

The United States Census

The Census

The United States government conducts a census every ten years, as required by the Constitution. A census is a count of all the people in an area. The U.S. Census is supposed to count all people living in the United States. Collecting information from every person in a country is a massive amount of work. The 2010 Census cost about \$12 billion (12,000,000,000 dollars)! More than 600,000 people worked for the U.S. Census Bureau when it collected population data in 2010.



- 1) Have you ever participated in the U.S. Census or another census? Do you know other people who have?

The History of the Census

The first nationwide census in the United States was in 1790, three years after the U.S. Constitution was completed. This was about a year after George Washington became president. The first census identified people who were considered white and counted them separately from people who were considered non-white.

- 2) Do you think the first U.S. Census counted all people? Which groups of people do you think were counted? Put checkmarks next to these groups.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black women | <input type="checkbox"/> Native American men |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black men | <input type="checkbox"/> White women |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Native American women | <input type="checkbox"/> White men |

- 3) Some people were counted in the first census, but were not allowed to vote. Put checkmarks next to groups who you think were allowed to vote in 1790.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black women | <input type="checkbox"/> Native American men |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black men | <input type="checkbox"/> White women |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Native American women | <input type="checkbox"/> White men |

The United States Census

Look at the count from the 1790 census below.

DISTRICTS	Free white Males of 16 years and upwards, including heads of families.	Free white Males under sixteen years.	Free white Females, including heads of families.	All other free persons.	Slaves.	Total.
Vermont	22435	22328	40505	255	16	85539
N. Hampshire	36086	34851	70160	630	158	141885
Maine	24384	24748	46870	538	NONE	96540
Massachusetts	95453	87289	190582	5463	NONE	378787
Rhode Island	16019	15799	32652	3407	948	68825
Connecticut	60523	54403	117448	2808	2764	237946
New York	83700	78122	152320	4654	21324	340120
New Jersey	45251	41416	83287	2762	11423	184139
Pennsylvania	110788	106948	206363	6537	3737	434373
Delaware	11783	12143	22384	3899	8887	59094
Maryland	55915	51339	101395	8043	103036	319728
Virginia	110936	116135	215046	12866	292627	747610
Kentucky	15154	17057	28922	114	12430	73677
N. Carolina	69988	77506	140710	4975	100572	393751
S. Carolina	35576	37722	66880	1801	107094	249073
Georgia	13103	14044	25739	398	29264	82548
	807094	791850	1541263	59150	694280	3893635

Image courtesy of U.S. Census Bureau

Categories:

Free white Males of 16 years and upwards, including heads of families.

Free white Males under sixteen years.

Free white Females, including heads of families.

All other free persons.

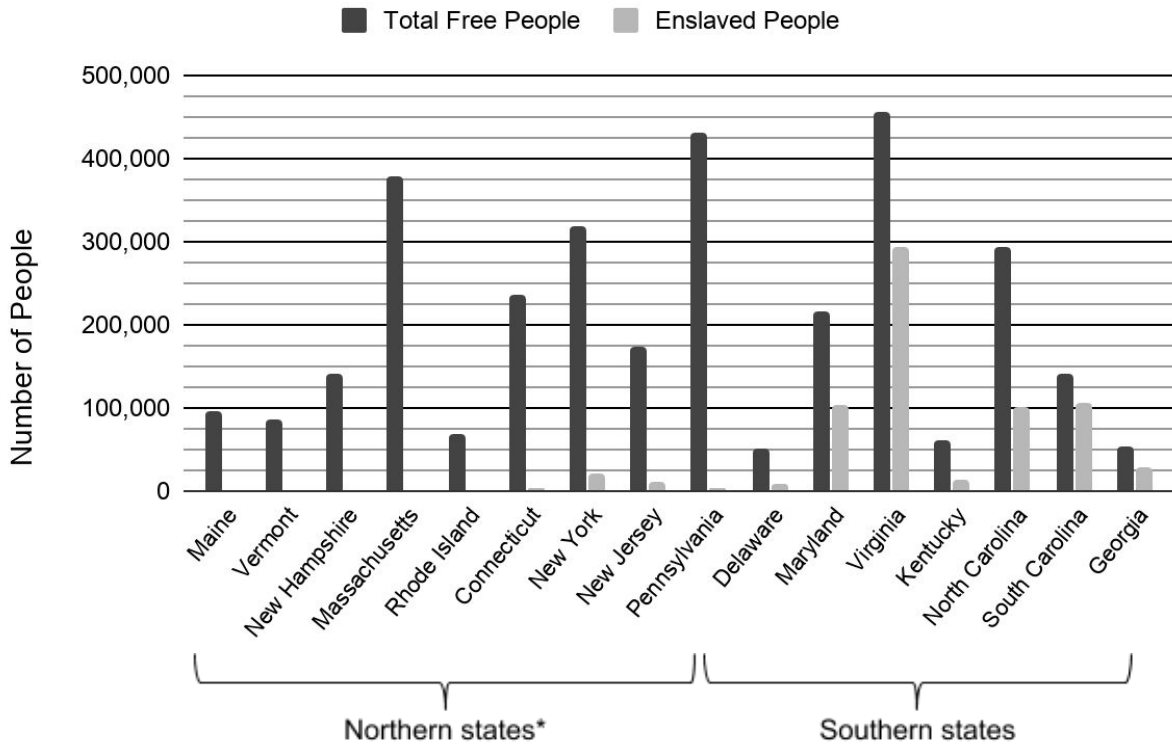
Slaves.

Total.

4) What do you notice?

The United States Census

Slavery and the 1790 Census



*In 1790, there were enslaved people in most Northern states, but the populations for some states were too small to show on this chart.

- 12) Based on the chart, about how many people were enslaved in New York?
- A. 1,000
 - B. 5,000
 - C. 20,000
 - D. 100,000
- 13) Based on the chart, which of the following statements is false?
- A. In Maryland, there were about half as many enslaved people as there were free people.
 - B. In South Carolina, there were almost as many enslaved people as there were free people.
 - C. There were no enslaved people in the North.
 - D. Of the Northern states, New York had the most enslaved people.

The United States Census

- 14) The total population of Virginia in 1790 was 747,610 and the enslaved population was 292,627. Approximately what percentage of Virginia's population was enslaved?
- A. 3%
- B. 10%
- C. 20%
- D. 40%
- 15) In which state was a higher percentage of the population enslaved compared with Virginia?

119

Names of heads of Families	White males 16 years and upwards	White males 16 years and under 16	Free colored males 16 years and upwards	Free colored males 16 years and under 16	Slaves
Abstract of the County					
Town of Otsego	563	427	608	6	8
Caughnawaga	1128	1068	1928	4	133
Pollatine	805	815	1582	10	192
Mohawk	1088	1141	2092	8	111
German Flatts	354	301	630	2	20
Herkemer	406	388	722	1	8
Whites Town	689	443	749	3	7
Chemung &c	648	644	1091	1	7
Canajoharie	1648	1538	2868	6	96
Harpersfield	524	424	772		6
Chenango &c	13	12	20		
Total County Montgomery	7866	7201	13152	41	588

The count in Montgomery County, NY (1790)
(U.S. Census Bureau)

Why do we use the term *enslaved people* instead of *slaves*?

We say *enslaved people* instead of *slaves* because it helps us remember that we are talking about people. For some enslaved people, being in slavery was a temporary position because they were able to escape or buy their freedom. Most people were never able to escape slavery, but they remained people first. The word *enslaved* also reminds us that people don't just become slaves. They were enslaved by other people.

The United States Census

In the town of Flatbush in Brooklyn, NY, the 1790 census surveyed heads of families in each of the five categories:

White males ≥ 16 years	White males < 16 years	White females	All other free persons	Slaves	Total
160	153	238	12	378	

Names of heads of families

Leonardus Bennet	2	3	1	—	1	
Peter Rapalji	—	1	1	—	3	
90 John Borum	—	1	2	1	—	
Isaac Eldred	—	1	2	2	—	
Hendrick Eldred	—	1	3	2	—	
Thomas Betts	—	2	1	5	—	
Isaac Snidecker	—	2	2	2	—	
Isaac Jornewell	—	1	1	3	—	
Jacobus Rich	—	1	—	1	—	
Joseph Howard	}	5	3	7	—	
Thomas Furman						
9 William Howard						
99	Totals	17	17	25	—	48
	brought from page 8	34	30	53	2	104
	Page 9	56	82	82	7	139
	d ^o 10	53	24	78	3	87
	Total in the Town of Flatbush	160	153	238	12	378

16) What do you notice about the count for Flatbush?

Some households and the totals for the town of Flatbush (Brooklyn), NY (1790) (U.S. Census Bureau)

The United States Census

As you know, a census is a count of people in an area. Another way to say census is *enumeration*, since *enumerate* means “to count.” A census worker who goes door-to-door counting people is called an *enumerator* (or someone who counts). In 1790, enumerators counted people in the original 13 states. They included the districts of Kentucky, Maine, and Vermont even though they were not states yet.

Think about how this information was collected. There was no Internet, no telephone system, and no United States Post Office. Enumerators traveled all over the states, probably by horse, visiting each household and taking notes on the people who lived there. Enumerators knew how to read and write, but many people they visited did not. The census takers interviewed the head of each household (usually considered to be a man), who told them the number of persons in each household.

Both George Washington and Thomas Jefferson thought that the final count in 1790 was lower than it should have been (an *undercount*). They thought the true population of the country was more than the 3.9 million inhabitants counted in the census.

- 17) What are some possible reasons people would not have been counted in the 1790 census?

At this point it is hard to know how many people were left out of the count, but we know that many African-American, Native Americans, and other people of color were undercounted or not counted at all when the census was done early in this country’s history. Native Americans living on reservations were not counted.

Note: When Europeans first colonized the land that is now the United States, there were different indigenous people already living on it. As Europeans took over the land, they set aside certain areas of land and forced the indigenous people to live there. The land set aside for indigenous people is called a reservation.

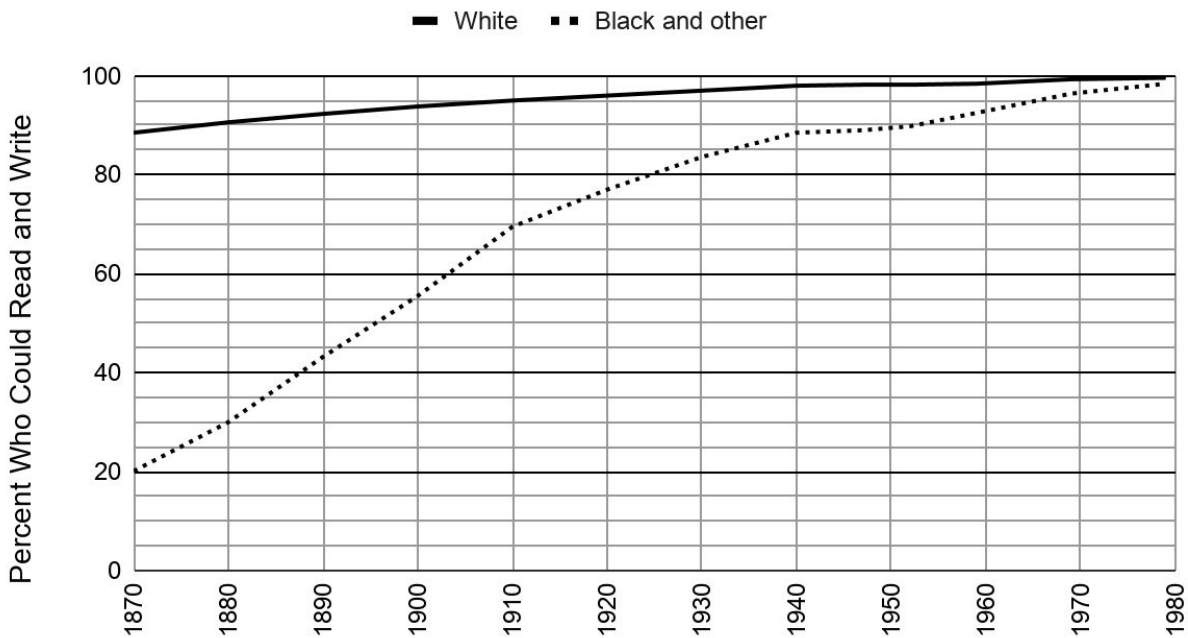
- 18) What are some reasons why people from these specific groups would not have been included in the count?

The United States Census

We don't really know the percentage of people who were able to read and write in the United States in 1790. The enumerators didn't ask about the ability to read and write in the first census. We do know the percentage of people who knew how to read in later years because a question about literacy was included in the census starting in 1870, just seven years after the Emancipation Proclamation¹ and five years after the end of the Civil War.

The graph below, based on data from the Census Bureau, shows the percentage of people who could read and write in any language, at different times in our nation's history. *Literacy* means the ability to read and write. A *literacy rate* is the percentage of people in a group who can read and write.

Literacy Rates in the United States (1870-1980)



19) What do you notice?

¹ In 1863, during the Civil War, the Emancipation Proclamation by President Abraham Lincoln freed more than 3.5 million enslaved African-Americans in the southern Confederate states at war with the North. People enslaved in other states were freed by the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1865.

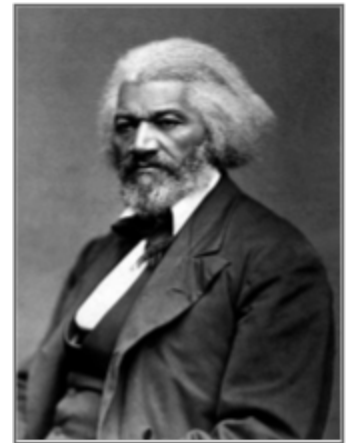
The United States Census

What it means to be *literate* has changed over time. In 1870, if you knew how to sign your name, you were considered literate. Over time, the definition of literacy has changed. In modern surveys, people are asked, “Can you read a newspaper? Can you write a letter? Can you write a short statement about your everyday life?” The answers to these questions indicate whether someone is literate.² Many people believe that the modern definition of literacy should include the ability to use numbers to understand the world (*numeracy*) and the ability to use computers to communicate and do research (*computer literacy*).

20) About what percentage of white people were literate in 1870?

21) About what percentage of Black people were literate in 1870?

During the era of slavery in the United States, the education of African-Americans, enslaved and free, was forbidden. Many Southern states had anti-literacy laws that made it illegal to teach an African-American person to read and write. Literacy was seen as a threat to slavery. Amazingly, many enslaved people risked violence and death and educated each other in secret. For example, the famous abolitionist³, Frederick Douglass, learned to read secretly as a child and eventually became a well-known author and leader against slavery.⁴



“Knowledge makes a man unfit to be a slave.”
- Frederick Douglass

As you can see in the chart on the previous page, African-American people devoted themselves to education after the Civil War and achieved near universal literacy by 1980.

22) Complete the table.

Year	% of Black and other		% of white	
	Literate	Non-literate	Literate	Non-literate
1870	20%	80%	88%	12%
1920	77%		96%	
1979	98.4%		99.6%	

² <https://ourworldindata.org/how-is-literacy-measured>

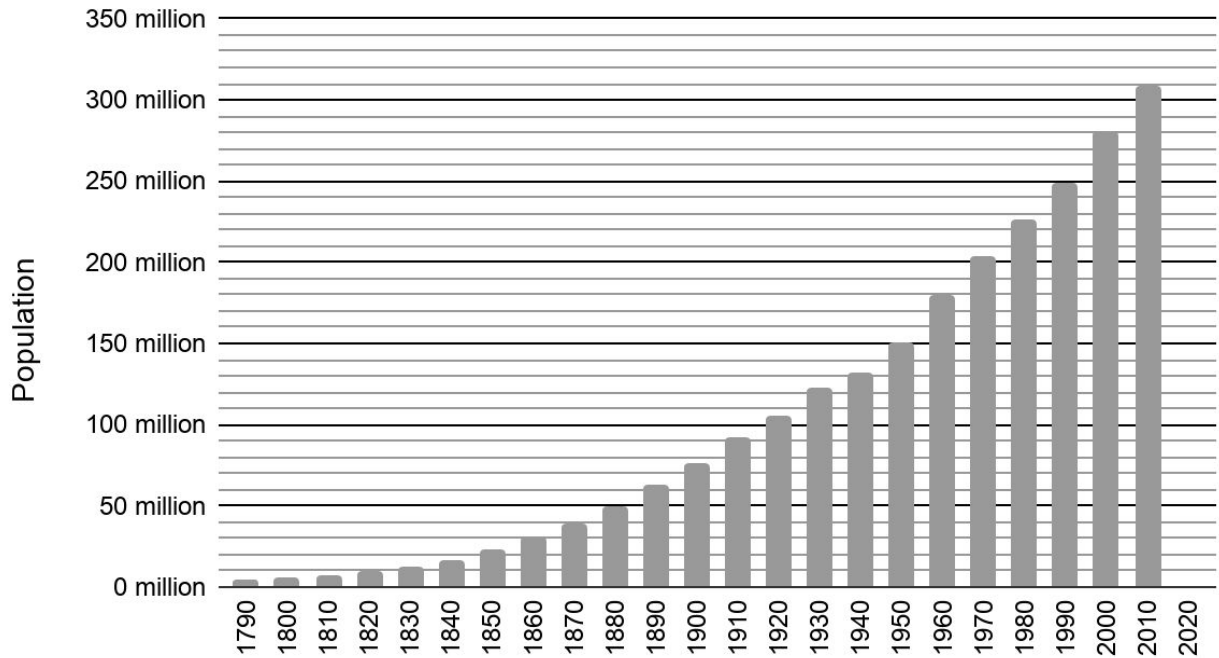
³ An *abolitionist* is a person who believes that a practice should be *abolished* or ended. Abolitionists in the early United States believed that slavery should be abolished.

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_during_the_slave_period

The United States Census

The graph below shows the total population from the 1790 through 2010 censuses. The next census happens in 2020.

Total U.S. Population According to the Census (1790-2010)



- 23) Write 3 true statements based on the graph. (You can write any statement you want, but make sure that you can provide evidence from the graph.)

The United States Census

- 24) How many times has the census happened in the history of the United States?
- 25) What was the approximate U.S. population in 2000?
- A. 250 million
 - B. 253 million
 - C. 265 million
 - D. 280 million
- 26) What was the approximate U.S. population in 2010?
- 27) Mark the following statements true or false.

Statement	True	False
The U.S. population in 1900 was about 75 million people.	✓	
The U.S. population in 1820 was about twice what it was in 1800.		
The biggest 10-year increase in population was between 1940 and 1950.		
The population in 1960 was about 20% higher than in 1950.		
The population in 2010 was about 310 million, which is 30% higher than the population of about 280 million in 2000.		
The difference in the U.S. population between 1790 and 2010 was about 305 million people.		

The Census and Political Representation

Data from the census is used in different ways. In this section, we will look at how the census is used to determine the number of political representatives of different communities.

28) Consider the following situation.

A school district is hiring 20 teachers to teach at three different schools. Each teacher can work at one school only.

School A: 100 students

School B: 250 students

School C: 150 students

How many teachers should go to each school? Explain your thinking below.

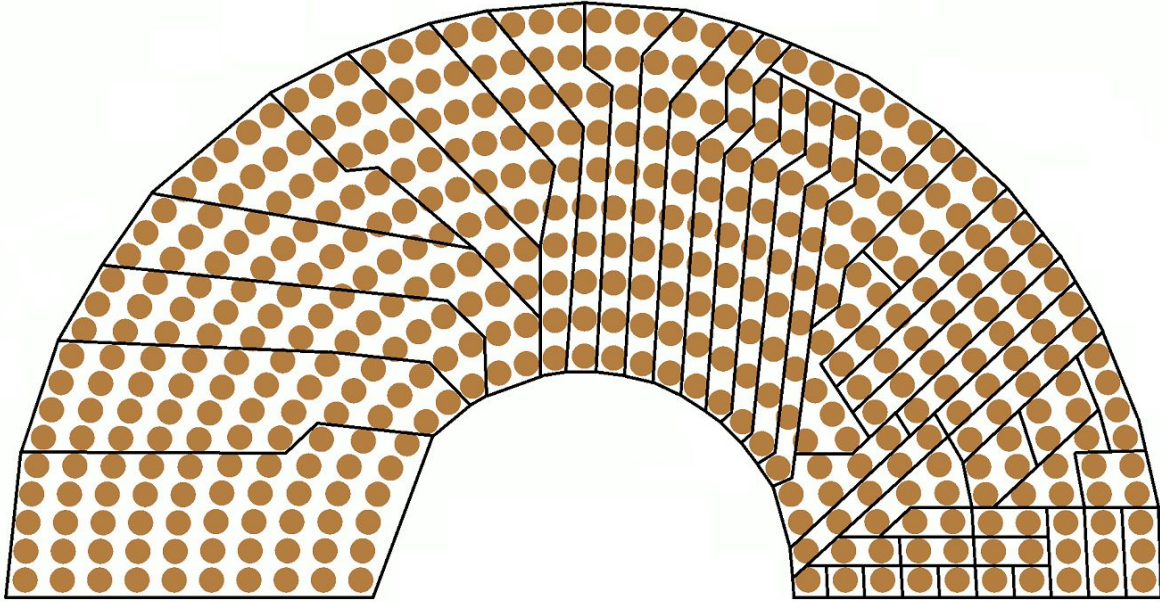
29) How many students will be with each teacher?

A. 20

C. 30

B. 25

D. 50



30) What do you notice?

The United States Census

The federal government is split into three branches: legislative, judicial, and executive. Congress represents the legislative branch, which has two parts: the Senate and the House of Representatives. They write all federal laws, declare war, regulate business, and control taxes and the federal budget. Federal judges, federal courts, and the Supreme Court make up the judicial branch, whose responsibility is to interpret laws. The president, advisors, departments and agencies are part of the executive branch, which enforces federal laws.

There are 100 senators in the Senate. Each state has exactly two senators, no matter how many people live in the state. This means that Wyoming, a state with a low population, has the same number of senators as California, a state with a high population.

In the House of Representatives, the number of representatives for each state is based on its population, which is determined by the census. When the House of Representatives makes a decision about a law, a budget, taxes, or a war, all the representatives vote. States with more representatives have more power than states with fewer representatives.



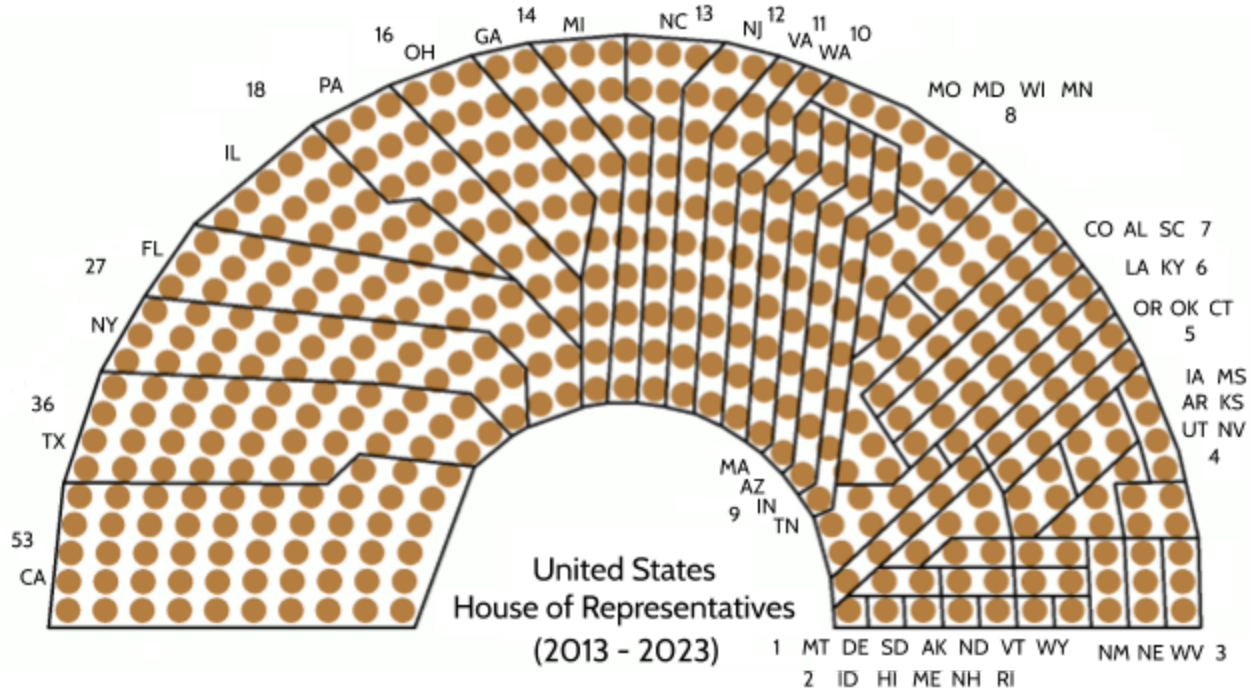
The United States House of Representatives in 2003

- 31) Name 2 states that you think probably have a lot of representatives.

- 32) Name 2 states that you think probably don't have many representatives.

The United States Census

Look over the diagram and table on the next two pages.



State	Census 2000		Census 2010	
	Population	Number of Representatives	Population	Number of Representatives
Alabama	4,447,100	7	4,779,736	7
Alaska	626,932	1	710,231	1
Arizona	5,130,632	8	6,392,017	9
Arkansas	2,673,400	4	2,915,918	4
California	33,871,648	53	37,253,956	53
Colorado	4,301,261	7	5,029,196	7
Connecticut	3,405,565	5	3,574,097	5
Delaware	783,600	1	897,934	1
Florida	15,982,378	25	18,801,310	27
Georgia	8,186,453	13	9,687,653	14
Hawaii	1,211,537	2	1,360,301	2
Idaho	1,293,953	2	1,567,582	2
Illinois	12,419,293	19	12,830,632	18
Indiana	6,080,485	9	6,483,802	9
Iowa	2,926,324	5	3,046,355	4
Kansas	2,688,418	4	2,853,118	4
Kentucky	4,041,769	6	4,339,367	6
Louisiana	4,468,976	7	4,533,372	6

The United States Census

State	Census 2000		Census 2010	
	Population	Number of Representatives	Population	Number of Representatives
Maine	1,274,923	2	1,328,361	2
Maryland	5,296,486	8	5,773,552	8
Massachusetts	6,349,097	10	6,547,629	9
Michigan	9,938,444	15	9,883,640	14
Minnesota	4,919,479	8	5,303,925	8
Mississippi	2,844,658	4	2,967,297	4
Missouri	5,595,211	9	5,988,927	8
Montana	902,195	1	989,415	1
Nebraska	1,711,263	3	1,826,341	3
Nevada	1,998,257	3	2,700,551	4
New Hampshire	1,235,786	2	1,316,470	2
New Jersey	8,414,350	13	8,791,894	12
New Mexico	1,819,046	3	2,059,179	3
New York	18,976,457	29	19,378,102	27
North Carolina	8,049,313	13	9,535,483	13
North Dakota	642,200	1	672,591	1
Ohio	11,353,140	18	11,536,504	16
Oklahoma	3,450,654	5	3,751,351	5
Oregon	3,421,399	5	3,831,074	5
Pennsylvania	12,281,054	19	12,702,379	18
Rhode Island	1,048,319	2	1,052,567	2
South Carolina	4,012,012	6	4,625,364	7
South Dakota	754,844	1	814,180	1
Tennessee	5,689,283	9	6,346,105	9
Texas	20,851,820	32	25,145,561	36
Utah	2,233,169	3	2,763,885	4
Vermont	608,827	1	625,741	1
Virginia	7,078,515	11	8,001,024	11
Washington	5,894,121	9	6,724,540	10
West Virginia	1,808,344	3	1,852,994	3
Wisconsin	5,363,675	8	5,686,986	8
Wyoming	493,782	1	563,626	1
Totals	280,849,847	435	308,143,815	435

33) Write a true statement based on evidence in the diagram and table above.

The United States Census

Answer the next two questions using the diagram and table on the previous page.

34) Which six states had the most representatives in 2000?

35) Which six states have the most representatives in 2010?

After each census, the total number of representatives are divided up between the states, based on their new populations. This process is called *apportionment*, because each state gets their *portion* of political representation. Apportionment is the process of sharing representation based on population, which means the more population you have, the more representation you have.



36) Using the map and the population and representation table above, describe three changes that happened as a result of the 2010 census.

The United States Census

Let's go back to the question of sharing 20 teachers with three schools. This is an *apportionment*—giving a portion of the total number of teachers to each school based on their student population. The table below is one way to solve the problem.

Since there are 20 teachers and 500 total students, we know there are 25 students per teacher ($500 \text{ students} \div 20 \text{ teachers} = 25 \text{ students/teacher}$). We can then see how many teachers should be at each school, so that there is one teacher for every 25 students.

Fill in the missing blanks.

	Number of Students	Calculation	Number of Teachers
School A	100	$100 \div 25 = 4$	4
School B	250		10
School C	150		
Total	500		20

Determining the number of political representatives for each state is based on each state's population, but there are some decisions you will have to make that are different from the example above.

- 37) Imagine that a small country needs to apportion 37 representatives to three states.

State	Population
D	150,000
E	100,000
F	10,000

How many representatives should each state have? Make sure all the representatives are apportioned (assigned to a state).

Explain your thinking below.

Where Does the Money Go?

The population data from the census is also used to decide how much money each state receives from the federal government for a range of programs. After the census in 2010, New York State received \$73 billion (\$73,000,000,000) for a long list of programs and projects, including the following:

Medicaid and Medicare	Special education
College grants and loans	Housing loans
Food stamps	Home energy assistance
Highways and roads	Unemployment insurance
Section 8 housing vouchers	Child care
Temporary aid for needy families	Adoption and foster care
Children's health insurance	Adult education funding
School breakfast and lunch programs	... and much more!

38) Which of the programs above do you think are important? Why?

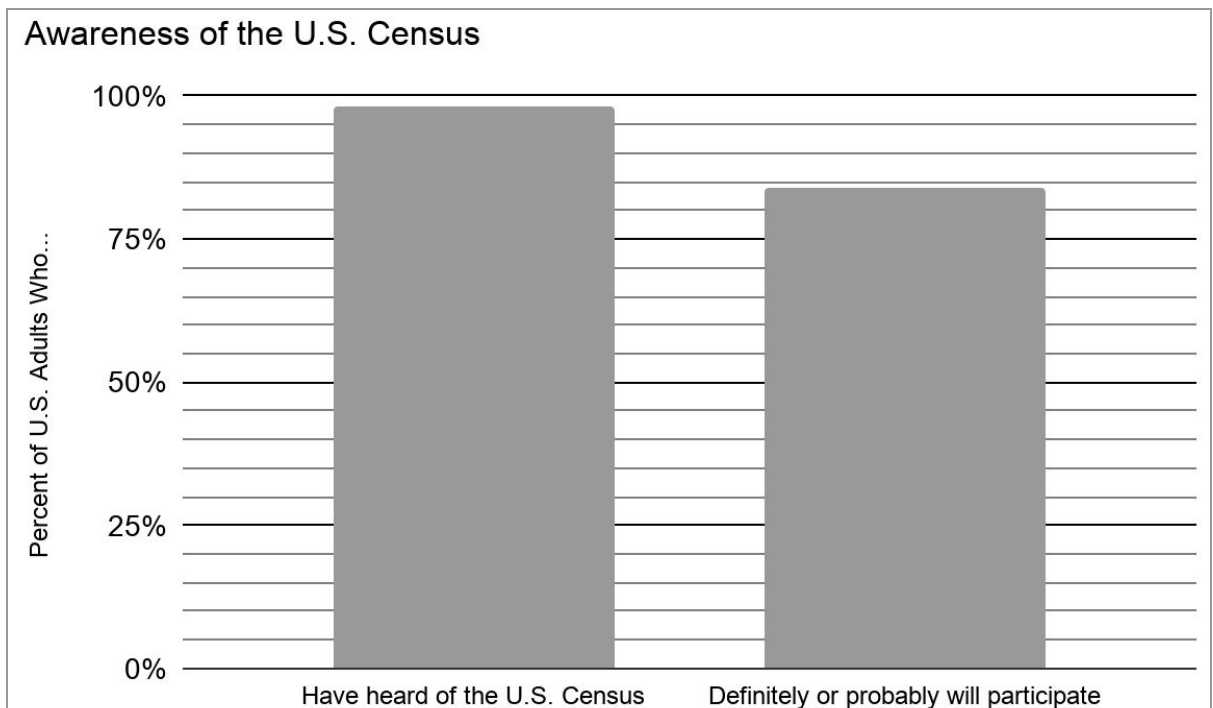
If a state's population is undercounted, the federal money it receives for the programs above will be lower than it should be. This means that there will be less money in the budget for these programs and people will receive reduced services and benefits.

Participating in the Census

39) Which of these groups of people do you think will be counted in the 2020 census?

- American citizens
- Youth under 21
- People who are registered to vote
- Residents with a “green card”
- Undocumented people living in the United States

The following graph is based on a survey⁵ of about 7,000 U.S. adults in September 2019.



40) About what percent of the people surveyed had heard of the U.S. Census?

41) About what percent of the people surveyed had not heard of the U.S. Census?

⁵ <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/10/18/most-u-s-adults-intend-to-participate-in-2020-census/>

The United States Census

- 42) 84% of the people surveyed said they probably would participate in the census. What percent of the people surveyed probably won't participate in the census?

Researchers use surveys to understand different populations. Surveys are used to learn our political opinions, our shopping habits, what we watch on television, and other kinds of information about groups of people. It wouldn't be practical for researchers to talk to everyone in a population every time they wanted to understand public opinion. For this reason, researchers usually select a random *sample* of people to interview.

The telephone numbers of the 7,000 people in this survey were chosen randomly by a computer. The researchers expect that the results of this survey are true of all U.S. adults, since these 7,000 people statistically represent the whole population.

- 43) Do you agree that the survey represents what U.S. adults think?

The U.S. Census is supposed to be a count of everyone living in the United States. It includes citizens and non-citizens, documented and undocumented immigrants, adults and children, people who are registered to vote and people who aren't registered to vote. Every household in the U.S. should receive a letter from the Census asking them to be part of the count. You don't have to be a citizen or registered to vote in order to be counted in the Census. People in the military are counted. People who are incarcerated are included in the count. People in long-term medical care are counted. Everyone is counted.

The census is not a survey. In a survey, a sample of the population is used to understand the whole population. In a census, everyone should be counted.

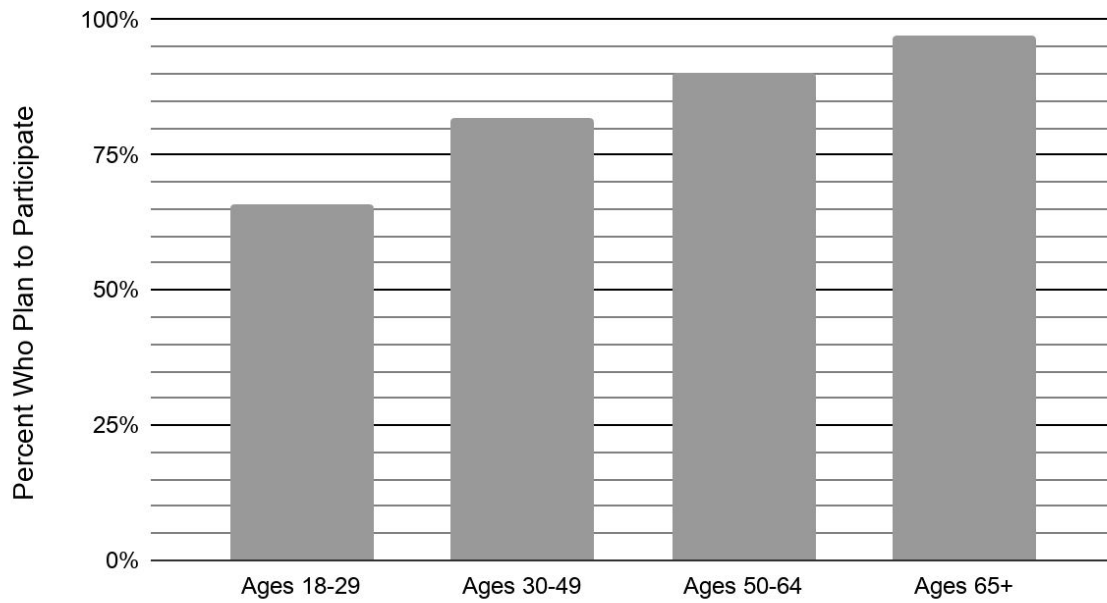
Since the Census is trying to count everyone, they will try hard to contact every household and every person in the United States. They will send a letter first. If you don't respond to the letter, they will send someone to knock on your door. If you don't answer the door, they will try again later. At some point, though, they will give up and you won't be counted.

Everyone living in the United States is counted except for people who don't respond to the Census.

- 44) Why do you think someone would not want to respond to the Census?

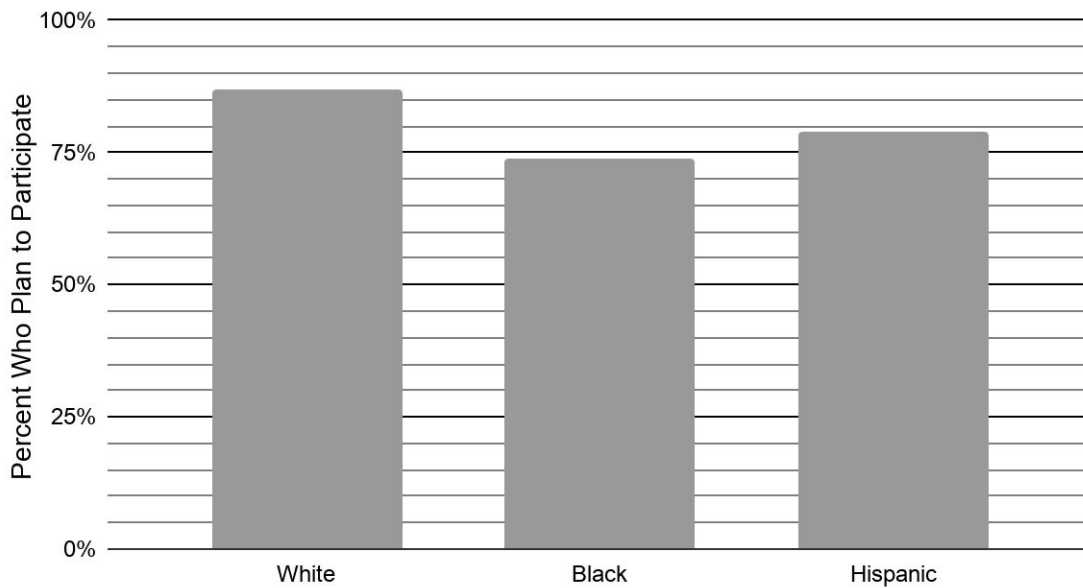
Examine the following three graphs from the same survey of U.S. adults in September 2019.

Expected Participation in Census 2020 by Age



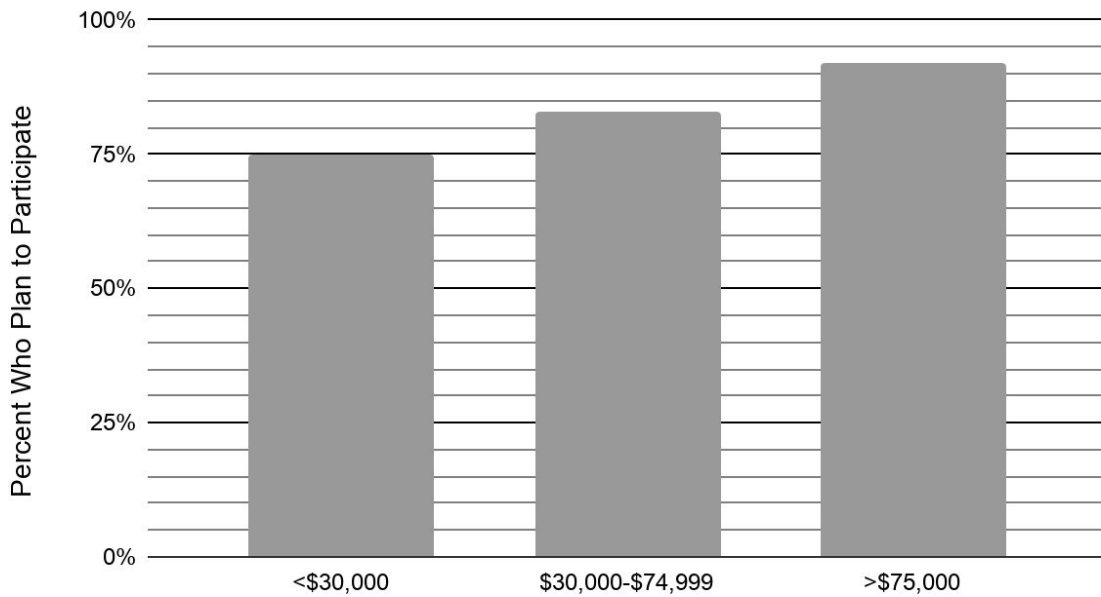
I.

Expected Participation in Census 2020 by Race



II.

Expected Participation in Census 2020 by Income



III.

45) Which groups are expected to have higher participation in the U.S. Census? Which groups are expected to have a lower rate of participation? Why is that important?

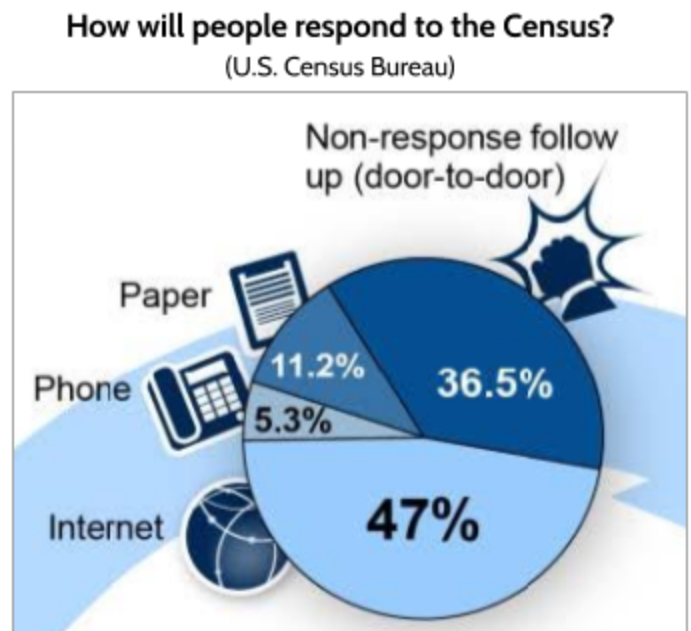
Write a paragraph about the data from the three graphs above.

How the Census Works

1. Most households receive a mailed invitation from the U.S. Census Bureau asking residents to complete the census questionnaire online. It is also possible to respond by telephone. Some people receive paper questionnaires, which can be mailed back postage-free.
2. Someone from each household should complete the census form. For household questionnaires and responses, everyone who usually lives and sleeps in the home—including babies and small children—should be included. Respondents can call a toll-free number for assistance. Libraries and other organizations offer help filling out the forms.
3. If no one responds from a household, a census taker (*enumerator*) knocks on the door to count the people living in the household.

The Census Bureau predicted the following response rate in the 2020 Census.

- 46) There are about 100 million households in the United States. About many households are predicted to respond through the Internet?
- A. 47,000
 - B. 470,000
 - C. 4,700,000
 - D. 47,000,000
- 47) About how many doors will census workers have to knock on?
- A. Yes
 - B. No



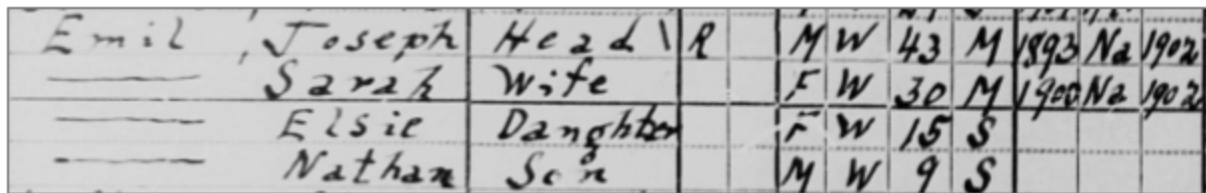
Common Questions

Can the police or immigration enforcement see Census records?

No. Census replies are confidential. By law, no one—neither the census takers nor any other Census Bureau employee—is permitted to reveal identifiable information about any person in a census response. Individual census records are sealed for 72 years, which means no one outside the Census Bureau can see these records.

Can I use Census records to find out about the history of my family?

Yes! After 72 years, Census records become public records. That means you can look up census records for your grandparents and great-grandparents if they lived in the United States and participated in the Census. It also means that if you participate in the Census now, your descendants can look at census records to learn more about you and their other ancestors.



Emil	Joseph	Head	M	43	M	Na 1902
	Sarah	Wife	F	30	M	Na 1902
	Elsie	Daughter	F	15	S	
	Nathan	Son	M	9	S	

1920 census record for the Emil family

The census information above is for my grandfather Nathan's family. He was 9 years old in 1920. From looking at census records, I learned that his parents emigrated from Poland and both became naturalized citizens in 1902. Another section of the record shows the address where they lived in Brooklyn in 1920.

What if someone doesn't speak English?

You can fill out census forms in many different languages. The Census Bureau will provide forms and materials in 13 languages. There will also be videos and other support in 60 languages. Go to 2020census.gov for more information.

Can I work for the Census?

Yes, even if you don't have a high school diploma yet! The Census Bureau looks for temporary workers every 10 years when the census is done. For information about working for the census, go to 2020census.gov/jobs.

A Timeline of Voting Rights and the Census in the United States

Many people of color were left out of the Census for many years. For example, Native Americans were not counted until 1900. Enslaved African-Americans were counted as $\frac{3}{5}$ of a person for the purposes of calculating the number of representatives given to each state. This was a result of the Three-Fifths Compromise when the Constitution was originally agreed upon in 1787.

Many people who were counted in the Census were not allowed to vote. At the beginning of this country's history, only white men could vote, and only if they owned property! If you were not a white man and did not own land, you were not allowed to vote.

Women and people of color have fought for full citizenship and equal rights, including the right to vote.

Here is a brief timeline of voting rights and the Census in the United States:

1789 States were given the power to decide voting requirements. States usually limited this right to property-owning or tax-paying white males who are 21 years of age or older (about 6% of the population).

1856 States allowed all white men to vote, even if they did not own property.

1865 The 13th Amendment abolished slavery.

"Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction."

1865-1880

At least 13 states passed laws that took away the right to vote from people convicted of a felony.⁶

1868 The 14th Amendment to the Constitution officially ended the "three-fifths rule."

"Representatives shall be apportioned among the several States according to



The first election where women could vote (New York City, March 1918)
Library of Congress

⁶ https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/2019-08/Report_Disenfranchisement_History.pdf

The United States Census

their respective numbers, counting the whole number of persons in each State...

1870 The 15th Amendment gave the right to vote to formerly enslaved men. (However, southern states created discriminatory barriers to prevent African-American people from voting. Violence and terror was also used to prevent Black people from voting for another 100 years.)

“The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”

1880 An attempt was made to count Native Americans living on reservations, but it was discontinued and a full count was not made.

1887 Native Americans were granted citizenship, if they left their tribe. Native American men were given the right to vote.

1900 Native Americans were counted in the full Census, including people living on reservations.

1920 Women were guaranteed the right to vote by the 19th Amendment to the Constitution.

“The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.”

The 19th Amendment mostly applied to white women. African-American women (and men) were often kept from voting by Jim Crow laws, literacy tests, poll taxes, and threats of violence until the mid-1960s.

1943 Chinese immigrants were granted citizenship and the right to vote.

1964 The 24th Amendment to the Constitution prohibited states from making people pay a tax in order to vote. Until then, many Southern states had charged a “poll tax” in order to keep African-Americans from voting.

1965 The Voting Rights Act protected the right to vote for racial minorities, especially in the South.

1971 The 26th Amendment to the Constitution lowered the voting age to 18.

2008-2019

Many states passed laws that returned the right to vote to people convicted of a felony. In some states, people convicted of a felony still cannot vote even after they have served their sentences. In all states except Maine and Vermont, currently incarcerated people cannot vote.

The Things that Qualify a Colored Man to Vote in the Southern States

IN order that you may know what will be demanded of you to vote under the Constitutions and laws of the several Southern States, we give below the substantial requirements of each, to wit:—

IN Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia and Tennessee

YOU MUST PAY YOUR POLL TAX.

YOU MUST REGISTER AND HOLD YOUR CERTIFICATE OF REGISTRATION.

If you can read and write you can register.

IN Alabama, Louisiana and South Carolina

If you cannot read and write you can register if you own \$300 worth of property.

IN Arkansas and Georgia

YOU MUST PAY YOUR POLL TAX.

IN Florida, Kentucky, Texas and West Virginia

You must reside in the State.

A man convicted of almost any crime may be barred from voting.

A page from a pamphlet encouraging African-American men to vote (published in Philadelphia around 1900)

Library of Congress