1

Invitation

> Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted.
>
> – *Albert Einstein*

The census seems innocuous. It exists in the realm of the mundane, an innocent exercise of state administration. For most of us, it is yet another government form to fill, file, and forget once every five or ten years, easily dismissed until we realize, a day past its due date, that it is mandated by law to complete. We peruse the question asking that we racially categorize ourselves, some of us with our eyes resting on the curious phraseology of "South Asian," some with our brows furrowing at the now-archaic descriptor "Negro." Some of us feel as though our backs are against the wall as we strategically answer in order to boost the numbers of a racial group that relies on census counts to maintain its political presence. Some of our stances are firm when we refuse to answer, believing race is a dangerous concept of an era long past. Some of our hearts sink when we are asked to pick a single race, feeling we are forced to choose between identities or even parents. Some of us respond with pride in being counted as a member of a particular racial group, and some of us never get counted at all.

As banal as it may appear to be, the census is an undeniably political enterprise. It is tied to two fundamental modalities of government: representation and redistribution. Census counts determine voting districts and the apportionment of seats in many representative democracies. Census data also help determine where government money should be spent and which programs should be created, retained, or eliminated. The census is

the nation's most authoritative source of information, created to generate the statistical knowledge that the state needs to govern. At the same time, census questions and categories dictate the most relevant social and economic characteristics of a country at a given moment in time. In this way, the census plays a role in constituting the nation and its composite parts even as it is, in and of itself, an instrument of state design.

Moreover, the census is a political institution. Nowhere is this clearer than in the relationship between census politics and the politics of race. The questions of whether or not to count by race and what categories to use are political decisions requiring purposeful state action. Classification systems necessitate consistent and unique principles that underpin the method of creating order out of chaos, categories that are mutually exclusive, and an organizational structure that is complete and all-encompassing.[1] Racial categories seem so obvious, so institutionalized, so very normal, that they appear ahistorical. However, there is normative power in counting and classifying. Racial categories assume distinctive symmetry – white and black are both perceived as equally racial, but are separate races. The very act of classifying creates a connection between phenomena judged to be similar, and therefore each classification abides by the criteria that determine which items, people, or groups belong and which do not. Censuses are in the business of drawing boundaries, but category-making is a process marked by uncertainty.[2] Racial classifications give the fictitious boundaries that separate racial groups a veneer of administrative legitimacy, at times creating powerful feedback incentives for social groups to adopt the identities promoted by the census in order to converse with the state. The census does not simply reflect an objective demographic reality, but instead plays a constitutive role in its construction.[3]

The politics of the census, therefore, reveal much about the politics of race. Throughout the world, laws and policies designed to exclude and segregate populations have depended on racial classifications. From the disastrous effects of apartheid in South Africa to the marginalization of

[1] Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star, *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999).

[2] See discussion in Debra Thompson, "What Lies Beneath: Equality and the Making of Racial Classifications," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 31, no. 2 (2015): 114–136.

[3] David I. Kertzer and Dominique Arel, "Censuses, Identity Formation, and the Struggle for Political Power," in *Census and Identity: The Politics of Race, Ethnicity and Language in National Censuses*, eds. David I. Kertzer and Dominique Arel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 2.

First Nations women in Canada, race riots in Great Britain, white-only immigration policies in Australia, and the creation of an almost unique urban sub-class in the United States, state-endorsed racial classification schemas have been instrumental in shaping political, legal, normative, and vernacular conceptions of race and racial difference. And while contemporary society may now accept that claims of racial belonging are better measured by self-identification, community acceptance, or cultural idioms, the fact remains that the state is still very much involved in making racial categories – in civil rights legislation, affirmative action policies, multiculturalism programs, and the like.

We are still, in the initial decades of the twenty-first century, uncomfortable with the legacies of the racial state. Liberal democratic conceptions of equality and citizenship demand that superficial phenotypes and morphological characteristics used to distinguish supposedly distinct races matter not; the self-evident truth of the liberal ideal is that all are created equal and should be treated as such. Yet, both the historical legacy and the contemporary politics of Western societies are plagued by massive racial inequalities. We now face an unavoidable paradox: on one hand, counting by race runs contrary to dominant norms of liberal democracies; on the other, racial statistics and the classification schema they rely on provide the sole means of ascertaining and remedying the extent of racial disadvantage.

The classificatory circumstances of the past and the designating dilemmas of the present raise a number of larger questions. How are racial boundaries defined and who decides where they lie? How does the census fit with other laws and policies that implicitly or explicitly invoke race? Why do census classifications change over time? What aspects of power and privilege are at work in designing the rules that rule race? And, perhaps most importantly, why do states make and manipulate racial classification schemas, and with what effects?

This book unpacks the complicated relationships among race, the census, and the state by examining the political development of questions about race on the national censuses of the United States, Great Britain, and Canada over almost two hundred years. The rationale for choosing these cases is both theoretical and empirical. In theoretical terms, these countries are "like" cases, often compared because it is possible to control for a number of relevant factors: majority language; level of development and industrialization; legal tradition based on Anglo common law; democratic regime; social values and political culture (broadly speaking); and ideological commitments to the principle of individual rights.

Comparisons of Great Britain, Canada, and the United States – or some combination thereof – have been used to study a wide array of political phenomena, including the welfare state, health care, immigration policies, pension reform, and electoral change.[4] These countries also share contemporary challenges of race relations and diversity governance: struggles to address increased immigration from non-European source countries; challenges to decades-old approaches to race relations, particularly from the political right and national minorities; the continued existence of racial inequality in social and economic factors such as housing, employment, and education; multiracial populations that are likely to grow exponentially in coming decades.

In empirical terms, the purposes of racial enumeration have shifted over time within each country, raising questions about the causes of change and stability in the racial politics of the census. The United States has consistently asked a question on race or color on every national census since 1790. Early censuses encoded race into the distinction between the free and slave populations, but by the mid-nineteenth century the census employed unsettled and fluctuating racial taxonomies alongside the persistent staples of black and white. American racial classifications stabilized after 1930 and were standardized in 1977 into what David Hollinger calls the ethno-racial pentagon:[5] White, Black, American Indian, Asian or Pacific Islander, and Hispanic. In the year 2000, the American census made history by allowing respondents, for the first time, to mark one or more racial category. In Canada, a question on race existed on the pre-Confederation censuses of the nineteenth century and was included on virtually every census through 1941. In 1951, the terminology of race was

[4] Julia S. O'Connor, Ann Shola Orloff, and Sheila Shaver, *States, Markets, Families: Gender, Liberalism and Social Policy in Australia, Canada, Great Britain, and the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Jacob Hacker, "The Historical Logic of National Health Insurance: Structure and Sequence in the Development of British, Canadian, and U.S. Medical Policy," *Studies in American Political Development* 12, no. 1 (1998): 57–130; Christian Joppke, *Immigration and the Nation-State: The United States, Germany, and Great Britain* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Ann Shola Orloff, *The Politics of Pensions: A Comparative Analysis of Britain, Canada, and the United States, 1880–1940* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993); Pradeep Chhibber and Ken Kollman, *The Formation of National Party Systems: Federalism and Party Competition in Canada, Great Britain, India, and the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

[5] David Hollinger, *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism*, rev. edn (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

abandoned, eventually replaced by the less ominous term "ethnicity." When it included a redesigned question intended to measure the "visible minority" population in 1996, Canada adopted the same multiple response approach that had long been in effect for its ethnic question. Unlike the United States and Canada, the decision to include a question on race is fairly recent in Great Britain; after several failed attempts to include a question in 1971 and 1981, the census of England and Wales first introduced its "ethnic question" in 1991 and modified several elements for the 2001 Census.

Comparatively, there are also puzzling differences among these circumstances at various points in time. Counting by race was an integral state imperative in the United States and Canada throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; this was not the case in Britain, though the imperial power retained a vested interest in counting by race in its colonies. In the post-war era, the United States continued its tradition of racial enumeration while Canada altered its trajectory and Great Britain made several failed attempts to begin to count by race. By the 1990s, all three cases implemented a direct question on race, and a decade later all made efforts to count mixed-race as never before. However, within this recent convergence to allow mixed-race people to identify as mixed-race if they so choose, the cases diverge in their distinctive approaches for doing so: the United States and Canada accept multiple responses ("mark one or more"), while Great Britain provides three single-response options under the heading "Mixed" alongside a free-text field.

The principal aim of this book is to explain how and why these transformations in counting and classifying by race occurred, and, in doing so, to contribute to our understanding of the complicated and contradictory ways that the bureaucratic exercises of state administration abet the construction of racial schematics and shape racial orders. Obvious racial politics – Jim Crow, apartheid, the struggle for civil rights – are always supported by obscure, yet governing, racial practices. The census requires a simple check-mark beside a predetermined box on a standardized government form; and yet, census counts also narrate the composition of the nation in the aggregate, simultaneously masking and concretizing racial categories and the boundaries that separate them, making the contested, constructed, unstable, and uncontainable nature of race and racial identities appear natural and immutable. To this end, I explore two interrelated questions across time and space. First, why count by race? What factors lead governments to develop and implement

a question on race?[6] Similarly, why do governments sometimes amend or abandon these questions? Second, who counts as what? What are the classification rules governing the enumeration of racial identities, and how did they come to pass? Who decides, and with what consequences?

In brief, I argue that the census is an evolving race-making instrument, shaped by transnational ideas, domestic-level institutions, and their interactions. First, I suggest that census politics in a given time period will reflect macro-level worldviews about the nature of race and racial difference and meso-level programmatic beliefs about whether racial statistics are a viable or problematic policy instrument. Here, I draw from a growing body of literature in the social sciences that affords causal significance to the role of ideas, but expand upon its empirical application to racial politics by focusing on the development and evolution of the idea of race itself. This involves two conceptual claims. First, race is a transnational phenomenon that exists in excess of national boundaries, and second, the meaning and reverence of race have changed substantially over time, often because of forces beyond the control of any one nation-state. I trace the evolution and impact of these global ideas on the racial politics of the census over four periods: the dominance of biological racialism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; the invalidation

[6] I make an analytical distinction between census questions that identify populations according to race and those that focus on ethnic origin, ancestry, nationality, birthplace, or other proximate signifiers of racial identity, for three reasons. First, race and ethnicity are not reducible to one another. Ethnicity, which can overlap and intersect with race, often describes a collectivity with common ancestry, a shared past, culture, and language, and a sense of peoplehood or community. However, the origins of race are in assignment and categorization, and while ethnicity can have similar beginnings it is more often associated with the assertions of group members. More importantly, as Cornell and Hartmann argue, "power is almost invariably an aspect of race; it may or may not be an aspect of ethnicity." See Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hartmann, *Ethnicity and Race: Making Identities in a Changing World*, 2nd edn (Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press, 2007), 31, Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2nd edn (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), chapter 1, and Howard Winant, "Race, Ethnicity, and Social Science," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38, no. 12 (2015): 2176–2185. Second, proximate indicators of race are not the same as directly tabulating race – that is, race and ethnicity do not necessarily line up. For example, before the implementation of a direct question on race in Canada, Haitians identified their ethnic origins as "French" and Jamaicans identified as "English" or "British." And finally, this differentiation is particularly justified given that two of the three cases – Canada and the United States – have distinct questions on race and ethnicity in their censuses. Britain's "ethnic question" conflates racial, ethnic, and national signifiers, but as the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) itself noted, "the census ethnic categories are essentially racial." OPCS, *Looking Towards the 2001 Census*, Occasional Paper 46 (London: OPCS, 1996), 40.

of exclusionary paradigms and the emergence of race as a socio-cultural construct in the post-war era; the "multicultural moment" of the 1980s and 1990s; and, most recently, the reframing of race to include a recognition of mixed-race identities at the turn of the twenty-first century. These shifts in the conceptualization of race were particularly powerful in the Anglosphere, transforming the politics of the census in sometimes subtle and sometimes pronounced ways by informing the legitimate ends of race policies and the appropriate means of achieving those ends.

Second, I identify two types of domestic-level institutions that constrain and enable the development of racial census taxonomies. The first is racial projects of the state – slavery, colonialism, immigration, civil rights, multiculturalism, post-racialism – that operate alongside the census. Each racial project possesses its own causes, internal dynamics, and political consequences, but also influences census politics by creating incentives for counting or not counting by race, inflating racial taxonomies, and imbuing racial worldviews of a given time period with nationally specific cultural, legal, and political repertoires. In nineteenth-century America, biological racialism was tied to political contestation over slavery and emancipation; census categories both informed and were derived from these debates. The worldview also shaped immigration and Indian affairs policy regimes in North America from the 1870s onwards. Racial classifications proved useful to measure the success of indigenous assimilation and to monitor the influx of "Orientals" on the western seaboard. Both sides of the political spectrum looked to the census to derive estimates of non-white immigrants to Great Britain after the Second World War, either to provide or dispel wild estimates about the size of this growing population. The multicultural moment legitimized race-conscious policies with egalitarian ends, though different civil rights regimes were adopted in each country. The recognition of multiracialism in the late twentieth century questioned the validity of discrete racial categories, at times providing ammunition for political actors to dismantle civil rights in the name of moving toward a post-racial world. These racial projects create the categorical imperatives for counting by race – not in the Kantian sense, but literally the ways that other areas of law and policy operating alongside the census create institutional imperatives for including (or avoiding) particular racial categories. At times, the various imperatives arising from these racial projects are incoherent; race-making can be a contradictory process.

Political institutions, broadly defined as "the rules of the game,"[7] are the second domestic factor. Though other scholars have explored census bureaus as political actors in themselves, the most notable of which is Melissa Nobles' trailblazing comparative study of census politics in the United States and Brazil,[8] I build on and depart from this and other important accounts by examining the census as a policy sphere where outcomes are often victories on political battlefields that involve multiple players and interests within and outside statistical agencies. By engaging with the insights of new institutionalism and American Political Development, I examine the ways that institutional arrangements frame the relationships between state and society, particularly in terms of venue access points and participants in the policy process. What Britain, Canada, and the United States hold in common is the nature of the census, an institution in its own right. Census policy effectiveness is measured by the quality of data produced and high response rates – this means that racial categories must be constructed in ways that are cognizable to both government and society. I identify three specific institutions that enable and constrain policy change: (1) the *centralization* of authority, especially as it relates to federalism and the horizontal organization of the statistical system; (2) the *autonomy* of statistical agencies to operate free of influence from above (that is, partisan politics) or below (for example, social movements), largely determined by system of government; and (3) the protocols of *census administration* for conducting censuses and the policy feedback that arises from traditions of racial enumeration. These institutions shape the contours of decision-making power – who gets a seat at the table, how they articulate their interests, and the relative power and influence they have in doing so – but are not static; not only do institutional arrangements vary between the United States, Great Britain, and Canada, but they

[7] Peter A. Hall, *Governing the Economy: The Politics of State Intervention in Britain and France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Kathleen Thelen and Sven Steinmo, eds., *Structuring Politics: Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Kathleen Thelen, "Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Politics," *Annual Review of Political Science* 2 (1999): 369–404.

[8] Melissa Nobles, *Shades of Citizenship: Race and the Census in Modern Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); see also Margo J. Anderson and Stephen E. Fienberg, *Who Counts? The Politics of Census-Taking in Contemporary America* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999); Peter Skerry, *Counting on the Census? Race, Group Identity, and the Evasion of Politics* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2000); Kertzer and Arel, *Census and Identity*; Jean-Louis Rallu, Victor Piché, and Patrick Simon, "Démographie et Ethnicité: Une Relation Ambiguë," in *Démographie: Analyse et Synthèse*, eds. G. Caselli, J. Vallin, and G. Wunsch (Paris: Institut National d'Etudes Démographiques, 2004), 481–515.

have each evolved substantially over time, as well. The story of the census is in part a story of institutional development.

Finally, I argue that the state interactively mediates between transnational and domestic influences. Transnational ideas about race may never be adopted, influential, or institutionalized in domestic contexts and, if they are, norms are often modified to produce similar but idiosyncratic outcomes. Using the scholarship from constructivist international relations and studies of policy diffusion as a guide, I analyze the processes of cultural and institutional translation through which racial ideas are obstructed, mediated, filtered, or refracted. These interpretive processes depend on the internal characteristics of racial norms (whether they resonate with domestic norms already in place or create ideational conflict), how transnational ideas are framed by domestic-level actors (whether they can be localized or whether actors have incentives for doing so, as well as the power, resources, and institutional position of those doing the framing), and the institutional context in which the idea operates (the extent to which these ideas are rendered as politically and administratively viable). Political actors and policymakers are important agents in this analysis, but they do not have a monopoly on these processes; social actors and harder-to-measure influences from, for example, diasporic consciousness can also play potent roles.

The incorporation, circumvention, or modification of transnational racial ideas in domestic policy is not the end of the story. Simply put, *racial ideas are not static*. National-level developments in race relations often have transnational reverberations, and sometimes global ideas about race morph precisely because of the ways that they have been adopted in domestic racial projects. Global ideas about race are therefore not simply "out there," ready and waiting to be adopted by political actors. Rather, the development of these ideas is an ongoing, discordantly melodic constitutive process. However, not all developments have the same influence on global racial norms. Some circumstances have caught the world's attention – decolonization, the American civil rights movement, the end of apartheid in South Africa – and have influenced both the transnational conception of race and the operationalization of racial projects elsewhere. The United States has been highly influential, perhaps more so than any other nation, but itself has consumed racial lessons from South Africa.[9] Incentives for action can thus be either positive, through

[9] Audie Klotz, *Norms in International Relations: The Struggle against Apartheid* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

social learning and lesson-drawing from the politics of race in other places, or negative, as states make efforts to avoid racial practices gone awry. In sum, there is a circuitry of racial ideas, and causal arrows point in many directions. The metaphor of a circulatory system is apt, with all its limitations: racial ideas are reused, recycled, and changed through the course of their travel, their influence thinner in some parts and thicker in others; not all contributing factors to the proliferation, maintenance, or alteration of racial ideas carry the same weight; some components of the circulatory system bear a heavier burden than others; and there is constant risk of obstruction as these ideas navigate or are forced through levels of abstraction.

The empirical focus on three Anglophone countries to explore the interaction of transnational norms and domestic institutions is useful in some ways and limiting in others. It is particularly useful in that the "Anglosphere," defined as "a grouping of English-speaking states, nations and societies united by the language, values, and institutions associated with the historical experience of England/Britain and its empire," is a pervasive discourse that pertains to the Anglophone presence in post-1945 global governance structures.[10] Since Anglosphere identity is defined not simply by language, but also culture, political institutions, liberal market economies, and long-standing but controversial "broader scientific and vernacular claims of the exceptionality and superiority of the English-speaking peoples," these characteristics are poised to enable the transmission of global racial ideas.[11] The relationships among these countries, which politicians often describe in familial, friendly, or at least neighborly terms, also provide traceable and detailed sequences of policy learning and diffusion.[12] In many ways, the focus on the United States, Great Britain, and Canada makes those circumstances when transnational racial ideas were obstructed or refuted all the more curious.

However, this Anglosphere angle also raises questions about the generalizability of the overarching argument. Though I am careful throughout the text not to overgeneralize from these cases to wider populations,

[10] Srdjan Vucetic, "Anglobal Governance?" *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 23, no. 3 (2010): 456.

[11] Vucetic, "Anglobal Governance?" 460; George and Bennett also note that cases can be selected with a view towards being the most likely to provide the strongest possible inferences on particular theories. See Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 31–32.

[12] George and Bennett, *Case Studies*, 33–34.