1850

Object: 1850 Presidential Advertisement with Census Map and Graphic

Disclaimer: *Users are warned that this document may contain outdated terminology which reflects that of the time period in which the data was collected and may be considered inappropriate or offensive today.*

After sex and age, the most basic data collected in the census is race. However, much like the United States as a whole, the Census Bureau has constantly shifted and changed the categories used to collect this information. In fact, it is possible for the racial category of a single person to shift from census to census, not only due to the change in categories, but by self-identification of the respondent, and, at times, assumptions made by the enumerator. However, the Census Bureau has always strived to ensure that the data is as accurate as possible and to evolve along with the country, particularly in as different terms have become outdated.

The first census questionnaire had only three possible race categories: white, free person (regardless of race), and slave. Through the 1840 census, there were only two possible racial categories – "white" or "black." American Indians living in tribal relations ("not taxed"), were specifically not counted as they were considered to be living in sovereign nations, and therefore did not have a racial category. Any free person not clearly falling into either of those two categories was generally counted as "white" by the census taker.

However, as the United States has evolved, so has the data collected by the Census Bureau. The 1850 Census marked the first shift, as the unit of enumeration moved from the household to the individual. This was the first census to list the names and races of all free people and the addition of the racial category "mulatto." William C. Reynolds used this 1850 census racial data to create the "Political Map of the United States" used in this newspaper article about the 1856 election.

The 1870 Census was a watershed moment in the collection of racial data, as the end of slavery, the acquisition of new territories, and the first wave of immigration from China. Further, the 14th Amendment raised the question of citizenship for American Indians living on tribal lands. This was also the beginning of the statistical revolution, as the census became more than a simple tabulation of numbers, so the government was eager for more specific data. In response, the then-Census Office added two more racial categories: "Chinese" and "American Indian."

The 1890 Census required even greater specificity of racial categories, adding "Japanese," "quadroon," and "octoroon"—although, as an early sign of the evolution of racial understanding, the latter two were dropped for the 1900 Census and never used again. Further waves of immigration in the early 20th Century was the catalyst for the addition of a racial category of "other" in the 1920 Census. This also marked the last use of the category "mulatto."

The increase of immigration from non-European countries added still more diversity to the United States. The 1930 Census marked another increase in categories, adding options for "Mexican," "Filipino," "Hindu," and

"Korean," as well as, for the first time, a write-in option. However, the "Mexican" option was dropped in [1940](#), and it was not until the [1970 Census](#), that the census asked a sample of the population about Spanish heritage. Since the [1980 Census](#), all respondents answer a question on Spanish/Latino/Hispanic heritage, including specific ethnicity. Other categories that have been added over the years include, "Hawaiian," "Aleut," "Eskimo," Vietnamese", "Guamanian," "Samoan," and "Asian Indian" As of the [2000 Census](#), respondents may choose multiple answers to the race question.

Final population count: 23,191,876