

[Bonus] AFD Ep 375 - The 1920 Census [Bill/Rachel] - Recording May 18

- This week on the bonus episode we are following up our main episode discussion of the 1921 Emergency Quota Act and the 1910 census with a discussion of the 1920 census. While it featured various domestic milestones and trends in urbanization, it was also conducted in the immediate aftermath of World War I, in which they tried to ascertain where immigrants had come from – sometimes years or decades before the war – based on the current locations of still-shifting borders, the emergence of new countries, and the disappearance of others. The 1920 Census in some circumstances asked for specific locations, like cities or towns, not just countries of origin, and also attempted to make ethnic or racial classifications of both immigrants and their American-born children, despite these rapidly shifting and difficult to pin down geographic and political situations. If we count some of the countries later retaken by the Soviets during or after the Russian Civil War, roughly 27 countries were either created or enlarged as part of the settlements after WW1. More than half a dozen countries or successor states lost territory. Notably some of these changes (between 1917 and the mid-1920s after this Census was conducted) included among others:
 - The breakup of the Austria-Hungary Empire including a small Austria, a very small Hungary, and a new Czechoslovakia, along with territorial transfers to a greatly expanded Serbia (later called Yugoslavia) and a greatly expanded Romania, as well as the creation of a new Polish state out of Austrian and Russian partitions of Poland as well as some of Germany's partition areas
 - Territorial additions for Italy from the former Austrian territories, with some disputed other claims
 - The temporary or longer-term independence of Baltic states and Caucasus states of the former Russian Empire such as Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, as well as a short-lived Ukraine set up by the German Empire. This is also to say nothing of the Central Asian regions.
 - The collapse of the Ottoman Empire and war of independence by nationalist Turkey against the Allied powers including a greatly expanded and still-expansionist Greece. New countries or League of Nations mandates like Iraq, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Mandatory Palestine, and more were being set up. (More on this in a few minutes.)
 - Bulgaria lost territory, but mostly newly acquired territory anyway.
 - Germany's overseas territories in Africa, the Pacific, and China were redistributed to the Allied powers, although this did not really affect the US Census much since immigration from these places was either very restricted or outright prohibited anyway and had been for quite some time in some cases.
 - Continental Germany lost territory to France, Denmark, Poland, and Danzig Free City
 - The US Census was conducted on January 1, 1920, earlier than typical, and many of these territorial changes just described had not even happened yet or were still shaking out.
- Additionally, just before World War One, in 1912 and 1913, the First and Second Balkan Wars and Italo-Turkish War had significantly changed the borders several times in the Balkans and the islands and African territories under Ottoman control, and all of these changes had also not been reflected by the 1910 US Census that preceded them. Greece, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Italy had all taken territory either from the Ottomans or each other.
- So how did the 1920 US Census attempt to handle this problem of vast territorial changes and new countries, compared to the 1910 Census that had simply asked country of origin? From [the official historical summary from the Census Bureau website](#):

The 1920 census included four new questions: one asking the year of naturalization and three about mother tongue. [...] Because of the changes in some international boundaries following World War I, enumerators were instructed to report the province (state or region) or city of persons declaring they or their parents had been born in Austria-Hungary, Germany, Russia, or Turkey. If a person had been born in any other foreign country, only the name of the country was to be entered. [...] The determination of race was based on the enumerator's impressions.

- The 1920 census was the one where former Ottoman subjects (Syrians, Lebanese, Armenians, etc) were re-classified:
 - https://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/overview/1920.html?ec_ak_reference=18.2cb7efc7.1590661529.a77271a
 - From JSTOR: *Becoming "White": Race, Religion and the Foundations of Syrian/Lebanese Ethnicity in the United States* - Journal of American Ethnic History, Summer, 2001, Vol. 20, No. 4 (Summer, 2001), pp. 29-58
 - The "whiteness" of Syrians (broad umbrella term that covered people of what had become Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan) - and thus the ability to become a citizen - was dependent on a number of factors: skin color (although the courts themselves said that color wasn't supposed to be a determining factor), connection to "Western civilization" (Semitic peoples were part of the origin of Western civilization), and religion (Christian Syrians had an easier time arguing for their whiteness than Muslim Syrians). The "race science" of the time was largely not used in courts; rather, congressional intent and common knowledge were used as a bar (would a man on the street call a Syrian white?) In typical science cherry-picking fashion, when race science accorded with the judge's views it was good, and when it didn't it was bad.
 - Religion was used as a way to separate peoples in the Ottoman state, and was used as a classification system more so than racial classification. This paradigm was brought to the United States from Syrian immigrants, and was often the base for their claim of whiteness. Since Syrian Christian immigrants shared their religion with their new country, they obviously "belonged" to the community.
 - The case for Syrian whiteness evolved from a positive declaration that they belonged to the white race, to a negative declaration that they didn't belong to the "colored" races, e.g. Black and Asian, and deserved all the rights that came with whiteness, such as the ability to become naturalized citizens
 - The court decisions for Syrian whiteness were used to bolster Armenian claims for whiteness.
 - An interesting facet of this is that now people with Middle Eastern ethnicity want to be separated from whites, for programs that provide assistance for minority communities, and for hate crime laws. The hate crime consideration definitely became very relevant after this article was published in the summer of 2001.
- The US Constitution requires decennial Census enumeration in part for redistributing Congressional seats between states. But after the 1920 Census, there was a notable [failure to reapportion districts](#): *The results of the 1920 census revealed a major and continuing shift of the population of the United States from rural to urban areas. No apportionment was carried out following the 1920 census; representatives elected from rural districts worked to derail the process, fearful of losing political power to the cities. Reapportionment legislation was repeatedly delayed as rural interests tried to come up*

with mechanisms that would blunt the impact of the population shift. Congress finally passed a reapportionment bill in 1929. The bill declared that the House of Representatives would be apportioned based on the results of the 1930 census. The 1929 act provided for an automatic reapportionment by the last method used unless Congress moved proactively to prevent that from occurring. The act also authorized the 1930 and subsequent decennial censuses. (Listeners might also know that the 1929 reform is what capped the total size of the US House of Representatives at 435, creating all kinds of malapportionment problems for the biggest and smallest population states.)

- The rural to urban shift was not just a matter of new definitions, since the trend was clear from the 1910 Census and the 1900 Census, which had used the same expansive benchmark for an urban area: Since 1900, incorporated places were deemed urban based on minimum population size of ... just 2,500 inhabitants. By this low threshold, fully 50% of the US population lived in an urban area in the 1920 Census, which is a good reminder that before then, the US population was incredibly rural, considering a majority were living in areas with fewer than 2,500 up until then. The more familiar modern definition of a metro area did not arrive until the 1950 Census, along with the concept of a Census-designated place without incorporation (although it wasn't called that until 1980).
https://www.census.gov/history/www/programs/geography/urban_and_rural_areas.html
- Proportionally from 1910 to 1920 the largest growth was in Arizona, Montana, and California. In absolute terms, the largest growth was in New York, Pennsylvania, and California. New York, the most populous state, crossed the 10 million resident mark. The two next most populous states in 1920 were Pennsylvania, and Illinois. Appropriately, the 3 largest American cities were New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia. The least populous were Nevada, Wyoming, and Delaware. The rapidly growing District of Columbia had more residents than eight states. Puerto Rico had more residents than the state of Florida!
- Side note: This was also the last Census before the 1924 Indian Citizenship Act (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_Citizenship_Act) which we will hopefully cover more in future years if the show continues.
- Current tie-ins: The disastrous 2020 census (Rachel's note: Idaho should have gained a seat!) and the situation in Armenia, also the Mandates of Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, etc.
 - The Trump Administration attempted to add a citizenship question. Many state and city officials feared this would discourage participation from immigrants, which would affect how federal funding is apportioned to cities and states for programs benefiting residents.
 - New York, California, and Maryland district courts all filed lawsuits to remove the citizenship question. *During these trials, documents released in May 2019 showed that the late [Thomas B. Hofeller](#), an architect of Republican [gerrymandering](#), had found that adding the census question could help to gerrymander maps that "would be advantageous to Republicans and non-Hispanic whites".*
 - The Trump administration sought to complete the census count earlier than originally scheduled. In September 2020, federal district court judge [Lucy Koh](#) issued a preliminary injunction against the plan to end counting on September 30 rather than the scheduled October 31, saying the Commerce Department "never articulated a satisfactory explanation". She also blocked a plan to deliver the count results to the White House by December 31, rather than the original April 2021 delivery date when Trump might be out of office.^[135] On the next business day, Commerce Secretary [Wilbur Ross](#) announced the count would end October

5, as the administration appealed Koh's decision to the [9th circuit](#). Koh ordered the government to produce documents to show the Commerce Department's reasoning.^[136] The appeals court upheld Koh's ruling,^[137] and the Census Bureau announced on October 2 that the count would continue until October 31.^[138] Also on October 2, Koh threatened to hold Ross in contempt for repeated violations of her order.^[139]

- The 9th circuit decision was appealed to the [Supreme Court](#). On October 13, in a 7–1 ruling, the court issued an unsigned order granting the request to end the count early.^[140] Justice [Sonia Sotomayor](#) was the lone dissenter, saying that "meeting the deadline at the expense of the accuracy of the census is not a cost worth paying, especially when the Government has failed to show why it could not bear the lesser cost of expending more resources to meet the deadline or continuing its prior efforts to seek an extension from Congress." The count ultimately ended at 5:59 a.m. Eastern Time on October 16, 2020
- The Census Bureau announced its apportionment figures on April 26, 2021. The following states will see changes in Congressional seats:
 - [California](#), [New York](#), [Illinois](#), [Michigan](#), [Ohio](#), [Pennsylvania](#), and [West Virginia](#) will each lose one seat.^[141]
 - [Colorado](#), [Florida](#), [Montana](#), [North Carolina](#), and [Oregon](#) will each gain one seat.
 - [Texas](#) will gain two seats.
- Past episodes referenced:
 - The main episode earlier this week #374: <http://arsenalfordemocracy.com/2021/05/17/may-16-2021-the-emergency-quota-act-of-1921-arsenal-for-democracy-ep-374/>
 - Vice President Thomas Marshall vs Woodrow Wilson on whether or not progressivism included eugenics and super-racism: <http://arsenalfordemocracy.com/2020/07/14/july-14-2020-hazen-pingree-john-altg-eld-thomas-marshall-arsenal-for-democracy-ep-316/>