

Historical Census Statistics On Population Totals By Race, 1790 to 1990, and By Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, For Large Cities And Other Urban Places In The United States

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Disclaimer

This report is released to inform interested parties of research and to encourage discussion. The views expressed on statistical, methodological, or technical issues are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the U.S. Census Bureau.

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Abstract

This working paper presents decennial census data on population totals by race (1790-1990) and by Hispanic origin (1970-1990) for large cities in the United States.

Other reports on historical census statistics for the United States

The following five reports present historical census statistics that are more detailed and/or more recent than historical census statistics published in reports from the decennial census of population or in *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970* (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1975a).

Population of States and Counties of the United States: 1790 - 1990, by Richard L. Forstall. U.S. Bureau of the Census. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996. Data for the 1900 to 1990 period are available also on the Census Bureau's Internet site at www.census.gov/population/www/censusdata/hiscendata.html.

Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790 to 1990,

by Campbell Gibson. U.S. Bureau of the Census, Population Division, Working Paper No. 27, 1998. Available also on the Census Bureau's Internet site at www.census.gov/population/www/censusdata/hiscendata.html.

Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 1850 to 1990, by Campbell Gibson and Emily Lennon. U.S. Bureau of the Census, Population Division, Working Paper No. 29, 1999. Available also on the Census Bureau's Internet site at www.census.gov/population/www/censusdata/hiscendata.html.

Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race, 1790 to 1990, and by Hispanic Origin, 1790 to 1990, for the United States, Regions, Divisions, and States, by Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung. U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division Working Paper No. 56, 2002. Available also on the Census Bureau's Internet site at www.census.gov/population/www/censusdata/hiscendata.html.

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[POPULATION DIVISION WORKING PAPER SERIES](#)

**HISTORICAL CENSUS STATISTICS ON POPULATION TOTALS BY
RACE, 1790 TO 1990, AND BY HISPANIC ORIGIN, 1970 TO 1990, FOR
LARGE CITIES AND OTHER URBAN PLACES IN THE UNITED STATES**

Introduction

This report presents decennial census data on the population by race and Hispanic origin for 306 large cities and other places in the United States, based on the 21 decennial censuses taken from 1790 to 1990. As of 1990, the vast majority of these places were incorporated (all as cities), but a few unincorporated places were included as well. The 306 places include all 224 places that ever had a census population of 100,000 or more in the period 1790 to 1990 and, to provide some geographic balance, an additional 82 places that historically were among the largest places in their state.

The categories used in this report to classify the population by race and Hispanic origin are the major categories used in 1990 census reports. The racial categories are White; Black; American Indian, Eskimo, and Aleut; Asian and Pacific Islander; and Other race. The Hispanic population may be of any race. In addition, data are shown for the White non-Hispanic (i.e., White, not of Hispanic origin) population.

This report represents an extension of historical census statistics on race and Hispanic origin that were presented previously in Population Division Working Paper No. 56, "Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race, 1790 to 1990, and by Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, for the United States, Regions, Division, and States" (Gibson and Jung, 2002). Data for 2000 are not included in this report, nor were they included in the previous report, because of a major limitation in the comparability of data on race. For the first time in the decennial census,

respondents in 2000 could report more than one race.¹

This report represents also an extension, to a lesser degree, of historical census statistics on large cities that were presented previously in Population Division Working Paper No. 27, "Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790 to 1990" (Gibson, 1998).

The specific list of places in the current report differs from that in Working Paper No. 27, and detailed categories of race (e.g., Chinese) and Hispanic origin (e.g., Mexican) included in Working Paper No. 56 are not shown in the current report; however, those two reports are recommended for more detailed discussions of the sources and limitations of historical data on urban places, race, and Hispanic origin than are included in this report.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Large urban places

For the 306 places included in this report, data on the population by race and Hispanic origin are shown as far back as they are available. The first requirement for adding places to the 224 places that ever had a census population of 100,000 or more in the 1790 to 1990 period was to limit the total number of places to about 300 to keep the project manageable. After experimenting with various alternatives, the criteria chosen for the additional places were that they were among the three largest incorporated urban places in the state in at least five censuses or were the largest incorporated urban place in the state in at least two censuses.

The primary sources for the total population of these places are the historical series developed by the Census Bureau during the 1930s on the populations of all urban places (generally, incorporated places of 2,500 or more population) since 1790 and the historical series on total populations shown in 1960 census reports for incorporated places of 10,000 or more population in 1960 and starting with the earliest census (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1964b, Table 5). The former series underlies tables on the urban population by size of place since 1790 that first appeared in 1940 census reports and that have been updated in subsequent censuses. The latter series includes total populations below 2,500 (i.e., when a place was not classified as urban) in years prior to 1960.

The major exception to the 2,500 population threshold for urban places was in the New England states, where, as described later, it is not always the practice to incorporate places within minor civil divisions (towns). In these cases, towns were defined as urban if they had a village or other thickly settled area with 2,500 or more inhabitants that constituted more than 50 percent of the town's population. In general, this criterion led to towns with a population of 4,000 or more being defined as urban.

The current report includes unincorporated places starting generally in 1950, reflecting a major change in the urban definition, and earlier in a few cases when data were published for unincorporated places. Unincorporated places, which have been called Census Designated Places (CDPs) in census reports since 1980, are indicated in the tables as "unic." It should be noted that the legal status of places was not always reported completely or systematically in censuses prior to 1900, and thus the two time series noted above may not always be correct in this regard. For detailed discussions of urban and urban place, see Truesdell, 1949, and Gibson, 1998.

For places in the New England states, data on the population by race and Hispanic origin back to the earliest census are shown for minor civil divisions. This reflects the greater governmental importance generally of minor civil divisions in New England states (towns, unless or until they are incorporated as cities) than in most other states (townships, most commonly). In states outside New England, places typically are first incorporated from parts of minor civil divisions.

In three New England states (Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island), no places are incorporated within minor civil divisions, and towns usually are not incorporated (as cities) until they have sizable populations (10,000 and sometimes much more). In the other three New England states (Connecticut, Maine, and Vermont), places are incorporated within towns (cities and boroughs in Connecticut, and villages in Maine and Vermont). However, because of the importance of towns in these states, data on population characteristics have sometimes been published for towns and not for their subordinate incorporated places. Data by race and Hispanic origin for both the town and subordinate incorporated place are shown if available.

With a few exceptions that are explained in notes to the tables, the total populations shown for places are the total populations shown at each census without subsequent corrections. These corrections have usually been extremely minor for large places, and in any case, have not been made by characteristics of the population, such as race and Hispanic origin.

Race and Hispanic origin categories, 1790 to 1990

As noted earlier, this report does not show data for the detailed categories of race and Hispanic origin; however, the detailed categories are included in this discussion to provide a full picture of census data on race and Hispanic origin. In some cases, data on major race categories have been aggregated from data on detailed race categories, most commonly for the Asian and Pacific Islander population.

The racial categories used in the decennial census have reflected social usage rather than an attempt to define race biologically or genetically. From 1790 to 1850, the only broad categories for which data were published were White and Black (Negro), with Black designated as free and slave. American Indians not taxed (i.e., living in tribal society) were not included in the enumeration. It is not clear how individuals who were not White or Black were classified by race; however, their number was extremely small.² A not available (NA) symbol is used in the tables for the American Indian, Eskimo, and Aleut category and for the Asian and Pacific Islander category from 1790 to 1850. An (NA) symbol is used also to indicate when data for the Hispanic and White non-Hispanic populations are not available, as discussed later.

In 1860, with much of the West region of the United States being enumerated for the first time in the decennial census, American Indians (excluding those not taxed) and Chinese (in California only) were identified separately. Japanese were identified separately starting in 1870. The attempt to enumerate all American Indians started in 1890; however, the "general enumeration" with the standard census questionnaire included only American Indians who were taxed.

Starting with the 1910 census, Asian and Pacific Islander categories other than Chinese and Japanese were identified for the first time in decennial census reports, including, for example, Filipino, Hindu, and Korean. The explicit identification of the entire population by race, without a residual "Other races" category, continued through 1940.

In the 1930 census only, there was a separate race category for Mexican. This population corresponded generally to the population of Mexican ancestry who were born in Mexico or with parents born in Mexico; however, it should be noted that the resulting count of the Mexican population was undoubtedly low because some people of Mexican ancestry did not want to be identified as such (Chapa, 2000). The race category of Mexican was eliminated in 1940, and 1930 race data were revised to include the Mexican population with the White population. In the tables in this report, 1930 census data are shown both ways: with Mexican included with White, and with Mexican shown separately in the space available in the "Other race" column.

The 1940 census was the first to include tabulations on the White population of Spanish mother tongue, including data for all states and for the 14 cities with 500,000 or more population. In previous censuses, published data on mother tongue had been limited to the White population of foreign stock (i.e., individuals who were foreign born or who were native of foreign or mixed parentage). There were relatively few individuals of Spanish mother tongue who were races other than White,³ and thus to the extent that Spanish mother tongue was a good indicator of the Hispanic population, 1940 census data provide a rough indicator of the size of the Hispanic origin population in 1940.⁴ Based on the relative sizes of the population of Spanish mother tongue and of Hispanic origin in 1970, 1940 census data on Spanish mother tongue appear to represent a somewhat low estimate of the population of Hispanic origin,⁵ but are included in this report in the absence of any other census data on the size of the total Hispanic origin population until 1970.

In 1950, an attempt was made for the first time (and with limited success) to identify individuals of mixed American Indian, Black, and White ancestry living in certain communities in the eastern United States. At the same time, the only Asian and Pacific Islander categories identified separately in 1950 census reports were Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino. Other individuals who were Asian and Pacific Islanders and individuals of mixed American Indian, Black, and White ancestry were grouped together as "Other race." In both 1950 and 1960, the population in the Other race category was less than 0.1 percent of the total population.

Census data on the Filipino population in 1950 were not published in general census volumes, but were limited to a subject report on characteristics that showed the Filipino population for the United States, the four regions, and states with Filipino populations of 2,500 or more: California, Washington, and New York (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1953b). The Filipino population in 1950 is included in the Other race category in this report.

The populations of Alaska (1880-1950) and Hawaii (1900-1950) were enumerated as territories prior to 1960, and their census questionnaires did not have exactly the same race categories as for the conterminous United States. In the 1960 census, the race categories were more similar to those for the conterminous United States, but were still different in that Eskimos and Aleuts were identified in Alaska, and Hawaiians and Part-Hawaiians were identified in Hawaii. However, since data for these groups were not shown separately below the state level, these groups are included in the Other race category, as they are in places in other states.

The race categories differed slightly also in 1970. Koreans were identified in tabulations for the conterminous United States and Hawaii, and Eskimos and Aleuts were again identified only in Alaska. In 1970, individuals who did not report their race as White but who entered a race

response suggesting Indo-European stock were classified as White. Data for Koreans, Eskimos, Aleuts, and Hawaiians were not shown separately for places and are included in the Other race category.

Table A-1 shows data on the population by race and Hispanic origin for the United States consistent with the data shown in this report for places. These data for the United States differ from data available at the national level by inclusion in the Other race category of the following: 62,000 Filipinos in 1950; 22,000 Eskimos and 6,000 Aleuts (all in Alaska), and 11,000 Hawaiians and 91,000 Part-Hawaiians (all in Hawaii) in 1960; and 28,000 Eskimos and 6,000 Aleuts (all in Alaska), and 69,000 Koreans and 100,000 Hawaiians (in states except Alaska) in 1970. (See Gibson and Jung, 1998, Table 1, for corresponding data by race and Hispanic origin available at the national level.)

In 1980 and 1990 census reports, a standard set of expanded race categories was used for all states. The Asian and Pacific Islander race category was used for the first time in tabulations, reflecting the release of Race and Ethnic Standards for Federal Statistics and Administrative Reporting (U.S. Office of Management and Budget, 1977). In addition to Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino, the categories of Korean, Eskimo, Aleut, and Hawaiian were included in tabulations for all states, and four additional categories of Asian and Pacific Islander were included on the census questionnaire and in tabulations: Vietnamese, Asian Indian, Guamanian, and Samoan⁶.

The history of census data on Hispanic origin (which is identified as an ethnic origin rather than as a race in federal statistics) is quite different from the history of census data on race. While there were various indicators of portions of the Hispanic origin population, including data on mother tongue, data on the population with Spanish surname, and the designation of Mexican as a race in the 1930 census, the first attempt to identify the entire Hispanic origin population was in 1970.

The Hispanic origin population of the United States was defined three different ways in 1970 census reports, the first and second based on 15-percent sample data and the third based on 5-percent sample data: (1) as the Spanish language population (the population of Spanish mother tongue plus all other individuals in families in which the head or wife reported Spanish mother tongue); (2) as the Spanish heritage population (the population of Spanish language and/or Spanish surname in the five Southwestern states of Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas; the population of Puerto Rican birth or parentage in New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania; and the population of Spanish language elsewhere); and (3) as the population of Spanish origin or descent based on self-identification. The Spanish origin population in 1970 was overstated in some states, especially in the Midwest and South, because some respondents

interpreted the questionnaire category of "Central or South American" to mean central or southern United States. Data on Hispanic origin were collected on a 100-percent basis in 1980 and 1990, based on self-identification.

Data on the White non-Hispanic population in 1970 were not published below the state level; however, they have been estimated for this report by assuming that the state-level proportions White among the Hispanic population apply to places in that state. When data on the total population are not available corresponding to 15-percent or 5-percent sample data on the Hispanic or White non-Hispanic population, percentages are based on the total population on the preceding line. These estimates for places are shown in italics in Table 1 through Table 51. At the national level in 1970, 94.9 percent of the Spanish language population was White, and 93.3 percent of the Hispanic (Spanish) origin population was White. The proportions at the state level are shown in Table A-2.

For the major categories of race and for the Hispanic origin population used in this report, the most important limitations on comparability are probably for the American Indian, Eskimo, and Aleut population, for the Asian and Pacific Islander population, and for the Other race population. Some of the fluctuations in the size of the American Indian population prior to 1960 reflect inconsistencies in reporting related to mixed racial background and to enrollment on an Indian Reservation or agency roll. Self-identification starting with the 1960 census and a changing social environment that fostered ethnic pride and awareness led to an increasing proportion of individuals with American Indian ancestry reporting as American Indian (Snipp, 2000).

Between 1960 and 1980, there was an increase in the number of Asian and Pacific Islander categories for which data were tabulated, as discussed previously. In addition, there were changes in editing procedures, especially with regard to 1980 sample data to tabulate write-in data in the Other race category for Asian and Pacific Islander groups not shown separately on the census questionnaire.

In the case of Other race, there was a dramatic population increase from 1970 to 1980. This reflected the addition of a question on Hispanic origin to the 100-percent questionnaire, an increased propensity for Hispanics not to identify themselves as White, and a change in editing procedures to accept reports of "Other race" for respondents who wrote in Hispanic entries such as Mexican, Cuban, or Puerto Rican. In 1970, such responses in the Other race category were reclassified and tabulated as White.

Accuracy of the data

Since 1940, some data in the decennial census of population have been collected on a sample basis (including all 1970 census data on Hispanic origin, as discussed earlier), or in some cases, tabulations were produced only on a sample basis. Because there was some additional editing of race data for sample tabulations in 1970, 1980, and 1990 census reports and of Hispanic data for sample tabulations in 1980 and 1990 census reports, both 100-percent and sample data on race and Hispanic origin from these censuses are included in this report where available. In 1990, the sample estimate of the Hispanic origin population at the national level is 2 percent lower than the 100-percent count (Table A-1), due in part to the use of sample data on ancestry and place of birth in allocating for nonresponse to the Hispanic origin question. Sample data are identified in the detailed tables.

The data contained in this paper are partially based on a sample of households or persons that responded to the census long form. As a result, the sample estimates may differ somewhat from the 100-percent figures that would have been obtained if all housing units, people within those housing units, and people living in group quarters had been enumerated using the same questionnaires, instructions, enumerators, and so forth. The sample estimates also differ from the values that would have been obtained from different samples of housing units, and hence of people living in those housing units, and people living in group quarters. The deviation of a sample estimate from the average of all possible samples is called the sampling error.

In addition to the variability that arises from sampling, both sample data and 100-percent data are subject to nonsampling error. Nonsampling error may be introduced during any of the various complex operations used to collect and process data. Such errors may include: not enumerating every household or every person in the population, failing to obtain all required information from the respondents, obtaining incorrect or inconsistent information, and recording information incorrectly. In addition, errors can occur during the field review of the enumerators' work, during clerical handling of the census questionnaires, or during the processing of the questionnaires.

Nonsampling error may affect the data in two ways: first, errors that are introduced randomly will increase the variability of the data and, therefore, should be reflected in the standard errors; and second, errors that tend to be consistent in one direction will bias both sample and 100-percent data in that direction. Such biases are not reflected in the standard errors.

The estimates in the table and figures may vary from actual values due to sampling and nonsampling errors. As a result, the estimates used to summarize statistics for one population group may not be statistically different from estimates for another population group. Further information on the accuracy of the data for the 1990 Census is located at [1990 Summary Tape File 3 Technical Documentation on CD-ROM](#).

General information on census data, including area classifications, definitions of topics, accuracy of the data (including both sampling error and nonsampling error), and collection and processing procedures is provided in decennial census publications listed in the section on Decennial Census Data References. The decennial census has been taken on a de jure (usual place of residence) basis rather than on a de facto (location at the time of the census) basis. For a general discussion of census coverage and underenumeration, see U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1975, Part 1, Series A 1 - 371, p. 1. For evaluations of census coverage since 1940, see Fay, et al., 1988; and Robinson, et al., 1993. For histories of the census of population see Wright and Hunt, 1900, Eckler, 1972, and Anderson, 1988.

For a bibliography of all U.S. Census publications through 1945, see Dubester, 1950. This catalogue was reprinted in the Bureau of the Census Catalog of Publications: 1790-1972 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1974). For publications of the 1980 and 1990 census, see U.S. Bureau of the Census 1984 and 1994. Additional information is available in the procedural histories of censuses cited in these catalogs.

Footnotes

¹For a discussion of the multiple-race concept, issues of comparability, and Census 2000 data on race and Hispanic origin, see Grieco and Cassidy, 2001, and U.S. Census Bureau, 2001a and 2001b.

²In 1860, when categories other than White or Black were first identified, the enumerated population other than White or Black was about 79,000, or only 0.25 percent of the total U.S. population (Table A-1). Data of dubious accuracy on Mulattoes were published in censuses of 1850 to 1870, 1890, 1910, and 1920 (Bennett, 2000c; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1922a, pp.16-17).

³Data on the foreign-born population by country of birth and race were published in the 1940 census only for the White population. Nationally, the foreign-born population from Spain and Latin America (shown as Cuba, other West Indies, Central America, and South America) of races other than White was about 28,000 in 1910 and about 83,000 in 1930, not all of whom were from countries where Spanish was the predominant language (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1913a, 1933a, 1943a).

⁴The 1940 census data on the White population of Spanish mother tongue were based on a 5-percent sample. The resulting estimate of White population was slightly larger than the 100-percent count of the White population for the United States and for many states and places. Estimates for 1940 are shown in this report both as published and as prorated to the 100-percent count of the White population.

⁵In the 1970 census, the Spanish language population nationally (9,589,000) was defined to include individuals of Spanish mother tongue (7,824,000) and all other individuals in families in which the head or wife reported Spanish mother tongue (1,766,000). The population of Spanish mother tongue thus was about 86 percent as large as the population of Hispanic origin based on self-identification (9,073,000). (Gibson and Jung, 1998, Table D-4.)

⁶As an extreme example of inconsistency in the classification by race over time, a person who was included in the Asian Indian category in 1980 and 1990 census tabulations might have been included in different categories previously: Hindu in 1920-1940, Other race in 1950-1960, and White in 1970.

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Table 1 - Table 51.

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Table A-1. Gibson and Jung, 1998, Tables 1, B-3, C-5, C-6, and C-7.

Table A-2. Gibson and Jung, 1998, Table E-5.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division,

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