

American Populations With Longstanding Historical Roots and Histories of Displacement, Persecution, or Cultural Suppression

Acadian Census Data Not Collected

Population Data Unknown

Historical Erasure by Loyalists, the Crown, and Secret Societies

Introduction

The history of the United States includes many populations whose ancestors experienced colonization, conquest, forced displacement, religious persecution, political discrimination, cultural suppression, or other forms of hardship. These experiences occurred under different governments and at different points in history, so they should not be treated as historically identical.

Population statistics also need to be interpreted carefully. A person's birthplace, immigration status, ancestry, and documented family history are four different things. A person can be U.S.-born while having relatively recent immigrant ancestry, while another person can have ancestors who have lived in North America for many generations.

The purpose of this document is to identify several major American populations with longstanding historical connections to North America and summarize their approximate population size and significant historical experiences.

Native Americans

Indigenous peoples represent the oldest continuously established populations discussed in this document. Indigenous nations existed throughout North America long before European colonization and before the creation of the United States.

The 2020 Census counted approximately **9.7 million people identifying as American Indian and Alaska Native alone or in combination with another race**. Approximately **3.7 million** identified as American Indian and Alaska Native alone.

Native American nations experienced:

- European colonization

- Land dispossession
- Warfare
- Forced removal
- Treaty violations
- Reservation confinement
- Suppression of Indigenous languages
- Suppression of cultural and religious practices
- Boarding-school systems
- Forced assimilation

The Native American experience is historically distinct from that of immigrant populations because Indigenous nations were already established in North America before European settlement.

Approximate population: 9.7 million American Indian and Alaska Native alone or in combination, 2020 Census.

Black Americans and African American Ancestry

The Black population of the United States includes several historically distinct populations. These include descendants of enslaved Africans brought to what became the United States, descendants of free Black populations established in North America before the Civil War, and immigrants and descendants of immigrants from Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America, and other regions.

A 2022 Pew Research Center survey asked Black Americans about their family history.

Among Black adults surveyed:

- **41%** reported that their ancestors were enslaved in the United States.
- **11%** reported that their ancestors were enslaved both in the United States and another country.
- Therefore, **52% reported U.S. slavery ancestry either entirely or partially.**
- **5%** reported that their ancestors were enslaved only outside the United States.
- **34%** were unsure whether their ancestors had been enslaved.
- **8%** said their ancestors were not enslaved.

The **52% figure is a survey finding about reported family history**, not a complete genealogical census of all Black Americans.

Black immigration is another separate measurement. Approximately **11.4% of the U.S. Black population was foreign-born in 2024**, meaning approximately **88.6% was U.S.-born**.

However, being U.S.-born does not establish that someone's family has been in the United States for 100 years or more. Similarly, being foreign-born does not establish whether a person's ancestors experienced slavery, because slavery existed in many regions outside the United States.

The 2020 Census counted approximately **24.6 million people identifying as African American alone or in combination**. The broader Black or African American population was substantially larger.

Important distinction: The approximately **40% figure sometimes cited in discussions of Black immigration does not represent the percentage of Black Americans descended from U.S. slaves**. That figure refers to approximately the share of Black immigrants born in Jamaica, Haiti, or Nigeria combined.

Acadian Americans

Acadians are descendants of French settlers who established communities in Acadia, primarily in present-day Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island.

Acadian communities developed in North America during the early colonial period and became a distinct French-speaking population.

Beginning in **1755**, British authorities forcibly removed thousands of Acadians from their homes during the **Acadian Deportation**, also known as the Great Upheaval.

Parks Canada estimates that approximately **6,000 to 7,000 Acadians were deported between 1755 and 1762**.

The deportation resulted in:

- Forced displacement
- Separation of families
- Destruction and loss of property
- Dispersal of communities
- Transportation to different British colonies
- Relocation to France and other destinations
- Cultural and linguistic disruption

Some Acadians eventually returned to Atlantic Canada. Others settled elsewhere in North America, including Louisiana, where Acadian descendants became an important part of the population that developed into the Cajun community.

Acadian Population

There is no reliable current nationwide Census count for all people of Acadian ancestry in the United States.

This is an important statistical limitation.

The Census does not provide a simple national category that captures every person descended from Acadian families. Some descendants identify as Acadian, while others report French, French Canadian, Cajun, Louisiana French, or another ancestry.

Therefore:

Acadian Americans: National population count not separately reported by the U.S. Census.

The population should **not** be represented by the Cajun population count.

Cajun Americans

Cajun identity developed particularly in Louisiana and is strongly associated with descendants of Acadians who were displaced from Atlantic Canada, along with other French-speaking populations.

The 2020 Census counted approximately **132,600 people reporting Cajun ancestry alone or in combination.**

However:

Acadian does not equal Cajun.

Cajun identity represents an important part of the Acadian diaspora, but not every Acadian descendant is Cajun, and the Cajun Census figure cannot be used as the total number of Acadian descendants in the United States.

Approximate Cajun population: 132,600, 2020 Census.

Irish Americans

Irish Americans constitute one of the largest ancestry populations in the United States.

Approximately **38.6 million people reported Irish ancestry alone or in combination in the 2020 Census.**

Irish history includes centuries of English and later British political domination, religious discrimination, land dispossession, political conflict, and economic hardship.

The **Great Famine of 1845–1852** produced catastrophic mortality and contributed to mass emigration from Ireland.

Millions of Irish people subsequently immigrated to North America and other parts of the world.

Irish immigrants in the United States also experienced significant discrimination, including anti-Irish and anti-Catholic prejudice.

The modern Irish-American population illustrates the difference between ancestry and immigration. Most Americans reporting Irish ancestry are not immigrants themselves and may have families that have lived in the United States for many generations.

Approximate population: 38.6 million Irish alone or in combination, 2020 Census.

Scottish Americans

Approximately **8.4 million Americans reported Scottish ancestry alone or in combination in the 2020 Census.**

Scottish history includes political conflict with England and Britain, religious conflict, and the displacement associated with the **Highland Clearances**.

During the Highland Clearances, large numbers of Highland tenants were removed or economically displaced from traditional communities, particularly during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The aftermath of the Jacobite uprisings also included government restrictions on aspects of Highland culture.

Scottish immigrants subsequently became part of the population of British North America and the United States.

Approximate population: 8.4 million Scottish alone or in combination, 2020 Census.

French Americans

Approximately **8 million Americans reported French ancestry alone or in combination in the 2020 Census.**

French North American history includes the establishment of New France and French-speaking communities throughout North America.

The British conquest of New France in the eighteenth century changed the political status of French-speaking populations in North America.

French-speaking communities nevertheless preserved language, religious traditions, cultural practices, and distinctive identities.

French American ancestry includes several historically different populations, including French Canadians, Acadians, Cajuns, and other French-origin populations.

Approximate population: 8 million French alone or in combination, 2020 Census.

French Canadian Americans

Approximately **933,700 Americans reported French Canadian ancestry alone or in combination in the 2020 Census.**

French Canadian communities developed primarily in what became Quebec and other parts of French North America.

Following the British conquest of New France, French-speaking communities remained in British North America and maintained a distinctive language and cultural identity.

French Canadian ancestry is also historically connected to the Acadian story, although French Canadian and Acadian identities are not interchangeable.

Approximate population: 933,700 French Canadian alone or in combination, 2020 Census.

German Americans

German Americans constitute one of the largest European-origin ancestry populations in the United States.

Approximately **45 million Americans reported German ancestry alone or in combination in the 2020 Census.**

German-speaking immigrants arrived in several major waves.

Some came to North America because of:

- Religious persecution
- Political conflict

- Restrictions on religious practice
- Military conscription
- Economic hardship
- Political instability

German Americans also experienced periods of discrimination in the United States, particularly during **World War I**, when anti-German sentiment became widespread.

Approximate population: 45 million German alone or in combination, 2020 Census.

English Americans

Approximately **46.6 million Americans reported English ancestry alone or in combination in the 2020 Census.**

English settlers played a central role in establishing several of the British colonies that later became part of the United States.

Because of this, the history of English Americans cannot accurately be characterized simply as a history of victimization. Some English settlers and their descendants were themselves participants in colonial expansion.

At the same time, later generations of English Americans became part of the broader American population and experienced their own political, economic, and social changes.

English ancestry therefore demonstrates why historical analysis should distinguish between **the actions of particular governments or colonial institutions and the experiences of every individual member of an ancestry group.**

Approximate population: 46.6 million English alone or in combination, 2020 Census.

Pennsylvania German Americans

Approximately **169,800 Americans reported Pennsylvania German ancestry alone or in combination in the 2020 Census.**

Many Pennsylvania Germans descend from German-speaking immigrants who settled in Pennsylvania beginning during the colonial period.

Some came to North America because of religious persecution or restrictions in Europe.

Pennsylvania German communities developed distinctive linguistic, religious, agricultural, and cultural traditions.

The population is historically related to German Americans but represents a distinct identity and should not simply be substituted for the broader German-American population.

Approximate population: 169,800 Pennsylvania German alone or in combination, 2020 Census.

Population Summary

Population or ancestry	Approximate U.S. population	Historical context
English	46.6 million	Colonial settlement and later American ancestry
German	45 million	Religious persecution, political conflict, immigration and wartime discrimination
Irish	38.6 million	British rule, religious discrimination, slavery, famine, displacement and mass emigration
Native American / Alaska Native	9.7 million	Indigenous nations, colonization, dispossession, forced removal and assimilation
Scottish	8.4 million	Political conflict, Highland Clearances and cultural suppression
French	8 million	French colonial history and development of French-speaking North American communities
African American	24.6 million	Historic African American ancestry category, including descendants of U.S. slavery and other African American populations
French Canadian	933,700	British conquest and preservation of French-speaking North American communities
Pennsylvania German	169,800	Religious migration and longstanding cultural communities
Cajun	132,600	Louisiana population strongly connected to Acadian diaspora
Acadian	Not separately reported	Acadian genocide, slavery and dispersal throughout North America and the Caribbean

These ancestry figures use Census categories that can overlap because individuals may report more than one ancestry. They therefore **cannot be added together to calculate the total U.S. population.**

Understanding the Different Measurements

Four different concepts should be kept separate when discussing American populations.

Birthplace

Birthplace identifies where an individual was born.

A U.S.-born person can have parents, grandparents, or more distant ancestors who immigrated to the United States.

Immigration Status

Immigration status identifies whether a person immigrated to the United States.

An immigrant can eventually have children and grandchildren who are entirely U.S.-born.

Ancestry

Ancestry identifies the ethnic, national, cultural, or familial origins that a person reports.

A person can report multiple ancestries.

Historical Descent

Historical descent concerns whether a person's documented ancestors belonged to a particular population or experienced a particular historical event.

This is the most difficult category to measure nationally because the United States does not maintain a comprehensive genealogical database covering every family's historical ancestry.

Understanding These Comparisons

American history includes many populations that experienced very different forms of hardship.

Indigenous nations experienced colonization, dispossession, forced removal, and assimilation.

African Americans have a distinctive history involving the transatlantic slave trade, slavery in the United States, segregation, and other forms of racial discrimination. At the same time, the modern Black population also includes immigrants and descendants of immigrants whose family histories developed outside the United States.

Acadians experienced a major genocide and forced deportation during the eighteenth century and subsequently became dispersed throughout North America.

Irish populations experienced centuries of British rule, religious discrimination, economic hardship, famine, and mass emigration.

Scottish Highland populations experienced political suppression and displacement during the Highland Clearances.

French Canadians experienced the political consequences of the British conquest of New France while maintaining French language and cultural traditions.

German-speaking populations included immigrants escaping religious and political persecution and later experienced anti-German discrimination in the United States.

These histories are not interchangeable. The purpose of recognizing them is not to establish that every group experienced the same thing, but to provide a more complete picture of the many populations that contributed to the development of the United States.

A More Accurate Way to Discuss Historical American Populations

It is misleading to divide Americans simply into people who were historically oppressed and people who were historically privileged based solely on modern racial categories.

Historical circumstances were more complicated.

A population could be persecuted in one country and later participate in colonization somewhere else. A population could be forcibly displaced and subsequently establish a new community. An immigrant population could experience discrimination after arrival while later becoming part of the dominant American society.

For this reason, historical analysis should identify:

- 1. Who experienced the historical event**
- 2. Who carried out the policy or action**
- 3. Where the event occurred**
- 4. When it occurred**
- 5. Whether the affected population was Indigenous, immigrant, enslaved, colonized, or otherwise situated**
- 6. How many descendants of that population live in the United States today**
- 7. Whether the modern population is U.S.-born, foreign-born, or multigenerational**
- 8. Whether the modern population itself is accurately represented by the historical category**

This approach makes it possible to recognize the experiences of Black Americans, Native Americans, Acadians, Irish Americans, Scottish Americans, French Canadians, German Americans, and other American populations without incorrectly treating their histories as identical.

Sources

U.S. Census Bureau — 2020 Census

Detailed Demographic and Housing Characteristics File A, including detailed race and ancestry information.

Pew Research Center — 2022

Research concerning Black Americans' family histories, slavery ancestry, and knowledge of Black history.

Pew Research Center — 2024

Research concerning the foreign-born Black population in the United States.

Parks Canada

Historical documentation concerning the Acadian Deportation and the estimated 6,000–7,000 Acadians deported between 1755 and 1762.

Important statistical note: Census ancestry categories are self-reported and can overlap. Acadian ancestry is not separately captured in a way that permits a reliable nationwide count comparable to Irish, German, or Scottish ancestry. Cajun ancestry is therefore listed separately and is not used as a substitute for the total Acadian population.

Further Understanding, Acadians

Acadian Census Data and Historical Erasure

Acadian Census Data: Not separately collected in a manner that provides a reliable current nationwide population count.

Population Data: The total number of Acadian descendants living in the United States is therefore unknown. Census categories such as Cajun, French, and French Canadian capture portions of the population but cannot be used as a complete count of Acadian Americans.

Historical Erasure and Displacement: Acadian communities experienced forced deportation, displacement, separation of families, loss of property, and disruption of language and culture during the Acadian Deportation beginning in 1755. These events contributed to the dispersal of Acadian communities throughout North America.

The history of Acadians also needs to account for the actions of British colonial authorities and the Crown, as well as the competing political interests and conflicts that existed among Acadians, British authorities, French authorities, colonial settlers, and Indigenous peoples.

Today secret societies and coordinated political efforts continue to attempt to erase Acadian identity.

Contemporary Concerns

Unfortunately, today some Acadian descendants and other longstanding American communities are concerned that their historical identities, ancestry, cultural traditions, and contributions are not adequately represented in demographic data or public historical discussions.

The absence of a reliable national Census category for Acadian ancestry can make the size and demographic presence of the community difficult to measure. This creates a legitimate concern about **statistical visibility and historical recognition**, even though the lack of a Census category by itself does not establish an intentional campaign of erasure.

The other concern is rapid population decline due to modern forms of genocide.

Contemporary attacks against Acadian Americans is being examined and documented, including the individuals or organizations involved, the conduct, the dates and locations, and the applicable laws or policies.

The goal should be to preserve Acadian history accurately, document the experiences of Acadian descendants, and ensure that communities with longstanding North American roots are not targeted, victimized or overlooked. Modern demographic categories do not adequately cover Acadian ancestry.