numbers to describe both the continent and their activities on it. The colonies prepared extensive reports on conditions in America for European powers. Cassedy (1969) notes,

Every patron, explorer, and colonial governor, whatever his nationality, quickly learned that he must gather quantitative as well as qualitative data about his discoveries or

domains if he was to hope for continued support or additional settlers for the new colonies (p. 3).

Thus, as a group, the colonial peoples of the Americas were predisposed to use and value numerical data about population and the economy. Numbers were used to measure the progress of national development.<sup>3</sup> The fledgling nation adopted a “modern practice”<sup>4</sup> and applied it to a distribution of power among the states—apportionment based on population.

The constitution, albeit “completely new,” still carried relics of the recent American past. In particular, the constitution was a product of its times in that it identified three population groups: “free persons” (the largely White European Americans), “Indians not taxed,” and “three-fifths of all other persons” (the Black slave population). In her history of the U.S. Census, Margo J. Anderson observed that the apportionment rule built into the census “a tradition of differentiating between these three great elements of the population. Henceforth national policy would be conceived in relation to these categories” (p. 12). This differentiation between population groups, a reflection of contemporary political values, created persistent problems for the United States. In its statement on race, the American Anthropological Association (2000) observed that historic American practices of differentiating between races “magnified the differences among Europeans, Africans, and Indians, established a rigid hierarchy of socially exclusive categories and underscored and bolstered unequal rank and status differences, and provided the rationalization that the inequality was natural or God-given.” Although seriously flawed, the reasons for the differentiation between free and slave populations were fairly obvious. The rationale for excluding Indians is notably more subtle.

The United States inherited the concept of establishing treaties with the Indians as sovereign nations from its European colonizers. A treaty was a contract between the United States and a sovereign Indian nation. Much of modern Indian law derives from this tradition. On the surface, the concept of relations between sovereign nations appears to be a humane and rational approach to relations between immigrant Europeans and the indigenous American population. According to historians Deloria (1974) and Johansen (1998) a treaty was a sophisticated and legal form of land grabbing that was legitimized by the “Doctrine of Discovery”—a European legal opinion that held that, because Indians had souls, the largely Christian colonizers could only gain title to Native American lands by treaty or by “just war.”

By negotiating treaties with the indigenous populations, the European immigrants could, in their own minds, legitimately gain title to Indian lands. With the phrase Indians “not taxed,” the constitution referred to those Indians living under their own governments in sparsely settled areas of the United States. As such, they were not recognized as citizens of the United States for purposes of taxation and representation. Although individual Indians became citizens by various means, it was not until the passage of the Indian Citizenship Act in 1924, that all Indians born within the territorial limits of the United States were made citizens. In 1940, the issue was finally laid to rest when Robert Jackson, the Attorney General, issued an opinion that all Indians were subject to taxation (Jackson, 1940).

## **Numbers and social policy**

Although the concept of a census was not controversial, expanding the census beyond its original, narrow boundaries proved to be problematic. James Madison successfully introduced an expansion in the scope of the original census when he persuaded Congress to distinguish between free White males over and under the age of 16. According to Cohen (1982), the division of free White males over and under the age of 16 identified the most important groups—the voters, the workers, and potential soldiers—concepts that Congress could understand. Congress, however, could not understand the need for data on occupations. To Madison, the answer was obvious, as shown by a sentence quoted by Cohen, “In order to accommodate our laws to the real situation of our constituents, we ought to be acquainted with that situation” (p. 159). Gradually, however, Congress was persuaded that it needed additional data to formulate national policy.

If numbers can be used to formulate policy, then particular numbers only become important when a policy issue looms on the horizon. Although early colonial settlers attempted to estimate the size of Indian populations,<sup>5</sup> getting an accurate count of the Indian population did not become important until the Indians were perceived to be a problem. Indians had been ceding various lands by treaty since the founding of the United States. After the War of 1812, small numbers of Indians moved westward. This westward movement, however, did not keep pace with the demand for lands held by Indians. In 1830, Congress narrowly passed an act that allowed for the removal of Indians to territorial areas west of the Mississippi. Known as the Removal Act of 1830, it empowered the president to force the exchange of Indian lands in any state or territory. Large indigenous populations were forcibly relocated to the Indian Territory in Oklahoma. Many of the Indians removed under the act had intermarried with local populations of European and African Americans and adopted a European lifestyle. According to one commentator, the government was indifferent to the fact that many of the families “forced to abandon their homes were nearly as European American genetically as their non-reservation neighbors” (Johansen, 1998, p. 274).

## **Early census data**

As westward expansion continued, the demand for knowledge about Indian populations increased. When Congress passed the appropriation bill for the Indian Department in 1846, it directed Indian agents to take a census of Indians in their respective districts and to gather any statistical information that may be required by the Secretary of War (An act making appropriations for the current and contingent expenses of the Indian Department, 1846). The Census of 1850 was the first to include information on Indian populations. This census included a one-page summary of the Indian population for the years 1789, 1825, and 1853. At best, the data, gathered from the *American State Papers* and reports from the Indian Office, are estimates. For example, the table lists the population of several tribes that resided in Louisiana in 1825. The Louisiana population figures are left blank for the year 1853; the table includes a note that, “It is believed that there but few Indians now in Louisiana” (U. S. Census Office, 1853, p. xciv). Populations for the territories are listed as estimates. Although the estimates show an increase in population from 1825 to 1853, territorial expansion accounted for this increase. The population

of specific tribes, such as the Winnebagoes, the Catawbas, the Osage, and others, declined from 1825 to 1853. After 1850, the census began to include data on the Indian population within the United States although the quality of the information and level of detail varied from census to census.

The Eighth Census (U.S. Census Office, 1864) contains data on the age and sex of the taxed Indian population within the states and territories. To compile the data, the census asked marshals (the census takers) to determine the status of each Indian. If, in the judgment of the marshal, the person had renounced tribal rule and exercised the rights of a citizen, then that individual should be included in the total population with a notation of “Ind.” opposite the name. These population totals are available for counties, states, and territories by age. A closer look at the data is revealing. In 1860, California had the largest population of taxed Indians. The marshals in some parts of California apparently took particular care in enumeration. The table that lists the population of cities, towns, and other subdivisions provides two additional population breakdowns. The marshals noted whether a person was “White,” “free-colored,” “Indian,” “half-breed,” or “Asiatic” (U.S. Census Office 1864, pp. 29-32). The tables for California are more detailed than most. The data for several other states with small populations of “taxed” Indians, for example, do not include separate tables for the Indian population. The numbers are only included in the aggregate totals under the heading “Civilized Indians by Age and Sex” U.S. Census Office 1864, pp.596-597). Their numbers ranged from two Indians in Mississippi to 17,798 in California. The entire 1860 census counted a total of 44,020 taxed Indians.

By 1870, matters became more complicated. The phrase “Indians not taxed” puzzled even the census. Francis A. Walker, Superintendent of the Census of 1870, lamented that:

In the absence of any constitutional, legal, or judicial definition of the phrase “Indians not taxed” within the Constitution or the census law of 1850, it has been held for census purposes to apply only to Indians maintaining their tribal relations and living upon Government reservations (Walker, 1872, p. xii.).

Thus, if an Indian lived outside of a reservation, he or she was generally considered to be taxed. However, who was an Indian—taxed or untaxed? The Indian population was in decline and marriage among the races was fairly common. Was a person of mixed parentage White, Indian, or Black? Walker (1872) outlined the options: to assign race based on the “condition” of the father or the mother; to assign race based on the “superior or inferior blood”; or to assign race by “the habits, tastes, and associations of the half-breed” (p. xiii). Walker believed that the latter was the most logical and least cumbersome choice. If a person of mixed race lived among Whites and adopted their “habits of life and methods of industry,” they were to be counted as White (p. xiii). Another person of similar ancestry, living in a community of Indians, was counted as Indian. The first alternative—the “condition” of the father or the mother was particularly problematic. During the era of slavery, if the condition of the mother was “slave,” then the child was considered a slave. Walker was not apparently bothered by a distinction

between “superior or inferior blood.” Although he does not explicitly state this, one can safely assume that White blood was considered superior to Indian or Black blood.

When it was published, the Census of 1870 contained a table entitled “Table of True Population” (U.S. Census Office, 1872, p. xvii) that included data on all population segments. The data on Indians were further subdivided into Indians “sustaining tribal relations” and “out of tribal relations.” The data on Indians “sustaining tribal relations” consist of enumerations of Indians on reservations and estimates of total populations on reservations and those maintaining a nomadic lifestyle. The table of “True Population” for the states and territories lists a total population of 38,925,508, including 357,981 Indians maintaining tribal relations. The official population count of the states for reapportionment was 38,558,371.

During the 19th century, the territorial limits of the United States expanded dramatically as the population grew and moved westward. In an effort to make sense of these changes, the Census of 1880 includes graphics to illustrate the “progress of the nation” (U.S. Census Office, 1883, p. xi).

It documented from whence the population came and to where it was going. The census provided elaborate data on the nativity and countries of origin of the White population and the density of population by decennial census. The printed reports included beautifully colored maps of population density and population distribution that documented the inexorable westward spread of the population. In addition, the reports provided a variety of data on the physical and climatic features of the country linked to theories of settlement. For example, it attributes several “Vacant Spaces on the Map of Population” (1883, p. xxi) to the presence of swampy lands or severe climate. Although Indian reservations are marked on many of the colored maps, the report fails to document the Indian population in the same detail as its predecessor of 1870. One table lists the “Sex of the Colored, Chinese and Japanese, and Civilized Indian Population, with General Nativity” (1883, pp. 544–545). “General nativity” distinguished between “native” and “foreign-born” populations of civilized Indians. The report provides detailed data on the age, sex, and nativity of the White population, but it cumulates data on Black, Chinese, Japanese, and “civilized Indian” populations under the umbrella heading “colored.” Paucity of the data aside, then, as now, the census numbers were newsworthy. Sherman Day reviewed the California Indian census figures for the *Overland Monthly*, a periodical self-described as “Devoted to the Development of the Country.” Day (1883) believed that improved statistics would help solve the “Indian problem” (p. 465) in California. In particular, he believed that government, armed with more comprehensive information, could educate and integrate the Indians of California. For his article, Day augmented information from the census with numbers gathered from reports of the Office of Indian Affairs. In addition, he urged local editors to publish “such additional facts as may come within their reach” (p. 472). He regarded the exclusion of Indian population data from the reports as “monomania in the Census Office” (p. 466). In particular, he scoffed at Walker’s attempts to explain the exclusion of nontaxed Indians—comparing their exclusion unfavorably with the inclusion of other noncitizens, such as Chinese immigrants. Day did not elaborate on the nature of the “Indian problem.”

The Census of 1880 introduced a special enumeration schedule for the Indian Division that could be used to measure the degree to which an Indian had adopted a European way of life. For example, it asks if a person was a chief or war chief, wore citizen's dress, was supported by civilized industries in whole or part, or was supported by hunting, fishing, or gathering. It also included a complex rubric for racial identification. The enumerators needed to distinguish between full-blood tribal members and individuals of mixed racial or tribal origin.<sup>6</sup> Although the schedule asked for a great deal of detail, obtaining it was not always easy or even possible.<sup>7</sup> Language and culture proved to be significant barriers to a precise count. Many Indians refused to participate in the census. Conditioned by history to believe that the federal government always and automatically lied to Indians, many were fearful that the government would use the information to force a new religion onto Indian tribes.

Conflict between Indian and White populations increased as Indians were squeezed into ever smaller areas of the West. The strategy of removing Indians farther to the west was no longer effective when White populations were established throughout the area. The Indian reservations, once outside the "settled" areas of the contiguous United States, became prime real estate. In 1887, Congress passed the General Allotment (Dawes) Act. Under its terms, heads of families or single individuals over the age of 18 could hold personal title to an allotment of land from the lands held in trust as a reservation. The allotted land was to be held in trust for a period of 25 years before it was eligible for sale.<sup>8</sup> With an allotment of land came citizenship. The total acreage of Indian lands continued to decline as lands once held in trust for Indian tribes became eligible for sale by individual owners. Although New Mexico and Arizona were not admitted into the union until 1912, the frontier had ceased to exist by 1890. In the introduction to the Census of 1890, the superintendent wrote:

Up to and including 1880 the country had a frontier of settlement, but at present the unsettled area has been so broken into isolated bodies of settlement that there can hardly be said be a frontier line. In the discussion of its extent, its westward movement, etc., it cannot, therefore, any longer have a place in the census reports(U.S. Census Office, 1892, p. xlviii).

### **Purity of blood**

With the passage in 1887 of the General Allotment (Dawes) Act, the United States government institutionalized the distinction between full- and mixed-blood Indians. To receive an allotment, Indians had to become enrolled members of their respective tribes.<sup>9</sup> To enroll in a tribe, an individual needed to prove a certain degree (purity) of Indian blood. To statisticians and social scientists of the day, these distinctions were important. Boas (1899) commented on the need to gather data that would help determine the success or failure of the government's Indian policies. He thought that better data would permit researchers to gauge the effects of land allotments, Indian education, and intermarriage between Indians and other races. According to Boas, it was a commonly held belief that, "half-breeds, the descendants of Indians and whites or of Indians and Negroes, are much inferior in physique, in ability, and in character, to full-bloods" (p. 51). Boas complained about the lack of detailed statistical information needed to refute or affirm this



opinion. Although this hypothesis is now regarded as absurd, the degree of Indian blood concept continues to play an important role in Indian law and tribal membership requirements.

### **The Census of 1890 and beyond**

For the 1890, Eleventh Census, the government produced its first full-scale reports on the Indian population. The introduction to the report on Indians taxed and not taxed includes a review of earlier data on Indian populations and concedes that the data were inaccurate. To illustrate this point, the office cited the Census of 1850 that estimated the Indian population of California to be 32,321—a precise-sounding number that was revised to an estimate of 100,000 only 3 years later (U.S. Census Office, 1894, p. 15).

The various reports from the 1890s (See Table 1) contain data, historical reviews of Indian tribes, essays on U.S. policy toward Indians, and descriptions of the condition of the Indians in the various states and territories. Lavishly illustrated with photographs, maps, and reproductions of paintings, the various reports pay close attention to evidence of “civilization.” The publications unabashedly espouse alternating and sometimes contradictory points of view. On some pages, they celebrate Indian “progress” toward “civilization.” On other pages, the reports lament conditions among the Indians. For example, although the publications include photographs of Indians in both western and native dress and depict both westernized and native modes of living, many of the illustrations seem to have been chosen to illustrate Indian “progress.” On one page, formally posed schoolgirls in fashionable clothing gaze at the camera (U.S. Census Office, 1894, pl. facing 264). On another page, Miss Ross, identified as a “half-blood Cherokee,” wears a white evening gown and carries a bouquet (U.S. Census Office, 1894, pl. facing 292).

Table 1.		
Special Census Reports on Indians		
Date	Title	Superintendent of documents number
1892	<i>Indians. Eastern Bank of Cherokees of North Carolina</i> (Extra Census Bulletin)	I 12.7:In 2/3
1892	<i>Indians. The Six Nations of New York: Cayugas, Mohawks (Saint Regis), Oneidas, Onondagas, Senecas, Tuscaroras</i> (Extra Census Bulletin)	I 12.7:In 2/2
1893	<i>Moqui Pueblo Indians of Arizona and Pueblo Indians of New Mexico</i> (Extra Census Bulletin)	I 12.7:In 2/4
1894	<i>The Five Civilized Tribes in Indian Territory: The Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole Nations</i> (Extra Census Bulletin)	I 12.7:In 2/1
1894	<i>Report on Indians Taxed and Indians Not Taxed in the United States (Except Alaska)</i>	I 12.5:7
1915	<i>Indian Population in the United States and Alaska: 1910</i>	C 3.2:In 2/3
1937	<i>The Indian Population of the United States and Alaska: 1930</i>	C 3.37/2:In 2

Although the reports document “progress,” they also document lack of progress in terms shocking to the modern reader. For example, commenting on the conditions of Indians in Idaho, one writer observes that students who had previously attended school had forgotten everything that they had learned. It further observed that some of them were among the “most degraded and worthless” (U.S. Census Office, 1894, p. 237). This is by no means an isolated example of language used in the census reports for 1890. Such wording is a reflection of the era. Even writers in sympathy with Indians used terms such as *savage*.<sup>10</sup> As reflections of an era, these reports, although they may be short on reliable data, are nevertheless valuable to modern researchers trying to understand the culture and values of the period.

After 1890, the regular census reports contain data on the Indian population. In addition to these regular tabulations, the Census Bureau again produced special reports in 1915 (U.S. Bureau of the Census) and 1937 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, Table 1). Arthur C. Parker, a noted Indian anthropologist and member of the Society of American Indians, greeted the 1915 report with enthusiasm. He wrote that, “it [the census report] is the story of what the Indian is and is becoming and how he is progressing” (Parker, 1915, p. 185). Although Parker was generally enthusiastic, he doubted that the census had obtained an accurate count of Indians merged into the general population. According to Parker, some Indians suppressed information about their origins because of fear of prejudice. For most individuals, however, he believed that Indian blood was a matter of pride. Analyzing Indian population trends, Parker accurately predicted

that, “all Indians, with the possible exception of Arizona and Montana, will be classified as taxed in 1940” (Parker, 1915, p. 207).

In contrast to reports from the Census of 1890, the special report published in 1915 appears to be more objective. Authors of the report were more careful in their choice of words and less judgmental in their conclusions. They no longer used the offensive term *half-breed*. Instead, they used the more neutral terms *full* and *mixed blood*. For example, the report contrasts the fertility and vitality of full- and mixed-blood Indians and concluded that mixed marriages between full- and half-blood Indians had a higher fertility rate and that children of those unions were more likely to survive. Unlike information contained in the report of 1890, the data are presented as facts rather than as evidence of any deficiencies or superiorities in Indians.<sup>11</sup> This change probably reflects both increased professionalism within the Census Bureau itself as well as the personalities of its authors.<sup>12</sup>

### **Citizenship**

By the Census of 1930, much had changed. With the passage of the Indian Citizenship Act in 1924, all Indians born within the nation's boundaries were declared citizens of the United States. To reflect this change, the Census Bureau altered one word in the title of the report on the 1930 census. With its publication, Indians “in” the United States became the Indians “of” the United States.

The history of the census is, in many ways, a history of social conflict within the United States. In 1790, slaves were at issue, then Indians, and later immigrants—legal or illegal. Now that Indians were citizens, a new potential problem emerged. The Census Bureau was concerned that Mexican laborers might attempt to pass themselves as Indians in the states that share a border with Mexico. To get an accurate count of the Indian population, the bureau instructed enumerators to take special care to differentiate between the two groups in the states of California, Arizona, and New Mexico.

Although the bureau was still collecting data on purity of blood, it acknowledged that the data were not necessarily reliable and consistent. In 1910, data on full- and mixed-blood Indians were collected with a special schedule so elaborate that it probably contained a large margin of error. In 1930, the census collected this information “incidentally” from the regular schedule. The data, however, provide interesting details about the Indian population. For example, the percentage of “full-blooded” Indians varied widely by tribe and region. In 1930, 97.9% of the Southwest Pima Indians were full blooded. In contrast, the report found that only 7.1% of the Eastern Algonquians, a northeastern tribe, were full-blooded Indians (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1937, p. 73). The bureau acknowledged that the numbers on full- and mixed-blood Indians might be inaccurate, but argued that they are nevertheless valuable from a social viewpoint. It observed, that, although an anthropologist might be skeptical of figures showing that 18.7 percent of the Chippewa Indians are “full blood,” the sociologist may still be interested in returns that show the proportion of the tribe who consider themselves or who are considered by the social group as full-blood Indians (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1937, p. 70).

Although the census always relied on individual judgment and perception for racial identification, with this statement it acknowledged the importance of perception in the identification of race by an individual or a group. In retrospect, this, and earlier instructions to enumerators, can be seen as an explicit acknowledgment of the subjective rather than objective nature of racial classification.

#### Changes in the definition of “Indian” and growth of the Indian population of the United States

Through the Census of 1950, the race of an individual was determined by the enumerator. With regard to American Indians, the techniques used were, at best, imprecise. In the late nineteenth and early 20th centuries, many Indians were probably overlooked by the census because they did not appear to be Indian, did not live on Indian reservations, were not recognized by the community as Indian, or chose to hide Indian ancestry from enumerators. Furthermore, the early population counts were frankly estimates rather than actual numbers. Those numbers that exist, however, generally show a population in decline. Although numbers vary, modern researchers have estimated that between 4,200,000 and 12,250,000 people lived in North America in 1492.<sup>13</sup> By 1890, the American Indian population of the United States reached its lowest point—237,196 men, women, and children with any appreciable degree of Indian blood (U.S. Census Office, 1894, p. 10). In recent decades, although the population has rebounded, it is nowhere near the numbers that existed in the pre-European contact Americas.

In 1960, the Census Bureau introduced racial self-identification. Since that date, the growth rate of the American Indian population has exceeded that for the U.S. population as a whole. In 1990, the census enumerated 1,937,391 American Indians—a 717% increase from 1900 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000b, p. 45). In contrast, the population of the United States has grown from 75,994,575 in 1900 to 248,718,301 in 1990—a 227% increase (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000b, p. 7). Modern demographers believe that the Indian population growth rate cannot be accounted for by strictly demographic means, such as births, deaths, and migration. They attribute growth to a combination of demographic and non-demographic factors: high fertility, improving mortality, and “changing patterns of racial self-identification on the part of people with only partial or distant American Indian ancestry” (Passel, 1996, p. 69). Arthur Parker believed in 1915 that some Indians chose not to disclose their ancestry because of fear of discrimination. In the latter half of the 20th century, however, that same ancestry can be a source of pride. Until the Census of 2000, the bureau required that multiracial individuals self-identify with a single race: White; Black; Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut; or Asian or Pacific Islander. Faced with a choice, many individuals of mixed heritage, who might have been identified as White, Black, or Asian in earlier years, probably identified themselves as Indian. Researchers attribute this change to several factors. Since 1915, cultural perceptions of Indians have altered. Portrayals of Indians in popular culture have changed from “negative to sympathetic and romanticized” (Eschbach et al., 1999, p. 36). More importantly, Indian activism helped create a pan-Indian identification that crosses tribal lines. According to Nagel (1996, p. 140), “Red Power activism put forth an image of American Indians as victorious rather than victimized...challenging Indians as powerless

casualties of history, redefining ‘red,’ ‘native,’ and ‘tribal’ as valued statuses imbued with moral and spiritual significance.”

## Conclusion

As directed by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the bureau revised self-reporting of race for Census of 2000. Unlike previous censuses, individuals were given the option of selecting more than one racial category. In the Census of 2000, 2,475,956 people identified themselves as American Indian or Alaska Native alone. A total of 4,119,301 people indicated that they were Indian and some other race or races, most often Indian and White (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001, p. 8). This shift in policy makes it difficult to compare data of various decennial censuses. The Census Bureau warns that, “caution must be used when interpreting changes in the racial composition of the U.S. population over time” (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001, p. 2). This caution applies to most of the earlier data as well. For political and cultural reasons, the census and its predecessors ignored or failed to take an accurate count of the American Indian population.

As applied by the census, racial classification is not an exercise in scientific objectivity. Instead, it depends on a variety of circumstances. One researcher (Snipp, 1989) stated:

Without doubt, the question of who is an Indian is as crucial for understanding the results of demographic studies as it is complex. The numerous ways in which American Indians can be defined in terms of race or ethnicity, or as a collection of ethnicities, means that the answer to the question depends on how it is posed (pp. 44–45).

At various times, an Indian was and is an Indian because of place of residence, appearance, acceptance within a community, lifestyle, purity of blood, and, finally, self-perception. Although numbers may appear to be accurate and objective, they are, in fact, highly subjective and sensitive to political considerations. The statistics used to formulate policy, propose solutions, and measure change rest on shifting sands. Although professional demographers are well aware of these issues and take measures to compensate for inconsistencies in the data, the average Census Bureau data user may not be aware of the problem. To provide a high level of service, librarians and other information professionals should be aware of and inform their users of the inconsistencies in the Census Bureau data on American Indians.

## Notes

1. The use of the phrase *Native American* to identify indigenous peoples of the Americas is of fairly recent origin; it can refer to American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Hawaiians of Polynesian descent. The name “Indian” was and is a misnomer. However, it the name most often used in early publications of the United States government and the census. According to Mathews (1966) in the 1840s, *Native American* referred to members of a short-lived political party whose principal political beliefs were opposition to aliens, foreign-born citizens, and Roman Catholics. By 1912, however, the phrase was used by the Society of American Indians to

designate indigenous peoples of the United States. The society, whose members were “both the native American and the American who has become so because he found on these shores a land of freedom,” promoted legislative reform.

2. Cassedy (1969) and Cohen (1982) discussed the influence of William Petty, author of *Political Arithmetick* (London, 1690). According to Cohen, Petty linked quantification, economic thought, and observation of facts by the senses as the basis for true knowledge. Cassedy wrote that Petty was particularly interested in the numerical description of colonization. Petty advised William Penn to keep extensive statistics and even considered visiting Pennsylvania.

3. Discussing the debate about a permanent statistics office, Davis (1972) writes that, “Statistics would provide the scientific basis for the art of government, the barometer of moral perfection, the ledger of economic progress, and the numerical record of the American experiment” (p. 161).

4. In a history of the U.S. Census, Lunt (1888) quotes Samuel Johnson, who, in 1775, commented on the “multitudes” of Scottish fighters who overwhelmed Caesar and observed that, “To count is a modern practice, the ancient method was to guess; and when numbers are guessed they are always magnified” (p. 73). Counting, as opposed to estimation, was still sufficiently new so as to be considered a modern rather than routine practice. Lunt notes that the colonial estimates of population differed significantly from the figures obtained by the official enumeration of 1790. Johnson's comments appeared in *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*. Cassedy (1969) records that during the early Colonial period, Captain John Smith estimated the size of Indian population in the area surrounding Jamestown. He also made various estimates of the Indian populations in other areas of New England. His principal object was to determine the number of fighting men.

5. Cassedy (1969) records that during the early Colonial period, Captain John Smith estimated the size of Indian population in the area surrounding Jamestown. He also made various estimates of the Indian populations in other areas of New England. His principal object was to determine the number of fighting men.

6. Thornton (1987) provides complete lists of questions on the supplemental (Indian) population schedules from 1880 to 1970. In addition, he provides an extensive consideration of the problems and inconsistencies in the definitions of American Indians used by the census. The census (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1989) provides samples of the schedules and instructions used in 1880 (pp. 31–33) and 1900 (pp. 46–47).

7. Testifying before a House Congressional Committee (1893) on proposals for the next census, Donaldson described both the Indian beliefs and the crude stratagems devised by agents to conduct an Indian Census. An agent would hold special events, such as feasts and religious services. As he counted attendance, the agent would surreptitiously transfer beans from one jacket pocket to another. Donaldson was an expert special agent who prepared several of the *Extra Census Bulletins* on Indians that were issued with the Census of 1890.

8. Contributors Gibson, 1988, Hagan, 1988 and Prucha, 1988 to volume 4 in the Smithsonian's *Handbook of North American Indians* provide an excellent overview of various laws and their effects on Indian land ownership.
9. The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) provides a search feature for enrollment jackets (files) in its NARA Archival Information Locator (NAIL) database <http://www.nara.gov/nara/searchnail.html>. Tips at the site advise the user to search by individual names and “Dawes” as a keyword. Search results include personal details, such as name, age, sex, degree of Indian blood, city of residence, and names of parents. In addition to archival descriptions, the site provides access to selected digital copies.
10. Writing of her experience assisting with the census of Indians on a Navajo reservation, Dr. Mary Pradt Harper (1900) uses the term *savage* more than once to describe her guides and the Indians who offered her accommodation.
11. The bureau was unable to draw conclusions from the data. It observed that the data “do not in themselves show whether this is due to conditions in the home or to greater virility of the offspring” (Bureau of the Census, 1915, p. 159). It also comments on the inadvisability of drawing firm conclusions because the numbers are small. The report further hypothesized that regional environmental and economic differences could affect both fertility and vitality. Thornton (1987) discusses the data on mixed- and full-blood Indians and provides an interpretation of the data from a more recent socioeconomic perspective. He also discusses the 20th century resurgence of the Indian population.
12. Dr. Roland Burrage Dixon taught courses on the ethnography of North and South America at Harvard University and served as the curator of ethnology for the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at that same university. After teaching at the Wind River Indian School, Dr. F. A. McKenzie became a professor of economics and sociology at Ohio State University. In 1912, he founded the Society of American Indians and was a member of the Indian Rights Association.
13. Thornton (1987, pp. 15–41) discusses the various estimates and the methods used. Population figures for North America include populations outside of the modern United States in Canada, Mexico, and the countries of Central America.

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