

## CHAPTER 3

## *New Faces, Old Faces*

### *Counting the Multiracial Population Past and Present*

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Multiracial Americans have often been heralded as “new people” and in fact have been rediscovered as such more than once in the last century. Charles Chesnutt’s 1899 novel *The House Behind the Cedars* features a mulatto character who uses the phrase to describe himself and others like him; in the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, “the new Negro” described a people that was “neither African nor European, but both” (Williamson, 1980, p. 3). More recently, Forbes (1993) has used the term “Neo-Americans” to denote populations combining African, European, and American Indian roots, and a century after Chesnutt’s work appeared, numerous articles and books—including this volume—convey the sense of multiraciality’s newness in titles such as “Brave New Faces” (Alaya, 2001) or “The New Face of Race” (Meacham, 2000).

Yet having populated North America for nearly four centuries, mixed-race people are far from being a recent phenomenon in the United

States. Their early presence has been recorded to greater and lesser degrees in legal records, literature, and historical documentation. As far back as the 1630s and 1640s, colonial records attest to the punishment of interracial sexual unions and the regulation of mulattoes’ slave status (Williamson, 1980). Dictionaries chart 16th-century English usage of the word *mulattow* (Sollors, 2000), although the meaning of this term has varied over time (Forbes, 1993). Finally, mixed-race people have long populated American literature, particularly since the early 19th century (Sollors, 2000). In sum, the multiracial community is not a new, 20th-century phenomenon but rather a long-standing element of American society.

By obscuring the historic dimensions of American multiraciality—emphasizing its newness but not its oldness—we may run the risk of ignoring lessons that past racial stratification offers for understanding today’s outcomes. For one thing, older social norms still make themselves felt in contemporary

discussion of mixed-race identity (Davis, 1991; Waters, 1991; Wilson, 1992). In addition, history reminds us that these attitudes toward multiraciality were embedded in complex webs of social, political, economic, and cultural premises and objectives, thereby suggesting that the same holds true today. Finally, turning to the past highlights how malleable racial concepts have proved to be over time despite the permanence and universality we often ascribe to them. Given the United States' history, the extent to which public attitudes toward mixed-race unions and ancestry have changed is remarkable. Perhaps the real new people today are not just those of multiracial heritage but also Americans in general who now conceptualize, tolerate, or embrace multiple-race identities in ways that were unacceptable in the past.

The history of census enumeration and scientific estimation of the multiracial population in the United States offers an illuminating window onto older conceptions of mixed-race status and a thought-provoking opportunity to compare past treatment of this community with its contemporary reflection. Although the introduction of multiple-race self-description on the 2000 census is often depicted as an entirely new innovation—much as multiracial people themselves are considered to be a new group (Nobles, 2000)—it was not in fact the first time that mixed-race origins have been recorded on the U.S. census. In the 19th century, multiracial response categories were a common, if sporadic, feature of decennial censuses whose appearance and disappearance can be traced to the social, political, and economic outlooks of the nation's white citizenry at the time. Accordingly, this chapter seeks both to describe historical practices for counting the mixed-race population and to link them with the racial ideologies that motivated and shaped them. Although the focus is on national census enumeration, I also study the efforts of scientists who sought for over a century to estimate the size of the multiracial population and

who tended to share the same preoccupations and preconceptions about race as the census officials of their day. Finally, I consider possible implications of the historical record for our understanding of the introduction of multiple-race classification on the 2000 census, suggesting that factors similar to those that weighed in the past are still discernible today.

## DEFINITION

Before embarking on the stated inquiry, it is crucial to elaborate on the usage of terms such as *multiracial* and *mixed-race*. I use these adjectives interchangeably to denote people whose genealogical ancestry was understood in their day as combining distinct races regardless of whether this mixture stemmed from their parents' generation or farther back. This definition underscores the notion that who we consider to be mixed-race depends at any given time on what we consider to be races in the first place (Morning, 2000). As well, Americans' catalogue of races has varied over time, as the changing racial categories on the U.S. census suggest (Bennett, 2000; Lee, 1993). In 1790, the first national census featured only one racial label—"white"—although the accompanying "slave" category was understood to denote blackness. In contrast, the 2000 census offered six main racial categories that could be combined to yield 57 possible multiple-race identities (U.S. Office of Management and Budget [OMB], 2000a). However, even in what may seem like a contemporary plethora of choice, certain kinds of ancestry cannot be registered as multiracial in the current federal statistical system. Notably, the fact that *Hispanic* does not appear as a response option to the census race question—instead it is treated as a category on a separate ethnicity question—makes it difficult to express white and Hispanic identity, for example, as a multiracial one.

However we may conceive of mixed-race identity today, the following discussion is limited to the types of identity that census enumerators and other government officials and researchers understood to represent racial mixture in the terms of their time. In this account, there is no true demographic distribution of racial identities against which historic census takers' efforts can be measured. Instead, the historical record teaches us that race is and has been simply what we make of it.

### MULTIRACIAL ENUMERATION ON THE U.S. CENSUS, 1790-1990

Approaches to counting mixed-race Americans have varied significantly over time. Although race has always figured on the U.S. census, the terms used, the definitions proposed, and the instructions designed for census takers and respondents have been so frequently altered that virtually no two census schedules are alike. Still, important continuities exist, notably in the differential attention to and statistical treatment of different combinations of racial ancestry.

#### *Multiracial Census Categories and Counts*

Before the year 2000, the U.S. census registered only two types of multiracial ancestry: the combination of black and white (generally referred to as *mulatto*) and American Indian race in combination with others (usually labeled *mixed blood*).<sup>1</sup> Moreover, it recorded these mixed ancestries somewhat sporadically.

*Mulattoes.* The first explicitly mixed-race category to make its way onto an American general population census schedule appeared in 1850 in the form of the *mulatto* option. Before then, the only racial terms used on the census had been *white*, *Indians (not taxed)* (and

thus excluded from enumeration), and *colored*, the latter not necessarily requiring African ancestry (Forbes, 1993). The *mulatto* category was used in census enumeration through 1920, with a brief disappearance from the 1900 census. However, this hiatus was preceded by an elaboration of taxonomy for black/white mixture in 1890, when *quadroon* and *octoroon* designations were added to the census.

Over the 70-year period in which they were enumerated, the proportion of *mulattoes* ranged from a low of 1.5% of the total population in 1870 to a high of 2.2% in 1910. As Table 3.1 shows, their share of the total black population (meaning both blacks and *mulattoes*) never fell below 11%, and it surpassed 20% in 1910. However, as the Census Bureau itself admitted in a 1918 report,

It is probably true that a much greater population than 20.9 per cent of the Negro population in 1910 were of mixed parentage. The proportion more or less affected by the dissemination has been estimated as high as three-fourths, and although no adequate data are available to substantiate such an estimate, the estimate is not in itself improbable. (p. 209)

Despite this acknowledgment of the widespread applicability of the *mulatto* category, however, it would soon be removed from the U.S. census.

*Mixed Bloods.* Long viewed as members of foreign nations, American Indians were not recorded independently on the general census until 1860, and then "Indians Not Taxed" were excluded from the count. Census officials did not attempt to enumerate the entire American Indian population, taxed and untaxed, until 1890, 100 years after the first U.S. census. However, what would prove to be a long tradition of enumerating American Indians apart from other members of the population had already begun with a "special Indian census" in 1850 (Nobles, 2000).

**Table 3.1** Census Enumeration of Mulattoes, 1850-1920

Year	<i>Mulatto Population</i>			<i>Total Black Population</i>		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>% of Total Black Population</i>	<i>% of Total U.S. Population</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>% of Total U.S. Population</i>	<i>Total U.S. Population</i>
1850	405,751	11.15	1.75	3,638,808	15.69	23,191,876
1860	588,363	13.25	1.87	4,441,830	14.13	31,443,321
1870 <sup>a</sup>	584,049	11.97	1.51	4,880,009	12.66	38,558,371
1880 <sup>b</sup>	NA	NA	NA	6,580,793	13.12	50,155,783
1890	1,132,060	15.12	1.80	7,488,676	11.90	62,947,714
1900 <sup>c</sup>	NA	NA	NA	8,833,994	11.62	75,994,575
1910	2,050,686	20.87	2.23	9,827,763	10.69	91,972,266
1920	1,660,554	15.87	1.57	10,463,131	9.90	105,710,620

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau (1923) *Abstract of the Fourteenth Census of the United States 1920*, Table 20.

<sup>a</sup>1870 figures as enumerated, not as later adjusted.

<sup>b</sup>Published figures not available for 1880.

<sup>c</sup>Mulattoes were not enumerated separately in 1900.

In 1880, “Indian Division” schedules recorded whether respondents were “of full-blood” or whether they embodied “mixture” with whites, blacks, mulattoes, or another tribe (U.S. Census Bureau, 1973). Questions about the blood “quantum” (i.e., fraction) of individuals identified as American Indian remained on the census—on general, supplemental or special schedules—through 1910 and later reappeared in 1930 and 1950.

In contrast to its admitted undercount of mixed ancestry among blacks, the U.S. Census Bureau was more satisfied with its estimates of the degree of mixed blood among American Indians, which fell between 35% and 45% (Table 3.2). In a comparison of the Indian census results of 1910 and 1930, the U.S. Census Bureau maintained that “both censuses were reasonably accurate and comparable with each other” (U.S. Census Bureau, 1937). One caveat emerged, however: “In North Carolina, and also in many other areas, the proportion of Indians shown in the census of 1930 as of full blood is much too high. This is particularly true of those tribes in which there is a large Negro admixture.” As review of the

enumeration instructions will demonstrate, census officials at the time were loath to classify individuals with any African ancestry as American Indians.

### *Census Instructions for Racial Enumeration*

The historical series of official instructions for enumerators reveals a great deal more preoccupation with mixed-race people than the limited range of multiracial census categories suggests. Even when multiracial categories were not included, directions for the census takers routinely took up the issue of classifying mixed-race people in the single-race categories available. Through 1960, when the U.S. Census Bureau switched from sending enumerators out to take the census in favor of mailing out questionnaires, the varying directions given to census takers offered powerful testimony to the ideological currents of their day.

*Defining Mixed-Race Groups.* One striking aspect of the enumerators’ instructions is the

Table 3.2 Census Enumeration of Mixed Bloods, 1910-1950

Year	Mixed-Blood Population		Total American Indian Population			
	Total	% of Tot. Indian Population	% of Tot U.S. Population	Total	% of Total U.S. Population	Total U.S. Population
1910 <sup>a,b</sup>	93,423	35.16	0.10	265,683	0.29	91,972,266
1920 <sup>d</sup>	NA	NA	NA	244,437	0.23	105,710,620
1930 <sup>b</sup>	141,101	42.45	0.11	332,397	0.27	122,775,046
1940 <sup>d</sup>	NA	NA	NA	333,969	0.25	131,669,275
1950 <sup>c</sup>	136,677	39.8	0.09	343,410	0.23	150,697,361

SOURCES: U.S. Census Bureau (1915) *Indian Population in the United States and Alaska 1910*, Table 12; U.S. Census Bureau (1937) *Indian Population of the United States and Alaska 1930*, Table 12; U.S. Census Bureau (1964) *U.S. Census of Population: 1960*. Vol. I, Characteristics of the Population, Part 1, United States Summary, Table 44; U.S. Congress, Office of Technology Assessment (1986) *Indian Health Care*, p. 76.

<sup>a</sup>1910 Indian count does not include Alaska population.

<sup>b</sup>In 1910 and 1930, American Indians whose blood quantum is not reported are grouped with full bloods.

<sup>c</sup>1950 figures use Office of Technology Assessment (1986) estimate of mixed-blood share, based on 1950 census returns.

<sup>d</sup>Blood quantum not recorded in 1920 and 1940.

variation in the ways the same terms were defined in different census years. In 1850, when the mulatto category was introduced on the census schedule, enumerators were not given any direction concerning who should be considered mulatto. It is likely that census officials felt the designation to be self-evident, especially in light of Forbes's (1993) contention that in the United States the word *mulatto* originally denoted all people of mixed-race ancestry, not just those with white and black origins. If this was still true to some extent in the mid-19th century (as Forbes claims), 1850 census takers might have assigned people to this all-purpose category without being overly concerned about precisely what type of mixture they represented. However, with time, definitions of who was mulatto appeared and for a while grew increasingly detailed. In 1870, enumerators were told that "the class *Mulatto*" included "quadroons, octoroons, and all persons having any perceptible trace of African blood" (quoted in

Nobles, 2000, p. 187). When those categories were themselves listed on the 1890 census schedule, the definitions of black/white ancestry became even more detailed, drawing on notions of blood proportions, or quanta, that had already been widely applied to American Indian mixed bloods (Nobles, 2000):

The word "black" should be used to describe those persons who have three-fourths or more black blood; "mulatto," those persons who have from three-eighths to five-eighths black blood; "quadroon," those persons who have one-fourth black blood; and "octoroons," those persons who have one-eighth or any trace of black blood. (p. 188)

After 1890, however, degrees of black and white ancestry would never again be delineated as carefully. Mulattoes did not figure on the 1900 census at all, and when this category returned in 1910 and 1920 only, it would be defined simply as including "all

persons having some proportion or perceptible trace of Negro blood" (Nobles, 2000, p. 188). In sum, over time the mulatto grouping was concretized, elaborately defined, simply defined, and then erased.

Census definitions of American Indian mixed bloods, on the other hand, endured until the advent of self-enumeration and generally grew more complex over time. When first mentioned in 1870, "half-breeds" were simply defined as "persons with any perceptible trace of Indian blood, whether mixed with white or with Negro stock" (U.S. Census Office, 1872, p. xiii), echoing the contemporaneous formula for identifying mulattoes. On the 1880 Indian Division schedules, mixture with mulattoes was added as another possible characteristic of mixed-blood status. In 1900, fractions or quanta of blood were introduced (down to one eighth), and interestingly enough, it was "white blood" and not Indian that was to be measured. In 1910, fractions of Indian, white, and Negro blood were recorded. In addition, although census takers reverted to a simple full-blood/mixed-blood dichotomy in 1930, the 1950 census reintroduced the blood quantum construct with the category "degree of Indian blood" and its response options: "full blood," "half to full," "quarter to half," and "less than 1/4" (U.S. Census Bureau, 1973).

Census officials' definitions of mixed-race people of American Indian origin also differed from those concerning mulattoes in that they drew on a range of social, cultural, situational, and behavioral factors. The 1870 census report discussed the question of classifying American Indian half-breeds at length, concluding,

Where persons reported as "half-breeds" are found residing with whites, adopting their habits of life and methods of industry, such persons are to be treated as belonging to the white population. Where, on the other hand, they are found in communities composed wholly or mainly of Indians, the opposite construction is taken. In a word, in

the equilibrium produced by the equal division of blood, the habits, tastes, and associations of the half-breed are allowed to determine his gravitation to the one class or the other. (U.S. Census Office, 1872, p. xiii)

Thus, the assignment of mixed bloods to one race or another did not depend entirely on their perceived genealogy but instead took into account their occupation, place of residence, social ties, and behavior. Although Indian blood quantum would later be carefully noted beginning with the 1880 census, the social status of the individual in question remained salient, as powerfully evinced by the 1930 census introduction of the idea of identifying Indians as those who were "accepted in the community" as such (U.S. Census Bureau, 1937, p. 1). This phrasing, which remained on the census through 1960, sanctioned the exceptional cases in which people of mixed-race ancestry could be assigned to the higher rather than the lower status of the two racial groups with which they were identified. That is, individuals of white and Indian origin could be designated as white if their communities recognized them as such, and those of Indian and black origin could be recorded as Indian. In contrast, mulattoes were afforded no such option; no amount of community recognition could legitimate the transformation from black to white.<sup>2</sup>

*Enumerator Instructions in the Absence of Multiracial Categories.* In most years in which multiracial categories were not used on census forms, enumerators received detailed directions about how to assign mixed-race people to single-race categories. Careful instructions regarding the proper classification of Indian half-breeds appeared in the 1870 census even though this category would not actually be enumerated until 1880. In 1940 and 1960, census takers were told how to treat "persons of mixed white and Indian blood" even though they could not be recorded as multiracial in those years.

Similarly, persons “of mixed white and Negro blood” still haunted the directions to enumerators 40 years after the removal of the mulatto category.

Moreover, the instructions for classifying multiracial groups often covered an even wider spectrum of racial mixtures than had ever been formalized in previous census race categories. In 1930, the mulatto category was absent and American Indians were recognized as full or mixed bloods only on a supplemental Indian schedule. Nevertheless, the enumeration instructions for the general population schedule took up the treatment of individuals of: black/white ancestry (to be designated as Negro); black/Indian ancestry (also to be returned as Negro in most cases); white/Indian mixture (usually to be labeled Indian); Mexican origin (“of a racial mixture difficult to classify,” to be listed as Mexican), and other “mixed races.” The directions for the last group were that “any mixture of white and nonwhite should be reported according to the nonwhite parent. Mixtures of colored races should be reported according to the race of the father, except Negro-Indian” (Nobles, 2000, p. 189). Thus, in a decennial census year in which essentially only one type of multiracial identity would be officially recorded (i.e., Indian mixed-blood status), a proliferation of directions was needed to channel all possible racial combinations into single-race groups. These extensive 1930 racial classification directions appeared through the 1960 census—the last to use enumerators’ observations to a significant extent—and in fact they grew even more detailed during this period. The instructions on the 1950 census identified a little-known segment of the population to be specially counted: the eastern triracial isolate communities of white, black, and American Indian ancestry (Berry, 1963). Enumerators were instructed to record such individuals “in terms of the name by which they are locally known,” such as “Siouian,” “Croatan,”

“Moor,” or “Tunica” (U.S. Census Bureau, 1953, p. 3B-5). In 1960, instructions about multiracial individuals were joined by directions concerning the racial classification of ostensibly ambiguous groups such as Italians, Puerto Ricans, and Syrians. Although these groups were not recognized as distinct races requiring independent census categories, their proper racial identification was deemed challenging enough—and important enough—to warrant special mention.

Investigation of historical U.S. enumeration reveals that although the range of racial categories used in any given census year was often limited, census officials were aware of and interested in a much wider range of racial configurations. Although only irregularly recorded as such, mixed-race people consistently figured in the Census Bureau’s instructions to its enumerators. Despite the ways in which multiracial enumeration varied from census to census, certain facets were fairly stable, notably the asymmetric treatment of black and American Indian ancestry and the overriding focus on the classification of mixed-race people with white ancestry. Together they paint a picture of a system of racial stratification in which some boundaries were more permeable than others.

### MULTIRACIAL CENSUS ENUMERATION IN HISTORIC CONTEXT

How can we explain the particular forms that multiracial census enumeration took on at different times in the past? Answers lie less with the nation’s demographic profile than in the historical cultural beliefs, social structure, and political and economic interests of the white population. As the dominant racial group in the United States—indeed, virtually its only citizens when the first census was taken—the concerns, beliefs, and objectives of whites have informed every aspect of American census taking.

### *Demographic Shifts and the Perception of Racial Boundaries*

A striking conclusion to be drawn from the historical record is that the presence or absence of multiracial census categories usually has not reflected the actual size of the American mixed-race population, even when contemporary bounds on what was considered multiracial are taken into account. This disconnect is demonstrated by the lack of attention to extensive black/Indian mixture (Forbes, 1993; Wilson, 1992) and by the removal of the mulatto category shortly after the Census Bureau itself put the mulatto share of the negro population at three quarters (U.S. Census Bureau, 1918). Similarly, interracial mixture involving Asians did not figure in any national census before 2000,<sup>3</sup> despite the presence of turn-of-the-century immigrant communities whose highly skewed sex ratios favored interracial unions (Barringer, Garner, & Levin, 1993; La Brack, 1999; Leonard, 1997), the interaction of thousands of white and black soldiers with Asian women during World War II and after (Spickard, 1989), and relatively high Asian outmarriage rates in recent years (Pollard & O'Hare, 1999).

It is tempting to attribute the introduction of multiple-race reporting on the 2000 census simply to significant growth in the American mixed-race population. In the wake of the Immigration Act of 1965, which ushered in a new wave of diverse non-European immigration, the 1967 U.S. Supreme Court *Loving v. Virginia* decision to invalidate state bans against interracial marriage, and the civil rights movement more generally, the number of U.S. married couples that involved either spouses of different races or Hispanics married to non-Hispanics more than quadrupled from 1970 to 1998, reaching 1.4 million couples, or 5%, of all married couples. Similarly, the annual share of multiracial births has grown from less than 2% of all births in 1977 to about 5% in 1997; in California that year, mixed-race infants made up the third-largest

group of births behind Hispanics and whites (Pollard & O'Hare, 1999). Clearly, a considerable increment is being added to the existing multiracial population of the United States.

However, such demographic shifts might well have gone unrecognized—as previous racial intermixture often had—had they not been accompanied by changing perceptions of multiraciality. Children in California that we now think of as mixed-race could instead have been described simply as monoracial, as has often occurred in both the past and present, especially with respect to black ancestry (Davis, 1991). To conclude, then, that multiple-race enumeration in 2000 was a “natural” reflection of the nation’s demographic trends is to ignore two important attitudinal prerequisites. First, multiracial people had to be recognized as a distinct group (e.g., as mulattoes were once distinguished from blacks) before their separate enumeration could take place. Such perceptions cannot be taken for granted because they reflect particular judgments of which groups constitute distinct races and which people belong to them. Second, the introduction of multiple-race identification on the 2000 census also required a change of attitude about whether perceived interracial mixture should be officially acknowledged. Judging from the historical record, census recognition of multiraciality cannot be said to be an automatic response to the perception of racial intermixture: Recall that the same people who were understood to be mulatto on the 1920 census were collapsed into the “Negro” category in 1930. In other words, our approaches to recording racial mixture have been anchored less in the nation’s demography than in our perspectives on racial variety and the desirability of its measurement.

### *Focus on Mixed-Race Groups With White Ancestry*

An important question raised by review of U.S. enumeration practices is why only two types of multiracial heritage have consistently

preoccupied American census takers: white/black people and white/Indian people. One obvious reason is simple ethnocentrism on the part of whites, described by Wilson (1992) as the “underlying assumption of the greater importance of White-colored mixtures over colored-colored” (p. 110). However, Lee’s (1993) statement that “race in the United States hinges most fundamentally on the colour line dividing White and Other (non-White) Americans” (p. 91) reminds us that the mixed-race people who inhabit the borderlands around the national color line play a unique part in our system of racial stratification. Sixty years ago, Kingsley Davis (1941) wrote that “the racial integrity of the upper caste is to be strictly maintained, to the degree that all persons of mixed racial qualities shall be placed unequivocally in the lower of the two castes” (p. 389). In other words, the classification of intermediate groups is instrumental for marking the boundaries and status of higher castes. Here Davis described a social structure characterized by hypodescent (i.e., the association of intermediate groups with lower-status rather than higher-status groups) as in the “one-drop” rule for blackness (Harris, 1964), but as F. James Davis (1991) noted, other social patterns have existed in different times and in different places. In early America, the social definition of individuals who descended both from whites and from blacks or American Indians—the two largest nonwhite groups—would certainly have commanded the attention of those who were concerned with preserving or reinforcing whiteness. This “gate-keeping” social function of mixed-race groups helps explain both the consistent interest of white Americans in people of mixed white and other ancestry (as opposed to, for example, black/American Indian background) and the variation in the degree of importance attached to, as well as the ways of classifying, multiracial groups. At different points in American history, it has been more

or less important to define and unify the white population (Jacobson, 1998).

The career of the mulatto census category exemplifies the relationship between multiracial enumeration and concerns about the nature of whiteness. As Nobles (2000) demonstrates, this racial category was first introduced on the 1850 census in response to scientists’ calls for data they believed would help settle important questions about the biological consequences of hybridity. Comparison of the fertility and mortality rates of mulattoes, blacks, and whites would eventually be of great interest to scientists wishing to test theories of “survival of the fittest” and to assess the supposed benefits of slavery and later racial segregation. Hence, enumerators from 1850 to 1890 were admonished to use “particular care” with the increasingly complex mulatto category; as the 1870 census instructions elaborated, “Important scientific results depend upon the correct determination of this class” (Nobles, 2000, p. 187). However, in the Reconstruction aftermath of the Civil War, southern whites’ fears for their political, economic, and social status led to widespread preoccupation with holding the line against black encroachment; these apprehensions were vividly symbolized by passionate antimiscegenation sentiment (Davis, 1991; Rosen, 1999; Williamson, 1980). In the same period, northern whites had to contend with the unsettling questions about just who was white that were raised by the great influx of new European immigrants, then viewed as members of distinct “races” such as Celtic or Slavic. Other rifts among whites—between North and South, elites and workers—also threatened the nation’s social fabric. In these cases and others, anxiety about the status and unity of whiteness would be resolved by reinforcing boundaries between whites and people of color, particularly blacks (Jacobson, 1998; Marx, 1998). As Warren and Twine (1997), Bashi and McDaniel (1997), Gans (1999), and others have argued, blackness is the measure

par excellence against which whiteness has traditionally been defined in the United States. Thus, a turn-of-the-century backlash against Reconstruction policies manifested itself in hardening Jim Crow segregation, antiblack violence, and a wave of state statutes outlawing black/white marriage. In implementing such bans, many states adopted racial definitions that instituted one drop of black blood as the determinant of blackness, signaling that no midway ground was possible between the poles of white and black (Davis, 1991). In this climate, the mulatto category was effectively rendered obsolete and removed from the census after 1920.

Just as mixed-race status marked social boundaries, it also played an instrumental role in the negotiation of access to political and economic resources. From the United States' earliest beginnings, race has governed fundamental aspects of life such as slavery and freedom, citizenship, enfranchisement, and property rights. Thus, multiracial people's intermediate social role also had material implications in a society in which, to white eyes, blacks represented a wealth of labor and Indians a wealth of land. How mixed-race individuals of European, African, and American Indian ancestry were defined could at times make all the difference between being property and owning it.

The experience of American Indian mixed bloods illustrates the importance of multiracial designation in regulating access to material resources. In the 18th and 19th centuries, mixed bloods received preferential treatment in many instances both from the white missionaries among them and from the U.S. government in the treaties it signed with American Indian nations (Churchill, 1999). The resulting privileges might take the form of special goods or services or extra or more preferable land parcels. Churchill (1999) argues that in this manner, whites sought to use mixed bloods as a "wedge" to curry favor or gain a foothold within tribal communities. The distinction between full and mixed bloods, however, was

more comprehensively entrenched in the land allotment process mandated by the Dawes Act of 1887. Not only did the allotment rolls identifying American Indians to receive land tracts take note of full- versus mixed-blood status, but later policy used blood quantum to determine the type of property title to be granted the new landowners (Prucha, 1984). Individuals with less than half Indian blood quantum were generally free to dispose of their land as they wished, whereas those with greater Indian ancestry were deemed less competent and the land assigned them was administered on their behalf by the U.S. government for several years. Giving free land title to mixed bloods had the ultimate effect of releasing this land to whites, for the allottees sold off their property in large numbers. Unrau (1989) concludes that over time, mixed bloods "played a pervasive role in the diminution of the Indian land base in the United States" (p. ix). By treating mixed bloods as a distinct faction of the American Indian community—and one more amenable to their goals—some whites hoped to gain access to resources that were otherwise off limits.

### *Different Measures for Mixed Bloods and Mulattoes*

As we have seen, mulattoes and mixed bloods tended to be enumerated in very different ways on the U.S. census. First, the mulatto category was for the most part a 19th-century phenomenon, whereas the mixed-blood label lasted well into the 20th century and is still commonly used within and outside the American Indian community (Nagel, 1996; Wilson, 1992). Second, the mathematical accounting of blood quantum so pervasively applied to Indians was only rarely used to describe black/white mixture. Third, although the proper racial adjudication of individuals of white and Indian ancestry could draw on their social and occupational characteristics, the correct labeling of people with black and white ancestry was never more than a matter

of their genealogy. Finally, whereas mixed bloods could occasionally be enumerated as white, this was never an option for mulattoes. Moreover, when it came to the blending of black and Indian blood, blackness was presumed dominant. Together these observations raise the question of why diverse types of racial mixture were enumerated so differently.

To some extent, the different implications of black and American Indian racial status for political, social, and economic outcomes explain why U.S. censuses enumerated mulattoes versus mixed bloods in very different ways. The economics of slavery (and later a nominally free but segregated work force) favored a one-drop system, which assigned mulattoes to the black population, thus augmenting the subjugated labor force available. This structure militated against the appearance of a mulatto census category at all, and in the period in which it was used its purpose was primarily to provide scientific ammunition in support of the indiscriminate enslavement or segregation of both blacks and mulattoes. American Indians, in contrast, were not sought as a labor force in early America (despite initial English attempts at their enslavement; see Smedley, 1999); rather whites coveted relations with them as a conduit to land acquisition. Thus, a one-drop rule for Indian identity had less immediate appeal from the perspective of whites; indeed, the contrary held for several purposes. First, beginning early in the 19th century, the U.S. government undertook a program of educating and “civilizing” Indians whose costs could be minimized the fewer the number of Indians for whom the government claimed responsibility. Such fiscal calculations remain relevant today: In 1986, the Congressional Office of Technology Assessment (OTA) estimated the current and future blood quantum composition of the American Indian population to project expected cost burdens on the Indian Health Service and to explore the possible impact of tightened blood quantum eligibility

requirements (U.S. Congress, OTA, 1986). Second, classifying American Indians of mixed-race ancestry as white (or black) eliminated potential Indian land claims based on treaties or federal law (Churchill, 1999). Finally, recognizing mixed-blood status served as a “divide-and-conquer” strategy with tangible benefits for land-hungry white settlers. In sum, a variety of structural factors have favored a more enduring and liberal use of the mixed-blood concept compared with the relatively brief life span of the mulatto category.

However, the contours of multiracial enumeration in the United States cannot be attributed solely to economic and political rationales, because the cultural mythology of race shared by early European Americans also exercised a powerful influence on the conceptualization and measurement of racial mixture. To the extent that whites viewed different nonwhite races in distinct ways, usually as embodying distinctly particular flaws, it is not surprising that their presumptions about different multiracial groups varied as well. According to Berkhofer (1978), American Indians were generally not considered “as low in the hierarchy of races as the Blacks” (p. 34). For example, President Thomas Jefferson made known his belief that unlike blacks, Indians were “in body and mind equal to the white man” (Wallace, 1999), and Prucha (1981) argues that this view of the Indian as “barbaric but redeemable” was shared by other major architects of federal Indian policy such as Secretary of War Lewis Cass and President Andrew Jackson. Indeed, Prucha contends that this belief was an essential ingredient of the federal government’s persistent attempts to educate and civilize the Indian population in a period when education was forbidden to black slaves. However, the fact that the civilizing mission often served to herd Indians off lands that whites coveted (Tyler, 1973) is a reminder that racial ideologies combine material interests with cultural representations in ways that are difficult to disentangle.

Stereotypes that whites held helped both to initially introduce certain policies toward blacks and Indians and later to justify these modes of treatment. Thus, images of belligerent and uncivilized Indians justified their displacement and extermination, whereas supposedly childlike but hardy blacks were best off under the paternal care of slave masters (Berkhofer, 1978; Bieder, 1986; Nobles, 2000; Smedley, 1999; Williamson, 1980).<sup>4</sup>

The similarity or distance that white Americans calculated between themselves and other races had striking implications for their predictions concerning the nation's racial destiny. The fundamental humanity ascribed to American Indians gave rise to hopes for their eventual "amalgamation" (as it was frequently called) with the white population (Prucha, 1981; Tyler, 1973), whereas the irreducible inferiority of blacks made their "miscegenation" with whites an end to be avoided at all costs (Davis, 1991). Like Thomas Jefferson (Prucha, 1981), prominent early anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan condoned Indian/white amalgamation; in the 1860s he wrote that the American Indian "must become a farmer and make money and throw off the Indian past. Those alone who do this will be able to save themselves and ultimately will be absorbed in our race" (cited in Bieder, 1986, p. 221). The alternative to Indians' amalgamation with whites, however, was widely claimed to be their extinction (Horsman, 1975; Tyler, 1973; Wallace, 1999). In Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1800), his picture of the vanishing Indian speaks to what Wallace (1999, p. 79) calls a "mordant fascination" with an increasingly widespread image of American Indians as "a conquered and dying race." The popular diagnosis—namely that Indians could not withstand contact with white civilization—gained even greater currency in the wake of Darwin's 1859 *On the Origin of Species*. The presumed imminent extinction of American Indians was then recast as a matter of the

survival of the fittest, so that an 1865 congressional resolution would declare the decline of the Indian population to be the result of "the irrepressible conflict between a superior and an inferior race when brought in presence of each other" (Tyler, 1973, p. 76).

Given the diverse outlooks that whites held about the future of blacks and American Indians, the figures of the mulatto and the mixed blood were also imagined as having very different characteristics and destinies. Consistent with the mythology of an Indian race whose only salvation lay in amalgamation with whites, the mixed blood represented a marked improvement over the full-blooded American Indian (Bieder, 1986; Horsman, 1975), for whom he might serve as a role model (Unrau, 1989). In marked contrast, the mulatto represented no such step up the evolutionary scale: Instead, he was a debilitated figure—physically weak, high strung, and sterile—who represented the deterioration of both black and white stock (Williamson, 1980). Like the full-blooded Indian, the mixed-race mulatto was expected to eventually die out, especially once the abolition of slavery put an end to white/black miscegenation, leaving behind completely and appropriately separate black and white populations. Also like the full blood, the mulatto had an escape route open to him via amalgamation, but it involved absorption by the black rather than the white population (Williamson, 1980). Although American Indians could gradually be assimilated by the white population, this avenue was closed to those with black blood, ensuring that whiteness would continue to be defined as the absence of blackness. By virtue of their predicted demise, multiracial people served as bridges to the racial future envisioned by whites.

The mirror contrast between mixed bloods' predicted absorption by whites and mulattoes' absorption by blacks was closely linked to the amount of attention paid by enumerators to the details of their hybridity. Simply, the belief

that American Indians could eventually become white justified a careful accounting of their proximity to or distance from whiteness: hence fractions of blood quantum. The meaningfulness of such calculation is apparent in Morgan's reckoning about white/Indian mixture (Bieder, 1986):

The second cross, giving three-quarters Indian, is an advance upon the native; and giving three fourths white is still a greater advance. . . . With the white carried still further, full equality is reached, tending to show that Indian blood can be taken up without physical or intellectual detriment. (p. 231)

Because black blood, on the other hand, could never be washed away—not even the proverbial single drop—the exact quantity of white blood that mulattoes had was irrelevant.

The logic of tracking hybridity en route to eventual whiteness—a kind of alchemy<sup>5</sup>—is found throughout the Americas. Its apogee materialized in the 18th-century series of colonial Mexican paintings known as *las castas* or *los cuadros del mestizaje*, which depict couples of diverse races and racial mixtures in their characteristic dress and surroundings. Spurred on by Linnaeus's 1735 systematization of taxonomy, the *castas* portraits also present the progeny of dozens of distinct racial mixtures and name each one. These names, in turn, frequently refer to the distance or proximity of the mixture from whiteness: A child who was *salta atrás* was a “jump back,” like a *torna atrás* (Nash, 1995). The colonial calculus of hybridity was also furthered by the development of special mathematical notation akin to the later U.S. measurement of blood quantum (Moreno Navarro, 1973). Yet the notion that racial impurity of any color could eventually be diluted to the point of disappearance, which appeared throughout the Western Hemisphere in the 18th and 19th centuries, made little headway against North American thinking about blacks.

Belief in the indelibility of blackness was one of the most striking cultural constructions to characterize 19th- and 20th-century census taking. Along with evaluations of the diverse qualities of multiracial people and predictions about the future of the American racial landscape, it formed a kind of racial cosmology that ordered the races, explained that ordering, and pointed the way toward its eventual resolution. At the same time, this cultural complex of beliefs, values, and symbols was interwoven with mixed-race people's structural position in a society in which race implied different relations to land and labor and delineated political and social communities. As a result, census enumeration of multiracial people reflected both the cultural meanings and material importance ascribed to them.

#### SCIENCE ESTIMATES THE MIXED-RACE POPULATION, 1920-1990

Motivated by many of the same concerns and perspectives on race as census officials, American scientists have demonstrated a long-standing interest in the mixed-race population. In the 19th century, they pressed for census enumeration of mulattoes and other mixed-race people in the belief that it would help address important scientific and policy questions. After the Census Bureau's early 20th-century termination of mulatto enumeration, social and natural scientists launched their own data collection efforts focusing on interracial mixture. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, scientists developed a variety of techniques for assessing just how racially mixed the American population had become, with a steady focus on the blending of black and white. It was already widely presumed and accepted that the American Indian population would be absorbed into the white, but whether “black blood” could similarly be assimilated was a much more controversial and troubling prospect.

### *Anthropometry, Genealogy, and Survey Research in the Social Sciences*

In his review of early 20th-century scientific thought regarding mulattoes, Williamson (1980) concludes that “social scientists took over the study of miscegenation and mulattoes where the census left off” (p. 115). Nobles (2000) also posits an alternating relationship between census enumeration and scientific theorizing on race when she writes that the census “has been most closely involved in developing ideas about race when (social) scientific thinking on race itself has been most unstable” (p. 26). Consistent with these views, certain academic research agendas on interracial mixture gained momentum once the Census Bureau permanently removed the mulatto category after 1920.

Anthropologists and sociologists in the first half of the 20th century were particularly interested in measuring the extent to which blacks had nonblack ancestry and the degree to which blacks had “passed” or were passing undetected into the white population. In other words, they sought to measure both past interracial mixture stemming from illicit unions and contemporary interracial mixture that occurred without being recognized. At times, their work countered beliefs that interracial sex had been minimal in the antebellum past, thus threatening cherished notions of white purity. In a period when white fear of “mongrelization” was rife—fueled not just by blacks, Indians, or Asians, but also by the new southern and eastern European immigrants (Kevles, 1985)—their work touched on the sensitive issue of “white blood” among blacks and, worse yet, “black blood” flowing in white veins.

One of the earliest examples of this work was sociologist Edward B. Reuter’s (1918) *The Mulatto in the United States: Including a Study of the Role of Mixed-Blood Races throughout the World*. In the same year, Caroline Bond Day began her research on racially mixed families, tracing their genealogy, physical appearance,

and attitudes toward interracial unions (Day, 1932). Melville J. Herskovits also linked anthropometry (the measurement of physiognomy) to genealogy. In his 1928 work, *The American Negro: A Study in Racial Crossing*, Herskovits reported that 78% of his black respondents claimed to have white and/or American Indian ancestry. In 1947, anthropologist Ralph Linton revised this estimate upward to 90% (Williamson, 1980, p. 118). As for passing, sociologist Charles S. Johnson believed that 10,000 to 20,000 mulattoes had disappeared into the white population each year from 1900 to 1920; in 1946 another sociologist, John Burma, guessed that 110,000 mulattoes were living as whites in the United States (Williamson, 1980, pp.103, 119).

### *Probing Genes, Blood, and Skin Color in the Natural Sciences*

The long-standing equation of race with physical characteristics that had originally led researchers to study the anthropometry of mixed-race people was further invigorated when the science of genetics began to develop rapidly in the mid-20th century. Older understandings of “mixed blood” metamorphosed into new models of mixed genes for which new theories, measurement techniques, and instruments were developed. In a period of activity marked by Crick and Watson’s 1953 discovery of the double-helix structure of DNA, biological researchers believed that genetic science would provide the precise answers about American multiracial ancestry that had eluded social scientists. At the same time, the study of mixed-race people promised to add to genetic knowledge, as attested by reports such as “Genetics of Interracial Crosses in Hawaii” (Morton, 1962) or “American Triracial Isolates: Their Status and Pertinence to Genetic Research” (Beale, 1957). Ironically, new insights into the human genome later challenged the long-standing belief that races were physically distinct groups (Marks, 1995).

An early but meaningful example of scientists' genetic analysis of the multiracial population comes from biologists Glass and Li's (1953) use of allele (gene variant) frequencies to study "the dynamics of the process of 'racial' or population intermixture." Specifically, they compared the frequency of a particular blood type in the black U.S. population to its frequencies in the white population and in some black African populations to estimate the "rate of gene flow from the U.S. White into the U.S. Negro population." In conclusion, they put "the accumulated amount of white admixture" at 31% of the black population.

The Glass and Li (1953) study illustrates how widely held presumptions about the workings of race informed ostensibly objective scientific inquiry. First, it announces that genes can be used to ascertain information about racial mixture (i.e., race is a matter of biology and not social science). In a haughty jibe, the authors write that "very much speculation has been indulged in on this subject by sociologists and others, but apparently without any serious, objective grounds for their opinions" (p. 14). However, although Glass and Li maintain that the new science of genetics can furnish answers never before possible, their focus on blood type actually harkens back to old beliefs in blood as the repository of racial difference (as seen in census categories measuring "Indian blood" or "white blood"). Second, the article posits gene flow as a one-way street whereby the black population is the receptacle for white genes. There is no flow of black genes into the white population, which remains pure of any nonwhite genes. Third, the study is also blind to the presence of any groups other than white and black:

The simplest situation to analyze would obviously exist where only two base populations were intermixing, a situation such as occurs in North America, where the American Negro population has been formed largely by the intermixture of a pure

Negro population and a European white population. (p. 1)

Finally, Glass and Li's research is motivated by the prospect of the eventual assimilation of the black population by the white, the timeline for which they put at a comfortable distance of about 39 generations, or 10 to 11 centuries, in the future.

Later studies echoed the major themes sounded in Glass and Li (1953). In 1969, zoologist T. Edward Reed used a similar technique, proposing a particular blood type as the best example of a "Caucasian gene" with which to estimate the percentage of blacks' genes that derive from white ancestors. Sociologist Robert Stuckert (1958) undertook an opposite strategy by considering the extent of African ancestry among whites. In his updated estimates, he put the share of whites with some African ancestry at 24% in 1970 and the share of blacks with some non-African ancestry at 81% (Stuckert, 1976). In a related area of scientific study of multiracial people, skin color was measured to pinpoint the genetic distance between races. From the 1950s through the 1970s, physical anthropologists analyzed the reflection of light from African, Caribbean, Brazilian, and mulatto people's skin (see, e.g., Barnicot, 1958; Mazess, 1967). In one example, Wienker (1979) compared the "reflectometry curve" of a sample of black American men to a West African group, determining that this sample of Americans was "relatively more 'African' genetically" than previously studied mulattoes due to "the long-standing isolation of the caste from which they are derived." As with the measure of blood, new scientific techniques were brought in to quantify very old ideas of skin color as an indicator of racial heritage.

Over the course of the 20th century, techniques based on anthropometry and genetics were assumed to provide more reliable estimates of the extent of American multiracial ancestry than qualitative inquiries into individual genealogies. These new approaches

would presumably ferret out the truth about interracial mixture from human bodies without having to rely on the dubious accuracy of personal accounts. To do so, however, racial evidence had to be found inscribed in the human body. When the idea that race was in fact a social construct and not a biological characteristic began to disseminate widely among academics in the late 20th century (although anthropologists such as Franz Boas and Ashley Montagu had proposed it in the 1930s and 1940s), these attempts to measure interracial mixture through physiology fell out of favor.<sup>6</sup>

### CENSUS 2000 AND BEYOND

At the same time that the idea of race as physically measurable faced serious challenge in academia, the U.S. Census Bureau was also confronted with new data suggesting that racial classification was anything but a straightforward and self-evident matter. In 1960, the Bureau began to gather its information by having Americans complete mailed questionnaires instead of being enumerated and described by visiting census takers. As a result, millions of individuals were suddenly confronted with the complexity of pegging all racial identities into a few boxes, a challenge that had previously been apparent in instructions to enumerators. Although the Bureau provided some direction on its questionnaires, large numbers of Americans remained either confused about how they should choose a race (only one selection was permitted) or antagonized by the options they were given. In ensuing years, the assumption that racial identities corresponded to evident, fixed, and mutually exclusive categories would come under increasing attack; one response to this was the 1997 revision of the federal government's racial classification guidelines to permit multiple-race identification (U.S. OMB,

1997). However, without a clear consensus on what race is and how it is best measured, it is difficult to gauge the accuracy of this new approach to multiracial enumeration.

### *Challenges for Racial Classification*

One of the earliest signs that traditional census classification overlooked significant dimensions of racial identity was the puzzling post-1960 growth in the American Indian population that could not be explained by fertility and mortality factors alone. Instead, demographers discovered that part of the increase was due to the inclusion of "new Indians," people who had previously identified themselves or been identified as belonging to another race (usually white) but switched to identification as Indian (Eschbach, 1993; Passel, 1976; Passel & Berman, 1986; Snipp, 1997). In addition, Snipp (1986) found that although 1.5 million people identified their race as American Indian on the 1980 census, more than four times as many claimed some Indian ancestry (pp. 47-48). Such findings coincided with studies characterizing whites' ethnic self-concepts as extremely subjective, mutable, optional, and indeed symbolic (Alba, 1990; Gans, 1979; Waters, 1990). These ideas about the fluidity and malleability of ethnic and racial identities ran counter to the system of racial classification used on the census, which assumed that individuals' identities were fixed and easily described by a handful of categories. The inadequacy of such an approach would also be highlighted by the reactions of Hispanics to the census questionnaire: From 1980 through 2000, nearly half eschewed the available racial categories and marked "other race" instead (Rodríguez, 2000; U.S. Census Bureau, 2001a). Research by the Census Bureau has since demonstrated that racial self-description is affected by

the design of surveys—for example, question placement, phrasing, and mode of delivery (Gerber, De la Puente, & Levin, n.d.; Martin, Demaio, & Campanelli, 1990)—and other social scientists have explored how the expression of racial identity, and especially multiracial identity, is affected by such factors as setting, genealogy, type of racial mixture, definition of multiraciality, appearance, and socioeconomic status (Harris, 2000; Rockquemore, 1999; Root, 1992, 1996; Waters, 1991; Wijeyesinghe, 1992; Xie & Goyette, 1997). However, the definition of race had already been challenged enough by the mid-1970s that when the OMB promulgated its original racial classification standards in 1977, it cautioned, “These classifications should not be interpreted as being scientific or anthropological in nature” (cited in Edmonston, Goldstein, & Lott, 1996, p. 36). As Edmonston et al. (1996) point out, “The directive is clear about what it is not” (p. 36) but is inconclusive about what the basis of racial classification is or should be.

In this climate of uncertainty over the meaning of racial categories, a determined segment of the mixed-race community became the catalyst for a significant overhaul of the federal government’s approach to racial classification in 1997 (Nobles, 2000). Largely at the impetus of the multiracial movement, in which interracial couples and their children figure prominently, the OMB revised its 1977 Directive 15 to permit multiple-race responses in the data collection efforts of all federal agencies (OMB, 1997). Although this change was implemented fairly quickly in some instances—for example, the 1999 American Community Survey fielded by the Census Bureau used the new race question format (Del Pinal, Taguba, Cresce, & Morning, 2001)—the 2000 U.S. census represented most Americans’ first exposure to the “mark one or more races” approach.

### *The Multiracial Census Count in 2000*

The 2000 census enumerated 6.8 million people, or 2.4% of the total U.S. population, as having marked more than one race (Grieco & Cassidy, 2001). This outcome was consistent both with preceding analyses that estimated the proportion of multiracial Americans to be in the low single digits<sup>7</sup> and with the early 20th-century estimates of mulattoes and mixed bloods added together, even though the new multiple-race format allowed for a much wider range of multiracial combinations than had ever appeared on the U.S. census before.

As stated earlier, the fact that Hispanics are not considered a racial group according to the federal standards for racial classification means that “Hispanic” could not be selected in conjunction with other races to form a multiple-race response on the 2000 census. Yet people who identified as Hispanic on the census’s separate ethnicity question figured prominently in the enumerated multiracial population, contributing one third of all multiple-race responses even though they made up only 12.5% of the total national population (see Table 1 in U.S. Census Bureau, 2001b). This outcome is due to the number of Hispanics who chose to combine one of the five main races listed (i.e., white, black, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander<sup>8</sup>) with the sixth, “some other race” option. Just as Hispanics overwhelmingly constituted the some other race single-race category, contributing 97% of that category’s responses, they made up two thirds of the white/some other race combined response, which was by far the most frequent multiple-race response on the 2000 census.<sup>9</sup> As Table 3.3 shows, the second-largest dual-race combination was white/American Indian and Alaska Native followed by the white/Asian pairing and the white/black group.

**Table 3.3** Racial Composition of the United States According to the 2000 Census

<i>Race</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>% of Total Population</i>
<i>Single Race Only</i>	274,595,678	97.57
White	211,460,626	75.14
Black or African American	34,652,190	12.32
American Indian and Alaska Native	2,475,956	0.88
Asian	10,242,998	3.64
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	398,835	0.14
Some other race	15,359,073	5.46
<i>Two Races</i>	6,368,075	2.26
White and black	784,764	0.28
White and American Indian	1,082,683	0.38
White and Asian	868,395	0.31
White and Native American	112,964	0.04
White and some other race	2,206,251	0.78
Black and American Indian	182,494	0.06
Black and Asian	106,782	0.04
Black and Native American	29,786	0.01
Black and some other race	417,249	0.15
American Indian and Asian	52,429	0.02
American Indian and Native Hawaiian	7,328	0.00
American Indian and some other race	93,842	0.03
Asian and Native Hawaiian	138,802	0.05
Asian and some other race	249,108	0.09
Native Hawaiian and some other race	35,108	0.01
<i>Three or More Races</i>	458,153	0.16
Total	281,421,906	100.00

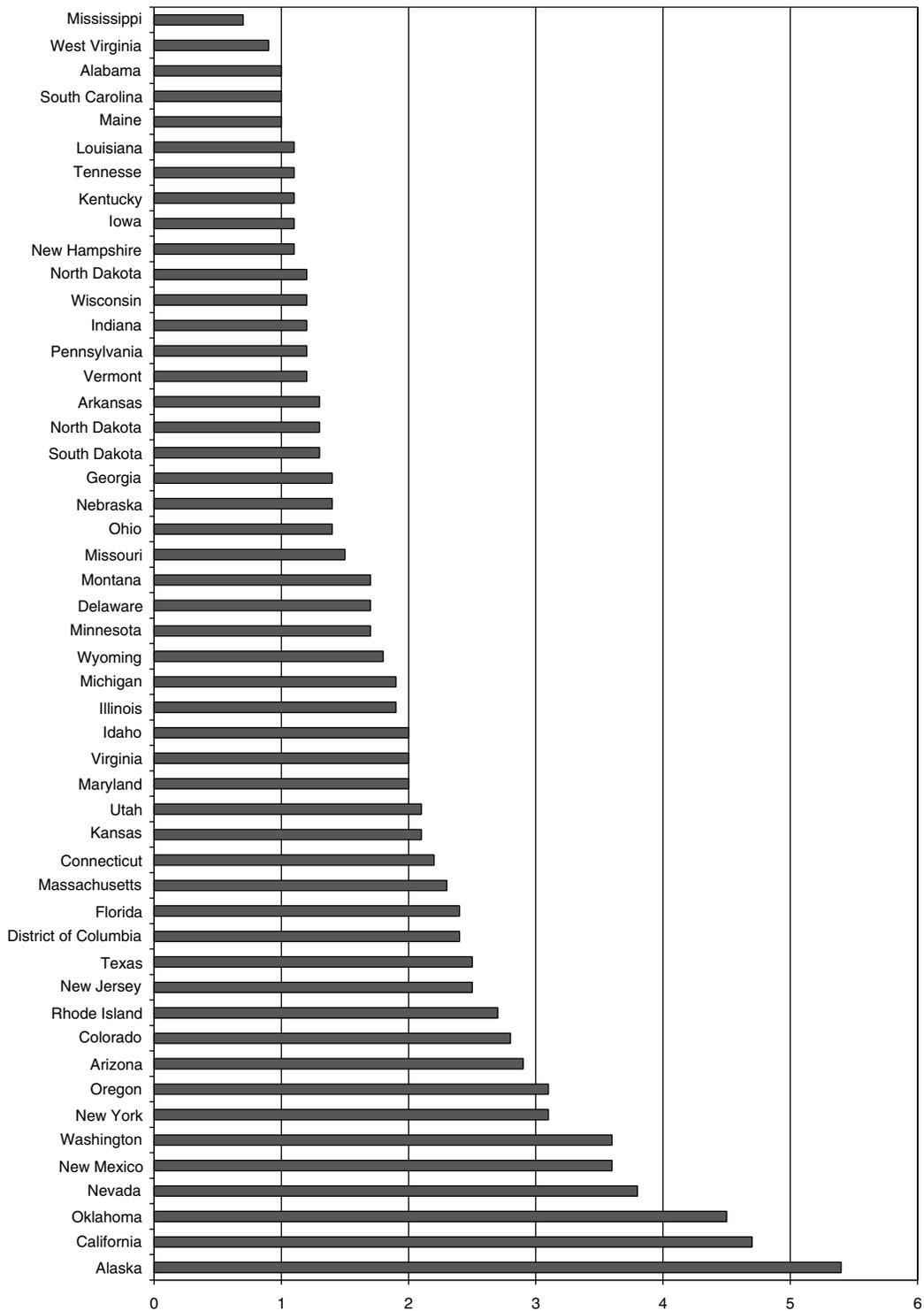
SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau (2001). *Population by race and Hispanic or Latino origin for the United States: 1990 and 2000 (PHC-T-1)*. Tables 1 and 2.

The 2000 census results also show a geographic pattern to multiracial identification, with multiple-race reporting being by far most prevalent in Hawaii, where more than 20% of the population selected two or more races (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001a). In general, rates of multiple-race reporting were highest in the west, often but not always in states with relatively large Hispanic populations (Figure 3.1). In contrast, the southeastern states recorded the lowest rates of multiple-race response.

Finally, multiracial identification on the 2000 census was also skewed toward younger ages. Whereas only 1.9% of adults 18 years of age and older chose more than one race to describe themselves, nearly 4% of people younger than 18 were described by two or

more races. As a result, people younger than 18 years contributed 42% of all multiple-race responses even though they made up only 26% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001b). This pattern alone—without even taking rising interracial marriage rates into account—may portend higher rates of multiple-race reporting on future censuses.

Although the recent census opens a much more detailed window onto the American multiracial population than has previously been available, the 2.4% mixed-race population share it recorded could be interpreted as a serious undercount. When we consider the large degree of mixed ancestry likely embodied in the nonwhite population alone and recall that this segment now constitutes 25% to



**Figure 3.1** Percentage of State Population Reporting More Than One Race (Excluding Hawai'i), 2000

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau. (2001). Census 2000 redistricting data (public law 94-171). Summary file.

31% of Americans (depending on how Hispanics are classified; see U.S. Census Bureau, 2001b), a percentage 10 times the 2000 census estimate of the multiracial population share seems at least as plausible (Morning, 2000). As Forbes (1993) explains, a great deal of the complexity of modern Americans' ancestry has been obscured by long-standing practices forcing them "into arbitrary categories which tend to render their ethnic heritage simple rather than complex" (p. 271). The gulf between the size of the multiracial population counted in 2000 through self-identification and the much larger size we might expect from full genealogical data is probably due to a combination of factors including individuals' lack of knowledge about their ancestry, reservations about disclosing what they do know, and belief that multiple-race identity only applies to those with parents of different races (Goldstein & Morning, 2000). As Harris (2000) demonstrates, our count of mixed-race people has everything to do with how we define and measure multiraciality.

It is possible that contemporary multiple-race reporting is being driven by the "biracial" offspring of mixed marriages as opposed to the large number of people whose mixed ancestry derives from antebellum unions. As we have seen, multiracial reports on the 2000 census were disproportionately a youth phenomenon. Moreover, some state-level classification systems define a multiracial person solely as one "having parents of different races" (Nobles, 2000, p. 139). Such a bias toward recent rather than genealogically distant multiracial heritage could have several implications (Morning, 2000). First, it would probably affect the relative weights of the types of ancestry described (e.g., favoring Asian/white identity over black/Indian), because different racial groups have made up different proportions of the population and interacted at varying rates over time. Today

American Indians and Asians are much more likely to marry partners of another race than are either blacks or whites (Pollard & O'Hare, 1999), yet black/white unions were an important source of interracial mixture in the past. A skew toward a particular segment of the mixed-race population could also color our assessment of multiracial people's socioeconomic characteristics (Harris, 2000). Finally, such a bias would necessarily affect projections of future population composition. For example, estimates by Edmonston, Lee and Passel (2000) put the multiple-race and -ethnicity population at 8% of the total in 2000 and project it forward to 34% in 2100. Although the latter figure may well prove to be an accurate prediction of the share of Americans who choose to identify themselves as multiracial a century from now, it could also be a reasonable guess about the number of mixed-race people living in the United States today. The difference lies in our understandings of whether we are becoming a multiracial nation or whether we have always been one.

## CONCLUSION

Study of the U.S. census reveals that the nation has held a sustained interest in mixed-race people over the course of its history. The circumstances of mixed-race people have been treated as a sort of bellwether for the eventual outcomes of the nonwhite races from which they descend; thus, the fates of mulattoes and mixed bloods were integrally tied to the presumed destinies of blacks and American Indians. Multiracial people have also served as a bridge for white access to resources held by communities of color and, perhaps most important of all, as a yardstick of distance marking social, political, and economic boundaries between whites and others. From their presumed characteristics

to their imagined futures, mixed-race Americans have been central to whites' understanding and definition of themselves.

Many aspects of older conceptualizations of multiracial status are still with us. For example, the divergent treatment and recognition of different types of mixed-race ancestry seems to persist. Xie and Goyette's (1997) study of biracial children of Asian ancestry found that more than 40% of the children of white/Asian marriages were identified by their parents as Asian, whereas less than 33% of black/Asian children were labeled that way. Rather than a 50-50 chance of being classified with one race or the other, social conventions still appear to influence which multiracial combinations are linked to which single races, with such rules remaining stronger with respect to black ancestry (Davis, 1991).

Given the extent to which mixed-race status has reflected societal beliefs and concerns in both the past and the present, it is worth trying to place contemporary developments in multiracial reporting in sociohistorical perspective. More specifically, we might ask why it is now possible for mixed-race people to identify themselves and be identified as such both on the census and to some degree in everyday life. In the past, the appearance and removal of multiracial census categories have been tightly linked to whites' political imperatives, economic objectives, social agendas, and beliefs concerning nonwhite peoples. Do the same factors shed any light on the introduction of multiple-race census reporting in 2000?

Of course, racial enumeration takes place today in a political and social context very different from the one that prevailed when the mulatto or mixed-blood census categories were introduced. First and foremost, it is anachronistic to presume that differentials in political power remain as lopsided in the wake of the civil rights movement. On a simple level, Census Bureau and other federal officials are no longer uniformly white, but, more importantly, American perspectives on race

and equality changed dramatically in the 20th century, if in theory more than in practice (Schuman, Steeh, Bobo, & Krysan, 1997). The civil rights struggle also led to another development with even more direct bearing on racial statistics: the series of legal prescriptions for combating discrimination embodied in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and their amendments and extensions. Today the collection of data on race is motivated in large part by the need to monitor compliance with the requirements of these statutes regarding, for example, employment discrimination or congressional redistricting (Edmonston & Schultze, 1995). As a result, racial counts are now more likely to benefit minority groups than they were in the past. Finally, changing American attitudes about race following the civil rights movement surely have a great deal to do with new openness toward multiraciality; the Supreme Court's 1967 decision to strike down state laws that banned interracial marriage is an important instance of such transformation.

Yet the fact that racial stratification is still clearly an entrenched feature of American life (Smelser, Wilson, & Mitchell, 2001) suggests that the historical factors of whites' social, economic, and political interests are still relevant to the evolution of the national census. In particular, I suggest three developments that may have had some bearing on the recent introduction of multiple-race census classification. First, the contemporary (if diminishing) use of minority racial identity to determine access to special protections or programs may have made one-drop assignment of mixed-race people to beneficiary nonwhite groups less palatable to whites than it was in the past. This parallels the ongoing distinct recognition of mixed-blood American Indians in a context in which access to certain resources depends on Indian identification: When there are benefits to be gained from minority racial status, one-drop treatment of mixed-race people is less attractive to the majority.

Second, racial inequality today may be perpetuated through mechanisms that do not require the heavy-handed institutional practices of yesteryear, such as rigid, official racial classification schemes. Instead of the old Jim Crow racism that was extensively supported by state-sponsored segregation and other *de jure* racist practices, Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith (1997) argue that a new “laissez-faire racism” has taken hold in the United States, one that “relies on the market and informal racial bias to re-create, and in some instances sharply worsen, structured racial inequality” (p. 17). According to this perspective, “extant patterns of black-white socioeconomic inequality and residential segregation [are viewed]. . . as outcomes of a free-market, race-neutral state apparatus” (p. 38). In such a climate, formal and overt racial classification standards may no longer be necessary for boundary marking and the allocation of rights and resources, and individuals’ self-identification as multiracial may be permissible because it is materially inconsequential.

Finally, the growing awareness that whites are predicted to lose their numerical majority in the 21st century may favor shifts in racial boundaries that help shore up the white population count. Here Kingsley Davis’s (1941) hypothesis about the boundary-marking role of mixed-race people remains especially relevant because it suggests that the new willingness to acknowledge multiracial identities—rather than following the hypodescent rule of treating them simply as members of lower-status monoracial groups—represents

a softening in the dominant racial group’s policing of its exclusionary boundaries. In a poignant reversal, 19th-century predictions of American Indian extinction now seem to be giving way to fears for the decline of the white population (Patterson, 2001; Warren & Twine, 1997). As in the past, “amalgamation” with other races may seem the only way out. The scenario of a future “beige majority” formed by the union of whites with Hispanics, Asians, and mixed-race people has been raised by writers who argue that the United States is moving from a system of racial stratification based on the distinction between whites and nonwhites to one in which a black versus nonblack dichotomy prevails (Gans, 1999; Lind, 1998; Sanjek, 1994). In such a shift, mixed-race Americans would be decoupled from the communities of color to which one-drop thinking has frequently assigned them in much the same manner as many people of American Indian ancestry have already come to be understood as white (Snipp, 1986). In their article “White Americans, the New Minority? Non-Blacks and the Ever-Expanding Boundaries of Whiteness,” Warren and Twine (1997) point out that the perception that the nation is becoming less white depends crucially on who counts as white, and new recruits are always possible. Should efforts to limit admission to the white category be relaxed, as they were for new European immigrants nearly a century ago, American concepts of multiracial identity will surely be further transformed.

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## NOTES

1. The category “part Hawaiian” appeared in 1960 (Bennett, 2000), but this need not denote a mixed-race ancestry, depending on whether other components of the respondent’s ancestry are considered to be racially distinct from a Hawaiian identity.

2. Of course, mulattoes “passing” for white involved “community recognition” of sorts. However, although it relied on acquaintances’ accepting the passer as white, it brooked no hint that he or she had any black ancestry. What is striking about the 1930 census instructions is that an individual known by the enumerator to be mixed blood could legitimately be recorded as white.

3. However, the 1950 census of Hawai’i introduced a multiracial question that showed approximately 4% of its population to be of mixed race other than partial Hawaiian (U.S. Census Bureau, 1963, p. xi).

4. See the equation of Indian “preservation and civilization” with removal and the reservation system in Tyler (1973, pp. 55, 80). Note also white settlers’ quasi-religious belief in their right to take possession of lands not properly cultivated by American Indians, prefiguring the notion of manifest destiny (Prucha, 1981; Smedley, 1999; Tyler, 1973).

5. This metaphor, equating the achievement of whiteness with the mysterious production of gold, appears elsewhere; see, for example, Jacobson’s (1998) *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*.

6. However, some argue that biological concepts of race still structure scientific thought today; see Duster (1999), Harrison (1999), Keita and Kittles (1997), and Lieberman (1997).

7. See Goldstein and Morning (2000), D. R. Harris (2000), OMB (2000b), Tucker et al. (1996), and U.S. Census Bureau (1996, 1997, 1999, 2000).

8. Although these are the main racial groups into which the Census Bureau groups 2000 data, the Asian category is actually represented on the census form by several subcategories (e.g., “Asian Indian,” “Chinese”), which are later aggregated for tabulation.

9. Author’s calculations based on the Census Bureau’s 2000 Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001a).

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