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Abstract

In this paper we examine the ways in which the federal decennial censuses have defined and identified who is an American Indian—and how those definitions have influenced the number of people identified as Native in the 1900-1940 censuses. Census documents indicate that during this period census enumerators were responsible for recording a person's race, with very few instructions about how to do this. Using materials generated from and about the 1900-1940 censuses, we conclude that the definitions and procedures resulted in many people who descended from residents of what is now the United States in the year 1491 not being enumerated as American Indian in these censuses. This occurred because many people with such Native ancestry were either not enumerated or were recorded as being of a non-Native race—with this being particularly common among those who were the most assimilated into Euro-American society. Materials from the 1960-2010 censuses provide evidence consistent with this conclusion. Many people in the 1960-2010 era who identified themselves as American Indian would not have been so identified using the methodology of the 1900-1940 era. Similarly, many people who said they had Native ancestry in the latter period were not recorded as being of American Indian race in those censuses, and this was a likely occurrence in the former period as well. These observations suggest that those people enumerated in the 1900-1940 censuses and recorded as American Indian would have been weighted towards those most closely associated with Native communities—including American Indian reservations. The 1900-1940 censuses would also have included people as American Indian who were generally assimilated into Euro-American society but who had physical attributes signaling Native heritage to the enumerators—or had sufficient Native identity to signal that to the enumerators. It is likely that such selectivities would have been experienced fairly similarly across the 1900-1940 years.

Introduction⁴

The federal decennial censuses are among the premier sources of information for documenting and analyzing demographic, social, and economic attributes and change in American society and history. Although the amount of information collected for each individual was limited and varied somewhat across decades, the censuses of the last part of the 19th and 20th centuries, as a whole, collected information about an array of attributes, including age, sex, household relationships, marital status, English language ability, literacy, school attendance, and years of school completed. These census data thus are an excellent source for documenting, describing, and explaining levels and changes in these aspects of American life. In addition, since a substantial core of questions was included for people of all groups, it is possible to compare the experiences, attributes, and trends across various subgroups of the population.

Although most American Indians were purposely not included in the decennial censuses before 1890, they have been included from 1890 forward. In addition to obtaining the same information gathered from the general population, in some census years American Indians were asked additional questions about other things such as tribe and ancestry. These censuses from

⁴ We have received valuable input and guidance from many people concerning numerous aspects of American Indian identity, history, and culture and many dimensions of census data collection and analysis that have been very valuable in formulating and writing this paper. These knowledgeable and helpful individuals include: Lillian Ackerman, Trent Alexander, George Alter, Laurie Arnold, Dennis Baird, Larry Cebula, Harold Crook, Phil Deloria, Norm DeWeaver, Greg Dowd, Beth Erdey, Bonnie Ewing, Steve Evans, Rodney Frey, Joe Gone, Kayla Gonyon, David Hacker, Eric Hemenway, Fred Hoxie, Nicholas Jones, Susan Leonard, Carolyn Liebler, Kevin Lyons, Scott Lyons, Diane Mallickan, Rachel Marks, Kendra Maroney, Alan Marshall, Ruth McConville, Chris Miller, Melissa Parkhurst, Allen Pinkham, Josiah Pinkham, Alphonse Pitawanakwat, Nancy Shoemaker, Matthew Snipp, Jason Sprague, Zoe Higheagle Strong, Rebecca Thornton, Connie Walker, and Patsy Whitefoot. We also appreciate the comments provided on an earlier draft by Norm DeWeaver. Assistance in preparation of the paper was provided by Jeffrey Swindle. At the same time that we appreciate the input and assistance of these individuals, we retain responsibility for any errors in the paper.

1890 onward, thus, constitute valuable sources of data for documenting American Indian life and social, demographic, and economic change during this important time period.

Basic decennial census data from 1890 onward about American Indians are available in government reports that have been released to the general public over the years, including special volumes devoted to American Indians in 1890, 1910, and 1930. The 1900-1940 censuses are particularly promising data sources for American Indians as extensive samples of the manuscript census enumeration schedules--the filled-out sheets used by the census enumerators--for these censuses have been coded and computerized into micro-data files that are publicly available from the University of Minnesota Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) project (Ruggles, Flood, Goeken, Grover, Meyer, Pacas, and Sobek ND). The regular samples include large numbers of records for American Indians, and for some years the Native population was over-sampled to produce even larger numbers of records for analysis. In addition, Ancestry.com and the University of Minnesota have assembled and distributed through IPUMS 100 percent complete-count individual-level data files of all U.S. residents, including American Indians, enumerated in decennial censuses through 1940.

Unfortunately, such data files for the 1890 census are not available because the manuscript census enumeration schedules were lost to fire and not available for individual-level analysis. In addition, public data files are not available for the period from 1950 onward because those data have not yet been made available for public analysis. Nevertheless, the 1900-1940 federal decennial censuses represent a remarkable source of information to study American Indians across this important forty years of history. For this reason, we focus our attention in this paper primarily on the 1900-1940 period, while at the same time considering other years as helpful for furthering understanding of American Indian census data.

All data collection projects are subject to many different sources of error, and this is especially true for censuses that collect data for an entire population such as the U.S. Among the errors contained to some extent in all censuses are people who are not enumerated and others who are counted more than once. Data collection projects also miss collecting some pieces of information, respondents sometimes do not know the requested information, and information is sometimes recorded improperly.

The ability to enumerate any population successfully is affected by many things including geographic mobility, geographic and social isolation, differences in language and culture, and distrust of the census and other governmental enterprises (Hoy 2015; Lujan 2014; Liebler 2018, pages 182-185; Liebler et al. 2017). Many American Indian groups have been affected by most of these conditions. In addition, the difficult history of Native encounters with Euro-American diseases, military power, thirst for land, social and economic organization, and educational institutions would likely make an accurate census of American Indians even more difficult than among many other groups (Hoy 2015; Jobe 2004; Lujan 2014; Sturm 2010, pages 35-44).

The difficulty of obtaining an accurate census of American Indians is exacerbated further by the fact that in the censuses American Indians are a subset of the entire American population, which raises issues about the definition of the Native population. Defining the population to be enumerated for the entire U.S. decennial census is a relatively straightforward task as the census defines the national population to be those resident within U.S. borders, although leeway is given to some individuals such as those in the military or the foreign service. However, when the focus shifts from the overall population to the specification of a particular group of people, as it does with American Indians, the task becomes substantially more difficult as it requires specification of who is in the group.

For censuses of American Indians, this immediately raises the question of “who is an American Indian?”—an issue that has been an open one for hundreds of years. As we discuss more fully below, there are many criteria for judging someone to be an American Indian—including being a descendent of original inhabitants of the Americas, being a tribal member, having the appearance or life style of a Native, and a person’s self-identification as Native. Each of these criteria has been used in U. S. censuses to categorize people as American Indian. This issue not only has substantial implications for censuses, but, as many have written, has important ramifications that extend far beyond census enumeration (Lyons 2010, pages 35-71; Snipp 1997, 1989, pp. 26-61; Hoy 2015; NCAI Policy Research Center 2016, pages 12-21; Liebler 2018, pages 181-182; Sturm 2010; Thornton 2005, pages 26-29; Hochschild and Powell 2008, pages 77-80; Leroux 2019).

Our primary purpose in this paper is to investigate how the federal decennial censuses have answered the question “who is an American Indian?”. How have they identified the group of people they have categorized under the label “American Indian”? How have census procedures for the identification of “American Indians” resulted in certain groups that might be considered “American Indian” being considered non-Native in the censuses? And, what differences do these identification and categorization procedures make in the number of American Indians enumerated and in the attributes documented for them?

We approach these questions by first considering the various criteria that might be used in identifying people as “American Indian”. We approach this part of the puzzle by first ignoring the censuses and their definitions and focus instead on the ways that governments and individuals have approached the identification of people as American Indian. This is necessary because the census is ultimately a social project that builds upon the culture and social relations within a society. We then discuss the ways in which the federal censuses have defined this identity and categorized people as American Indian or another race. In this discussion we

examine several ways in which census procedures and definitions have evolved over time. Following this discussion, we investigate the very different results that occur when applying shifting definitions to who is an American Indian.

We recognize as we address these aims that the concepts of “race” and “American Indian” have long been central in American society and to the decennial census, and both are problematic terms. Despite the long tradition of racial categorization in American society and in the census, race has become a suspect category, with no scientific basis for distinguishing among groups identified as separate races. Nevertheless, race continues to be a social category widely used in society and the census (Hirschman 2004; American Anthropological Association 1998; Jacobson 2002; Sollors 2002; Bentley 2003; Office of Management and Budget 1997).

The category of “American Indian” was not one originally invented by Native peoples of what is now known as the Western Hemisphere. In the year 1491, there was, of course, no “America”, and Indians lived in Asia. The Natives of the now-called Western Hemisphere thought of themselves by more specific names such as Niimiipuu, Haudenosanee, Ojibwe, and Lakota (Lyons 2010, pages 66-69; Thornton 1987, pages 186-189; Nagel 1996, pages 3-4). The American Indian label was created by Europeans as part of their colonization process to refer in general to the original peoples of the hemisphere and their descendants. The problematic nature of this language has led to the creation of such terms as “Native Americans” and “First Nations”. These terms, however, have their own difficulties; for example, in 1491, there was no America to be a native of. In addition, the term “native American” is sometimes used to mean someone who was himself or herself born in what is now known as America rather than someone who is a descendent of someone living in what is now America in the year 1491.

With these considerations, we interchangeably use the three terms mentioned above, but rely primarily on the category of “American Indian” for two reasons. First, American Indian is the category used by the Census Bureau in the data collections we discuss. And, second, many descendants of people resident in the Western Hemisphere in the year 1491 refer to themselves and their groups as American Indians (Lyons 2010, pages 66-69)⁵. Nevertheless, as we use the language of “American Indian”, “Native American”, and “First People”, we recognize the colonial and problematic nature of the categories. We also use the term “Native” in this paper as a shorthand term for “American Indian”.

The Decennial Census Program

However, before we address the specific issues about the identification of American Indians in the censuses, we provide a brief discussion of the decennial census program from its inception with the U. S. constitution and the first census of 1790. The decennial census is one of the long-standing institutions of the United States, as it is mandated in the Constitution. Censuses were to be conducted decennially for the purpose of distributing political power and taxing responsibility proportionately across the several states. Everyone was to be enumerated except American Indians who were not taxed (US Constitution, Article 1, Section 2, Clause 3; quoted in NCAI Policy Research Center 2016, pages 12-13). Although the Constitution was explicit in excluding from the census rolls American Indians who were not taxed, it did not specify what constituted the statuses of taxed and not-taxed, but over time taxed American Indians came to be understood as those who had separated from tribal life, exercised the rights and responsibilities of state or territorial citizens, and mingled with the Euro-American

⁵ This observation can be illustrated by data from the 2000 census that asked people: “What is your ancestry or ethnic origin?”. People could provide one or more ancestries. Of those who indicated “Native American” or “American Indian” as their first ancestry, 73 percent indicated “American Indian” (U.S. Census Bureau 2007, Table 1). The number reporting themselves as “Native American” was only slightly higher than the number reporting “Indian” without any modifier, and it is very likely that many of those saying “Indian” without a modifier would have thought of themselves as “American Indian”.

population as co-residents or living near Euro-American towns or settlements (Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2021). On the other hand, the non-taxed came to be defined as those living on reservations or in communities composed mainly of American Indians and those living nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyles. This political distinction continued well into the 20th century, but by the census of 1890, all American Indians were included in the censuses, and this inclusion has continued to the present (Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2021).

With two exceptions in 1930, American Indians in the 1900-1940 censuses were asked to provide the same information as the other residents of the country. The 1930 exception was the exclusion of the questions about the state or country of birth of the person's mother and father. The regular enumeration schedules for the general population for the five 1900-1940 censuses are shown at the following website: <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-1-d&q=u.s.+census+forms> (also available in U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1989a). The result of this census design is that these decennial censuses allow the comparison of American Indians with other groups on a substantial array of important attributes.

In addition to the questions asked of all residents, the 1900, 1910, and 1930 censuses asked American Indians additional questions. The supplemental questions in 1900 and 1910 were fairly substantial and were asked after the regular questions for the general population (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1989a, pages 46-47, 56-57). The 1930 American Indian supplement included questions about tribal affiliation and the individual's non-Native ancestry (U. S. Bureau of the Census 1937, page 1). There were no special American Indian enumeration schedules for 1920 and 1940, as those censuses asked American Indians only the questions on the regular enumeration schedules used for the general population.

Multiple Ways of Identifying Who is an American Indian

As discussed earlier, a central issue for any census is the definition of the population to be enumerated. This is a relatively straightforward issue when the population of interest is the entire residential population within a set of geographical borders, but gets much more complex when the focus shifts to the specification of a subgroup of the population, as it does with American Indians. The focus on a subgroup requires specification of who is in the group; who should enumerators and analysts classify as being in the group—in this case, the American Indian group?

As mentioned above, the concept of “American Indian” has long been considered in American society and by the Census Bureau as a race. Defining American Indians as a racial group places them in context with other groups defined by society in general and by the Census Bureau in particular as races—such as Whites, Blacks, and Asians. Whether or not American Indian is a race, there is no single criterion for deciding who is and who is not an American Indian. Instead, there are many possible definitions within the general American public, and the criteria used have not remained fixed over time.

As we will document, this complex and changing situation in the American public has had substantial implications for the measurement strategies used by the census. In our discussion below, we focus on four main criteria Americans have used for categorizing people as American Indian: original inhabitants of the Americas and their descendants; membership in an American Indian tribe; association with and appearance of an American Indian; and self-identity. We present these criteria only to demonstrate the range of definitions used in American society and not to argue that any definition or combination of definitions is the correct one. We now turn to a discussion of these criteria in general American society and culture—to be

followed by a discussion of census definitions and their influence on the number of American Indians enumerated in the censuses.

Original Inhabitants of the Americas and Their Descendants.

As we mentioned earlier, the category of “American Indian” was not one originally invented by Native peoples of the Western Hemisphere themselves. The “Indian” concept itself originated with European colonists to refer in general to the original peoples of the hemisphere and their descendants (Lyons 2010, pages 66-69; Thornton 1987, pages 186-189; Nagel 1996, pages 3-4). Thus, the original definition was one of origins, ancestry, and relationship to Euro-Americans. In this approach, an American Indian is anyone with Native American ancestry—that is anyone who had ancestors in the Americas in 1491. This emphasis on being descendants of the original inhabitants of North America continues to be important for many in defining who is an American Indian (Snipp 1989, p. 40).

However, the boundary between American Indians and other groups was blurred almost immediately after the arrival of Euro-Americans by the high rate of childbearing by multi-racial parents that resulted in extensive numbers of people with multiple ancestries (Phinney 2003; Snipp 1997, pages 676-677; Snipp 2002, pages 190-195; Thornton 1987, pages 186-189). By the time of the 1910 U.S. census, only 56 percent of those identified as American Indian in that census were reported as definitely having no non-Native ancestry (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1915, page 31). In addition, some people categorized in that census as Euro-American undoubtedly had Native ancestry.

This high degree of mixing among American Indians and other groups has led to many discussions about how to define people with multiple ancestries. One question that arises in this discussion is how many Native ancestors are needed for one to be an American Indian—with this discussion often couched in terms of “blood quantum”. The degree of Native blood also

became an important factor in many areas of government treatment of American Indians—taking on political and legal implications (Jobe 2004; Hoy 2015; NCAI Policy Research Center 2016). However, for ancestry to be a decider of race, it is necessary to have some kind of cut-off on the degree of non-Native ancestry—a cut-off that is, of necessity, arbitrary.

Tribal Membership

Tribal membership could also be a definer of being American Indian, with tribal members being considered American Indian and tribal non-members being considered non-Native (Lyons 2010, pages 41-46; Snipp 2002, pages 195-199). This criterion, of course, immediately brings forth additional terms requiring definition—most notably what groups constitute a tribe and how does one come to have membership in a tribe?

Tribal recognition, of course, raises the issue of who legitimizes this status: a group of people claiming tribal status; the larger community; or a state or federal government. The federal government officially recognizes some groups as tribes, placing these tribes within a government to government relationship with the federal government (U.S. Supreme Court 1974; DeWeaver 2013; Liebler 2018). Recognition of tribes by the federal government thus makes the designation of American Indian a political rather than racial or ethnic designation. This designation brings benefits to a tribe and its members, with numerous non-recognized groups desirous of that designation. Tribes can also receive state recognition.

Of course, state and federal recognitions are formal statuses, and many groups claiming tribal status are not recognized by either national or state governments (Snipp 1997, 2002; Thornton 2005, pages 28-29). These groups can receive legitimacy through their own self-designation and perhaps through community recognition but do not have formal governmental recognition.

Another issue with using tribal membership as a criterion for specifying that a person is American Indian is that tribes have control over their membership—a circumstance endorsed by the federal government in the case of federally-recognized tribes (Indian and Native American Employment and Training Coalition 2004). Tribes set the parameters concerning who is a member and different tribes have different rules concerning who can be a member. Thus, a person who qualified as being a tribal member in one tribe might not qualify in another tribe with more stringent requirements. In addition, an individual might have considerable Native ancestry that is divided among several different tribes but not enough ancestry in any one tribe to be eligible for membership—and thereby not qualify as an American Indian using this approach.

Appearance and Association

A third criterion for judging a person to be an American Indian is appearance. Does a person look and act like an American Indian through lifestyle and behavior (Lyons 2010, pages 51-58; Jobe 2004, pages 70-71; Leroux 2019, pages 29-30; Phinney, page 38)? Physiological attributes, language, religion, hairstyle, and dress can also be part of this criterion. A person who behaves as an American Indian (however that may be defined) could be identified as such. Association can also be an important criterion since people who live by or associate with American Indians may be identified as American Indian.

Self Identity

Being an American Indian can also be a self-constructed identity where people assert their own inter-subjectivity with the recognition and assertion that they are Native (Lyons 2010; Snipp 2002, pages 199-203; Sturm 2010). That is, with this principle, individuals themselves decide whether they are American Indian or something else. This means that it is likely for there to be some individuals with considerable Native ancestry who would not classify themselves as American Indian with this approach.

It would also be possible with this self-identification approach for some people with little or no Native ancestry to classify themselves as American Indian. This could happen by family traditions mistakenly identifying a non-Native ancestor as Native. There is also the possibility of some people with very minimal or even no Native ancestry counting themselves as American Indian for various purposes, including financial gain, land rights, and political advantage (Sturm 2010, pages 5-14; Leroux 2019, pages 135-220). Such appropriation of American Indian status can be vigorously contested by others who have different views of what it means to be American Indian (Leroux 2019, pages 135-220; Sturm 2010, pages 5-14).

Of course, using self-identification as the criterion for deciding whether a person is American Indian raises the issue of people identifying with more than one group. For example, a person could simultaneously identify as American Indian and White. How would such individuals be categorized in this self-identification approach: as American Indian; as White; as both American Indian and White? Multiple identities could also arise between American Indian identity and identity with other groups such as Blacks and Asians. In addition, self-identification may be fluid and change across time (Liebler et al. 2016; Bentley et al. 2003)

Census Definitions of the American Indian Population

For every decennial census from the beginning, the Census Bureau identified racial categories for grouping people. We begin our discussion of the census definitions of the American Indian population with the 1900-1940 censuses—because these censuses are the primary focus of our paper. In addition, the definitions and measurement protocols for the 1900 census followed closely those of the 19th century.

Table 1 documents both the racial categories the Census Bureau used in its 1900-1940 censuses and its instructions for determining people's membership in those categories. As shown in Table 1, the racial categories used in 1900 were American Indian, White, Black,

Chinese, and Japanese. Both the number and content of categories used by the Census Bureau to define race changed across the censuses from 1900 to 1940, with both additions and deletions of categories between censuses (also see Bennett 2000 and Snipp 2003).

As Jobe (2004, page 75) has stated, “Through the Census of 1950, the race of an individual was determined by the enumerator”. That is, the enumerator was given the assignment of categorizing people into racial categories. This raises the question of the criterion the Census Bureau provided its enumerators to decide the race of individuals; was the criteria to be ancestry, tribal membership, association and lifestyle, the person’s self-identity, or something else? As shown in Table 1, the operational answer to this question ranged from “none of the above” to almost “all of the above”.

The enumerator in 1900 was simply instructed to fill a column in the enumeration schedule labeled “Color or race” as follows: “Write ‘W’ for white; ‘B’ for black (negro or of negro descent); ‘Ch’ for Chinese; ‘Jp’ for Japanese, and ‘In’ for Indian, as the case may be” (Census Office 1900, page 29). Except for instructions for determining between “Blacks” and “Mulattos” to be discussed later, the enumerators in 1910 and 1920 were given no additional instructions beyond being told to write the race of the individual in the appropriate column (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1919, page 27). This lack of direction merely extends the practice of the 19th century of providing enumerators no official formal guidance concerning how to determine a person’s race (Census Office, 1860, 1870, 1890).

But, in 1930, the enumerators were given instructions that attempted to clarify boundaries among Whites, Negroes, American Indians, and Mexicans (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1930, page 26; also see U.S. Bureau of the Census 1937, page 1). These instructions emphasized the importance of ancestry—or blood quantum—for both Negroes and American

Indians. And, for American Indians alone, they introduced lifestyle and community assessment as criteria for designating a person to be American Indian.

The 1930 instructions stated that “A person of mixed white and Negro blood should be returned as a Negro, no matter how small the percentage of Negro blood”. “A person of mixed Indian and Negro blood should be returned a Negro, unless the Indian blood predominates and the status as an Indian is generally accepted in the community”. “A person of mixed white and Indian blood should be returned as Indian, except where the percentage of Indian blood is very small, or where he is regarded as a white person by those in the community where he lives”. Concerning Mexicans, it was determined by the Census that “all persons born in Mexico, or having parents born in Mexico, who are not definitely white, Negro, Indian, Chinese, or Japanese, should be returned as Mexican”.

The directions to interviewers concerning racial categories—especially those relevant to American Indians--changed somewhat from 1930 to 1940. For 1940, the Census Bureau produced both an unabridged version of the instructions and an abridged version (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1940a, page 43; U. S. Bureau of the Census 1940b, page 7). Both 1940 versions of the instructions regarding the classification of people of Negro and American Indian heritages followed the 1930 instructions closely in assigning cases to the Negro category. The category of Mexican was removed from the 1940 list of races, and both versions instructed the enumerators to record Mexicans as White “unless definitely of Indian or other nonwhite race”. The unabridged version of the instructions for categorizing people of White and Native heritages said that such a person “should be returned as Indian, if enrolled on an Indian Agency or Reservation roll; or if not so enrolled, if the proportion of Indian blood is one-fourth or more, or if the person is regarded as an Indian in the community where he lives” (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1940a, page 43). Just below this instruction, the unabridged version said simply that “Any mixture of white and nonwhite should be reported according to the nonwhite parent”. The

1940 abridged instructions provided only one sentence about mixtures of white and nonwhite, repeating the unabridged statement that “Any mixtures of white and nonwhite blood should be reported according to the race of the nonwhite parent” (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1940b, page 7).

Although the Census Bureau provided guidance in the 1930 and 1940 censuses about the criteria for deciding race, we have found very little guidance from the 1900-1940 period concerning how the enumerator was to ascertain the information needed to make such determinations. Was it through observation of physical traits, observation of dress, living arrangements, geographical residence, asking the respondent, or some combination of the above that was supposed to guide the enumerator in deciding what race to record?

For the 1910 census that asked enumerators to distinguish between “Black” and “Mulatto”, the enumerators were told to include as Black “all persons who are *evidently* full-blooded negroes, while the term ‘mulatto’ includes all other persons having some proportion or *perceptible* trace of negro blood” (italics added) (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1910, page 28; also Table 1). Clearly, for this racial distinction, the enumerators were supposed to have their visual observations enter into the judgement of the racial category to record. While we have found no instructions for using what is evident and what is perceptible for deciding other racial distinctions such as Native-White or Native-Black—either in 1910 or later—it is likely that enumerator perceptions would have played a significant role.

The lack of direction in the interviewer instructions about how to ascertain race continued through at least the 1950 census (U.S. Bureau of the Census no date, pages 469-470). However, a 1950 special report about non-whites indicated that “The information on race is ordinarily not based on a reply to questions asked by the enumerator but rather is obtained by observation. Enumerators were instructed to ask a question when they were in doubt” (U.S.

Bureau of Census 1953, page 3B-4). This comment, however, does not provide a citation to an instruction along this line, nor does it tell how the enumerator was to ascertain relevant information about such criteria as tribal membership and ancestry without asking. Nevertheless, it does indicate that observations and perceptions were significant in making judgements about the racial category to record.

This review indicates that census instructions about criteria for deciding race evolved substantially from 1900 to 1940—from having enumerators decide based entirely on their own judgements, with no suggested definitions from the Census Bureau, to asking the enumerators to consider most of the elements that we discussed earlier. That is, the 1940 instructions told enumerators to take into account tribal enrollment, the proportion of Native blood, and community recognition. The changing definitions very likely reflected the Bureau's increasing awareness of definitional issues and its efforts to improve definitions and categorization of individuals.

It is exceptionally difficult to know how the census enumerators viewed and interpreted the instructions and criteria they received—or how they thought they should obtain the information necessary for making decisions about a person's race. And, it is similarly difficult to know how the enumerators actually conducted their enumerations and made their decisions. We know that interactions between enumerators and the people being enumerated are complex and do not always follow the instructions of study designers and supervisors, even when such instructions seem clear, as they were not in the census enumerations of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Similarly difficult is knowing how the changing Census Bureau definitions and changing societal understandings may have influenced how many and which people were categorized as American Indian and the determination of the amount of Native ancestry a person had. The

Census Bureau briefly discussed issues of definitions and data quality concerning the 1910 and 1930 censuses in its 1937 special published American Indian volume, acknowledging differences in procedures that “should be taken into account in making comparisons between the two years” (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1937, page 1). The Bureau indicated that “No specific tests have been made to determine the degree of accuracy in the returns of either census, but a general study of the statistics leads to the conclusion that both censuses were reasonably accurate and comparable with each other as regards those Indians who retained a close tribal organization and were universally recognized as Indians of some specific tribe” (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1937, page 1). No such claims were made for the enumeration of American Indians who did not have such close tribal affiliations.

The Bureau also recognized that the number of American Indians in the population depended on the definition used. The Bureau, for example, speculated that if the “definition of the Indian population were limited to Indians maintaining tribal relations”, the 1930 census had over-counted Natives. More specifically, they said that if such a definition were used, the number of American Indians would not have been the 332 thousand population enumerated by the 1930 decennial census but close to the 228 thousand number enumerated in 1932 by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), an organization that had its own census program focused on Natives associated with BIA agencies or reservations. “On the other hand” the published Census volume indicated that “if all persons having even a trace of Indian blood were returned as Indians, the number would far exceed even the total returned at the census of 1930” (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1937, page 2). With such variation in numbers, depending on definitions, it is easy to be skeptical of the Bureau’s claim noted above that the 1910 and 1930 censuses were “accurate”. However, given similarities in procedures over time, it is more likely that the two censuses are comparable.

Thus, the Census Bureau was itself clear in recognizing the ambiguous operational definition of being American Indian that it used in the 1910 and 1930 censuses—and presumably in the other decennial censuses of the early 20th century as well. The Census Bureau definition of American Indian clearly did not require the inclusion of all people with Native ancestry; in fact, it appears to have left out many of them. At the same time, the Census Bureau definition was not limited to those with affiliation with an American Indian reservation or agency. Where the definition fell between including all who had any Native ancestry and only those affiliated with reservations was left ambiguous, an issue we take up in the next section.

The Census Bureau view that there were considerably more people with American Indian ancestry in the early part of the 20th century than were recorded in the decennial censuses as American Indian is supported by the view of a prominent Native anthropologist and museum specialist—Arthur Parker.⁶ Writing in the *Quarterly Journal of the Society of American Indians* about the results of the 1910 decennial census, Parker (1915, pages 205-207) offered the following observations.

“It is to be seriously doubted that the census enumerators obtained anywhere near the exact number of persons of Indian blood who are merged in the general population. The writer knows of many who refuse for various reasons to be regarded as Indians.....This denial is due to several reasons, the most common of which is the local prejudice against Indians”.

⁶ Parker was particularly well placed to provide perspective on this topic because he was of Seneca and Scots-Irish heritage and an extensive observer and writer about American Indian life. He played prominent roles in several organizations, including the Rochester Museum of Arts and Sciences, the Society for American Indians, the American Association of Museums, and the New York State Archaeological Association (Porter 2000).

“We know of clergymen, authors, lecturers, lawyers, engineers, clerks, men in public service, newspaper men and others who have a prominent degree of Indian blood and yet who were not enumerated as Indians.”

“These facts lead one to suspect that Indian blood is more widely diffused than most persons imagine, and that there are numerous men and women intermixed with the civil population who range from one-fourth to one two-hundred-fifty-sixth Indian blood”.

Insights from Post-1940 Innovations in Census Methodology

We now turn from the 1900-1940 censuses to those occurring in later years when the Census Bureau introduced new data collection methodologies that produced results that provide insights into Native identity as revealed in the more recent censuses. That is, the new methodologies and post-1940 census results reveal insights into how people do and do not identify themselves as American Indians in the census. They also demonstrate how American Indian identity may have been changing in the post-1940 decades.

Here we consider three specific innovations in census methodology. We first focus on the change in 1960 from having the enumerator record the race of the individual to having the respondent determine and record the race of himself/herself and other household members. We then discuss the innovation in 2000 of allowing a person to identify more than one racial category versus being limited previously to choosing one race. The third innovation we discuss occurred in 1980 when the census began asking individuals to identify both their race and their ancestry. Note that while these data sources provide useful information, like all data sets, they are subject to their own sources of error.

Our analyses of these methodological innovations and results depend upon a substantial body of excellent research analyzing and interpreting the post 1940 censuses. These studies of the post-1940 censuses have demonstrated that differences in census methodology and question wording have substantial implications for the number of people enumerated as American Indians (for example, Passel 1976; Passel 1996; Passel and Berman 1986; Snipp 1989, 2003; Liebler and Ortyl 2014; Liebler et al. 2017; Eschbach 1993; Bentley et al. 2003; DeWeaver 2013; Harris 1994; Indian and Native American Employment and Training Coalition 2004). That is, the number of people enumerated as American Indian depends in a very substantial way on the census methodology used, with implications for how we consider what it means to be American Indian in the period after 1940.

Switch from Enumerators to Self-Enumeration

Beginning partially in 1960 and expanding through 1980, census methodology shifted from having enumerators conduct the enumerations in person to having large portions of the population enumerated through the mails (Bennett 2000, pages 172-179; Gibson and Jung 2002, page 1; Passel 1996, page 80; Jobe 2004, page 76; Snipp 2003, pages 569-570; Snipp and Lott 2009, pages 101-109). That is, instead of all enumerations being conducted in person by an enumerator, as they had been in previous censuses, a mixed procedure was used in 1960. Some of the enumerations were conducted using earlier personal enumeration procedures, while other enumerations were conducted using a system of mailing out the blank enumeration forms to people, asking the people to fill out the census forms, and then a census worker stopping by to collect the census forms. If the questions on race had not been answered when the census workers arrived to collect the forms, they were instructed to ascertain race themselves.

The 1970 census expanded the use of the mails so that all enumeration forms were distributed by mail. For approximately 3/5ths of the population, the people were requested to return the forms by mail while the rest of the population was told to give their completed form to a census worker as in 1960. In instances where the form was filled incompletely, incorrectly, or not at all, the census workers were instructed to obtain the information by reading the question to the person⁷ (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1973, Appendix A and Appendix C).

The use of the mails increased even more with the 1980 census. Again, all forms were mailed out, but this time about 95 percent of the people were requested to mail their forms back and the remaining 5 percent were requested to return their completed forms to a census worker (U. S. Bureau of the Census 1989b, Appendix C, page C2).

The crucial result of this procedural change was that race shifted from being defined and categorized through an interaction between the person and the enumerator to a procedure where self-identification determined the answers to the census question about race. In effect, the individuals filling out their own census forms became the sole definers and categorizers of their race as well as the race of all other individuals living in their households. This meant that self-identification essentially replaced the interviewer guidelines, enumerator-individual interactions, and enumerator evaluations that had guided decisions about racial membership in previous censuses.

Several scholars have argued that the shift from enumerator judgement to self-identification contributed greatly to dramatic increases in the number of people enumerated as American Indians in the last part of the 20th century (Passel 1976, pages 404-407; Passel 1996, pages 83-88; Snipp 1989, pages 62-73; Snipp 2003, pages 569-570; Jobe 2004, page 76;

⁷ However, a 1980 census report indicated that “In 1970, race was obtained on the basis of observation by enumerators in rural areas of the country, including most reservations” (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1989b, Appendix B, page B4).

Eschbach 1993, pages 643-644). As documented in Table 2, with the exception of modest ups and downs, the enumerated American Indian population remained relatively stable across the six decades from 1890 to 1950⁸. Then, beginning with the 1960 census, when the self-enumeration methodology was introduced, the number of American Indians enumerated increased sharply across the rest of the century. Most importantly for our purposes is the nearly fifty percent increases in American Indians enumerated in both the 1960 and 1970 censuses and the 72 and 38 percent increases in the 1980 and 1990 censuses. These huge increases occurred in an environment where the general national population was increasing by only 19, 13, 11, and 10 percent across the same time periods.

The nearly 50 percent increase in the enumerated American Indian population between 1950 and 1960 suggests that there were some people in 1960 who identified themselves as Native, but who would have been categorized by a census enumerator as non-Native if there had been a regular enumerator as in earlier censuses. It also suggests that the shift to self-enumeration permitted these people to have their American Indian identity recorded on the census form. Also, note that the self-enumeration methodology was only partially phased into operation in 1960, making it likely that a full transition to self-enumeration in 1960 would have allowed even more people to record their Native identity, resulting in even more people being enumerated as American Indian in 1960.

Interestingly, the dramatic increase in the number of people enumerated as American Indian did not show a one-time increase in 1960, but continued and even intensified in subsequent censuses. Part of the 1960-1980 increase could be due to the fact that the self-enumeration methodology was not completely implemented in 1960 but was implemented

⁸ Thornton and Young-DeMarco (2021) attributed much of the ups and downs in census counts across these years to differential census coverage.

slowly across those decades. However, it is unlikely that this could be the entire explanation, and several researchers concluded that self-identification as Native increased dramatically after 1960, leading to a growing number of people identifying as American Indian in the later censuses. The causes of the increased identification as Native is difficult to establish definitively, but researchers have pointed to such things as more positive cultural images of American Indians, increased Native activism for positive recognition of Native identity, and a revival of Native heritage (Passel 1976, pages 403-404; Snipp 1989, pages 71-73; Snipp 1997, page 671-678; Jobe 2004, page 76; Nagel 1996, pages 9-12 and 84-94; Shoemaker 1999, pages 5-6; Sturm 2010, pages 44-57). It has also been suggested that some individuals who had no or very little Native ancestry present themselves as American Indian any way—for a number of reasons ranging from the symbolic to the remunerative (Sturm 2010, pages 5-14).

To this point, we have interpreted the dramatic post-1950 increase in American Indians enumerated in the censuses to the introduction of self-enumeration in the censuses and the increase of people's identification as Native during the period. However, before entirely accepting this conclusion, we must consider the possibility that other factors such as differential census coverage, international migration, and excess of fertility over mortality could explain these very large increases in population. Most scholars believe that while there may have been some differential census enumeration coverage and net international migration during the post-1950 period, they were of very small magnitude and could not affect American Indian population counts significantly (Passel 1976, page 407; Passel 1996, page 85; Passel and Berman 1986, pages 163-165; Snipp 2003, page 570; Harris (1994, pages 591-592). Although a 1980 Census Bureau report (1989b, Appendix B, pages B-3 to B-4) identified "improvements in enumeration procedures, especially on reservations" and "the omission of the word 'race' from the 1980 wording" as contributing to the increases in American Indians enumerated during the 1970-1980

period, it also recognized that other things such as increasing Native identity in the population were important.

The minimization of differential coverage and international migration as explanations leaves two possible factors as alternative explanations to census methodology and increasing Native identification for the rapid increase in enumerated American Indian population: fertility and mortality. One approach to eliminating the possible influence of fertility on population change is to limit the population change between censuses to the people who were alive at the first census and follow them to the next census. This is done by calculating census survival ratios by dividing the number of people from ages X to Y in the second census by the number from ages X-10 to Y-10 in the first census. This can be done for small ranges of X to Y like five or ten year age cohorts or for large ranges of X to Y across a larger age range such as 20-59. Unfortunately, this census survival ratio approach leaves mortality and identity issues confounded, but it requires few assumptions, and, as we will see, provides interesting results.

The last column of Table 2 shows a broad overview of census survival ratios for each inter-decadal census period from 1900 through 2000 for the population age 20-59 compared with the population age 10-49 ten years earlier. For historical perspective, we note that with the exception of 1920-1930, the inter-decadal census survival ratios for 1900-1910 through 1940-1950 range from .67 to .80. The fact that these ratios are substantially below one is to be expected due to mortality diminishing the population over a ten year period. Yet a very important observation from the Table 2 census survival ratios is that they jump dramatically from .73 in the 1940-1950 decade to 1.07 in the 1950-1960 decade. And, the ratios are even higher for subsequent decades, reaching 1.40 in 1970-1980. These numbers indicate that despite mortality taking its toll across these years, the number of American Indians enumerated actually increased as each group aged from 10-49 to 20-59. More specifically, across these inter-

decadal census years, the number of American Indians enumerated increased between 7 and 40 percent despite mortality being a force for decreasing the number to be enumerated.

These census survival ratios are consistent with those Passel (1996, pages 87-88) calculated for more detailed ten year age cohorts over the same time period. The graph Passel prepared summarizing these survival ratios shows that the ratios fluctuate by age, but almost all are above the number to be expected based on mortality and most are above 1, indicating the broad general pattern of increasing cohort size over time. Passel emphasized the striking implications of these patterns when he wrote that the number of American Indians born in the 1940s “more than doubled” between their enumerations in 1950 and 1990. “All birth cohorts of American Indians reaching adulthood in the post-World War II era”, he went on to say “have participated in the accretions from changing self-identification” (page 88).

A second approach for studying population change uses a “population balancing equation” method to measure both births and deaths during an inter-decadal period and add births to and subtract deaths from the enumerated population at the first census to obtain an expected population at the second census. With our previous understanding that international immigration and census enumeration differentials are very small during the post-1940 period, and assuming that births and deaths are measured accurately which can be a challenging undertaking (Harris 1994, pages 591-592), then the difference between the expected and actual enumerated populations at the second census reflects changes in self-enumeration and Native identity over time. Several investigators have used this method to study American Indian population change from 1960 through 2000 and have generally concluded that the dramatic increases in population from 1960 onward could not be explained by the surplus of births over deaths—or any of the other possible confounding effects (Passel 1976, pages 404-407; Passel 1996, pages 83-88; Passel and Berman 1986, pages 164-168; Snipp 1989, pages 62-73; Jobe 2004, page 76; Liebler and Ortyl 2014, pages 1105-1106; Eschbach 1993, pages 643-644;

Harris 1994, pages 591-592). Self-enumeration methodology and the increasing identify of being Native has been seen as the explanation for most of the dramatic population growth.

As part of his detailed and sophisticated analyses of American Indian population change reported earlier, Passel (1996, pages 83-85) conducted a population balancing equation analysis of American Indian population change from 1950 to 1960. His calculations indicated that his estimates of high fertility and low mortality could explain the enumerated American Indian population growth between 1950 and 1960. Passel did not comment on the apparent inconsistency between these results and his previously-discussed survival ratio results, and we make no attempt to resolve it. At the same time, we find that the existence of census survival ratios above one reported by Passel and by us in Table 2 for the 1950-1960 period are compelling since they involve fewer assumptions than the population balancing equation method—and more than balance out the effects of mortality during the decade. These considerations lead us to the tentative conclusion that the self-enumeration methodology and self-identity as Native was a significant part of the increase in 1950-1960 American Indian population, as it was for later decades.

The Switch from Reporting One Race to the Option of Reporting Multiple Races

A second important change in census methodology for ascertaining race occurred in 2000. Until 2000, the U.S. census recorded individuals as having only one race, ignoring the fact that many people had multiple ancestries and identities. For the first time in 2000, the census gave people the option of listing more than one race on the census form (Bennett 2000; Perlmann and Waters 2002; Snipp 2003; Liebler and Ortyl 2014). This modification grew out of the important 1997 Office of Management and Budget (1997) directive mandating federal government data collection projects to ask people to select one or more categories in reporting their race. This Office of Management and Budget directive was implemented in the 2000

census question that asked: “What is this person’s race? *Mark one or more races to indicate what this person considers himself/herself to be*” (quoted in Snipp 2003, pages 576-581, italics in original). A multi-race option was also offered to people in the 2010 and 2020 censuses.

Table 2 provides the basic results of the 2000 and 2010 census enumerations of American Indians, Aleuts, and Eskimos (hereafter, AI/NA), dividing the AI/NA population into those who listed only AI/NA race and those who listed AI/NA and another race. Even if we consider only people who listed themselves as AI/NA without another race, the number increased by 26 percent between 1990 and 2000 and by 18 percent between 2000 and 2010. Furthermore, the comparable 1990-2000 census survival ratio of 1.07 suggests that the long-term trend in increasingly more people identifying as American Indian continued through the 1990-2000 period, a conclusion consistent with the detailed and comprehensive work of Liebler and Ortyl (2014, pages 1123-1125). That is, people with some Native heritage were more likely in 2000 to mark themselves as American Indian than in 1990 due—as discussed above—to such things as more ethnic pride and wider cultural acceptance.

The data in Table 2 also indicate that giving people the option of identifying with more than one race clearly resulted in additional people enumerated as AI/AN in 2000 and 2010 (Bennett 2000; Snipp 2003; Liebler and Ortyl 2014). In fact, the addition of AI/AN people with multiple races to the AI/AN population increased the enumerated number of AI/AN in 2000 by two-thirds—from just under 2.5 million to just over 4 million. The consequence of allowing multiple races in 2010 was even greater than in 2000, with the addition of the multi-race people to the American Indian category increasing the total by more than three-fourths. Liebler and Ortyl (2014, page 1102) reported that if the multi-race AI/NA people were included and if births, deaths, and immigration were taken into account, there were about one million people who reported themselves as AI/AN in 2000 but non-AI/AN in 1990.

The large number of people identifying themselves as AI/NA along with another race suggests that there were substantial numbers of people in 1990 who identified themselves as both AI/NA and non-AI/NA who gave priority to the non-Native identification in their 1990 census report, but, ten years later in 2000—and again in 2010-- when they had the option to report more than one race, they took that opportunity. Put another way, in both 2000 and 2010, there were clearly more people with AI/NA identity than there were people whose primary identity was AI/NA.

In considering the importance of these data, it is useful to understand the results of a Census Bureau study suggesting that a large fraction of people who report being American Indian along with another race give priority to the other race. This conclusion is derived from data obtained from two Bureau sample surveys conducted in 2001 (Bentley 2003). In one 2001 survey the Bureau interviewed a sample of people who had participated in the 2000 census and asked them to report their race, but instead of asking them to designate one or more races, asked them to designate one race (Bentley 2003). In this follow-up sample survey, of those who said on the census that they were both White and AI/NA, only 24 percent said that they were AI/NA on the single race follow-up survey question and 59 percent said that they were White. Interestingly, another 14 percent said that they were both White and AI/NA even though they were asked to report just one race⁹. The reporting of AI/NA race in the follow-up survey was even lower for people who reported on the census that they were both Black and AI/NA.

The Census Bureau interviewed another sample of people in June-August 2001 and then again in August-October 2001 (Bentley et al. 2003). In the first wave of this panel survey, respondents were asked to mark one or more races using the 2000 census methodology, while

⁹ These percentages were calculated from Table 14 on page 33 of Bentley (2003). People with missing data on the recontact interview are excluded from these calculations. These percentages do not add to 100 as a few small categories were ignored in these calculations.

in the recontact survey they were asked to report one race. Of those who said on the first survey that they were both White and AI/NA, 30 percent on the recontact survey said that they were AI/NA on the single race question and 57 percent said that they were White. Another 9 percent said that they were both White and AI/NA even though they were asked to report just one race¹⁰. As in the survey discussed above, the reporting of AI/NA race in the recontact survey was even lower for people who reported on the initial wave of the survey that they were both Black and AI/NA. Although these two sample surveys cannot be definitive in saying how multi-race American Indians view their identity, the results seem to suggest that there is a mixture of people reporting American Indian race along with another race in censuses and surveys: a majority give precedence—at least on censuses and surveys—to their non-Native identity, a significant minority give precedence to their Native identity, and a yet smaller minority emphasizes the two identities relatively equally.

Further insight into the meaning of the responses to census questions asking people to mark one or more races can be gleaned by studies that match people participating in two censuses—that is for the same person, matching their reports in two censuses (Liebler 2018; Liebler et al. 2016; Liebler et al. 2017). These studies indicate that among people who respond in a census that they are American Indian along with some other race, substantial majorities report a different combination of races in the second census. There are also some differences in reporting across multiple censuses when a person reports that they are only American Indian in one census, but such discrepancies are much fewer for people who report being only American Indian, as compared to those who report more than one race. Of course, as the authors of these studies indicate, some of this inconsistency could be due to several methodological issues such as the person reporting the data changing, mistakenly checking the wrong box, language

¹⁰ These percentages were calculated from Table 13 on page 32 of Bentley (2003). People with missing data on the recontact interview are excluded from these calculations. These percentages do not add to 100 as a few small categories were ignored in these calculations.

difficulties, and matching errors. Nevertheless, it appears that while identity, at least as reported on censuses, is quite fixed for many American Indians, it is also fluid for many others (Liebler 2018; Liebler et al. 2016; Liebler et al. 2017; Bentley 2003).

Adding a Census Question about Ancestry

A third important census innovation was adding a question on ancestry. Beginning in 1980 the Census Bureau asked about each individual's ancestry as well as race (Snipp 1989, pages 44-47; Snipp 2003, pages 574-; Liebler 2018, pages 183-184). Although the census continued to provide people a list of races to choose from, it provided no list of ancestries to choose from; individuals were simply invited to write in whatever ancestry they identified for themselves. Respondents could report as many ancestries as they wanted (and had space for).

Of central importance is the fact that in each of these censuses there were large differences in identification as American Indian race and reporting American Indian ancestry (Snipp 1989, pages 47-52; Liebler 2018, pages 183-184; Passel 1996, pages 86-87). As reported by Snipp (1989, pages 47-52), in 1980 about 1.5 million people reported their race as American Indian, but more than four times as many--about 6.8 million--reported that they had American Indian ancestry. In fact, among those who reported Native ancestry, only 18 percent reported their race as American Indian, while 77 percent reported their race as White and 5 percent reported being another non-Native race. However, the great majority (73 percent) of those who reported American Indian race also identified themselves as having Native ancestry. Clearly, in 1980 there was a very large population of people who said they had Native ancestry who did not report themselves as being of American Indian race.

This discrepancy between the race question and the ancestry question indicates that they are measuring different things—related, to be sure, but different. In fact, if researchers wanted to identify the population of people who descended from residents of America in the

year 1491, they would focus on the population indicating they had American Indian ancestry because that approach appears to come closer than the race question. In fact, as noted above, the race question seems to identify only a modest proportion of such Native people.

Of course, the question on ancestry is undoubtedly imperfect for identifying descendants of people resident in America in 1491. There are likely many such people who do not know they have Native ancestors or fail to report it on the census and such people would be excluded using this census ancestry question. In addition, some people without Native ancestry would mistakenly report that they had Native ancestry. As with other research, errors of measurement are very difficult to eliminate in identifying who is American Indian.

After careful and detailed analyses of the racial and ancestry data from the 1980 census, Snipp decided to focus his 1980 comprehensive analysis of the attributes of the American Indian and Alaska Native population exclusively on the criteria of race. "For the record", he stated, "*the statistical data presented in subsequent chapters of this book pertain only to persons who identified their race as American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut in the 1980 census, regardless of how they described their ethnic ancestry*" (Snipp 1989, page 58, italics in original). He indicated that this decision was consistent with the procedures used by the Census Bureau in earlier censuses: "The concept of ethnic ancestry was first introduced in the 1980 census, and as a result it has little comparability with data from earlier decennial censuses" (Snipp 1989, page 58). He also indicated that individuals who identified themselves as having Native ancestry but not American Indian race in the 1980 census were probably "not identified as American Indians in 1970 or earlier censuses" (page 58).

Snipp's extensive analyses of the 1980 census results also provide insights into how the definition of the American Indian population would affect estimates of the attributes of that population. A series of Snipp's analyses shows that people identified in 1980 as having Native

ancestry but not American Indian race, as compared with those with both Native race and ancestry, have, on average, more years of education, higher rates of employment, higher earnings, less poverty, and less use of languages other than English (Snipp 1989, pages 53-57). Similar results have also been reported by Eschbach and his colleagues (1998, page 37) and by Liebler and Ortyl (2014, page 1111) who found that people identified in one census as American Indian but in a previous census as non-Native had higher than average levels of education. In addition, the people who have recently identified themselves as Native are more likely to have been geographically located outside of areas historically having large American Indian populations (Eschbach 1993, pages 643-629; Liebler and Ortyl 2014, pages 1111-1121; Passel 1996, pages 89-97). DeWeaver (2013) and Indian and Native American Employment and Training Coalition (2004) also found that people who report an AI/AN race in conjunction with another race are more likely than people reporting only AI/AN race to be located outside of areas with historically high concentration of American Indians and too have higher levels of socioeconomic attainment.

Implications of Post-1940s Results for 1900-1940 Census Data

We next consider how the post-1940 census results may provide insights into American Indian identity in the 1900-1940 period as well as insights into the interpretation of census results during those years. We use the later censuses to obtain insights into earlier results knowing that it is important to avoid interpreting the past anachronistically by assuming that circumstances existing at one point in time also applied in the past. We understand that later censuses have no direct relevance to results for earlier periods, but believe that with proper caution, results from later censuses may provide insights into circumstances and processes that were operating during earlier periods.

We begin with the observation that there were many people in the U.S. in 1980 with Native ancestry—as many as 6.8 million according to the census that year. And, many of these people were of multiple ancestry—having both Native and non-Native ancestors. It is likely that a substantial number of these multiple-ancestry individuals are of relatively recent origin in that the union of Native and non-Native ancestry for them occurred only after 1940. At the same time, we know that progeny resulting from parents of different races or ancestry was not a new phenomenon beginning in the last half of the 20th century but has been part of Native society for centuries. This means that there were undoubtedly many people of both Native and non-Native ancestries during the first part of the 20th century. Although we cannot know for sure, it is likely that just as large fractions of the people of Native ancestry in 1980 were enumerated as non-Native, significant fractions of people of Native ancestry during the early 20th century were enumerated as having a non-Native race. This is consistent with the Census Bureau's conclusion (mentioned earlier) about the 1930 census when it said that “if all persons having even a trace of Indian blood were returned as Indians, the number would far exceed even the total returned at the census of 1930” (U.S bureau of the Census 1937, page 2). This understanding is also consistent with the view of Arthur Parker on this issue discussed earlier.

Although we cannot know, it is likely that there were also more people with Native identity in the early part of the 20th century than were recorded in those censuses as American Indian. The census innovations for self-identification and permitting the recording of multiple racial identities in the post-1940 era found more people with Native identity than the old enumeration methods would have found. There is a high likelihood that such people existed in the early 20th century as well, but the census methodology of that era would have recorded them as non-Native. We believe, however, that Native identity was less in the 1900-1940 period than in 1960 and beyond as it is likely that the upward trend in identity observed in the later period was also occurring in earlier times.

Then, there is the issue of the willingness to report Native identity in public documents in the early 20th century. It is likely that willingness to identify as American Indian would have been less in the early 20th century than in the later period. If this is true, it is unlikely that the introduction of a self-enumeration methodology and the ability to identify as multiple races would have had the same large effect in the early 20th century as they did later. So this would likely have muted, at least to some extent, the effect of the new methodologies if they had been introduced in the early 20th century.

We, of course, cannot know whether people who were categorized by the censuses of 1900-1940 as American Indian race would have had higher or lower socioeconomic status than people who had Native ancestry but who were not listed as being of American Indian race. However, we expect that the same kind of relationships observed in the last part of the 20th century would have held in the first part of the century. That is, we expect that in 1900-1940, the people who had Native ancestry but not identified as having American Indian race in the censuses would also have had higher levels of education, income, employment, and exclusive English language use than those that were actually identified as being American Indian in those censuses. Put another way, the reported level of socioeconomic status during the 1900-1940 years would have been greater if the definition of American Indian had included all those with Native ancestry.

This expectation is consistent with Parker's observation that the desire to be recorded in the 1910 census as American Indian was not evenly distributed in the Native population. He noted, "As a general rule, however, persons having Indian blood in any appreciable degree are very quick to claim it from sheer ancestral pride" (Parker 1915, page 205). That is, those recorded in the census were highly selective of those with an "appreciable degree" of American Indian blood.

Summary and Conclusions

Our review of the census questions designed to ascertain people's race reveals many evolving approaches over the 1900-2010 period. The period began with the census enumerator being responsible for recording a person's race, with very little in the way of instructions about how to do this. Beginning in the 1930s, enumerators were given guidance about how to ascertain race, but this guidance was relatively brief and not entirely clear. Then, beginning in the 1960s, the census shifted the responsibility for categorizing from the enumerator to the person being enumerated—with the result being that racial designation became one of self-identity. In 1980 the census introduced another innovation, asking people to report their ancestry as well as their race. Then, in 2000, the census recognized that people might identify with multiple races and asked people to mark one or more races rather than just one.

Of course, within this long and evolving history of measuring race in the census, is the recognition that race itself is a suspect category. It is not based upon science and anthropology but is a “social-political construct” (Bentley et al. 2003, page 2). The Office of Management and Budget (1997) in its directive on federal measurement of race also admitted the difficulties in defining race when it stated in its directive on the topic that “The racial and ethnic categories set forth in the standards should not be interpreted as being primarily biological or genetic in reference. Race and ethnicity may be thought of in terms of social and cultural characteristics as well as ancestry.” These observations at the turn of the 21st century seem relevant in understanding previous census efforts.

Inasmuch as the post-1940 censuses have been analyzed and reported by many others, as discussed above, we focus our summary and conclusions on the 1900-1940 censuses. We begin with the observation that these censuses do not provide a reliable representation of the descendants of the people who lived within the current boundaries of the U.S. in 1491. The

people included as American Indian in these censuses very likely have Native ancestors, but many people with Native ancestors were not enumerated in the censuses. Our investigation also suggests that the people actually enumerated in the 1900-1940 censuses do not provide a complete representation of all people who actually identified themselves as Native. If the 1900-1940 censuses had been self-enumerated and allowed people themselves to identify their race (or races) on the censuses, there would have been more people enumerated as American Indians.

So what was the universe of people enumerated as American Indians in the 1900-1940 censuses? As we have discussed in many places in this paper, this is a very difficult question. It is especially difficult to answer in the case of people of multiple ancestries—who were likely a substantial population by the early 20th century. We believe that the census documents from the late 19th and early 20th centuries—as discussed above—provide good guidance on this. The 1870 census report was clear that “the habits, tastes, and associations” of people with multiple ancestries were highly relevant in determining race and that such people “found residing with whites, adopting their habits of life and methods of industry” should “be treated as belonging to the white population” while the opposite designation should be made for those “found in communities composed wholly or mainly of Indians” (Census Office 1872, page xiii).

The 1930 and 1940 instructions to enumerators followed a similar approach. The 1930 instructions indicated that a person of mixed ancestry “should be returned as Indian, except where the percentage of Indian blood is very small, or where he is regarded as a white person by those in the community where he lives” (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1930, page 26). And in 1940 the instructions said that a person of mixed White and American Indian ancestry “should be returned as Indian, if enrolled on an Indian Agency or Reservation roll; or if not so enrolled, if the proportion of Indian blood is one-fourth or more, or if the person is regarded as an Indian in the community where he lives” (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1940a, page 43).

These instructions suggest a substantial overlap between being assimilated into Euro-American society and being considered as racially White—a factor that likely played a role in enumerating people as American Indian or some other race in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Many people with Native ancestry living in Euro-American communities would simply have been enumerated as White rather than American Indian. This phenomenon was likely exacerbated by the desire of significant numbers of people of Native ancestry to avoid the census altogether or to be recorded as White rather than American Indian. The number of people with Native ancestry recorded in the censuses as American Indian would have been further depressed by the standard census challenges of achieving complete enumeration.

At the same time, we know that there was not a complete overlap between being classified as White in the censuses and being assimilated into Euro-American society. As discussed by Thornton and Young-DeMarco (2021), the censuses through 1880 only included those who were “taxed”—with the operational definition of “taxed” being those who were extensively assimilated into Euro-American society. Yet thousands of these “taxed” and presumably assimilated American Indians were enumerated in the 1860-1880 censuses as American Indians. Most likely these were those who had physical attributes signaling Native heritage to the enumerators—or had sufficient Native identity to signal that to the enumerators. It appears that it is these people, along with those who were closely connected to Native communities such as those on reservations that were included in the 1900-1940 censuses as American Indian. Further evidence of this pattern is provided by the fact that, as discussed by Thornton and Young-DeMarco (2021), more than 90 percent of those enumerated in 1910 as American Indians were living in districts containing Natives on reservations or where 20 or more Natives were enumerated in 1900. Understanding these selectivities and their implications for the 1900-1940 American Indian census data should be kept in mind as the data are analyzed.

Although the meanings of race and the identification of people by race undoubtedly evolved somewhat over the 1900-1940 period—and affected census results—the changes were unlikely to be nearly as severe as those that occurred in 1960 and later years. This can be seen in the relatively stable American Indian population numbers between 1900 and 1950 that contrast sharply with the changes that occurred after 1950. This should give researchers confidence in being able to use the 1900-1940 decennial censuses to study social change.

We bring this discussion to a close with the observation that the 1900-1940 decennial censuses provide a substantial body of information to study American Indian society and social change among Natives over an important period of time—the first four decades of the 20th century. Censuses, by nature, are limited in the amount of data that can be collected, but, as we have discussed, the U.S. decennial censuses include information on several important aspects of life—and with the IPUMS data files, that information is available for a very large number of individual American Indians.

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Table 1. Enumerator Instructions for recording Race by Census Year

Year	Text
1900	<p>126. Column 5. Color or race.—Write "W" for white; "B" for black (negro or of negro descent); "Ch" for Chinese; "Jp" for Japanese, and "In" for Indian, as the case may be.</p>
1910	<p>108. Column 8. Color or race.—Write "W" for white; "B" for black; "Mu" for mulatto; "Ch" for Chinese; "Jp" for Japanese; "In" for Indian. For all persons not falling within one of these classes, write "Ot" (for other), and write on the left-hand margin of the schedule the race of the person so indicated.</p> <p>109. 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.</p>
1920	<p>120. Column 10. Color or race.—Write "W" for white; "B" for black; "Mu" for mulatto; "In" for Indian; "Ch" for Chinese; "Jp" for Japanese; "Fil" for Filipino; "Hin" for Hindu; "Kor" for Korean. For all persons not falling within one of these classes, write "Ot" (for other), and write on the left-hand margin of the schedule the race of the person so indicated.</p> <p>121. For census purposes the term "black" (B) includes all Negroes of full blood, while the term "mulatto" (Mu) includes all Negroes having some proportion of white blood.</p>
1930	<p>150. Column 12. Color or race.—Write "W" for white; "Neg" for Negro; "Mex" for Mexican; "In" for Indian; "Ch" for Chinese; "Jp" for Japanese; "Fil" for Filipino; "Hin" for Hindu; and "Kor" for Korean. For a person of any other race, write the race in full.</p> <p>151. Negroes.—A person of mixed white and Negro blood should be returned as a Negro, no matter how small the percentage of Negro blood. Both black and mulatto persons are to be returned as Negroes, without distinction. A person of mixed Indian and Negro blood should be returned a Negro, unless the Indian blood predominates and the status as an Indian is generally accepted in the community.</p> <p>152. Indians.—A person of mixed white and Indian blood should be returned as Indian, except where the percentage of Indian blood is very small, or where he is regarded as a white person by those in the community where he lives. (See par. 151 for mixed Indian and Negro.)</p> <p>153. For a person reported as Indian in column 12, report is to be made in column 19 as to whether "full blood" or "mixed blood," and in column 20 the name of the tribe is to be reported. For Indians, columns 19 and 20 are thus to be used to indicate the degree of Indian blood and the tribe, instead of the birthplace of father and mother.</p> <p>154. Mexicans.—Practically all Mexican laborers are of a racial mixture difficult to classify, though usually well recognized in the localities where they are found. In order to obtain separate figures for this racial group, it has been</p>

	<p>decided that all persons born in Mexico, or having parents born in Mexico, who are not definitely white, Negro, Indian, Chinese, or Japanese, should be returned as Mexican ("Mex").</p> <p>155. Other mixed races.—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 (see par. 151).</p>
<p>1940 Unabridged</p>	<p>458. Column 10. Color or Race.—Write "W" for white; "Neg" for Negro; "In" for Indian; "Ch" for Chinese; "Jp" for Japanese; "Fil" for Filipino; "Hin" for Hindu; and "Kor" for Korean. For a person of any other race, write the race in full.</p> <p>454. Mexicans.—Mexicans are to be regarded as white unless definitely of Indian or other nonwhite race.</p> <p>455. Negroes.—A person of mixed white and Negro blood should be returned as a Negro, no matter how small the percentage of Negro blood. Both black and mulatto persons are to be returned as Negroes, without distinction. A person of mixed Indian and Negro blood should be returned as a Negro, unless the Indian blood very definitely predominates and he is universally accepted in the community as an Indian.</p> <p>456. Indians.—A person of mixed white and Indian blood should be returned as Indian, if enrolled on an Indian Agency or Reservation roll; or if not so enrolled, if the proportion of Indian blood is one-fourth or more, or if the person is regarded as an Indian in the community where he lives. (See par. 455 for mixed Indian and Negro.)</p> <p>457. Mixed Races.—Any mixture of white and nonwhite should be reported according to the nonwhite parent. Mixtures of nonwhite races should be reported according to the race of the father, except that Negro-Indian should be reported as Negro.</p>
<p>1940 Abridged</p>	<p>45. Column 10. Color or race.—For symbols to be entered in this column, see the note at the bottom of the schedule. Any mixtures of white and nonwhite blood should be recorded according to the race of the nonwhite parent. A person of mixed Negro and Indian blood should be reported as Negro unless the Indian blood greatly predominates and he is universally accepted in the community as an Indian. Other mixtures of nonwhite parentage should be reported according to the race of the father. Mexicans are to be returned as white, unless definitely of Indian or other nonwhite race</p>

Table 2

American Indian (and American Indian/Aleut/Eskimo) Population Enumerated in
Decennial Censuses, Inter-decadal Change for American Indian and U.S. Populations, and
Inter-decadal Census Survival Ratios

Year	American Indian	American Indian/Aleut/ Eskimo	American Indian % Change	U.S. % Change	Census Survival Ratio
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
1890	248,253				
1900	237,196		-4.5	20.7	
1910	265,683		12.0	21.0	0.80
1920	244,437		-8.0	14.9	0.67
1930	332,397		36.0	16.1	0.98
1940	333,969		0.5	7.2	0.72
1950	343,410		2.5	14.5	0.73
1960	508,675	551,669	48.6	19.0	1.07
1970	775,328	827,255	49.9	13.3	1.20
1980	1,339,509	1,420,400	71.7	11.5	1.40
1990	1,842,302	1,959,234	37.9	9.8	1.11
2000 (1)		2,475,956	26.4	13.2	1.07
2000 (2+)		4,119,301			
2010 (1)		2,932,248	18.4	9.7	
2010 (2+)		5,220,579	26.7		

Sources and definitions:

The 1890-1990 data for columns 2 and 3 are taken from Gibson and Jung (2002), Table 1 and Appendix B.

The 2000 and 2010 data are provided in Table 1 of Norris, Vines, and Hoeffel (2012).

The column for “American Indian” indicates the number of American Indians enumerated in the censuses for the coterminous U.S. (that is, excluding Alaska and Hawaii).

The column for American Indian/Aleut/Eskimo indicates the combined number enumerated in the censuses for these three groups for the entire U.S., including Alaska and Hawaii.

The 2000 (1) number and the 2010 (1) number indicate the people giving American Indian/Aleut/Eskimo as the only race. The 2000 (2+) number and 2010 (2+) number indicate the people giving American Indian/Aleut/Eskimo as the only race or this race along with another race.

The American Indian percent change column (Column 4) is the percent change between the number in the specified year compared to the number the previous decade. For 1900-1960, the percentage change refers to the American Indian population, and for 1970-2000 it refers to the American Indian/Aleut/Eskimo population.

The U.S. percent change column (Column 5), like the American Indian percent change column, is the percent change between the number in the specified year compared to the number the previous decade. The sources for the population numbers are the same as for Columns 2 and 3.

The census survival ratio column (Column 6) is the ratio of the American Indian (or American Indian/Aleut/Eskimo) population ages 20-59 in the specified year divided by the American Indian (or American Indian/Aleut/Eskimo) population ages 10-49 in the previous decade. For 1900, the age distribution was not available and it was assumed to be equal to the 1910 age distribution. For 1940, the age distribution was not available and it was assumed to be equal to the 1930 age distribution. For 1960, the age distribution was assumed to equal the 1960 American Indian age distribution. For 1970, the age distribution was assumed to equal the 1970 American Indian age distribution. For all other years, the Census publications provided age distributions for the appropriate year and group (American Indian or American Indian/Aleut/Eskimo).