

## Lesson Plan – Learning History through Primary Sources: The Census

**Age:** High School

### **Standards**

- **History:** The historical method of inquiry to ask questions, evaluate primary and secondary sources, critically analyze and interpret data, and develop interpretations defended by evidence from a variety of primary and secondary sources.
  - Analyze continuity and change in eras over the course of United States history.
  - Evaluate a historical source for point of view and historical context.
- **Research and Reasoning:** Collect, analyze, and evaluate information obtained from multiple sources to answer a question, propose solutions, or share findings and conclusions.
- **Oral Expression and Listening:** Effectively operating in small and large groups to accomplish a goal requires active listening.

### Teacher Guide

Before passing out worksheets, go over the history of the census with students together or have them work in groups.

Once they know the background of the census, pass out the worksheets, and the 1920, 1930, and 1940 censuses. The actual images of the census have been included as well as spreadsheets with the pertinent information typed up. The answers to the worksheet have been provided as well.

After students complete the questions, hand out the example of the 2020 census and have students compare and contrast the censuses from the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s to the 2020 census. Some prompt questions are listed below.

- 1) Which census is more useful to historians and genealogists?
- 2) How has the census improved?
- 3) What questions do you wish the 2020 census asked?

**Extra:** For homework or extra credit, have students see if they can find their grandparents or great-grandparents on a census! AncestryLibrary.com can be accessed to the Cañon City Public Library with a library card or a free account can be created at FamilySearch.org. Knowing names, birthdates, and a residence location will help in the search. When looking for women, remind students to learn their relative's maiden name.

## Learning History Through Primary Sources: The Census

All the way back in 1790, the very first census asked only six things:

- The name of the head of the household
- The number of free white males 16 years and older
- Free white males under 16
- Free white females
- All other free persons
- Enslaved people in the household

Enslaved people were counted as three-fifths of a person<sup>1</sup>. American Indians were not counted at all unless they were taxed. “Indians not taxed” included American Indians living on reservations or those roaming in unsettled areas of the country. This original census, under the direction of Thomas Jefferson, the Secretary of State, covered the original 13 states, plus the districts of Kentucky, Maine, Vermont, and the Southwest Territory (Tennessee). U.S. Marshals acted as the first enumerators (census takers) and came up with a count of 3.9 million people. Jefferson and George Washington expected the number to be higher and were unconvinced of the accuracy of the count. The first census left a lot to be desired but ever since that time, a census has been conducted every ten years.

According to the United State Census Bureau, “the framers of the Constitution of the United States chose population to be the basis for sharing political power, not wealth or land”. The census aims to count the population of the country to decide on federal funds, grants and support to states, and apportionment of representatives among other things. Apportionment refers to the process of dividing the 435 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives based on state population counts from each census. The number of seats each state receives is set for 10 years until the next census. The answers given in the census cannot be used against respondents – results can only be used to produce statistics. The Census Bureau is required by law to protect personal information and keep it confidential. The information cannot be shared with any government agency, court, or with law enforcement.

Previous censuses in the United States are released every 72 years to the public. The 1940 census was released in 2012 and the 1950 census is set to be released in April 2022. The information contained within the censuses can tell historians and genealogists information about the movement of people, their jobs, how many children they had, and their age. Of course, due to the way in which the census was conducted before 1960, the information collected can be incorrect, either deliberately or unintentionally. When a census worker came to collect information, whoever answered the door was often the one providing the information. In some cases, children or even someone just visiting the family imparted what information they believed to be true or they just guessed.

If the family was gone when the enumerator arrived, a neighbor likely answered the questions. In some cases, the census workers misspelled names due to mishearing or not asking how the family spelled their names. Ages often became a problem when a household member answering the questions did not

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<sup>1</sup> The three-fifths compromise was an agreement reached by the state delegates at the 1787 Constitutional Convention. For taxation and representative purposes, each enslaved person was counted as three-fifths of a person so the less populated south could receive more electoral power than they would have if the enslaved population was not counted.

know the ages of the others or they deliberately lied. An article published in the *Cañon City Record* on May 17, 1900 expands on this issue:

### **Lie About Their Ages**

#### **One Serious Difficulty that Confronts Census Enumerators**

The most difficult task of a census enumerator is to obtain information about the ages of people. It is assumed that a woman may lie about her age and a man about the fish he catches without committing sin, but the phenomenon goes still further. Young people usually want to be considered old, middle-aged people report themselves younger than they are and very old people will add a few years to their actual age. Children under fifteen throw their ages forward to sixteen, girls stretch a point to be eighteen and boys nineteen or more always like to be considered men. Therefore the age returns of a census are usually more incorrect than any other, and it is impossible to determine accurately whether the average duration of life is increasing or decreasing...

Regardless, the census is important both in the past and present as it gives a picture of the population over the years and determines important statistics today.

Your task is to look at three censuses of Anton Adamic: 1920, 1930, and 1940. Fill out the worksheet provided (pages 3 and 4).

You will be looking specifically at Anton Adamic. His family has been added to the spreadsheets to give you context.

After completing the worksheet, you will be looking at the 2020 census and comparing it to the 1920, 1930, and 1940 censuses. While discussing the similarities and differences, take some time to look at the section asking about race. Prior to 1960, the census taker was the person who determined the race of the respondent. As 1960 was the first census mailed to each home, people could choose the race they most closely identified as for the first time. Since 2000, people can choose more than one race on the census.

Another part of the census to think about is how women are recorded. Until 1850, women's names were rarely listed unless they were a widow because only then were they considered the head of household. When occupation began to be asked by enumerators, many enumerators did not ask married women if they had an occupation because they assumed women were simply "keeping house". Even married women who did work often neglected to mention their participation of paid labor due to societal norms that dictated a wife's place was in the home. This historically led to an undercount of women who held jobs. Even when women did inform enumerators of employment, between 1910 and 1940, their instructions were to question the accuracy of unusual occupations for women but not the men.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Understanding the Census**

- 1) Anton Adamic was born in 1872. Look at the ages on each census. Are the ages listed in the censuses accurate? You'll have to subtract the age of Anton written on the census from the year the census was conducted.

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- 2) Under "Nativity and Mother Tongue" in the 1920 census, Adamic is listed as being born in Austria. In the 1930 and 1940 census, under "Place of Birth", he is listed as being born in Yugoslavia. Why do you think his place of birth is different in the censuses?

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- 3) Adamic and his wife Mary had six children in total. Why do you think only 5 are listed in the census in 1930 and only one in 1940?

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- 4) What are three other facts you can learn about Anton Adamic within these censuses?

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5) Why do you think the censuses ask about education and the ability to read and write?

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6) Why do you think the U.S. Census Bureau wanted to know if homes had a radio in the 1930s?

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7) What does it mean to be naturalized?

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8) Why do you think the U.S. Census Bureau wanted to know if someone was a veteran?

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9) What are some similarities and differences you see between the questions asked on these censuses?

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## Understanding the Census – Answers

- 1) All three censuses have him being born in 1872-1873. This slight difference could be accounted for depending on his birth month and what month the census was completed.
- 2) Yugoslavia did not come into existence until 1918 and was not recognized as a country until 1922 as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Prior to this, it was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which is why Adamic was listed as Austrian. In 1929, the name was changed to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Your birthplace is always listed as the current name of a country. For example, if you were born in Czechoslovakia before 1993, your birthplace would now be listed as either Czech Republic or Slovakia, depending on the location you were born. Yugoslavia officially ceased to exist as a country by 1992.
- 3) The oldest daughter of the Adamic's, Mildred, was married by 1930 and living with her husband. The rest of the children were not married and it was typical for unmarried children, especially those who worked with their parents, to live at home at the time. By 1940, only Paul was living with his parents. He was in charge of the farm and based on the census records, Anton was retired as he is listed as not working.
- 4) There are many things that can be learned from the censuses. Examples include that Adamic was a coal miner previous to owning land, he immigrated in 1898, and his home was worth \$2000 in 1930.
- 5) The Census Bureau asks about education and literacy to create statistics about education in the nation and helps create an understanding of education needs. A decrease in illiteracy can be seen by looking at censuses. In 1870, 20% of the population claimed to be illiterate in the census. By 1920, illiteracy was down to just 6% and in 1979 it was down to 0.6%. In the early part of the 1900s, it was common for people to only attain an 8<sup>th</sup> grade education.
- 6) The Census Bureau asked about if a home had a radio in the 1930s. According to the National Archives, "American business and political leaders viewed radio as a source of cultural "uplift" for the population as well as a valuable medium for advertisement of mass-produced goods. The inclusion of a question on radio ownership reflected this new interest in the possibilities of consumer items and methods of mass communication."
- 7) Naturalization is the legal act or process by which a non-citizen of a country may acquire citizenship or nationality of that country. While the 1920 census lists Adamic as becoming naturalized in 1910, based on the record from the U.S. Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service, he was actually naturalized in 1904.
- 8) The census of 1930 asked whether a person was veteran. Veteran status is asked to identify how many there are, and is frequently used in funding allocation. The 1930 census also asked which war the person served in, which, according to the National Archives, was simply of interest for accounting purposes.
- 9) Some similarities between questions asked on these censuses are name, relationship to head of household, and place of birth. Some differences in questions include veteran status, age at first marriage, and residence in 1935.

**Note:** While the census is very useful in providing certain information, it is always best to also look at other sources. From oral histories and newspapers, we know that Anton Adamic was one of the founders of Prospect Heights and ran the Prospect Heights Mercantile Store. He was also a saloon owner, common in Prospect Heights in the 1910s. He was arrested and fined multiple times for selling alcohol when Fremont County prohibited the sale and purchase of liquor. He passed away in June 1949 in his home at 514 Riverside Ave., which we know from his obituary in the *Cañon City Daily Record*. He is buried in Lakeside Cemetery.

## Census Fast Facts

- In the first census in 1790, households were asked the number of free white males 16 years and older and free white males younger than 16. This helped to determine the country's industrial and military potential.
- American Indians were not counted on a general federal census until 1860 and the instructions were clear who was and wasn't to be enumerated: "Indians not taxed are not to be enumerated. The families of Indians who have renounced tribal rule, and who under state or territory laws exercise the rights of citizens, are to be enumerated."<sup>2</sup> The census in 1900 was the first time American Indians were enumerated on reservations as well as in the general population. There were enumerations of Pueblo Indians in 1850-1870 in the New Mexico Territory, an 1857 Shawnee Census taken as part of the Kansas Territorial Census, and an 1880 Special Census of Indians that attempted to enumerate all the untaxed American Indians. There was also an 1890 Census report of American Indians but the majority of the 1890 censuses were lost in a fire in 1921.
- According to the Census Bureau, by 1909 over 50 percent of the 624 permanent employees were women. The first five female supervisors and three female expert chiefs of divisions in the bureau were appointed by 1920. During the 1910 census in Fremont County two women served as enumerators, Miss Lula Lines and Miss Winifred Hoeyer.
- Most of the 1890 census was destroyed except for a few remaining scraps. The census schedules were in the basement of the Commerce Department Building and on January 10, 1921, smoke was spotted about 5 o'clock. When firemen arrived, they began hosing water into the building which flooded the cellar. With no disaster or recovery plan of historic documents and artifacts at the time, the Chief Clerk opened the windows to let out smoke and everyone went home after the fire was extinguished, leaving the cellar flooded. The 1890 census was stacked directly in the path of the fire and water. According to the Census Director at the time, an estimated 25% was destroyed with 50% damaged by water, smoke, and fire. No cause was ever discovered for the fire.
- Prior to 1960, enumerators decided the race of a respondent. Since 1960 was the first mail out census, people were able to choose what race they most closely identified as for the first time. Beginning in 2000, respondents had the option to choose more than one race.

## Further Reading

Blake, Kellee. "First in the Path of the Firemen." *Prologue Magazine* 28, no. 1 (Spring 1996). Accessed September 3, 2020. <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/1996/spring/1890-census-1.html>.

"History." United States Census Bureau. Accessed September 3, 2020. <https://www.census.gov/history/>.

Horowitz, Juliana Menasce, Mark Hugo Lopez, Rich Morin and Kim Parker. "Race and Multiracial Americans in the U.S. Census." Pew Research Center. June 11, 2015. <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/06/11/chapter-1-race-and-multiracial-americans-in-the-u-s-census/>.

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<sup>2</sup> *Eighth Census, United States—1860. Instructions to U.S. Marshals*, p. 14.