

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

How and why has “race” evolved throughout the history of the U.S. Census?

Lesson Objectives:

- I will be able to explain how the U.S. Census can affect my state - California.
- I will be able to analyze census information and explain how the census identification by race¹ or color have changed over time.

PART I - Introduction:

The current government of the United States began with the **ratification**² of the United States Constitution on September 17, 1787. President George Washington was unanimously elected as the first President of the United States and served as president from 1789-1797: but who were the Americans governed by President Washington? How did the government keep track of the people who lived within American borders and meet the goals outlined by the Preamble of the Constitution “...to form a more perfect Union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defence, and promote the general welfare and the blessings of liberty...”?

The idea of the census can be traced to Article I, Section 2 of the Constitution. The purpose of **enumeration**³ is to 1) determine how much representation a state has in the House of Representatives and 2) **apportionment**⁴ of federal taxes to the states. The first census began in 1790 and is still counted every decade (e.g., 2000, 2010, 2020...and so forth). All residents are counted regardless of citizenship status or what the answers to the census are. The questions on the census survey includes questions such as age, marital status, education, income and other questions used to study the nation’s **demographics**⁵.

Discussion Question #1: Why is it crucial to make sure everyone is counted on the census?

The census survey has changed throughout the years, but the question “What is the person’s race?” has been asked since 1790. According the Census Bureau ([census.gov](https://www.census.gov)), race is key to implementing many federal laws and is needed to monitor compliance with the Voting Rights Act and the Civil Rights Act to assess racial equality. State governments use the data to determine congressional, state and local voting districts. Race data are also used to measure fairness of employment practices, to monitor racial disparities in characteristics such as health and education, and to plan and obtain funds for public services. The census not only informs important decisions that will likely affect our future, but it is also a key to understanding America’s past. For instance, the 2010 Census was the first time in history in which California did not increase in Congressional representation! This is crucial because California was underrepresented which, therefore, also meant a decrease in federal funding. For instance, according to the [Public Policy Institute of California](https://www.ppic.org/), California received about an estimate of \$77 billion in census-related funding. An accurate census count, that

¹ race: a group of people thought to share certain distinctive physical characteristics such as facial features, skin color, or hair texture.

² ratification: the act of signing or making an agreement to make something official or valid

³ enumeration: to mention one by one; a count of the population in the census

⁴ apportionment: the process of dividing the 435 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives among the 50 states according to each state’s population determined by the decennial census. At the conclusion of each census, the results are used to calculate the number of House memberships to which each state is entitled.

⁵ Demographic: statistical data on a population

does not underrepresent California's population, would have meant more funding to ensure that the needs of the people residing in the state are better met. This funding impacts programs such as Medi-Cal (health insurance for low-income residents), nutrition programs, housing assistance, highways, foster care, Section 8 housing, and education.

Discussion Question #2: How was the 2010 census a negative effect on California?

Calling all Californians! We need your help in order to ensure all Californians are represented. As a citizen, there are many things you *must do* or there could be repercussions in the form of a fine, ticket, or even jail time. These **civic duties** are mandatory and include obeying the law, attending school from ages 6-18, paying taxes, and appearing in court for jury duty or as a witness. All persons residing in the U.S., regardless of residency status, must fulfil these tasks because duties mandatory for all residents. In addition, there are tasks we *should do*, but are not required to do by law. These are known as **civic responsibilities** which include, among other things, voting, being informed, helping your community, respecting and protecting others' rights. By completing and promoting the 2020 Census, the responsibility of being counted and helping your community will be met.

*Discussion Questions #3: How is the census connected to your civic responsibility?
Why is it important to be counted in the 2020 Census?*