From ‘Mulatto’ to ‘Negro’: The 1930 United States Census and the Erasure of Mixed-Race People

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Reference/Access Services Librarian
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• Land Acknowledgement
• Content Warning
• My story
• What the census calls us
• History of the "mulatto" category
• Race Science and Eugenics
• Passers experiences
• Passing in the media
• Lasting impact & Research implications
Land Acknowledgement

I am on the ancestral territory of the Wabanaki Confederacy, the Massachusett, and the Pawtucket/Pennacook. “Today the Pennacook are no longer a distinct tribe, but many of their descendants can be found among the Abenaki people who continue to live in New Hampshire, Vermont, Maine, Massachusetts, and Canada.”


Learn More Here: Native-Land.ca
Content Warning

This presentation contains some disturbing descriptions of racist acts and language now understood to be offensive.

Terms

Nig/Neg
Negro
Mulatto
Miscegenation/Amalgamate
Mongrel
Leroy Edmonds at work in 1926, family photo
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leroy Edmonds</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Mulatto</td>
<td>Home General</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Edmonds, Roy; Head; Home Rented; Value: $30; Farm: No; M (male); Nig/Neg (Negro); 38 yrs old; M (married)
Pew Research Center: What the Census Calls Us

What Census Calls Us
A Historical Timeline

This graphic displays the different race, ethnicity and origin categories used in the U.S. decennial census, from the first one in 1790 to the latest count in 2020. The category names often changed from one decade to the next, in a reflection of current politics, science and public attitudes. For example, "colored" became "black," with "Negro" and "African American" added later. The term "Negro" was dropped for the 2020 census. Through 1950, census-takers commonly determined the race of the people they counted. From 1960 on, Americans could choose their own race. Starting in 2000, Americans could include themselves in more than one racial category.

Before that, many multiracial people were counted in only one racial category.

Use the interactive timeline on their website!
### 1890 Census Instructions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Amount of “black blood”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negro/Black</td>
<td>¾ or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mulatto</td>
<td>¾ to ⅜</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quadroon</td>
<td>1/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Octoroon</td>
<td>⅛ or any trace</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Use the interactive timeline on their website!
Creation of the "Mulatto" Category

Dr. Josiah Clarke Nott
(Courtesy of the Alabama Department of Archives and History)

(Courtesy of The New York Public Library)
The "Mulatto" Category

Joseph C.G. (Camp Griffith) Kennedy,
Superintendent of the Census, 1850-1853 and 1860-1865
(U.S. Census Bureau | Census History Staff)
The "Mulatto" Category

(Civil war photographs, 1861-1865, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.)

1890 Census Schedule
(Courtesy of the United States Census Bureau)
The Split

"Amount of Negro and Other Colored Blood Illegal in Various States for Marriage to Whites: 1929,

by W.A. Plecker, Eugenical News (vol. 14:8)
An Increase in People of Color

Statistical atlas of the United States, based upon the results of the eleventh census. United States Census Office. 11th Census, 1890, and Henry Gannet. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress)
Race Suicide & Eugenics

Theodore Roosevelt, ca. 1901.
Perry, Eugene A.
(Courtesy of the Library of Congress)

The Passing of the Great Race, or, The Racial Basis of European History.

The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy.
Race Suicide & Eugenics

Theodore Roosevelt, ca. 1901.
Perry, Eugene A. 
(Courtesy of the Library of Congress)


Passing for White in the U.S.

Lemuel Haynes, [Pioneer Negro preachers]. Woodson, Carter Godwin, 1875-1950
The history of the Negro church. (Courtesy of The New York Public Library)

Patrick F. Healy, S.J., President of Georgetown, 1873-1882 (Courtesy of Georgetown University Library, University Archives)

William and Ellen Craft, 1872. (Courtesy of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library)

Anita Florence Hemmings, 1897 (Ref. #3.888) ©Vassar College/ Courtesy, Archives & Special Collections, Vassar College Library
# Passing Mania: Fear and the Census

- **3,000 Negroes Cross the Line Each Year**
  - The Philadelphia Tribune, July 12, 1928

- **75,000 Pass in Philadelphia Every Day**
  - The Afro-American, December 19, 1931

- **Crossing the color line: social and economic ambitions lead negroes to “Pass” at rate of 5,000 a year to white fold**
  - New York World, July 28, 1929

- **Rhinelander Sues To Annul Marriage; Alleges Race Deceit**
  - The New York Times, Nov. 27, 1924
Passing in Literature, 1920-1940

- 1926 - Flight by Walter White
- 1926 - Show Boat by Edna Ferber
- 1928 - Plum Bun by Jessie Redmon Fauset
- 1928 - Quicksand by Nella Larsen
- 1929 - Passing by Nella Larsen
- 1931 - Black No More by George S. Schuyler
- 1932 - Light in August by William Faulkner
- 1934 - The Ways of White Folk by Langston Hughes

Nella Larsen, Author, circa. 1920. (Courtesy of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library)

Charles W. Chesnutt, 1902. (Courtesy of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library)
The Census Change

"Color Line in Census: Director Will Have Negroes to Enumerate Negroes, Whites for Whites."

Edward Dana Durand, Director of the Census
(1909-1913)
U.S. Census Bureau | Census History Staff
Pick a Side: Passing in Race Films

**Imitation of Life, 1934**
New York Public Library Digital Collections

**Veiled Aristocrats, 1932**
Screenshot by Gabby Womack

**Lost Boundaries, 1949**
Courtesy of the Historical Society of Cheshire County

**Pinky, 1949**
Screenshot by Gabby Womack
The Effects of Passing on the Census

Leroy Edmonds with coworkers at the Philadelphia Navy Yard, 1943
The Effects of Passing on the Census

Anita Florence Hemmings, 1897 (Ref. #3.888) ©Vassar College/ Courtesy, Archives & Special Collections, Vassar College Library

Theodore C. Marceau (1859–1922), Belle da Costa Greene, May 1911 Biblioteca Berenson, I Tatti, The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies
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