

# African Americans, Facts and Figures

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**African Americans** or **Black Americans** are citizens or residents of the United States who have origins in any of the black populations of Africa. In the United States, the term is generally used for Americans with at least partial Sub-Saharan African ancestry. Most African Americans are the direct descendants of captive Africans who survived the slavery era within the boundaries of the present United States, although some are—or are descended from—voluntary immigrants from African, Caribbean, Central American or South American nations. African Americans make up the single largest racial minority in the United States.

## History



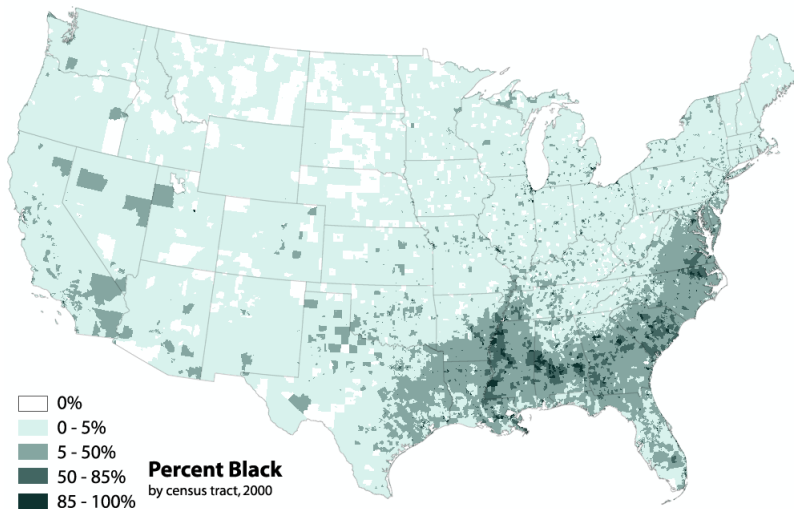
*An artist's conception of Crispus Attucks, the first "martyr" of the American Revolution.*

The first recorded Africans in British North America (including most of the future United States) arrived in 1619 as indentured servants who settled in Jamestown, Virginia. They for many years were similar in legal position to poor English indenturees, who traded several years labor in exchange for passage to America. Africans could legally raise crops and cattle to purchase their freedom. They raised families, marrying other Africans and sometimes intermarrying with Native Americans or English settlers. By the 1640s and 1650s, several African families owned farms around Jamestown and some became wealthy by colonial standards. The popular conception of a race-based slave system did not fully develop until the 1700s. During the 1770s Africans, both enslaved and free, helped rebellious English colonists secure American Independence by defeating the British in the American Revolution. Africans and Englishmen fought side by side and were fully integrated. James Armistead, an African American, played a large part in making possible the 1781 Yorktown victory that established the United States as an independent nation. Other prominent African Americans were Prince Whipple and Oliver Cromwell, who are both depicted in the front of the boat in George Washington's famous 1776 Crossing the Delaware portrait. By 1860, there were 3.5 million enslaved Africans in the United States due to the Atlantic slave trade, and another 500,000 Africans lived free across the country. In 1863, during the American Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation. The proclamation declared all slaves in states that had seceded from the Union were free. Advancing Union troops enforced the proclamation with Texas being the last state to be emancipated in 1865. While the post-war reconstruction era was initially a time of progress for African Americans, in the late 1890s, Southern states enacted Jim Crow laws to enforce racial segregation and disenfranchisement. Most African Americans followed the Jim Crow laws and assumed a posture of humility and servility to prevent becoming victims of racially motivated violence. To maintain self-esteem and dignity, middle-class African Americans created their own schools, churches, banks, social clubs, and other businesses.

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, racially discriminatory laws and racial violence aimed at African Americans began to mushroom in the United States. These discriminatory acts included racial segregation—upheld by the United States Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896—which was legally mandated by southern states and nationwide at the local level of government, voter suppression or disenfranchisement in the southern states, denial of economic opportunity or resources nationwide, and private acts of violence and mass racial violence aimed at African Americans unhindered or encouraged by government authorities. The desperate conditions of African Americans in the South that sparked the Great Migration of the early 20th century, combined with a growing African-American intellectual and cultural elite in the Northern United States, led to a movement to fight violence and discrimination against African Americans that, like abolitionism before it, crossed racial lines. The Civil Rights Movement aimed at abolishing public and private acts of racial discrimination against African Americans between 1954 to 1968, particularly in the southern United States. By 1966, the emergence of the Black Power movement, which lasted from 1966 to 1975, expanded upon the aims of the Civil Rights Movement to include racial dignity, economic and political self-sufficiency, and freedom from white authority. The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom and the conditions which brought it into being are credited with putting pressure on President John F. Kennedy and then Lyndon B. Johnson that culminated in the passage the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that banned discrimination in public accommodations, employment, and labor unions.

In 2008, Democratic Sen. Barack Obama defeated Republican Sen. John McCain becoming the first African-American elected to the office of President of the United States, and making Barack Obama, Michelle Obama, and daughters Malia and Sasha the first African American First Family of the United States. Ninety-five percent of African American voters voted for Obama.

# Demographics



*African Americans as percent of population, 2000.*

In 1790, when the first U.S. Census was taken, Africans (including slaves and free people) numbered about 760,000—about 19.3% of the population. In 1860, at the start of the American Civil War, the African-American population increased to 4.4 million, but the percentage rate dropped to 14% of the overall population of the country. The vast majority were slaves, with only 488,000 counted as "freemen". By 1900, the black population had doubled and reached 8.8 million.

In 1910, about 90% of African Americans lived in the South, but large numbers began migrating north looking for better job opportunities and living conditions, and to escape Jim Crow laws

and racial violence. The Great Migration, as it was called, spanned the 1890s to the 1970s. From 1916 through the 1960s, more than 6 million black people moved north. But in the 1970s and 1980s, that trend reversed, with more African Americans moving south to the Sun Belt than leaving it.

The following gives the African-American population in the United States over time, based on U.S. Census figures. (Numbers from years 1920 to 2000 are based on U.S. Census figures as given by the *Time Almanac* of 2005, p 377) The World Factbook gives a 2006 figure of 12.9% Controversy has surrounded the "accurate" population count of African Americans for decades. The NAACP believed it was under counted intentionally to minimize the significance of the black population in order to reduce their political power base.

Year	Number	% of total population	Slaves	% in slavery
1790	757,208	19.3% (highest)	697,681	92%
1800	1,002,037	18.9%	893,602	89%
1810	1,377,808	19.0%	1,191,362	86%
1820	1,771,656	18.4%	1,538,022	87%
1830	2,328,642	18.1%	2,009,043	86%
1840	2,873,648	16.8%	2,487,355	87%
1850	3,638,808	15.7%	3,204,287	88%
1860	4,441,830	14.1%	3,953,731	89%
1870	4,880,009	12.7%	-	-
1880	6,580,793	13.1%	-	-
1890	7,488,788	11.9%	-	-
1900	8,833,994	11.6%	-	-
1910	9,827,763	10.7%	-	-
1920	10.5 million	9.9%	-	-
1930	11.9 million	9.7% (lowest)	-	-
1940	12.9 million	9.8%	-	-
1950	15.0 million	10.0%	-	-
1960	18.9 million	10.5%	-	-
1970	22.6 million	11.1%	-	-
1980	26.5 million	11.7%	-	-
1990	30.0 million	12.1%	-	-
2000	36.6 million	12.3%	-	-

By 1990, the African-American population reached about 30 million and represented 12% of the U.S. population, roughly the same proportion as in 1900. In current demographics, according to 2005 U.S. Census figures, some 39.9 million African Americans live in the United States, comprising 13.8 percent of the total population. At the time of the 2000 Census, 54.8 percent of African Americans lived in the South. In that year, 17.6 percent of African Americans lived in the Northeast and 18.7 percent in the Midwest, while only 8.9 percent lived in the western states. The west does have a sizable black population in certain areas, however. California, the nation's most populous state, has the fifth largest African-American population, only behind New York, Texas, Georgia, and Florida. According to the 2000 Census, approximately 2.05% of African Americans identified as Hispanic or Latino in origin. Many of whom may be of Brazilian, Dominican, Cuban, Haitian, or other Latin American descent.

The only self-reported ancestral groups larger than African Americans are Irish and German Americans. Due to the fact that many African Americans trace their ancestry to colonial American origins, some simply self-report as "American".

Almost 58 percent of African Americans lived in metropolitan areas in 2000. With over 2 million black residents, New York City had the largest black urban population in the United States in 2000, overall the city has a 28 percent black population.

Chicago has the second largest black population, with almost 1.6 million African Americans in its metropolitan area, representing about 18 percent of the total metropolitan population. Among cities of 100,000 or more, Gary, Indiana, had the highest percentage of black residents of any U.S. city in 2000, with 84 percent (though it should be noted that the 2006 Census estimate puts the city's population below 100,000.) Nonetheless, Gary is followed closely by Detroit, Michigan, which was 82 percent African American. Other large cities with African-American majorities include New Orleans, Louisiana (67 %), Baltimore, Maryland (64 %) Atlanta, Georgia (61 %), Memphis, Tennessee (61 %), and Washington, D.C. (60 %).

The nation's most affluent county with an African-American majority is Prince George's County, Maryland, with a median income of \$62,467. Other affluent predominantly African-American counties include Dekalb County in Georgia, and Charles City County in Virginia. Queens County, New York is the only county with a population of 65,000 or more where African Americans have a higher median household income than European Americans.

## Contemporary issues

African Americans have improved their social and economic standing significantly since the Civil Rights Movement and recent decades have witnessed the expansion of a robust, African-American middle class across the United States. Unprecedented access to higher education and employment in addition to representation in the highest levels of American government has been gained by African Americans in the post-civil rights era. Nevertheless, due in part to the legacy of slavery, racism and discrimination, African Americans as a group remain at a pronounced economic, educational and social disadvantage in many areas relative to European Americans. Persistent social, economic and political issues for many African Americans include inadequate health care access and delivery; institutional racism and discrimination in housing, education, policing, criminal justice and employment; crime, poverty and substance abuse. One of the most serious and long standing issues within African-American communities is poverty. Poverty itself is a hardship as it is related to marital stress and dissolution, health problems, low educational attainment, deficits in psychological functioning, and crime. In 2004, 24.7% of African-American families lived below the poverty level.

## Politics and social issues



*President-elect Barack Obama with wife Michelle and daughters, Malia Ann and Sasha*

Collectively, African Americans are more involved in the American political process than other minority groups in the United States, indicated by the highest level of voter registration and participation in elections among these groups in 2004. African Americans collectively attain higher levels of education than immigrants to the United States. African Americans also have the highest level of Congressional representation of any other minority group in the U.S. African Americans tend to vote overwhelmingly for Democrats in U.S. elections. Even most conservative African Americans tend to vote for Democrats. In the 2004 Presidential Election, Democrat John Kerry received 88% of the African American vote compared to 11% for Republican George W. Bush.

Historically African Americans were supporters of the Republican Party due to the fact that it was Republican President Abraham Lincoln who helped in granting freedom to American slaves. The African American trend of voting for Democrats can be traced back to the 1930s when in the middle of the Great Depression, Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal program provided economic relief to African Americans. The African American vote became even more solidly Democratic when Democratic presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson pushed for civil rights legislation during the 1960s.

After over 50 years, marriage rates for *all* Americans began to decline while divorce rates and out-of-wedlock births have climbed. These changes have been greatest among African Americans. After more than 70 years of racial parity black marriage rates began to fall behind whites. Despite that, overall African Americans tend to be more socially conservative compared to the general American public. African Americans favor "traditional American values" about family and marriage. Voting patterns on social and cultural issues continue to remain in line with ideologies of the Republican party. Although African Americans generally support a more progressive tax structure to provide more services and reduce injustice and support more government spending on social services.

## News media and coverage



*BET founder Robert L. Johnson with U.S. President George W. Bush*

News media coverage of African American news, concerns or dilemmas is inadequate, some activists and academics contend. Activists also contend that the news media present distorted images of African-Americans. To combat this African Americans founded their own television networks. Black Entertainment Television, founded by Robert L. Johnson is a network that targets young African Americans and urban audiences in the United States. Most programming on the network consists of rap and R&B music videos and urban-oriented movies and series. Additionally, the channel shows syndicated television series, original programs, and some public affairs programs. On Sunday mornings, BET broadcasts a lineup of network-produced Christian programming; other, non-affiliated Christian programs are also shown during the early morning hours daily. BET is now an global network that reaches 85 million viewers in the Caribbean, Canada, and the United

Kingdom. In addition to BET there is BET J (BET Jazz) which is a spin-off cable television channel of BET, created originally

to showcase jazz music-related programming, especially that of black jazz musicians. While jazz music still remains the primary focus, programming has been expanded to include a block of urban programs as well as some R&B, neo soul, and alternative hip hop. TV One is another African American oriented network and a direct competitor to BET. It targets African American adults with a broad range of programming. The network airs original lifestyle and entertainment-oriented shows, movies, fashion and music programming, as well as classic series such as *227*, *Good Times*, *Martin*, *Boston Public* and *It's Showtime at the Apollo*. The network primarily owned by Radio One. Radio One, Inc., founded and controlled by Catherine Hughes, it is one of the nation's largest radio broadcasting companies and the largest African American owned radio broadcasting company in the United States. Other African American networks scheduled to launch in 2009 are the Black Television News Channel founded by former Congressman J. C. Watts and Better Black Television founded by Percy Miller.

## Economic status



*Oprah Winfrey, the wealthiest African American of the 20th century*

Economically, African-Americans have benefited from the advances made during the Civil Rights era, particularly among the educated, but not without the lingering effects of historical marginalization when considered as a whole. The racial disparity in poverty rates has narrowed. The black middle class has grown substantially. In 2000, 47% of African Americans owned their homes. The poverty rate among African Americans has dropped from 26.5% in 1998 to 24.7% in 2004.

In 2004, African-American workers had the second-highest median earnings of American minority groups after Asian Americans, and African Americans had the highest level of male-female income parity of all ethnic groups in the United States. Also, among American minority groups, only Asian Americans were more likely to hold white-collar occupations (management, professional, and related fields), and African Americans were no more or less likely than European Americans to work in the service industry. In 2001, over half of African-American households of married couples earned \$50,000 or more. Although in the same year African Americans were

over-represented among the nation's poor, this was directly related to the disproportionate percentage of African-American families headed by single women; such families are collectively poorer, regardless of ethnicity.

By 2006, gender continued to be the primary factor in income level, with the median earnings of African-American men more than those black and non-black American women overall and in all educational levels. At the same time, among American men, income disparities were significant; the median income of African-American men was approximately 76 cents for every dollar of their European American counterparts, although the gap narrowed somewhat with a rise in educational level. Overall, the median earnings of African-American men were 72 cents for every dollar earned of their Asian American counterparts, and \$1.17 for every dollar earned by Hispanic men. On the other hand by 2006, among American women with post-secondary education, African-American women have made significant advances; the median income of African-American women was more than those of their Asian-, European and Hispanic American counterparts with at least some college education.

African Americans are still underrepresented in government and employment. In 1999, the median income of African-American families was \$33,255 compared to \$53,356 of European Americans. In times of economic hardship for the nation, African Americans suffer disproportionately from job loss and underemployment, with the black underclass being hardest hit. The phrase "last hired and first fired" is reflected in the Bureau of Labor Statistics unemployment figures. Nationwide, the October 2008 unemployment rate for African Americans was 11.1%, while the nationwide rate was 6.5%.

The income gap between black and white families is also significant. In 2005, employed blacks earned only 65% of the wages of whites, down from 82% in 1975. *The New York Times* reported in 2006 that in Queens, New York, the median income among African American families exceeded that of white families, which the newspaper attributed to the growth in the number of two-parent black families. It noted that Queens was the only county with more than 65,000 residents where that was true.

In 1999, the rate of births to unwed African-American mothers was estimated by economist Walter E. Williams of George Mason University to be 70%. The poverty rate among single-parent black families was 39.5% in 2005, according to Williams, while it was 9.9% among married-couple black families. Among white families, the comparable rates were 26.4% and 6%.

According to *Forbes* magazine's "wealthiest American" lists, a 2000 net worth of \$800 million dollars made Oprah Winfrey the richest African American of the 20th century; by contrast, the net worth of the 20th century's richest American, Bill Gates, who is of European descent, briefly hit \$100 billion in 1999. In *Forbes*' 2007 list, Gates' net worth decreased to \$59 billion while Winfrey's increased to \$2.5 billion, making her the world's richest black person. Winfrey is also the first African American to make *Business Week*'s annual list of America's 50 greatest philanthropists. BET founder Bob Johnson was also listed as a billionaire prior to an expensive divorce and has recently regained his fortune through a series of real estate



investments. Although Forbes estimates his net worth at \$1.1 billion, which makes him the only male African-American billionaire, Winfrey remains the only African American wealthy enough to rank among the country's 400 richest people.

## Health

By 2003, sex had replaced race as the primary factor in life expectancy in the United States, with African-American females expected to live longer than European American males born in that year. In the same year, the gap in life expectancy between American whites (78.0) and blacks (72.8) had decreased to 5.2 years, reflecting a long term trend of this phenomenon. By 2004, "the trend toward convergence in mortality figures across the major race groups also continued," with white-black gap in life expectancy dropping to 5 years. The current life expectancy of African Americans as a group is comparable to those of other groups who live in countries with a high Human Development Index.

At the same time, the life expectancy gap is affected by collectively lower access to quality medical care. With no system of universal health care, access to medical care in the U.S. generally is mediated by income level and employment status. As a result, African Americans, who have a disproportionate occurrence of poverty and unemployment as a group, are more often uninsured than non Hispanic whites or Asians. For a great many African Americans, healthcare delivery is limited, or nonexistent. And when they receive healthcare, they are more likely than others in the general population to receive substandard, even injurious medical care. African Americans have a higher prevalence of some chronic health conditions.

African Americans are the American ethnic group most affected by HIV and AIDS, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It has been estimated that "184,991 adult and adolescent HIV infections [were] diagnosed during 2001-2005". More than 51 percent occurred among blacks than any other race. Between the ages of 25-44 years 62 percent were African Americans. Dr. Robert Janssen (2007) states, "We have rates of HIV/AIDS among blacks in some American cities that are as high as in some countries in Africa". The rate for African Americans with HIV/AIDS in Washington D.C. is 3 percent, based on cases reported. In a New York Times Article, about 50 percent of AIDS-related deaths were African-American woman, which accounted for 25 percent of the city's population. In many cases there are a higher proportion of black people being tested than any other racial group. Dr. Janssen goes on by saying "We need to do a better job of encouraging African Americans to test. Studies show that approximately one in five black men between the ages 40 to 49 living in the city is HIV-positive, according to the *TIMES*. Research indicates that African Americans sexual behavior is no different than any other racial group. Dr. Janssen says "Racial groups tend to have sex with members of their own racial group.

## Cultural influence in the United States



*The King & Carter Jazzing Orchestra photographed in Houston, Texas, January 1921*

From their earliest presence in North America, African Americans have contributed literature, art, agricultural skills, foods, clothing styles, music, language, social and technological innovation to American culture. The cultivation and use of many agricultural products in the U.S., such as yams, peanuts, rice, okra, sorghum, grits, watermelon, indigo dyes, and cotton, can be traced to African and African-American influences. Notable examples include George Washington Carver, who created 300 products from peanuts, 118 products from sweet potatoes, and 75 from pecans; and George Crum, who invented the potato chip in 1853. African American music is one of the most pervasive African-American cultural influences in the United States today and is among the most dominant in mainstream popular music. Hip hop, R&B, funk, rock and roll, soul, blues, and other contemporary American musical forms originated in black communities and evolved from other black forms of music, including blues, ragtime, jazz, and gospel music. African American-derived musical forms have also influenced and been incorporated into virtually every other popular musical genre in the world, including country and techno. African-American genres are the most important ethnic vernacular tradition in America, as they have developed independent of African traditions from which they arise more so than any other immigrant groups, including Europeans; make up the broadest and longest lasting range of styles in America; and have, historically, been more influential, interculturally, geographically, and economically, than other American vernacular traditions.

African Americans have also had an important role in American dance. Bill T. Jones, a prominent modern choreographer and dancer, has included historical African-American themes in his work, particularly in the piece "Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land". Likewise, Alvin Ailey's artistic work, including his "Revelations" based on his experience growing up as an African American in the South during the 1930s, has had a significant influence on modern dance. Another form of dance, Stepping, is an African-American tradition whose performance and competition has been formalized through the traditionally black fraternities and sororities at universities.

Many African-American authors have written stories, poems, and essays influenced by their experiences as African Americans. African American literature is a major genre in American literature. Famous examples include Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Zora Neale Hurston, Ralph Ellison, Nobel Prize winner Toni Morrison, and Maya Angelou.

African-American inventors have created many widely used devices in the world and have contributed to international innovation. Norbert Rillieux created the technique for converting sugar cane juice into white sugar crystals. Moreover, Rillieux left Louisiana in 1854 and went to France, where he spent ten years working with the Champollions deciphering Egyptian hieroglyphics from the Rosetta Stone. Most slave inventors were nameless, such as the slave owned by the Confederate President Jefferson Davis who designed the ship propeller used by the Confederate navy.

Following the Civil War, the growth of industry in the United States was tremendous, and much of this was made possible with inventions by ethnic minorities. By 1913 over 1,000 inventions were patented by black Americans. Among the most notable inventors were Jan Matzeliger, who developed the first machine to mass-produce shoes, and Elijah McCoy, who invented automatic lubrication devices for steam engines. Granville Woods had 35 patents to improve electric railway systems, including the first system to allow moving trains to communicate. He even sued Alexander Graham Bell and Thomas Edison for stealing his patents and won both cases. Garrett A. Morgan developed the first automatic traffic signal and gas mask.

Lewis Howard Latimer created an inexpensive cotton-thread filament, which made electric light bulbs practical because Edison's original light bulb only burned for a few minutes. More recent inventors include McKinley Jones, who invented the movable refrigeration unit for food transport in trucks and trains. Lloyd Quarterman worked with six other black scientists on the creation of the atomic bomb (code named the Manhattan Project.) Quarterman also helped develop the first nuclear reactor, which was used in the atomically powered submarine called the Nautilus.

A few other notable examples include the first successful open heart surgery, performed by Dr. Daniel Hale Williams, the conceptualization and establishment of blood banks around the world by Dr. Charles R. Drew, and the air conditioner, patented by Frederick McKinley Jones. Dr. Mark Dean holds three of the original nine patents on the computer on which all PCs are based. More current contributors include Otis Boykin, whose inventions included several novel methods for manufacturing electrical components that found use in applications such as guided missile systems and computers, and Colonel Frederick Gregory, who was not only the first black astronaut pilot but the person who redesigned the cockpits for the last three space shuttles. Gregory was also on the team that pioneered the microwave instrumentation landing system. In 2000, Bendix Aircraft Company began a worldwide promotion of this microwave instrumentation landing system.

## Political legacy



*Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. remains the most prominent political leader in the American civil rights movement and perhaps the most influential African American political figure in general.*

African-Americans have fought in every war in the history of the United States.

The gains made by African Americans in the Civil Rights and Black Power movements not only obtained certain rights for African Americans, but changed American society in far-reaching and fundamentally important ways. Prior to the 1950s, Black Americans in the South were subject to *de jure* discrimination, or Jim Crow. In the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., African Americans and their supporters challenged the nation to "rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed that all men are created equal...."

The Civil Rights Movement marked a sea-change in American social, political, economic and civic life. It brought with it boycotts, sit-ins, demonstrations, court battles, bombings and other violence; prompted worldwide media coverage and intense public debate; forged enduring civic, economic and religious alliances; disrupted and realigned the nation's two major political parties. Over time, it has changed in fundamental ways the manner in which blacks and whites interact with and relate to one another. The movement resulted in the removal of codified, *de jure* racial segregation and discrimination from American life and law, and heavily influenced other groups and movements in struggles for civil rights and social equality within American society, including the Free Speech Movement, the disabled, women, Native Americans, migrant workers and immigrants.

# The term "African American"

## Political overtones



*Jesse Jackson, Jr. is member of the United States House of Representatives representing the state of Illinois.*

The term African American carries important political overtones. Earlier terms used to identify Americans of African ancestry were conferred upon the group by Americans of European ancestry and were included in the wording of various laws and legal decisions which became tools of white supremacy and oppression. There developed among blacks in America a growing desire for a term of their own choosing.

With the political consciousness that emerged from the political and social ferment of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the term Negro fell into disfavor among many blacks. It had taken on a moderate, accommodationist, even Uncle Tom, connotation. In this period, a growing number of blacks in the United States, particularly African-American youth, celebrated their blackness and their historical and cultural ties with the African continent. The Black Power movement defiantly embraced *Black* as a group identifier. It was a term social leaders themselves had repudiated only two decades earlier and a term often associated in English with things negative and undesirable, but they proclaimed, "Black is beautiful".

In this same period, a smaller number of people favored *Afro-American*. In the 1980s the term *African American* was advanced on the model of, for example, German American. Jesse Jackson popularized the term, and it was quickly adopted by major media. Many blacks in America expressed a preference for the term, as it was formed in the same way as names for others of the many ethnic groups. Some argued further that, because of the historical circumstances surrounding the capture, enslavement and systematic attempts to de-Africanize blacks in the United States under chattel slavery, most African Americans are unable to trace their ancestry to a specific African nation; hence, the entire continent serves as a geographic marker.

For many, African American is more than a name expressive of cultural and historical roots. The term expresses pride in Africa and a sense of kinship and solidarity with others of the African diaspora—an embracing of the notion of pan-Africanism as earlier enunciated by prominent African thinkers such as Marcus Garvey, W. E. B. Du Bois, Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia and, later, George Padmore.

## Who is African American?

Since 1977, the United States officially classified black people (revised to *black* or *African American* in 1997) as *A person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa*. Other Federal offices, such as the United States Census Bureau and the adheres to the OMB standards on race in its data collection and tabulations efforts. The U.S. Department of Justice Federal Bureau of Investigation also categorizes black or African-American people as "A person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa" through racial categories used in the UCR Program adopted from the Statistical Policy Handbook (1978) and published by the Office of Federal Statistical Policy and Standards, U.S. Department of Commerce derived from the 1977 OMB classification.

Due in part to a centuries-old history within the United States, historical experiences pre- and post-slavery, and migrations throughout North America, the vast majority of contemporary African Americans possess varying degrees of admixture with European and Native American ancestry.

In their attempt to impose segregation and restore white supremacy in the late 19th century, some southern states created laws defining a person as black if the person had any known African ancestry. This was a stricter interpretation than what had prevailed earlier. It became known as the one-drop rule, meaning that a single drop of "black blood" makes a person "black". Some courts called it the traceable amount rule, and anthropologists used to call it the hypodescent rule, meaning that racially mixed persons were assigned the status of the subordinate group.

Prior to the one-drop rule, different states had different laws regarding color; in Virginia, for example, a person was legally black if he or she had at least one-sixteenth black ancestry. The one-drop rule originated in the Southern United States in the 19th century, likely in response to whites' attempt to limit any black political power in the wake of Reconstruction. The first year in which the U.S. Census did not count mulattoes was 1920, evidencing a shift in the American conception of what an African American is. For African Americans, the one-drop system of pigmentocracy was a significant factor in ethnic solidarity. The binary interpretation of race forced African Americans to share more of a common lot in society than they might given widely varying educational and economic levels after the Civil War. They created common cause—regardless of their multiracial admixture or social and economic stratification.

In the 1980s, parents of mixed-race children began to organize and lobby for the ability to show more than one ethnic category for their children. When the U.S. government proposed the addition of the category of "bi-racial" or "multiracial" in 1988, the response from the public was mostly negative. Some African-American organizations, and African-American leaders such as Senator Diane Watson and Representative Augustus Hawkins, were particularly vocal in their rejection of the category, fearing massive defection from the African-American self-designation and a loss in political power.

This reaction is characterized as "historical irony" by Daniel (2002). The African-American self-designation had been a response to the one-drop rule, but then people were resisting the ability to show their multiple heritage. At the bottom was a desire not to lose political power of the larger group. Whereas before people resisted being characterized as one group regardless of ranges of ancestry, now some were trying to keep them in the same group. The African American civil rights movement of the 1950s to 1960s achieved successes in getting rid of anti-miscegenation laws, which attempted to restrict people's freedom in marriage.

In recent decades, the multicultural climate of the United States has continued to expand with waves of new immigration. Although the terms mixed-race, biracial, and multiracial are increasingly used, it remains common for those who possess visible traits of black heritage to identify or be identified as blacks or African Americans. People of mixed ancestry possessing any recent black heritage may self-identify demographically as African American while acknowledging their African-American and other cultural heritages socially.

For example, 55% of European Americans classify Senator Barack Obama as biracial when they are told that he has a white mother, while 66% of African Americans consider him black. Obama describes himself as black and African American, using both terms interchangeably, and is generally considered to be African American.

Relationships between Native Americans and African slaves first occurred in 1502, and have continued throughout the centuries. Tracing the genealogy of African Americans and Native Americans is a difficult process, because records were not kept for most African slaves and many Native Americans did not speak English. Another difficulty is that elder family members sometimes withhold pertinent genealogical information. However, knowing the family's geographic origins is a key factor in helping trace Native American ancestry from specific tribes. Due to continued intermarriage between African-Americans and Native Americans, some people who are considered African American can also claim Native heritage. Since the 1980s many Native groups have refused to consider as members people who also have African-American ancestry, or who are descendants of slaves held by the tribe. (See Black Cherokees.) Issues have become complex.

### **Terms no longer in common use**

The terms mulatto and colored were widely used until the second quarter of the 20th century, when they were considered outmoded and generally gave way to the use of *negro*. By the 1940s, the term commonly was capitalized, but by the mid 1960s, it had acquired negative connotations. Today, the term is considered inappropriate and is now often used as a pejorative. *Colored* and *Negro*, now largely defunct, survive in certain historical organizations such as the United Negro College Fund, the National Council of Negro Women, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Negroid was a term used by first in the 18th century to describe some indigenous Africans and their descendants throughout the African diaspora. As with most descriptors of race based on inconsistent, unscientific phenotypical standards, the term is controversial and imprecise. Growing numbers of blacks have substituted the term Africoid, which, unlike *Negroid*, encompasses the phenotypes of all indigenous peoples of Africa.