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Religion on the Brink

Settler-Colonial Knowledge Production in the US Census

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Settler colonialism entails an outside community's seizure of lands and resources from the original inhabitants of a territory.[1] But more than this, these outsiders, or settlers, seek to supplant and erase the lands' original inhabitants.[2] These twin processes of settler colonialism—physical and ideological erasure—have been ongoing in the United States.[3] Over the course of the nineteenth century, the borders of the United States continued to expand from the original colonies into Native territories further west.[4] From the 1803 Louisiana Purchase to expansions in the Northwest and Southwest via war and negotiation in the mid-nineteenth century, the United States executed land deals with Mexico and European imperial powers. In addition, the US federal government negotiated numerous agreements and treaties with Indigenous nations to gain access to Native lands.[5]

As these expansions occurred, the US federal government sought to manage Indigenous peoples via federal Indian policies.[6] Some methods included the creation of reservations for Native Americans, combined with the often-violent removal of Native peoples from their homelands to these separate areas. While arguably the most well-known of the Indian removals was the "Trail of Tears," in which thousands of Cherokees, Chickasaws, Choctaws, Creeks, and Seminoles were removed from their ancestral homelands in the Southwest to Indian Territory over the 1830s and '40s, additional removals occurred throughout the United States.[7] They included the 1838 Potawatomi "Trail of Death" in what is now the Midwest and the 1864 "Long

Walk" of the Diné (Navajo) in the Southwest.[8] However, US removal and reservation strategies became less tenable over the course of the nineteenth century as non-Native settlers continued to push for additional Native lands.

US federal Indian policy thus shifted in tandem with a changing political relationship between Native peoples and the United States.[9] By the end of the nineteenth century, federal Indian policies transformed from efforts to separate Native peoples from settlers into efforts to incorporate Native Americans into mainstream US citizenry.[10] The Dawes Act of 1887 created a system that divided up communally held Indian reservations into individual plots and sold "excess" lands to non-Natives, further reducing Native landholdings. In addition, this act called for the assimilation of Native Americans into US society, pressuring them to adapt their cultures and societies to Euro-American norms. As Tisa Wenger and Jennifer Graber each document in their contributions to this volume, religion has played a role in the United States' interactions with Native nations, both as a mechanism and as a target of imperial control. The US government explicitly singled out Native American religions during the assimilation era in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[11]

Historian Patrick Wolfe has argued that "invasion is a structure not an event."[12] In this way, he emphasizes the processes and systems that establish and maintain settler rule over Indigenous peoples and lands rather than acts of conquest alone and in themselves. Ultimately, he argues that a key feature of the structure of settler colonialism is a "logic of elimination."[13] In this vein, this chapter describes the US government's creation of knowledge about Native Americans, emphasizing their supposed decline, as a constitutive feature of US empire. A key feature of settler colonialism is indeed the seizure of lands from its original inhabitants. But in addition to acts of physical violence such as Indian removals and the targeting of Native

traditions, the structures of settler colonialism include ideological formations—the production of information, ideas, and narratives that support and justify violent actions.

This chapter describes the settler-colonial production of knowledge via European and US enumerations of Native Americans, including official US Census publications. I discuss two ways in which religion factored into these histories of enumeration. First, when seeking to determine how to classify Native peoples, as either "untaxed" and outside of the purview of the US Census Bureau or "taxed" and subject to inclusion in the census, enumerators considered Native peoples' "habits." Chroniclers of Native cultures in the nineteenth century sometimes used this term to refer to what we would now describe as religious traditions, but in census documents it functioned to describe a general state of social and cultural assimilation that probably would have included (while not being limited to) the adoption of Christianity. Second, I describe the striking inclusion of Native religions as evidence of decline in key assimilation-era Indian census materials. The inclusion of religion in Indian census records is noteworthy given the fact that religion does not factor significantly into other US Census publications.[14] These census materials presented Native religions negatively, in contrast to what Tisa Wenger describes in this volume as the "good religion" of the settlers. The collection—or creation—of statistical data about Native Americans served the purposes of settler colonialism through its purportedly objective documentation of the "decline" of Native Americans, a form of erasure that justified settler supplanting of Native lands.

Early Enumeration of Native Americans

While Native Americans were not consistently enumerated in the US Census until the late nineteenth century, Europeans and Euro-Americans collected and recorded data on Native

inhabitants of what is today the United States long before the nation was founded. During the colonial era, European military officers, missionaries, traders, and surveyors gathered information about Native religions and cultures via surveys, observations, and interviews. Original data was often replicated in later reports. In the 1782 edition of his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Thomas Jefferson drew on four different sources of data to produce his own catalogues of Native Americans living within and outside of the United States. His sources included figures from earlier British, French, and US military reports and traders. Jefferson's tables included Native nations' names and subcategories or groups, with estimated numbers from each original data source and information about where they were located. Comparisons of Jefferson's sources reveal numerical discrepancies. For example, each data source has a number for Shawnees: five hundred, four hundred, three hundred, and three hundred located near the Scioto and Muskingum Rivers in Ohio.[15]

In the mid-nineteenth century, the federal government funded data collection on Native Americans for the purposes of regulating Indian affairs. In November of 1846, Congress approved a request for additional funding for the newly created Office of Indian Affairs. Henry Rowe Schoolcraft (whose earlier career is discussed in Wenger's chapter) was appointed to collect data about Native Americans under this office. Schoolcraft's data included four major groups: Iroquois, Algonquin, Dakota, and Appalachian, corresponding to the Northeast, Great Lakes, and Southeast regions, as well as general categories for "tribes of the new states and territories south and west, now including Texas and Mexican acquisitions, East of the Rocky Mountains." A final category included "fragmentary tribes in the older states."[16] By 1850, part of the Indian Appropriation Act of 1846 required Indian agents "to take a census and to obtain such other statistical information of the several tribes of Indians among whom they respectively

reside." They reported this information to the secretary of war.

Overall, at least sixteen historical estimates or reports of Native populations were produced beginning in 1789, from a 1789 estimate from the secretary of war to the general 1890 census. Of this list of sixteen sources, four were produced by the secretary of war (1789, 1825, 1829, and 1834), three by Indian Affairs officers (1822, 1836, and 1837), and five by the US Census Office (in 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880, and 1890). An additional four were produced by scholars, at least one of which (particularly Gilbert Imlay's) drew heavily on previous figures.[17] By tracing changes in the ways agents of the government have gathered data about Native Americans, we can see the political shift in the relationship of Native Americans to the US body politic, and the government's efforts to assimilate Native Americans into the folds of mainstream US citizenry. We can also see the way that religion functions and its role in assimilation practices. The so-called progress of Native Americans outlined in census materials was part of the "progress" of the settler-colonial assimilation project of the United States.

The History of Native Americans in the US Census

Native Americans have historically been one of the US Census's most undercounted groups.[18] In 2010, Native Americans living on reservations were undercounted by 4.88 percent.[19] These undercounts, especially among those living on reservations, have several causes. The lack of access to means of communication—due to rurality or lack of economic resources—makes it difficult for some families on more remote reservation communities to self-report. Additional challenges have included linguistic barriers and the fact that some segments of Native American populations move frequently. In addition, many Native Americans are wary of participating in the US Census.[20]

The US Census, in fact, was specifically designed *not* to count Native Americans. While government agents did attempt to enumerate Native peoples in the colonial era for strategic reasons, the US Census initially excluded Native Americans in its counts. The US Constitution called for the regular enumeration of the population in order to determine political representation and the distribution of taxes. However, there were racial and political distinctions determining who would be counted. Article 1, Section 2 of the Constitution states, "Representatives and direct Taxes shall be apportioned among the several States which may be included within this Union, according to their respective Numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole Number of free Persons, including those bound to Service for a Term of Years, and *excluding Indians not taxed*, three fifths of all other Persons" (emphasis added). As outlined in the Constitution, people of African descent who were enslaved were not counted as full citizens.[21] Native Americans who were "not taxed" were specifically excluded from the counts. This latter condition reflects the reality that Native Americans were considered to be sovereign political entities, akin to foreign nations, as mentioned in Article 1, Section 8 of the Constitution. As a result, Native Americans were not counted in the first several decennial enumerations.

Scholars have documented how racial and ethnic categories in the US Census have changed over the years.[22] But the categories of "American Indian" or "Native American" do not merely represent a particular racial or ethnic group. Rather, Native Americans have a unique and specific *political* identity as members of sovereign nations that were eventually incorporated into the United States as "domestic dependent nations."[23] As the United States continued to expand its territorial boundaries over the course of the nineteenth century, new questions arose about whether and how to include Native Americans in the US Census, and how to interpret the Constitution's designation of "Indians not taxed."

Ultimately, according to census enumerators the category of "Indian" was not limited to heritage, parentage, or even blood quantum—it was also tied to individuals' actions and activities. Most generally, it referred to Native Americans who were not citizens, who were living among their own communities, and who engaged in Native cultural forms. In the censuses of 1850, 1860, and 1870, some Native people of mixed heritage were counted on surveys. They were considered "Indian" if they lived on reservations, and "white" if they did not. Information on "taxed" and "nontaxed" Native Americans was collected during the 1880 census, but it was not published. Finally, in 1890, the Census Bureau collected and published this information.[24]

While some information on Native populations was included in the 1850 census, the 1860 census was the first to contain significant data regarding Native Americans. There was no category for "Indian" in the 1860 census, but enumerators were instructed to count "families of Indians who have renounced tribal rule, and who under state or territory laws exercise the rights of citizens."[25] This census contained information on "taxed Indians" living in each state or territory, including age and sex.[26] When determining whether or not to count an individual as a "taxed Indian," the enumerator was instructed to decide whether individuals had given up tribal rule and were participating in broader society. If that was the case, they were included in the census as citizens and listed as "Indian." California's records are especially detailed in this year, while other states include totals of "Civilized Indians by Age and Sex." In the 1860 census, approximately forty thousand Native people who were considered "assimilated"—who owned land individually—were counted.

When preparing the 1870 census, agents expressed confusion about the category "Indians not taxed" and struggled with how to determine what category to place people into, especially for those with mixed heritage. Anyone living on a reservation by this point was considered "not

taxed." But for those with mixed heritage, enumerators faced a challenge. There were few possibilities for determining the category—either by father's or mother's heritage, or by "superior" blood. But beyond ancestry, the categories of "Indian" versus "non-Indian" were delineated in part by features of culture. Ultimately, enumerators were instructed to place individuals in racial categories according to the "habits, tastes, and associations" of the individual.[27] This census included data on Indians divided into two categories, those who were "sustaining tribal relations" and those who were "out of tribal relations."[28]

The 1880 census did not include as much detailed information about the Native American population. This census in particular was interested in presenting the idea of the progress of America. Minimal data was included about "uncivilized Indians," and "civilized Indians" were lumped together with Japanese and Chinese under the category of "colored—other." The 1890 census was the first comprehensive report that considered Indians taxed and not taxed (discussed in more detail below). Censuses produced after 1890 included information on Native Americans. Beginning in 1900, each decennial census contained information on Native Americans as part of the regular tabulations.

Tracing over these different years of the census enumeration and its exclusion or inclusion of Native Americans, we can see that a shift slowly occurred in the way Native peoples were included. At the time of the founding of the United States, the government engaged with Native peoples as sovereign nations, separate from the US body politic and thus not under the purview of the federal government in the same way as its citizens were. Ultimately, changes in the US Census Bureau's policies and practices regarding the enumeration of Native Americans have mirrored the changing political relationship between Native nations and the US government. Over the course of the nineteenth century, as the country's political boundaries

continued to expand into Native lands, Census Bureau officials eventually directed enumerators to count Native Americans who were living in Euro-American society. While official census records thus began to include some Native Americans in the mid-nineteenth century, the Census Bureau did not complete full reports of the Native population, both on and off reservations, until the late nineteenth century, when Native American censuses were conducted in 1890, 1910, and 1930.

Questions about classification persisted throughout these years as, with the lack of official parameters, enumerators had to figure out their means of classifying Native Americans. Importantly, habits and customs—including individuals' levels of assimilation—were at times used to classify difference. The categories of "taxed" versus "untaxed" eventually gave way to categories judging the level of Native peoples' assimilation. While census materials did not explicitly describe religion in discussions of the "habits" that they mention, conversion to Christianity was a key goal of US assimilation efforts. Explicit discussions of Native American religions were present in the 1890 Indian census.

Native American Religions in the 1890 Indian Census

Political scientist Benedict Anderson described the census—along with the map and the museum—as three institutions of power that "profoundly shaped the way in which the colonial state imagined its dominion—the nature of the human beings it ruled, the geography of its domain, and the legitimacy of its ancestry."[29] Census publications function as empirical documents offering statistics about the US population. Yet, while the US Census Bureau today aims for rigor and accuracy, census enumeration and other forms of government-sponsored

population counting have historically reflected political realities and agendas. As data scientist Margaret Jobe argues, despite their air of scientific objectivity, "census publications are artifacts of changing social and political values rather than objective statements of reality."[30] Indeed, assimilation-era Indian census publications included an array of highly variable data sets produced during the colonial era, as well as subjective qualitative accounts of Native populations and lifeways.

The US government's 1890 census report on American Indians contained typical census data, including population statistics and mortality rates, but it also included a great deal of historical and narrative information on Native cultures. However, unlike general population reports common in previous censuses, the report included commentary about Native religions. The census report's narrative about Indigenous population decline presented a picture of "religion on the brink," Native American traditions as teetering precariously on the edge of extinction. An analysis of the 1890 census report brings into sharper view the prevalent Euro-American perspective that Native American cultures would inevitably die out. This shared feature of both the census reports and other government reports—the narration, and even the fantasy, of the extinction of Native American people—offered a purportedly objective narrative justification for assimilation policies that targeted Indigenous beliefs and practices at the individual and communal levels.

In 1890, as part of the eleventh census, government agents traveled throughout the United States to gather information about Native American communities. This 1890 undertaking was the largest and most comprehensive census of Native Americans yet attempted.[31] Fifty-seven government agents worked as enumerators, and together they visited 148 Native communities, on and off reservations, for the purposes of gathering data about each nation. An additional

thirty-six special agents visited Indian agencies to verify the statistical data that the enumerators gathered.[32]

Some of the census enumerators were Native Americans. For example, most of the agents who worked among the so-called Five Civilized Tribes removed to Indian Territory, present-day Oklahoma, belonged to one of those nations—Choctaw, Cherokee, Creek, Chickasaw, or Seminole. The US government did make an effort to cooperate with leaders to facilitate the work of the enumerators; the census report specifically mentioned this process through which it worked with members of the local population in Indian Territory.[33] But the majority of the enumerators were non-Native, outsiders to the communities they counted.

Those who prepared the census presented it as authoritative, "closely and accurately taken under a special law."[34] The government published a short preliminary report, primarily containing population statistics, in 1891. This report contained a brief and a number of charts and graphs detailing the demographics of different nations throughout the United States. The charts were divided, in part, according to location. Officials gathered and presented data on the Five Civilized Tribes who lived in Indian Territory separately from Eastern Cherokee people who remained in North Carolina. The report presented this information separately from those of other Native nations in the West, which was also distinct from information presented about Six Nations people from the Eastern Woodlands.[35] The census distinguished between Native Americans living on and off reservations. To further account for those living on reservations, census data included divisions based on separate agencies within the different states that contained reservations. For example, the chart for the state of Washington was divided according to the state's five Indian agencies: the Colville, Neah Bay, Puyallup, Tulalip, and Yakima agencies. These numbers were further divided on the basis of subdivisions within nations

themselves, in some instances categorized by a smaller permanent community, in the case of the Anishinaabe people living in different towns near the La Pointe agency in Wisconsin.

On some reservations in the Plains region, where people lived in traditional semipermanent villages, the census bulletin listed divisions based on smaller, self-regulated groups rather than towns. This was the case for enumerations of Lakota people, described in the documents by the name "Sioux," whom the report organized into different "bands." In each of these tables, columns accounted for numbers of men and women. Another column entitled "Ration Indians" denoted those individuals who received food and supplies from the government. On the far right of each of these charts was a column that indicated whether or not the total population of each group was increasing or decreasing, based on a comparison of current data with numbers collected previously, as early as one year prior. According to the 1891 census bulletin, enumerators had gathered information about births and deaths from "several sources, including the agents' and physicians' reports."[36]

In 1894, the Government Printing Office published a more complete report of the 1890 Indian census. This publication included many additional charts that contained much more detailed information about the nations that the census officials had visited. In addition to enumerating the Native American population, the document drew on scholarly accounts, previous census data, historical overviews, maps, and discussions about language. This supplemental, historical information comprised approximately 20 percent of the report. The remainder of the 683-page document detailed information gathered about each community. In addition to population statistics, it included profiles on leaders and important people, as well as maps and portraits. This report offered what was, at that time, the most comprehensive single account of American Indian populations.

Many of the Native American communities that the census officials visited did not participate willingly in the process. In the 1891 census bulletin, census superintendent Robert P. Porter noted that many of the agents had difficulty in obtaining statistics from the communities they visited: "Many of the enumerators engaged in the work met with serious and dangerous opposition, their portfolios being looked upon with suspicion." Many Native communities were indeed unwilling to participate, concerned about what the information was for and what the result of their participation might be. In some cases, Porter noted, "These officials narrowly escaped with their lives."[37] However, the author of the report presented it as a success: Porter suggested that "the results accomplished have been most satisfactory."[38] Despite the difficulties, the members of the Census Office stood by their reports.

As the census report noted, Native American communities were concerned about what the census would mean for them. Some communities met to discuss its potential impact on their communities and how they might respond.[39] In some cases, religious leaders urged members of their communities not to participate in the survey. As explained in the census report, "Some of the reservation Indians were very cautious in their reception of the enumerators. [The agents'] portfolios were suggestive of books, and many Indians, considering them books of new religious creeds, refused to answer the questions. Others advised resistance, claiming that this enrollment was a scheme to get their names, which would then be attached to an alleged treaty, and they would be robbed of their right to remain on their lands."[40] The authors of the census, while noting these concerns, failed to take them seriously and viewed them as an impediment to the data-gathering process.

Given the ways in which the census presented data about Indigenous populations, and the analysis that the government agents used when discussing the data, Native communities' fears

and resistance were warranted. The US Census collected information about the Native American populations in a way that would aid the government's management of Native populations. Broadly, it presented a cynical picture of Native American communities. The census narrated the decline of Native American populations and presented Indigenous culture and society as unimportant and inconsequential. In addition, the report indicated that its purpose was to aid in the government's assimilation interests. For example, in a discussion of land in the 1894 report detailing the 1890 census, the author suggested that one of the primary purposes of gathering information about Native Americans was to determine how many occupied the land. "Preliminary to [a] survey of lands within the public domain the United States requires the extinction of the Indian title or Indian right of occupancy thereof."[41] The report then outlined the most effective ways of extinguishing Indian land title.

One key feature of the census's discussion of Native American communities was its portrayal of Native people as inherently different from Euro-Americans. The racial descriptions found in this census described Native Americans as without logic or rationality, physically strong, and inherently indisposed to work.[42] Discussions of Indigenous religion in the census also echoed this point. According to the census report, Native beliefs and practices were not logical and did not feature in any way scientific modes of thinking. The report attested that Native people "have no mathematics in their methods, and many of these alleged singular and complex religious and other systems would not be known save for their development or invention by white men. It remained, in many instances, for white men to tell the Indian what his methods and systems were."[43] At the same time, the census report denied that Native Americans had spiritual systems, calling into question anthropological studies of the day:

> That the North American Indian had or has any well-defined religious views or

> beliefs as we understand them remains yet to be ascertained. The ideal Indian has a religion, but the real Indian has none. "God," a word he first heard from the Europeans, has to him in fact no special significance. It means anything around and above him. His mythology is crude and embraces the natural features around him: fire, water, the air, earth, the sun, moon, and stars, and all animated nature. The real Indian hangs to his mythology, which is ingenious for its elements but unsatisfactory as a theory, with desperate tenacity.[44]

In a historical overview of Native Americans published in the census report, the author described the innate, inborn differences between Native Americans and Euro-Americans in psychological and spiritual terms. "The North American Indian, a child of nature, seems to possess a peculiar logic, and it seems to have been born in him."[45] Many resources refer to Native Americans as lacking "logic," so this innate "logic" refers rather to a system of beliefs and orientations that, on the basis of outsider ideas about the absence of Indigenous science or religion, the author would probably have characterized as "illogical." The report asserted, "While the North American Indians, according to some authors, have a complete system of religion in forms most ingenious and mathematical in its sequences, these same Indians are incapable of inventing, constructing, or building anything that requires the mental power of combination."[46] The census presented this lack of both science and religion as a feature of Native American cultures and as an inborn, essential difference between Native and Euro-American people.

Scholars in Native American studies have described the "declension narrative" in which Euro-Americans have depicted the decline of Native peoples.[47] Woven throughout the census is the same narrative about the decline. In a historical overview of Native American cultures, the 1890 census suggested that upon the arrival of Europeans, Native communities that came into

contact with Euro-Americans were "self-sustaining and self-reliant, with tribal governments, many forms of worship, and many superstitions, with ample clothing of skin and furs, and food fairly well supplied."[48] Following along with the declension narrative, the author suggested that, from the period of contact with Europeans, Native communities steadily declined in all ways of life.

Beyond offering an argument in support of the declension model, the author actually went a step further, narrating the annihilation of all Native Americans. The author suggested that "he could see that his race was about to be covered with a cloud that would eventually engulf it . . . with clenched teeth, and club or gun in his hand, he places his back to the rock and dies in resistance."[49] The Native American, according to the census, "welcomes death."[50] The author argued, "Even nature, the Indian's god, is silent as to him, and speaks not. Such has been his life, such the result, that if the entire remaining Indians were instantly and completely wiped from the face of the earth they would leave no monuments, no buildings, no written language save one, no literature, no inventions, nothing in the arts or sciences, and absolutely nothing for the benefit of mankind."[51] This narration of the inevitable decline of Native American culture served to authorize the US government's assimilation policies. What is so striking about this statement is its imagining of an American future without Native Americans. The author claimed that writers had created romantic notions of Native Americans that did them a disservice. The problem, the author argued, was that these romantic notions had made the mainstream public and politicians *too hopeful* about the possibility that Native Americans could adapt to Euro-American civilization.[52]

The author of the census was apparently familiar with research on Native traditions but did not seem to take seriously the idea that Native Americans could have religion. The author

even went so far as to suggest that ethnologists came up with their own theories about Native religious systems and then cajoled Native people into agreeing with the ethnologist about the theory they invented. According to the census report, "Any ingenious ethnologist or investigator wedded to a theory, if he has a vivid imagination and a stock of money or food, can obtain ample proof of that theory from an Indian."[53] In some ways, then, the ideas present in the census differed from those of government anthropologists at the time, who actively sought to document Native religions and cultures and systematically used the term "religion" to describe Indigenous beliefs and practices. While many government researchers also supported assimilation policies and advanced racialized theories of cultural evolution, their theories of Native religion operated in a slightly different way, insofar as they eventually conceded that "religion" existed among Native cultures.[54] The 1890 Census presented a starker perspective, equating a lack of religion with the lack of humanity—and the absence of Native futures.

Conclusion: Inclusion in the 2020 Census as an "Act of Rebellion"

This chapter has drawn on data and narratives from the US government's enumerations of Native Americans to argue that these censuses documented the purported decline of Native cultures. Despite the relative absence of data about religion in their usual versions of the US Census, information about religion was included in Native American censuses, generally depicting it as evidence of the need for assimilation. One can interpret the US Census, vis-à-vis Native American communities, as a system of settler-colonial knowledge production with the ultimate goal of managing Indigenous life—what theorist Michel Foucault would describe as a technology of state power or biopolitics and what anthropologist David Scott would further

describe as a feature of colonial governmentality.[55]

The US Census—and interpretations of it—have changed over time. Foucault's influence has shaped social scientists' research on governments' collection of information about the citizens and occupants of their countries.[56] According to this "state-centered" interpretation, government censuses can be interpreted as tools used by the state for the purposes of government.[57] However, this is not the only way to interpret the US Census. Social scientists have argued that it has shifted over time from an explicitly imperial tool to a system in which social groups have exerted their own pressure on the process. Drawing on Jennifer Graber's framework (chapter 6), we can consider a shift in the US Census from one that leveraged and extended an "imperial frame" to one that Indigenous communities have themselves leveraged. Since the 1960s, many minoritized communities, including Native Americans, have increasingly pressed the US Census Bureau to make changes that enable people to better represent themselves.[58]

Data collection for the 2020 United States Census faced unprecedented challenges. In March of 2020, when US residents were invited to self-report their household information via surveys, the nation was stricken by the COVID-19 pandemic and its ensuing economic instability. In the summer, natural disasters including fires and massive storms hit different regions of the country. The Black Lives Matter movement, advocating for the lives and well-being of Black Americans, reemerged on a national scale in response to repeated and widespread police violence against people of color. This natural and sociopolitical context in which the 2020 census occurred was thus especially disruptive to the count. In previous years, Black, Indigenous, Asian American, and Latinx households; families with low income; and people living in rural areas were less likely to respond to the Census Bureau's requests for information.

The natural, social, economic, and public health crises of 2020 created even more barriers to census reporting among these communities, many of whom have historically been undercounted.[59] Census undercounts can harm these communities, who may, as a result, miss out on both economic resources and political representation.[60]

In recent decades, Native American organizers throughout the United States have worked to educate their communities about the significance of being counted in the census.[61] Today, statistical data from the census directly impacts the distribution of resources to Native American communities. For example, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the US Congress passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act in April of 2020. One outcome of this act was the distribution of monetary resources to tribal governments. This aid was essential to Native nations, many of whom were acutely affected by COVID-19.[62] According to a May 2020 study jointly produced by the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development and the University of Arizona's Native Nations Institute, rather than using self-reported numbers from nations themselves, the US Department of Treasury developed a population distribution formula utilizing racial data derived from the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the US Census to allocate funds. These publicly available numbers were known to be inconsistent with actual tribal enrollment numbers. This resulted in the uneven distribution of funds, in some cases significantly over or under what each nation should have gotten on the basis of actual numbers of enrolled members.[63]

The national count for the 2020 US Census began in a small, isolated Alaskan village in January of that year. While most census activities were scheduled to begin months later, the director of the Census Bureau, Steven Dillingham, explained to the media that beginning the process earlier in Alaska would ensure a more accurate count. When the ice begins to thaw in the

spring, travel to remote villages throughout Alaska is more difficult. In addition, many members leave the village to pursue seasonal work. However, despite the early start, the events of 2020 would introduce a host of additional challenges to getting an accurate count of American Indian, Native Alaskan, and Hawaiian citizens. When describing the challenges, Natalie Landreth, a senior attorney for the Native American Rights Fund, who advocates for policies supporting Native Americans and Native Alaskans and Hawaiians, stressed the significance of the census. Landreth said, "I want to tell every American Indian and Alaska Native to be counted as an act of rebellion because this census is not designed to count you."[64] Indeed, as documented in census reports, in the past, the federal government did imagine that Native cultures would cease to exist. Despite historical exclusion, and even recent challenges, inclusion in the US Census can be an avenue for Native Americans to access resources and exercise their rights.

Notes

1 Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," 388.

2 Whyte, "Indigeneity and US Settler Colonialism."

3 J. Byrd, *Transit of Empire*; Deloria, *Playing Indian*; J. O'Brien, *Firsting and Lasting*; Morgensen, "The Biopolitics of Settler Colonialism."

4 For a discussion of US expansion over the course of the nineteenth century and its impact on Native American religions, see Graber, *The Gods of Indian Country*.

5 Deloria and DeMallie, *Documents of American Indian Diplomacy*.

6 Duthu, *American Indians and the Law*.

7 Perdue and Green, *The Cherokee Nation and the Trail of Tears*.

8 Bowes, *Land Too Good for Indians*; Denetdale, "Discontinuities, Remembrances, and

Cultural Survival."

9 Dees, "Religion and U.S. Federal Indian Policy."

10 Holm, *The Great Confusion in Indian Affairs*.

11 McNally, *Defend the Sacred*; Wenger, *We Have a Religion*.

12 Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," 388.

13 Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," 387.

14 Good, "Questions on Religion in the United States Census."

15 US Census Bureau, *Report on Indians Taxed and Not Taxed in the United States (Except Alaska) at the Eleventh Census: 1890* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1894) 5.

16 US Census Bureau, *Report on Indians Taxed and Not Taxed*, 15.

17 These included Croghan, Bouquet, Hutchins, Dodge, Carver, and other writers. US Census Bureau, *Report on Indians Taxed and Not Taxed*, 1–45.

18 Lujan, "As Simple as One, Two, Three."

19 Jacob Wallace, "Census Hasn't Always Counted Native Americans," *Journal* (Cortez, CO), August 11, 2020, https://the-journal.com, accessed February 15, 2021.

20 Lujan, "American Indians and Alaska Natives Count," 328–29.

21 Hickman, "The Devil and the One Drop Rule."

22 Lee, "Racial Classifications in the US Census: 1890–1990."

23 Duthu, *American Indians and the Law*.

24 Lujan, "American Indians and Alaska Natives Count," 321.

25 Collins, "Native Americans in the Census, 1860–1890," 1.

26 Jobe, "Native Americans and the U.S. Census," 70.

27 Francis A. Walker, *A Compendium of the Ninth Census* (Washington, DC Government Printing Office, 1872), 19.

28 Jobe, "Native Americans and the U.S. Census," 71.

29 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 163–64.

30 Jobe, "Native Americans and the U.S. Census," 67.

31 Collins, "Native Americans in the Census, 1860–1890," 1–5.

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