

# "Race Unknown" and "Two or More Races": IPEDS and the Social Construction of Race

*Karly S. Ford*

*AIR IPEDS Educators*

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# Agenda

- Research Articles about IPEDS race reporting categories
  - Race Unknown (*Educational Researcher*)
  - Two or More Races (*Journal of Higher Education & Race, Ethnicity and Education*)

# OMB (Directive 15) Collection and Reporting Guidelines

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- No, not Hispanic / Latino
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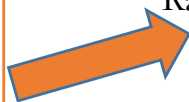
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Only in  
higher  
education



# What Do We Know About “Race Unknown”?

Karly Ford<sup>1</sup> , Kelly Rosinger<sup>1</sup>, and Qiong Zhu<sup>1</sup>

One ethnoracial reporting category perplexes higher education researchers: “race and ethnicity unknown.” Using the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), we constructed a 28-year panel of 4,401 institutions. We find that the for-profit sector ranges from 5% to 18% “race unknown” students. In addition, almost 10% of students attending the most selective institutions were reported as “race unknown” in 2009 before dropping off precipitously. The size of the “race unknown” category can be attributed to some combination of student responses and data collection practices. We suggest researchers refrain from dropping “race unknown” from their studies as doing so may bias findings for the other ethnoracial categories, especially when comparing rates of student enrollment across institutional types.

**Keywords:** descriptive analysis; higher education; identity; race



Kelly Rosinger & Qiong Zhu  
Penn State University

**Table A1**  
**Studies Using IPEDS Race/Ethnicity Data for Outcome Variables**

Author(s)	Year of Publication	Year of IPEDS Data	Race-Related Outcome(s)	Racial Categories Included
Griffith	2011	1987–2005	Enrollment shares by race/ethnicity	Black, Hispanic, Asian
Koledoye, Joyner, & Slate	2011	2008–2009	STEM baccalaureate attainment by race/ethnicity	Black and Hispanic
Fryar & Hawes	2011	1992–2000	Enrollment of minority	Black, Latino
Hinrichs	2012	1986, 1988, 1990–2003	Enrollment shares by race/ethnicity	Asian, Black, Hispanic, Native American, White
Backes <sup>a</sup>	2012	1990–2009	Enrollment shares by race/ethnicity; graduate shares by race/ethnicity	White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, race unknown
Byrd, Dika, & Ramlal <sup>a</sup>	2013	2005, 2009	STEM degree completions by race/ethnicity	White, Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino, race/ethnicity unknown, noncitizens
Hinrichs	2014	2002–2009	Graduation rate by race/ethnicity	White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, overall
Belasco, Rosinger, & Hearn	2015	1992–2010	Enrollment share of underrepresented racial minority	African American, Hispanic, Native American
Zhang, Hu, & Sensenig	2015	2000–2014	Enrollment by race/ethnicity	White, non-White
Rankin, Scott, & Kim	2015	2002, 2006–2012	Degree completions by race/ethnicity	White, Black, Hispanic
Jaquette, Curs, & Posselt	2016	2002/03–2012/13	Enrollment share of underrepresented racial minority	Black, Hispanic, Native American or Alaskan Native, multirace
Hill <sup>a</sup>	2017	1998–2009	Enrollment shares by race/ethnicity	Minority, nonminority, race unknown
Umbricht, Fernandez, & Ortagus	2017	2003–2012	Enrollment of minority	Not clear
Dache-Gerbino	2017	2010	Enrollment shares by race/ethnicity	White, Black, Latina/o
Gándara & Rutherford	2017	1993–2004	Enrollment by race/ethnicity	Black, Hispanic
Baker, Klasik, & Reardon	2018	1986–2014	Enrollment selectivity gaps	Black-White gap, Hispanic-White gap
Soliz	2018	2001–2012	Enrollment by race/ethnicity	Black, Hispanic
Allen & Wolniak	2018	1998/99–2011/12	Diversity index	American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic, White, and other (two or more races, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and nonresident alien)
Kelchen	2018	2004/05–2015/16	Enrollment of underrepresented racial minority	African American, Hispanic, Native American, and multiracial
Fountain	2019	2000–2014	Enrollment by race/ethnicity	Black, Hispanic, White, Asian

<sup>a</sup>Studies that explicitly included the “race unknown” category in the analyses.



Is “Race Unknown” error?

i.e is it evenly/randomly distributed across institutional type?



Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)



28-year panel of 4,401 institutions



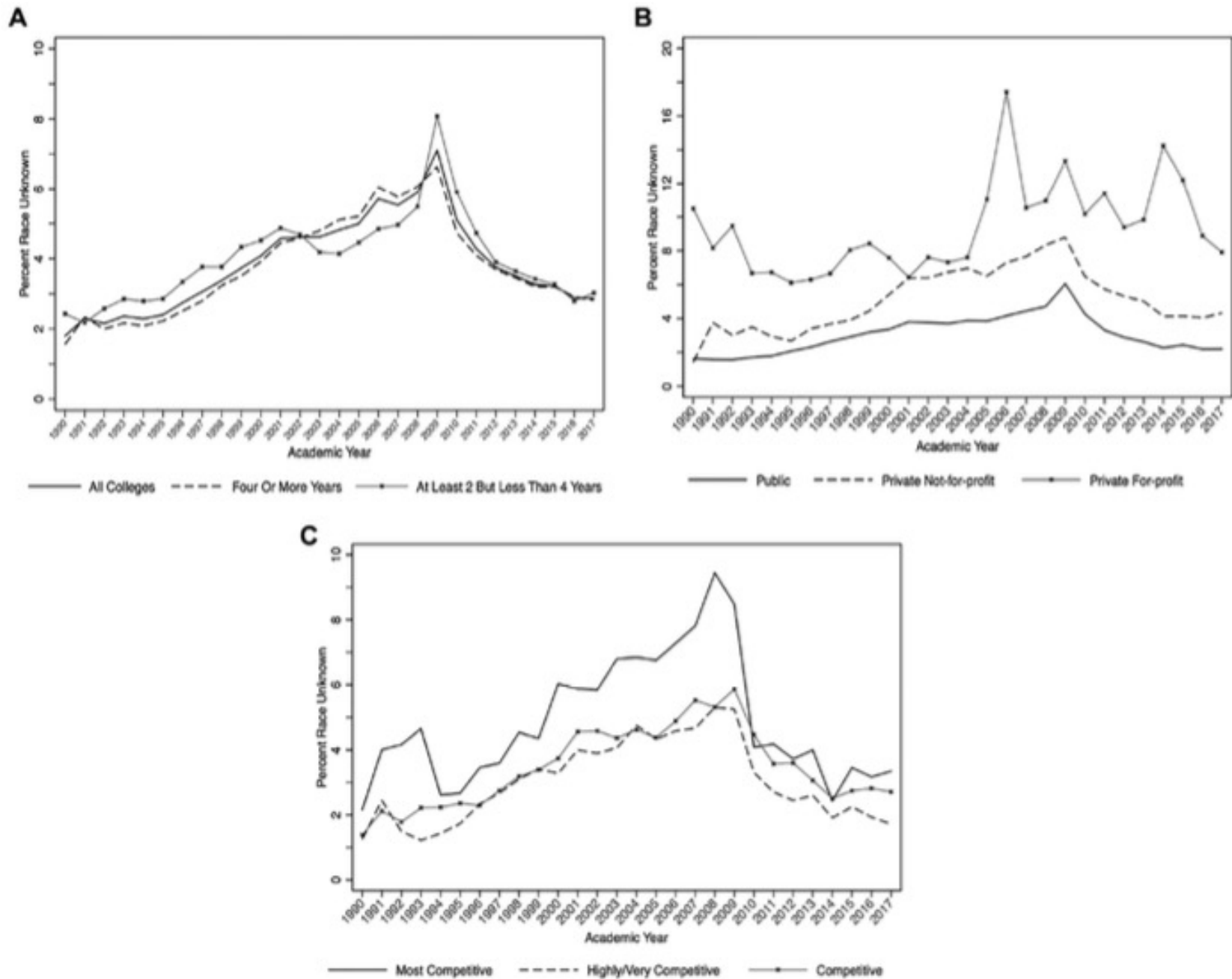
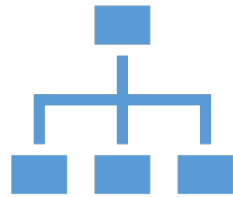


FIGURE 1. *Percentage race unknown enrollment by type of institution.*  
*Note.* All figures reflect full-time, first-time enrollment.

# What drives Race Unknown?



Organizational factors



Student factors

# Organizational side factors

- For-profit and non-competitive higher education
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- Changes over time in how race is collected
  - 2010 “two or more races” introduced
    - Never more than 2-3% so does not account for the highest levels of race unknown
  - Wording of the item changed over time
    - Common App
      - 2008 “If you wish to be identified with an ethnic group, please check all that apply”
      - 2010 “Please indicate how you identify yourself. (Select one or more)”

# Student side factors

- Selective higher education (and T14 law schools)
  - High stakes admissions process
  - Reluctance may be related to the perception that some groups are favored
    - No peer-reviewed studies, journalistic and non-peer reviewed sources



# Recommendations

For researchers:

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- No. Do not treat it as an analytical racial group
  - Think about this group as some combination of self-interested individuals and organizations reacting to incentives
- Acknowledge “race unknown” in your work: Inequalities in higher education may be way worse than our data show us

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- Collect data in less high stakes moments (selective)
- Examine incentives
  - 140 universities over the period reported 100% race unknown
- Consider federal mandate on the collection of race/ethnicity in higher education

Pause for questions...



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# IPEDS reporting Category: “Two or More” Races



Ashley Patterson & Leandra Cate  
Penn State University



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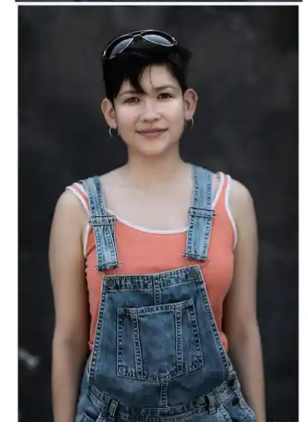
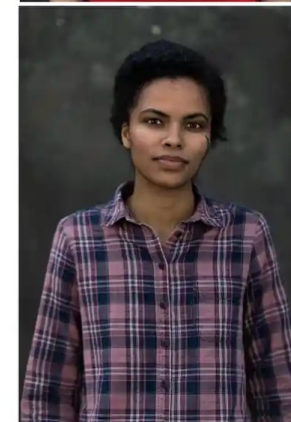
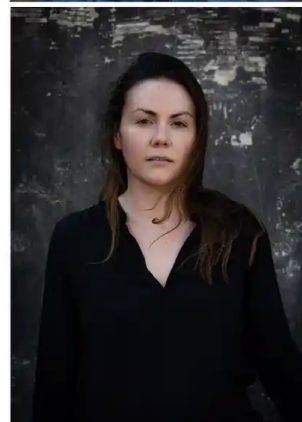
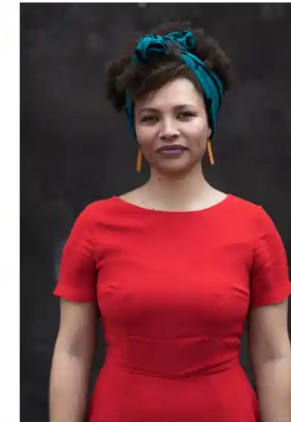
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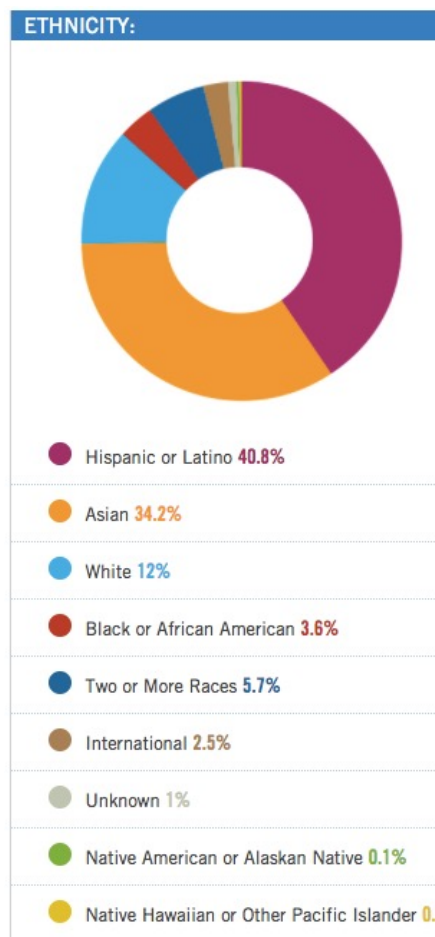


# Background

- Currently 7% of the US population
- 20% by 2050
- Politically mobilized in the 1990s



# How do universities make meaning of the IPEDS reporting category for “two or more races”?



# Research Design

IPEDS: Carnegie Classifications:

Research Highest, Higher, moderate  
377 institutions

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# Research Design

IPEDS: Carnegie Classifications:

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- “[Name of university] race admissions statistics”
- Inclusion of sites 0-3 clicks in
  - Institutional Research websites had some of the most interesting patterns

# Themes, coding and re-coding

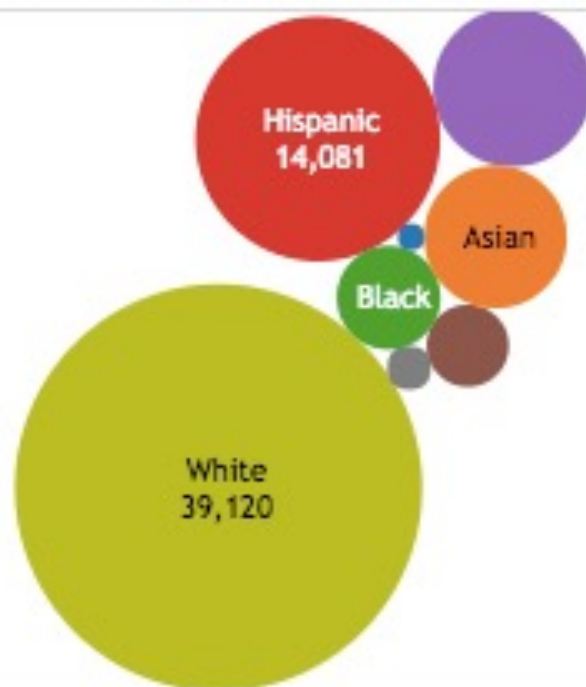
- Start with the standard 8 categories from OMB and wrote out narrative descriptions about how the representation differed.
- We analyzed these descriptions until broad themes emerged
- Created codes from the themes
- And re-coded iteratively

Race/Ethnicity	Percentage
African American	5.8%
Asian American	5.9%
Hispanic/Latino	6.2%
International	8.6%
Native American/Alaskan Native	less than 0.1%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	less than 0.1%
White	68.4%
Multiple Races	2.6%
Unknown	2.1%





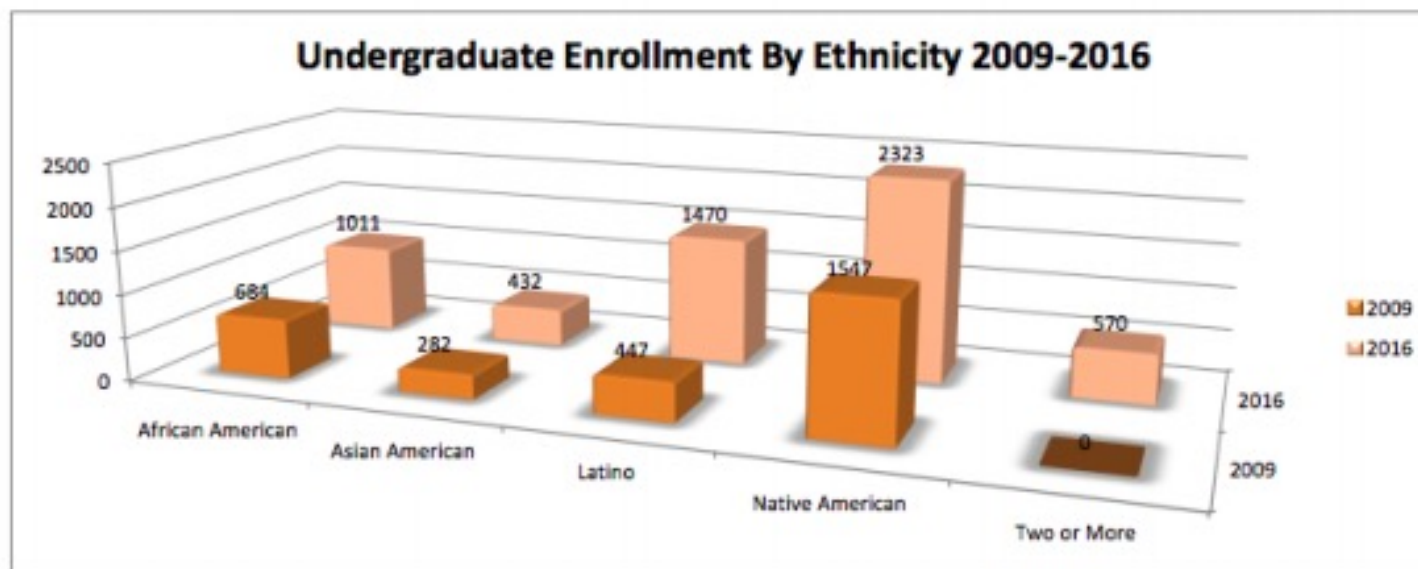
## Ethnicity Breakdown for Fall 2017



### Ethnicity

- |   |  |
|---|--|
|  American Indian |  Multi-racial excluding Black |
|  Asian           |  Unknown/Not Reported         |
|  Black           |  White                        |
|  Hispanic        |  |
|  International   |  |





	FALL 2009	FALL 2016	CHANGE	%CHANGE
African American	684 (23.1%)	1011 (17.4%)	<b>+327</b>	<b>48%</b>
Asian American*	282 (9.5%)	432 (7.4%)	<b>+150</b>	<b>53%</b>
Latino/Hispanic	447 (15.1%)	1470 (25.3%)	<b>+1023</b>	<b>229%</b>
Native American**	1547 (52.3%)	2323 (40.0%)	<b>+776</b>	<b>50%</b>
Two or More Races	---***	570 (9.9%)	<b>+570</b>	---
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2960 (100%)</b>	<b>5806 (100%)</b>	<b>+2846</b>	<b>96%</b>

Source: Compiled from data provided by OSU IRIM from 3 September 2009 through 11 November 2016.

\*Asian American category includes Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders

\*\*Includes biracial students identified as Native American and White

\*\*\*Data for this category were not readily identifiable until 2010

ETHNICITY	%
American Indian or Alaska Native	2%
Asian	21%
Black or African-American	10%
Hispanic of any race	11%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	1%
White	71%
Race/ethnicity unknown	2%

*\*Students self-reporting two or more races are counted once in each race/ethnicity category.*



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A yellow bracket groups the percentages for American Indian or Alaska Native (2%), Asian (21%), Black or African-American (10%), Hispanic of any race (11%), Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (1%), and White (71%). A blue box next to the bracket contains the value 118%.

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1000+ undergraduates come from all 50 states and more than 75 countries around the world.

International students can find support along the way from the university's **International Office**, which guides both students and their families through federal regulations, institutional guidelines and the adjustment to living in the United States.

Students from

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## Class of 2021:

- Hispanic or Latino: 12%
- American Indian or Alaska Native: 1%
- Asian American: 19%
- Black or African American: 10%
- White: 48%
- International: 10%
- Pell Grant recipients: 19%
- First-generation college students: 10%



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# Findings

- No consensus around how to report/present “two or more races”
  - Race is socially constructed and fluid

## Takeaways across the two papers...

All social data, but race data in particular, is socially constructed





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All social data, but race data in particular, is socially constructed

Race data reflects ongoing processes between individuals, organizations and contexts

Thank you!

karly@psu.edu

@karlysarita

The Pennsylvania State University  
400 Rackley Building  
University Park, PA 16802-3201  
Phone: (814) 865-6346  
Fax: (814) 865-3638



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# BONUS MATERIAL...

IF YOU WANT A DEEPER EXPLANATION OF HOW RACE IS SOCIALLY  
CONSTRUCTED AND FLUID...

# Race is...

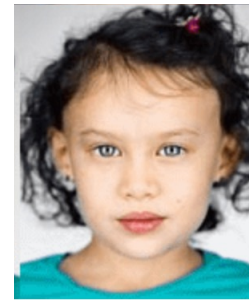
## Socially constructed:

- Race in the Americas dates back to The Barbados Slave Code of 1661
  - “Negro” and “Masters/Christians”
  - In early 1700s, “white” entered law to restrict voting
- Because it is socially constructed, categories shift based on:
  - Era (what work do these categories need to do?)
  - Geography
  - Setting

# Race is...

## Fluid

- No one "true" race
  - Racialization
    - experiences with schools and criminal justice system (Penner and Saperstein)
- Dominican American immigrant
- "Indio" → Latino → Black
- Mixed race kids → single race adults (Pew, 2015)



# Final thoughts...

”Race, as a category is meaningful because it shapes how people are treated and the opportunities to which they have access, rather than a characteristic that individuals carry with them into educational contexts.”

John B. Diamond, 2018

Chapter 14. Race and White Supremacy in the Sociology of Education: Shifting the Intellectual Gaze

