

The Political Impact of Multiracial Americans on Black America

Key Terms

Mixed-Race, Multiracial, African-Americans, Social Protections, United States Census.

Description

This issue brief examines the potential threat that mixed-race individuals pose to the political salience of African-Americans. It also outlines the political impact of multiracial peoples on the black community.

Key Points

- Multiracial Americans are the fastest growing ethnoracial group in the United States.
- The most common racial combination among mixed-race Americans is black and white.
- During the Multiracial Movement of the 1990s, multiracial organizations fought to have a “mixed-race” category added to the U.S. Census.
- African-American leaders opposed the concept of a mixed-race category on the U.S. Census on the grounds that it would undermine social policies designed to protect racial minorities.
- In 2000, the federal government settled the issue of multiracial recognition by allowing people to select “one or more” races on the U.S. Census for the very first time.

Issue Brief

Today, multiracial Americans are the fastest growing ethnoracial group in the United States. Since 2000, America’s mixed-race population has increased by 32% to approximately 9 million people, or 2.9% of the nation’s total population. Among this populace, the most common racial combination is black and white. The number of biracial Americans of black and white descent has increased by 134% since 2000, now accounting for some 1.8 million people. Although this emergence of multiracials has changed the face of the black community physically, it is yet to impact African-Americans politically. For example, some multiracial advocates see the phenomenon of mixed-race individuals as a call for an officially recognized multiracial identity, distinct from those races that make up the Ethnoracial Pentagon. African-American leaders, however, have warned that such a classification would undermine civil rights gains and take away from the salience of the black political bloc. Both black and white opponents of multiracial recognition discourage mixed-race categories on the grounds that they would dilute the purity of the races. In 2000, the federal government settled this issue by allowing people to check “one or more” races on the United States Census. This act was the result of a decades-long struggle that culminated with the multiracial movement of the 1990s. During this movement, several multiracial organizations

advocated for exclusively mixed-race issues, including the recognition of multiracial peoples as a distinct group on the U.S. Census. African-American civil rights leaders, however, claimed that such a category would reduce the census count of existing racial minorities, and thereby under represent the level of inequality experienced by blacks as reported through census statistics. This in turn, they argued, would under represent the need for policies and programs designed to protect racial minorities. In his book, The New Colored People: The Mixed-Race Movement in America, Jon Michael Spencer argues that federal relief funds for blacks would decline if there was a decrease in the number of officially registered African-Americans. Because of this, he urges the multiracial community to put aside their desire for recognition for the greater good of the black community.



<http://newamericamedia.org/2010/04/mixed-race-numbers-expected-to-increase-on-2010-census.php>

In 2000, the federal government settled the issue of multiracial recognition by allowing people to select “one or more” races on the U.S. Census for the very first time. There were many reasons behind this, however, enforcing civil rights laws and allowing for accurate ethnoracial representation were the main concerns in adopting the “one or more” option. For civil rights purposes, the federal government groups those who mark more than one race into the chosen ethnoracial category that is least represented in the American population. For purposes of ethnoracial representation, those who select more than one race are counted once for each race that they mark. By doing this, the federal government continues to protect racial minorities and also preserves the ethnoracial distinctions of mixed-race individuals, which would otherwise be covered up by a blanket “multiracial” category. This is especially important in medical diagnoses and research in which accurate ethnoracial data is crucial, a point the federal government made sure to emphasize in its decision for the “one or more” option.

9. What is Person 1's race? Mark one or more boxes.

White

Black, African Am., or Negro

American Indian or Alaska Native — Print name of enrolled or principal blood quantum

Asian Indian

Chinese

Filipino

Other Asian — Print name

Japanese

Korean

Vietnamese

Native Hawaiian

Guamanian or other Pacific Islander

Spanish origin — Print name of enrolled or principal blood quantum

Puerto Rican, Nicaraguan, Salvadoran, Spaniard, Mexican, or other Latin American

<http://newsone.com/nation/newsonestaff4/tennessee-naacp-akas-helped-increase-black-participation-in-u-s-census/>

Although the implementation of the “one or more” option preserved the numerical integrity of African-Americans, some black intellectuals have proposed doing away with the concept of race altogether. They argue that instead of losing some political salience to an autonomous multiracial community, “it would be better to eliminate racial categories altogether.” This idea, however, would have dire effects on the black community. Eliminating racial categories would undermine the vital use of ethnoracial census statistics used to detect and remedy discrimination. And while the idea of a “raceless” society seems far fetched, opponents of affirmative action have already made a serious run at getting rid of racial classifications in government affairs. One of the most famous cases of this was California’s Proposition 54 spearheaded by former political activist Ward Connerly, an African-American. Prop 54 would have prohibited the classifying of individuals on the basis of race, ethnicity, color, or national origin in most state and local government matters. This would have devastated the black community in terms of identifying African-Americans as a disadvantaged group in need of social protections. Fortunately, Prop 54 was struck down by California voters in 2003.

From examining some of the political implications of multiracial peoples on the black community, we can see that mixed-race individuals have the potential to negatively effect the social safeguards and political salience of African-Americans. This potential, however, is yet to be fulfilled as the U.S. Census continues to include multiracial African-Americans in the black category of the Ethnoracial Pentagon, as well as identify blacks as a disadvantaged group.

General References

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United States Census Bureau. <http://www.census.gov/>.

Relevant Websites

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<http://thenewvoters.news21.com/mixedrace/multiracial-identity-racial-struggle>

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