4

Whites and Other Social Races

AS A FORMER census official once pointed out, decennial censuses often reflect a country's historical needs, and the information collected is deemed necessary for the national interest and for the needs of small geographic areas (Estrada 1993:497). These "historical needs" are seen differently by different political groups, however, and when governments try to create statistical representations of its populations, the process is predicated on political and ideological choices. Thus the resulting categories generally reflect a political consensus on who is to be counted, how, and how often (Lee 1993). These categories describe the population(s) from the perspective of those who have the power to select them, and in turn, they influence the way that populations see themselves.

Over time, U.S. decennial census classifications have moved toward a more sharply defined bipolar structure. Basically, two socially constructed polarities have evolved that contain "whites" at one end and "other social races" at the other. Although each polarity has been and continues to be fluid, this dichotomy has prevailed throughout most of the census's two-hundred-year history. At various times, different divisions are featured, for example, white, black, and mulatto or white, black, Chinese, and Indian. But even in these instances, the basic dichotomous structure of "whites and other social races" has been retained. It is this bipolar structure that groups—those not quite white or black—have contested in the past, and it is this structure that Latinos today resist (Halter 1993; Leonard 1992; Loewen 1971; Smith 1993).

This chapter traces the decennial censuses' changing classification of race. Besides some surprising changes over time, we will see the evolution of this bipolar structure. Among the surprises are that the U.S. Constitution did not refer to color or race when it set forth the criteria on which the census was to be based. Rather, the initial distinctions pertained to free or slave status and taxed Indians.

By 1790, however, when the first census was taken, the color term *white* was introduced, and so it was *color*—and not *race*—that became the primary term of classification. Color remained an essential category of the census for more than a century and a half and preceded race as a category by nearly one hundred years. The concepts of color and race were officially joined in the twentieth century and are the foundation of the bipolar structure that evolved.

THE EARLY CENSUSES

Because the United States of America was conceived as a democratic and representative government, its people had to be counted. In addition, all the states had to agree on who was to be counted and how. The 1787 Constitution of the United States established the outline of such a count in its criteria for apportionment, an immediate outcome of which was the structure of the census with regard to race.

According to article I, section 2, clause 3 of the U.S. Constitution (the apportionment rule), the population was to be counted every ten years, and this became the mandate for the decennial census. The same paragraph specifies:

> 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. (cited in Anderson 1988:9)

What is interesting about this excerpt is its vagueness. With the exception of the oblique reference to Indians, "race" is not explicitly mentioned. "Free Persons" does not specify "whites," and persons of African descent are not directly mentioned.

Nonetheless, it is understood that "three fifths of all other Persons" refers to slaves, who were of African descent. That is, for apportionment purposes, persons in this category were to be counted as three-fifths of a white person. In addition, indentured servants, most of whom were from Europe, were to be counted as free persons. The

Constitution clearly states that untaxed Indians—most likely the majority of Indians then—were not to be counted. But the implication was that taxed Indians would be counted. These were generally Indians who lived in European settlements and were no longer affiliated with a tribe. They may also have included Indian women who had married white men.

As Anderson noted, the apportionment rule incorporated into the census and the political fabric of the new nation a tradition of differentiating "these three great elements of the population"—the free, slave, and Indian populations (1988:12). The method used to determine apportionment was tantamount to deciding who was to be acknowledged, and how. These decisions reflected how various groups of people were viewed at that time, which groups were considered to be part of the constituent population, and which were not.

In the first census of 1790, being indentured or being a Native American did not prevent one from being counted. As long as they paid taxes, Indians could be represented.[1] Slaves, however, were not counted or represented. Thus the two main non-European components of the U.S. population were recognized in different ways. Being counted, however, was not by itself assurance of equal citizenship rights, for free white women were counted but could not vote, and free white men who did not own property could not vote. But not being counted meant that a person had no official place in society and being calculated as a fraction of a free person meant that one was regarded as a different or lesser kind of person.

The Initial Reference Point

The 1790 census was taken one year after President George Washington was inaugurated and included the population of the original thirteen colonies plus the territories of Maine, Kentucky, Vermont, and Tennessee (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1989:1). The questions asked the name of the head of the family and the number of persons living in each household who were free white males or free white females, both over and under sixteen years of age; all other free persons; and slaves. The gender and age of the slaves or "other free people" were apparently not important (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1978:1).[2] The interest in "free white males over the age of sixteen" reflected the need "to assess the

SIXTH CONGRESS. SESS. I. CH. 12. 1800.

Schedule of the whole number of persons within the division allotted to A. B.

	Name of county, parish, township, town, or city where the family resides.
	Name of head of family.
	Free white males under ten years of age.
	Free white males of ten and under sixteen.
	Free white males of sixteen and under twenty-six, including heads of families.
	Free white males of twenty-six and under forty-five, including heads of families.
	Free white males of forty-five and upwards, including heads of families.
	Free white females under ten years of age.
	Free white females of ten years and under sixteen.
	Free white females of sixteen and under twenty-six, including heads of families.
	Free white females of twenty-six and under forty-five, including heads of families.
	Free white females of forty-five and upwards, including heads of families.
	All other free persons, except Indians, not taxed.
	Slaves.

1800

ELEVENTH CONGRESS. SESS. II. CH. 17. 1810.

Schedule of the whole number of persons within the division allotted to A. B.

	Name of the county, parish, township, town or city where the family resides.
	Names of head of family.
	Free white males under ten years of age.
	Free white males of ten, and under sixteen.
	Free white males of sixteen, and under twenty-six, including heads of families.
	Free white males of twenty-six, and under forty-five, including heads of families.
	Free white males of forty-five and upwards, including heads of families.
	Free white females under ten years of age.
	Free white females of ten years, and under sixteen.
	Free white females of sixteen, and under twenty-six, including heads of families.
	Free white females of twenty-six, and under forty-five, including heads of families.
	Free white females of forty-five and upwards, including heads of families.
	All other free persons, except Indians, not taxed.
	Slaves.

1810

SIXTEENTH CONGRESS. SESS. I. CH. 24. 1820.

Schedule of the whole number of persons within the division allotted to A. B.

	Name of the county, parish, township, town, or city, where the family resides.
	Names of heads of families.
	Free white males under ten years.
	Free white males of ten and under sixteen.
	Free white males between sixteen and eighteen.
	Free white males of sixteen and under twenty-six, including heads of families.
	Free white males of twenty-six and under forty-five, including heads of families.
	Free white males of forty-five and upwards, including heads of families.
	Free white females under ten years of age.
	Free white females of ten and under sixteen.
	Free white females of sixteen and under twenty-six including heads of families.
	Free white females of twenty-six and under forty-five, including heads of families.
	Free white females of forty-five and upwards, including heads of families.
	Foreigners not naturalized.
	SLAVES.
	Males under fourteen.
	Males of fourteen and under twenty-six.
	Males of twenty-six and under forty-five.
	Males of forty-five and upwards.
	Females of fourteen.
	Females of fourteen and under twenty-six.
	Females of twenty-six and under forty-five.
	Females of forty-five and upwards.
	FREE COLOURED PERSONS.
	Males under fourteen years.
	Males of fourteen and under twenty-six.
	Males of twenty-six and under forty-five.
	Males of forty-five and upwards.
	Females under fourteen years.
	Females of fourteen and under twenty-six.
	Females of twenty-six and under forty-five.
	Females of forty-five and upwards.
	All other persons, except Indians not taxed.

1820

FIG. 4.1. Census Schedule Forms, 1800–1820. *U.S. Statutes at Large,* 6th–12 Cong., 1799–1813, vols. 2 and 3, ed. Richard Peters, Esq. (1846 and 1856; reprint, Buffalo: Dennis & Co., 1963).

country's industrial and military potential" (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1989:1).

Between the drafting of the Constitution in 1787 and the taking of the first census in 1790, the term *white* became an explicit part of the first category to be measured. The "slaves" category remained unchanged, and the third category was labeled "all other free persons." Theoretically, those in political charge could have chosen another definition for the first category and, consequently, themselves. That is, they could have chosen "free English-speaking males over sixteen" or "free males of Christian descent" or "of European descent." But they chose color. Having named the central category "white" gave a centrality and power to color that has continued throughout the history of the census.

A Definitive Color Line

In the census's first four decades, local authorities took the census, and so the information was not uniform. Hence, the categories used on the national census frequently differed from those used on the state census. Finally in 1830, uniform census forms were introduced, although congressional records between 1800 and 1820 already included schedules recommended for taking the census (see figure 4.1).

By 1840, the census categories had established a number of patterns, and significant changes had been made as well. As table 4.1 shows, between 1790 and 1840, the categories of "free whites" and "slaves" stayed the same. But in 1800 and 1810, the 1790 category "all other free persons" was changed to "all other free persons, except Indians not taxed." In 1820 it was subsumed under "free colored persons," and in 1830 it disappeared altogether.[3] The "free colored persons" category was retained in the 1840 census.

In 1830, when uniform census forms were introduced, the color line was also more clearly established. The original color-free category "all other free persons" that appeared in the first three censuses had disappeared. The major divisions were now more explicitly "colored": whites, who were free, and coloreds, who were free or slave. (See appendix C for a discussion of why the first three censuses did not contain a color term and why the original "all other free persons" category was replaced by the "free colored" category.)

Table 4.1
Labeling Citizens and Others in Early Censuses, 1790–1840

1790	1800	1810	1820	1830	1840
Free white males and females	Free white males and females	Free white males and females	Free white males and females	Free white males and females	Free white males and females
Slaves	Slaves	Slaves	Slaves	Slaves	Slaves
All other free persons	All other free persons, except Indians, not taxed	All other free persons, except Indians, not taxed	Free colored persons (all other free persons, except Indians, not taxed)	Free colored persons	Free colored persons
			Foreigners not naturalized	Foreigners not naturalized	Foreigners not naturalized

Sources: Return of the Whole Number of Persons within the Several Districts of the United States (1802); "Aggregate Amount of Each Description of Persons within the United States of America, and the Territories Thereof, Agreeably to Actual Enumeration Made According to Law, in the Year 1810" (1810); *Census for 1820* (1821); U.S. Dept. of State (1832a and b, 1835, 1842); U.S. House of Representatives (1895); *U.S. Statutes at Large* (1846, 1856); U.S. Bureau of the Census (1967, 1978, 1989); *Heads of Families at the First Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1790: New York* (1992).

THE EVOLVING BIPOLAR STRUCTURE

After 1820 and the shift to color categories, the elements of culture, language, religion, and mixture were compacted into a choice between white and colored. By 1830, a bipolar structure—of "whites" and "nonwhites"—was clearly taking shape. As table 4.1 shows, the categories used between 1790 and 1840 were based on the three criteria of freedom, birthplace, and color (on one side were "free white males and females," "all other free people," "free colored," and "foreigners, not naturalized"; and on the other side were "slaves"). By 1830, however, the data on "free people of color" and "slaves" were combined in some instances. For example, a table in the 1830 census reporting "the number of deaf and dumb" combined "slaves and colored persons" in one count, and "aliens and foreigners not naturalized" were included in the white count (U.S. Dept. of State 1832a:42–43). Moreover, "aliens and foreigners not naturalized" were included in the "total white" count (U.S. Dept. of State 1832b:48–51).

The bipolar structure of white and colored became more explicit.

Although the censuses between 1830 and 1860 reported the numbers of whites, slaves, and free colored in separate columns, some of the tables combined slaves and free colored.[4] The hypodescent rule also became more explicit,[5] and "other races" were put into the not-white or colored column. By the third decennial census (1820), whiteness was more precisely defined, with the addition of the "foreigners not naturalized" category[6] (see table 4.2). This category distinguished the foreign (most likely white and free) from the native-born white and free. Its introduction suggests a distinction between the "whites" in the power structure, who were citizens by birth, and "probationary whites," who were not (Ignatiev 1995; Jacobson 1998). In the 1850 census, the category of "free whites" was changed to simply "whites," which suggests that by this time it was evident that all the people in this category were free.

As table 4.2 shows, from 1820 to 1880, census forms continued to ask for "color," but by the twentieth century, they shifted away from the term *color* and substituted *race*. As table 4.3 indicates, "mixed" persons were counted, as there appeared to be a growing concern with measuring mixture more accurately, particularly after the Civil War. A category of "other races"—for example, Chinese, Indians, and Japanese—was added. Finally, more information, such as exact age, was collected for all persons, regardless of race or color.

Beginning with the 1850 census, census takers were instructed to gather information on the color, age, sex, and other characteristics of each slave and free colored person. This was a major shift, because previously these groups had simply been listed as household members and information about them was not collected. Now these two "not-white" groups, the slaves and the free colored, were to be described as fully as the white group.

Mulattoes

As table 4.3 shows, in both the free and slave populations, mulattoes were counted for the first time in 1850, with similar procedures used to count both the slaves and the free colored.[7] According to the published data, mulattoes never constituted a large proportion of the total recorded "Negro" population—less than one-fifth in all but one year (Miller 1991:table 2; Williamson 1984:102). But given the difficulties of measuring those who attempted to "pass" and of "accurately" measuring "mulatto-ness," these figures are not reliable.

Table 4.2
The Shift from "Color" to "Race" in Decennial Censuses, 1790–1990

Census Categories	1790	1800[a]	1810	1820	1830	1840	1850	1860	1870	1880	1890[b]	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990
All other free persons	■	■	■																		
Free colored				■	■	■															
Color							■	■	■	■											
Color or race																			■		
Race												■	■	■	■	■	■				■
Is this person . . . ?[c]																		■		■	

[a] The 1800, 1810, and 1820 censuses contain the category "all other persons except Indians not taxed." But starting with the 1820 census, that category was placed under a new, broader category, "free colored persons."
[b] In 1890, the category stated "whether white, black, mulatto, quadroon, octoroon, Chinese, Japanese, or Indian." Figures for these groups were reported separately and there was also a "total colored" column that provided the total for all these groups. See U.S. House of Representatives 1895.
[c] In the 1960 and 1980 censuses, an interrogative category was used: Is this person . . . ?

Sources: Return of the Whole Number of Persons within the Several Districts of the United States (1802); "Aggregate Amount of Each Description of Persons within the United States of America, and the Territories Thereof, Agreeably to Actual Enumeration Made According to Law, in the Year 1810" (1810); *Census for 1820* (1821); U.S. Dept. of State (1832b, 1842); U.S. House of Representatives (1895); U.S. Bureau of the Census (1932, 1943, 1953, 1963, 1973, 1978, 1989).

Table 4.3
Labeling Mixture and Other Races, 1850–1880

1850[a]	1860	1870	1880
Whites	Whites	Whites	Whites
Free blacks	Free blacks	Blacks	Blacks
Free mulattos	Free mulattos	Mulattos	Mulattos
Slave blacks	Slave blacks		
Slave mulattos	Slave mulattos		
		Indians[b]	Indians
		Chinese	Chinese
			Japanese[c]

[a] By 1850, gender (referred to then as "sex") was being recorded for most groups.
[b] Counts for Indians and Chinese were reported in the 1860 census. But it was in 1870 that categories for these groups appeared on the census form.
[c] A category for the Japanese was not listed separately on the census form in 1880, but some of the tables did report separate figures for the Japanese (see, e.g., U.S. House of Representatives 1883:table 1a, p. 3). The preface to the 1880 census also describes Whites and Coloreds and indicates that Asiatics includes Chinese, Japanese, East Indians, etc. (U.S. House of Representatives 1883:xxvi).

Sources: U.S. House of Representatives 1883:xxvi, 1895; *U.S. Statutes at Large* 1856; U.S. Bureau of the Census 1967, 1978, 1989.

The concern with correctly measuring color surfaced after the Civil War when the slave category became an anachronism, and it is evident in the instructions given to enumerators during this period. In the 1850 and 1860 censuses, the enumerators had been instructed to write "B" for "black" and "M" for "mulatto" and to leave the space blank for "white." But in 1870, the census takers were instructed: "It must not be assumed that where nothing is written in this column 'white' is to be understood." This may have corrected what must have been a problem in the previous censuses, that leaving the space blank might have enabled some people of mixed ancestry to "pass" into the "white" category. Thus, when in doubt about the "color" of difficult-to-classify individuals, the enumerators might have been inclined to leave the designation blank, resulting in their being counted as "white." This type of "passing" may have been more tolerated under slavery, when the number of free people of color was relatively small and the condition of slavery served as a primary marker of status, color, and race. But "passing" was not tolerated after Emancipation, when status could not be determined as easily and light-skinned former slaves might try to pass into the white category.

The instructions for the 1870 census also advised enumerators to be "particularly careful in reporting the class Mulatto. The word is here generic, and includes quadroons, octoroons, and all persons having any perceptible trace of African blood." In addition, "Important scientific results depend upon the correct determination of this class" (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1989:26). The concern with mixture (understood mainly as the proportion of "black blood") reached a peak in the 1890 census, which counted quadroons (one-quarter "black blood"), octoroons (one-eighth "or any trace of black blood"), mulattoes (three-eighths to five-eighths black), and blacks (three-quarters or more) (Wright 1956:187).[8] This more complicated racial scheme was unworkable for the census, however, and it was omitted from the next one (Miller 1991:1; U.S. Census Office 1901:cxi).[9]

THE GROWTH OF A RACIST IDEOLOGY

The statement that "important scientific results" depended on the correct classification of "mulattoes" and "blacks" suggests that the census may have been influenced by the then popular theories of scientific racism, which held that group differences could be "scientifically" attributed to "race." It is widely believed today that in the nineteenth century, a racist ideology (based on color differences) developed that served the purpose of rationalizing expansion, slavery, and class differences (Banton 1983; Barzun 1965; Bernal 1987; Bieder 1986; Freedman 1984; Gossett 1963; Gould 1981; Johansen 1982:84; Jordan 1968; Sanjek 1994:5; Snowden 1983; Stanton 1960; Thomas 1989: 29–31; Thompson 1989). Horsman, who examined writings, politicians' speeches, and newspaper coverage of the period, found that after 1815, the "supposed lessons of the American experience hastened the collapse of Enlightenment theory and helped produce scientific theories of black and Indian inferiority. Along with this debasement of other races was to come an enhancement of the white race as superior " and more explicitly stated census concerns about the mixing of the races (1981:115).

By 1850, the census publications already manifested a strong identification with northern Europe and a desire to preserve, legitimize, or develop a northern European "racial" identity for the United States. As the 1850 census stated: "The great mass of the white population of this country is of Teutonic origin, with a considerable admixture of Celtic"

(U.S. Secretary of the Interior 1853b:10). It was reasoned that with a predominantly northern European population, the United States would be able to compete with its northern European counterparts, particularly since it was located on much the same latitude and had a climate similar to that of Europe (U.S. Secretary of the Interior 1853b:10–11).

The assumption was that climate had determined and would continue to determine the evolution and progress of the different human races. The United States, imagined as a country whose population was of primarily Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic origin, was seen as having a particular destiny. According to the 1850 census,

> As has been truly observed, "a race of men launched upon the tide of existence, have, by virtue of all the conditions, a determined course to run, which will make its own way, and fulfil its own destiny, in accordance with a system of laws as unalterable and supreme as those which control the physical universe." (U.S. Secretary of the Interior 1853b:10)

Another assumption was that the same laws of life would prevail on both sides of the Atlantic and "produce like results upon both continents" (U.S. Secretary of the Interior 1853b:10).

To this end, the life expectancies of American whites were computed and compared with those in Europe and were found to be the same for the "different branches of the Teutonic family of nations, in temperate climates." The statistics were compared for England and Massachusetts, which are on the same latitude, and for those of Maryland and France, which are also on the same latitude. That this type of discourse should appear in the census volumes was unusual, as they tended to be rather bureaucratic and devoid of editorial positions. The departure probably reflected the intensity of these issues before the Civil War.

This view of a future predestined by geographic location, the migration of northern Europeans, and climatic features was undoubtedly the basis of the concern with the growth of the "colored" population, which had evolved in more southern latitudes, in different climates, and from seemingly less advanced people. This concern also reflected a perceived threat to the numerical and political dominance of whites and to the clear demarcation of the "races." Whites may also have feared that the colored (both slave and free) population might retaliate

against what one census publication referred to as the "governing race" (U.S. Secretary of the Interior 1852:20).

These concerns about the races' mixing and the growth of the "colored" population had surfaced earlier in census documents. For example, in the preparation for the 1830 census, Congress specifically asked the census for projections of this population's growth and its impact on the white population. The 1830 census accordingly prepared tables comparing the 1790 and 1830 populations, in which it combined both the free colored and slave populations (U.S. Dept. of State 1835). Also in 1850, the census produced tables showing the ratio of increase of the white, free colored, and slaves since 1790 (U.S. Secretary of the Interior 1853a:ix, lxxxvii).

Concern with the growth of the colored (both slave and free) population may also have been rooted in the fear that they might retaliate against the "governing race" (U.S. Secretary of the Interior 1852:20). Indeed, the demographic picture of the populace at the start of the census taking shows that the "governing race" was not so much in the majority (in all areas) as subsequent history texts suggested. In 1790, those seen to be the military and commercial guardians of the society were not the overwhelming majority of the population. Free white males over the age of sixteen constituted only 20.7 percent of the total population, and slaves and "all other free persons" of all ages accounted for 17.8 percent and 1.5 percent, respectively[10] (*Heads of Families*, 1908/1992:8). The distribution of blacks by state at this time also shows that some had very high proportions of "Negroes" (U.S. House of Representatives 1895:xcvi). For example, in 1790, blacks (both slave and free) constituted 44 percent of South Carolina, 41 percent of Virginia, 36 percent of Georgia, 35 percent of Maryland, 27 percent of North Carolina, 22 percent of Delaware, and 19 percent of Ohio Territory (*Reference Library of Black America* 1990:483). These demographic findings may have fueled the concern of many about the growth of the "colored" populations.

This concern continued throughout the nineteenth century. The last census before the Civil War, in 1860, contained a table comparing the growth rates of the free colored, slave, and white populations by state and territory between 1840 and 1850 (Kennedy 1862:table 1, p. 130) and a table showing the percentage increase of the free colored and slave populations between 1790 and 1850 (Kennedy 1862:17). Then, in the

1870, 1880, and 1890 censuses, maps were included that showed the density of the colored population and the proportion of colored in the total population (U.S. House of Representatives 1883, 1895; U.S. Secretary of the Interior 1872b).[11]

Occasionally, the census expressed concern with the growth of the colored population. For example, when relating the history of African Americans in Maryland, a special census volume stated: "The tendency of the colored race to encroach upon the numerical superiority of the white continued for twenty years longer, until, in 1810, they were found to have attained the ratio of 38.22 in a hundred of the entire population, and the whites had declined correspondingly to 61.78" (U.S. Secretary of the Interior 1852:20). It added that during the last twenty years, the number of colored had been more than double that of whites but that a way had been found a way to check this growth:

> There was in 1810, reason for apprehension that, in another half century, the blacks would become the preponderating race. There is reason to believe that this alarming tendency was checked by the introduction of new pursuits of industry, giving employment to a portion of the native population, which would otherwise have sought it beyond the limits of the State and inviting into it emigrants from abroad. (U.S. Secretary of the Interior 1852:20)

These efforts, plus the encouragement of migration from Great Britain and Germany, "rescued the whites from the peril, which seemed to be impending, of a loss of their numerical predominance" (U.S. Secretary of the Interior 1852:20).

Free People of Color

Free people of color were a challenge to the distinction between the slave and free populations. On the one hand, they were free and therefore perhaps entitled to the same rights as nonslaves. On the other hand, they were of African descent and thus "not equal" to free whites. Because of the striking rise in their numbers in the two decades before 1820, it became important to count them more precisely.[12] (See appendix D for a more detailed discussion of the concerns with the growth of this group.)

Other Races

Before 1870, the census form offered a choice between two categories, whites, defined in terms of the absence of any "black blood," and colored, defined by its presence. Then in 1870, categories for Chinese (and later Japanese) were added to the census form in response to the increasing numbers of Asian immigrants toward the end of the nineteenth century.[13] The addition of Native Americans reflected the growing recognition of their dependence on the U.S. government after they were relocated onto reservations (Lurie 1974).

In 1870, data were gathered according to color (i.e., "whites," "Chinese," "Indian," and "colored"—blacks and mulattoes) but were reported separately by group. Thus, under the heading "Color," the enumerators were to write in "white (W)," "black (B)," "mulatto (M)," "Chinese (C)," or "Indians (I)" (U.S. Secretary of the Interior 1872a:18, 20–21; 1872b:606–609). According to Carlberg (1992), these additions may have been "color" groupings, but they did not represent the population referred to as "colored" at the time. In other words, they were not "colored" (as understood then), but they also were clearly not "white."

This method of separately reporting information on the other races was continued in the 1880 census,[14] but some tables and the introductory section of the 1890 census contain a footnote that the "colored population" included "persons of negro descent, Chinese, Japanese, and civilized Indians" (U.S. House of Representatives 1895: 400–401, clxxx, 681).[15] Thus, it appeared that the earlier "white" and "colored" dichotomy had begun evolving into a "white" and "other than white" dichotomy, with many more categories in the "other than white" group.

Whiteness and Birthplace

The large influx of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe also led to a concern about how they were affecting the population at large. Hence, the 1880 census listed the proportion of "defective, dependent, and delinquent classes"—including the mentally disabled, retarded, blind, and deaf—among the native born, foreign born, whites, and colored (U.S. House of Representatives 1883:926 and table ix). In addition, the census gave the distribution of native-born colored in the population according to state or territory of birth (U.S. House of Representatives 1883:477 and table xii).

This concern with immigrants and their impact on the total population was reflected again in the 1890 census, in the more elaborate maps, charts, and sections on the foreign-born population. Maps and tables also showed the distribution in the United States of "Natives of the Germanic Nations" and of "Greco-Latins." Pie charts described changes in the U.S. population over time in the birthplaces of native-born parents, foreign parents, foreign born, and colored. These were called the four "elements at each census" and were accompanied by tables and discussions of the marital status of each (U.S. House of Representatives 1895:clxxix, 394, 681 ff). These reports suggest the continuing concerns with preserving a national identity as a basically northern European people.

The United States' bipolar structure was still in place at the end of the nineteenth century, although it had become more complex. Whites were clearly the central category by which others were defined—as either white or not white. Now, however, there were "other races" and also more information on everyone. The official definition of "mulatto" was someone with any perceptible trace of African blood, which was an important step in the development of the hypodescent rule. At that time, the rule distinguished mulattoes from blacks, but eventually it would define all blacks (Grieve 1996:56).

Concern with the impact of immigration on the total population continued. Questions about immigrants and their racial origins were the subject of the government's massive Dillingham Report, which focused on immigration at the turn of the century (*U.S. Immigration Commission* 1911). The report used the phrase "races and peoples" throughout and entitled its ninth volume *Dictionary of Races or Peoples*. This reflected the ambiguity of whether Europe's linguistic groups were racial groups or peoples. Nonetheless, these various white peoples were eventually accepted as Caucasian or American white (Jacobson 1998).

As the century drew to a close, questions of who was white and who could be a citizen also began to be litigated in the courts, thereby defining whiteness even more narrowly (Haney López 1996). The persistence of the 1790 federal law requiring that naturalized citizens be white, in combination with other state laws that required one to be a citizen in order to own property, vote, hold office, and the like, continued to restrict the rights of many nonwhite immigrants and to bring them to court in an attempt to be designated either "white" and/or a citizen.[16]

By the end of the nineteenth century, it was clear from these court cases that a basic racial structure of whites and not-whites had evolved.

THE SECOND CENTURY

Color or Race, 1900–1940

The 1900 census dropped the 1890 attempt to count the black population by blood quantum of one-eighth and so forth and admitted that these figures had been "of little value" (U.S. Census Office 1901:cxi). But it still counted mulattoes and blacks as two subcategories of Negro,[17] and a footnote to the "Negro" column indicated that this category included "all persons of Negro descent." In addition, a special census of Native Americans asked how much "white blood" they had (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1989:46). Thus, "blood" (and its effect on color) still seemed to be an important, if not the principal, basis for establishing a person's color, which in turn determined his or her "race."

The division between "white" and "other-than-white" became much more clear-cut in the 1900 census. Now the data on blacks, Chinese, Japanese, Indians taxed, and Indians not taxed were listed under the broader "Colored" column (U.S. Census Office 1901:483). Likewise, in the introduction to the 1900 census, whites and colored were carefully distinguished: "From these tables it appears that the population of the entire area of enumeration in 1900 is composed of 66,990,788 white persons and 9,312,589 colored persons, the latter figure comprising . . . persons of negro descent, . . . Chinese, . . . Japanese, and . . . Indians" (U.S. Census Office 1901:cxi, numbers omitted).

Curiously, the 1900 census also added the term *race* to *color* and introduced the phrase *color or race*, which was used on all the census forms for the next forty years (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1978, 1989). Used together, these terms reinforced the singularly *physical* interpretation of racial construction in the United States. Nevertheless, both the white and other-than-white race groups were in fact social and political constructions. Although the 1900 census text was clear with regard to the division between races, it was slippery when classifying "mixed" or in-between groups. It noted, for instance, that the Croatans in North Carolina had been counted as white in 1890 and as Indian in 1900 (U.S. Census Office 1901:cxxiv).

The 1910 census addressed the issue of in-betweenness more directly. It gave new instructions to the enumerators that formed the basis for the following decennial censuses: "For all persons not falling within one of these [race or color] classes they should write 'Ot' (for other). . . . For census purposes, the term 'black' (B) includes all persons who are evidently full-blooded negroes, while the term 'mulatto' (Mu) includes all other persons having some proportion or perceptible trace of negro blood" (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1989:ii, 50).

Perhaps influenced by the then politically ascendant eugenics movement, which also was influencing immigration legislation (Jacobson 1998:133; Marks 1995:87 ff), the 1920 census reported in its introduction the "color or race" of the people in the United States' outlying possessions—Guam, American Samoa, the Panama Canal Zone, the Virgin Islands, the Philippine Islands, and "Porto Rico" (Puerto Rico) and also a special census of "Porto Rico" (U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census 1922:11). In addition, the census more explicitly defined blood "purity" and categories; for example, "The term 'white' as used in the census reports refers to persons understood to be pure-blooded whites." Also, the "colored" applied to blacks, Indians, Chinese, Japanese, and "all other," who were "Filipinos, Hindus, Koreans, Hawaiians, Malays, Siamese, and Maoris" (U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census 1922:10; 1921:16).

The 1920 census still had a few tables counting mulattoes,[18] but volume 2 acknowledged the "considerable uncertainty" concerning "the classification of Negroes as black and mulatto," since the "accuracy of the distinction" depended largely on "the judgement and care employed by the enumerators" (U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census 1921:16–17). Furthermore, figures for the same county varied greatly depending on whether the census enumerators were black (as in the 1910 census) or white (as in the 1920 census). Black enumerators found a higher proportion of mulattoes. This awareness that racial perception was influenced by variables such as the interviewer's race or the community's acceptance probably helped move the 1920 census to abandon the distinction between "mulatto" and "black," thereby moving the hypodescent rule to another level. Anyone with any black ancestry was now simply "black" or "Negro."

Paradoxically, the awareness that racial classification was socially constructed, that is, influenced by personal and social factors, led to a more rigid adherence to genetic ancestry, which further reinforced the

hypodescent rule. The hypodescent rule also separated "race" from "ethnicity," for regardless of ethnicity, one's race was the main determinant of one's status. Thus, race was the primary means of identification, and ethnicity was subordinated, obscured, or combined with race.

Williamson (1984), Davis (1992), and Domínguez (1986) discussed this shift in the hypodescent rule and the involvement of both the government's definitions and people's own self-affirming and self-determining actions. Williamson, for example, argued that in the shift from a three- to a two-tier racial structure, a "new people" was born. A fusion of Europeans and Africans, they were proud and articulated their identity most eloquently in the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s (p. 111). When the Negro culture was embraced, "negritude" was also redefined, and "the beauty of all colors and features" was recognized (p. 58). Accordingly, race was redefined as based on descent and cultural definitions rather than appearance. African Americans found strength in their blackness and in that strength lay the power to stand apart from the world (p. 187). As Williamson noted, "The drive for a biracial society had reached its culmination . . . not by white dictation . . . but . . . by the eager embracement of 'blackness' by American Negroes" (p. 3).[19]

The 1920 census also confirmed the hypodescent rule by specifying how mixed-race people were to be classified: "A person of mixed blood is classified according to the nonwhite racial strain or, if the nonwhite blood itself is mixed, according to his racial status as adjudged by the community in which he resides." The examples provided made clear that "regardless of the amount of white blood," a person with a mixture of "Negro" or "Indian" blood was to be classified "either as an Indian or as a Negro, according to his racial status in the community in which he lives." Finally, the white population was divided into four groups depending on birthplace (U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census 1922:10).[20]

As table 4.4 indicates, although other categories were added throughout the twentieth century, the censuses taken between 1900 and 1940 varied little from the basic structure established in 1920. This structure contained three divisions (whites, Negroes, and other races) within a basically bipolar population of whites and colored. "Other races" included all those who were not white or Negro, for example, Japanese, Chinese, and Indians—all those who were nonwhite or colored.

There was, however, one interesting deviation. In 1930, "persons of Mexican birth or parentage who were not definitely reported as white

Table 4.4
Census Race and Color Categories, 1890–1990

	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990
White	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Black		■	■	■							
Negro					■	■	■	■			
Black/Negro									■	■	■
Mulatto	■		■	■							
Quadroon	■										
Indian	■	■	■	■	■	■					
American Indian							■	■			
Indian (Amer.)									■	■	■
Aleut								■		■	■
Eskimo								■		■	■
Asian or Pacific Islander											■
Chinese	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Japanese	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Filipino					■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Hindu					■	■					
Korean					■	■			■	■	■
Hawaiian								■	■	■	■
Part Hawaiian								■			
Vietnamese										■	■
Asian Indian										■	■
Guamanian										■	■
Samoan										■	■
Mexican					■						
Other			■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

Source: Adapted from Sharon M. Lee, "Racial Classifications in the U.S. Census: 1890–1990," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 16 (1) (January 1993): 78.

or Indian were designated Mexican" and tabulated with "other races," such as Native American, Japanese, or Chinese (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1932:1).[21] The 1940 census, however, reversed this policy regarding Mexican classification, stating that "persons of Mexican birth or ancestry who were not definitely Indian or of other nonwhite race were

returned as white" (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1943:3). Thus, within a decade, Mexicans were shifted from their own "Mexican" category to being included in the "white" category—unless they appeared to census interviewers to be "definitely Indian or of other Nonwhite races" (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1943:3; see table 4.4).

Fluctuating Labels, 1950–1990

Until 1940, "color or race" was consistently used as a label to describe groups, but in the second half of the century, this practice changed. As table 4.2 shows, in 1950, the census form used only "race." In both 1960 and 1980, it simply asked, "Is this person . . . ?" and provided a list of categories.[22] In 1970, it was "color or race," and in 1990, it was again "race." As this book goes to press, the question in the 2000 census will be, "What is this person's race?" and in a major departure from the census's two-hundred-year history, more than one response will be allowed.

After World War II, the census first tried to explain the concept of race, and the 1950 census admitted that the concept lacked scientific precision and was based on public opinion (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1953:35). The census also recognized the importance of context in determining race: "Experience has shown that reasonably adequate identification of the smaller 'racial' groups is made in areas where they are relatively numerous but that representatives of such groups may be misclassified in areas where they are rare" (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1953:35). Similar admonitions were repeated in the 1960 census (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1963:xx).[23] These questions mirrored the scientific and international community's broader questioning of the concept of race, in the wake of the atrocities committed during World War II in the name of racial purity (see UNESCO 1952).

The question of "who was black" in the United States also was examined more closely and was found to have different answers in different states. In the years leading up to the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision outlawing segregation in the public schools, it was evident that legal definitions of a "black" person varied as well. As Haney López (1996:118–119) noted, some states used a broad "one-drop" rule; for example, in Alabama and Arkansas, anyone with one drop of Negro blood was black. Texas used the "all persons of mixed blood descended from negro ancestry" standard. Tennessee followed the same rule but

included *mestizos*; it defined "blacks in terms of mulattos, mestizos, and their descendants, having any blood of the African race in their veins." A number of states—Florida, Indiana, Missouri, Nebraska, North Carolina, South Carolina, and North Dakota—followed a more precise and simple one-eighth rule, and Oregon had a one-quarter rule. Utah law used a similar blood-quantum approach that distinguished among mulattoes, quadroons, and octoroons.

Other states relied on what could be established. For example, Georgia referred to "ascertainable" nonwhite blood. Kentucky relied on a combination of any "appreciable admixture of Black ancestry and a one-sixteenth rule." Louisiana adopted an "appreciable mixture of negro blood" standard, and Mississippi combined an "appreciable amount of Negro blood" and a one-eighth rule. Maryland used a "person of negro descent to the third generation" test. Interestingly, Oklahoma, the home of many resettled Indian nations, referred to "all persons of African descent," adding that the "term 'white race' shall include all other persons," which suggests that Native Americans and others were now "white." Virginia appeared to differentiate black Indians from blacks when it defined blacks as those in whom there was "ascertainable any Negro blood: with not more than one-sixteenth native American ancestry."

By 1970, the census appears to have begun departing from what it admitted was a very unscientific, contextually dependent, and opinion-based approach and shifted to a self-classification of race. Although the census forms as a whole were still administered by census takers, the 1970 census noted that information on race was "obtained primarily through self-enumeration" and that respondents self-classified themselves "according to the race with which they identify themselves" (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1973:5).[24] By 1980, census forms were mailed, and the recipients chose their race from the categories supplied. Self-classification continued in the 1990 and 2000 censuses.

THE LONG ROAD TO TODAY

From our current vantage point, it may seem surprising that throughout the census's two-hundred-year history, color and not race has usually been the term of reference. "Race" appeared on the census form only at the start of the twentieth century when it was included with