

TITLE: Measuring Race and Ethnicity Across the Decades, 1790-2010: Coded to 1997 Office of Management and Budget Classification Standards

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The submitted poster is an infographic timeline capturing one aspect of the operationalization of the U.S. Census Bureau race and ethnicity variables on decennial Censuses from 1790 to 2010. In order to understand the history of how race has been conceptualized and operationalized, the authors relied on historical Census documents. The authors also relied on Humes and Hogan (2009) which detailed the social, political, and economic influences on how the U.S. Census Bureau collected race data throughout our history. U.S. Census Bureau history was researched in order to understand the relationship between this history and the current historical moment, given the “2010 Census Race and Hispanic Origin Alternative Questionnaire Experiment” and the possibility of design changes for race and ethnicity in the 2020 Census.

Two key aesthetic elements compose the infographic. First, it is coded according to current 1997 Office of Management and Budget classification standards. Second, the terminology comes straight from each of the decennial Census forms and from Humes and Hogan (2009); the terms have not been modified.

While it is possible to tell many stories via this infographic, the following describes three of those visible themes:

- 1) It is possible to see when certain categories appeared on or disappeared from the U.S. Census. For example, the “Other race” category existed in some form from 1790 through 1840, then disappeared in between 1850 to 1900, and then reappeared again in 1910. Second, the infographic shows when Asian groups first became part of the U.S. Census. Also visible are the decades when more detailed Asian subgroups were added, including, as an interesting example, the term “Hindu” in the 1920, 1930, and 1940 Censuses. Third, also visible is the Hispanic/Latino ethnicity category,

which first appeared on the 1970 census sample form. In 1930, however, the category “Mexican” was used as a race.

- 2) Also visible are race categories that have changed and race categories that have remained the same. The terminology of “White” has been used since the very first Census. In comparison, terminologies in all of the other categories have changed and/or have been added to over time. For example, we see African Americans first counted as “Slaves,” then as “Slaves” and “Free Colored Persons,” and then other terminologies such as “Mulatto,” “Quadroon,” and “Octoroon,” and then “Negro” and “African American.” The term “Black” has been used consistently across time, too.
- 3) Finally, it is also possible to see how categories have been modified given certain historical moments. For example, in 1960 the terms “Aleut,” “Eskimo,” and “Hawaiian” appear for the first time. These subcategories became part of the U.S. Census after both places, Alaska and Hawaii, became official states of the union in 1959.

In conclusion, it is the authors’ desire that this infographic can be a pragmatic starting point for community stakeholders, race and ethnicity academics, and Census data users in understanding how race and ethnicity variables have changed over 220 years.