Finnish North Americans today by statistics

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Statistics on the population of foreign origin living in North America are based on the Censuses of the United States and Canada. Before the 1980s, the Censuses of both countries distinguished the population of foreign origin by their own or their parent's place of birth. This made it possible to track ethnic groups for two generations. The question on parental birthplace provided data only for people with one or both parents born outside the United States. The rest of the population was classed as natives of native parentage, not further distinguishable on the basis of their ethnicity.

In the 1980 US Census, the question on birthplace was dropped and replaced with a new question on "ancestry" making it possible to connect people to ethnic groups in the third generation and beyond (Brittingham & de la Cruz 2004). In Canada a similar change was made in the 1986 Census.

Shifting identities

Ancestry is a broad concept that can mean different things to different people; it can be described alternately as where their ancestors are from, where they or their parents originated, or simply how they see themselves ethnically. Some people may have one distinct ancestry, while others are descendants of several ancestry groups, and still others may know only that their ancestors were from a particular region of the world or may not know their ethnic origins at all.

Because of intermarriage and distance from their immigrant roots, people increasingly have multiple ethnic identities to choose from in defining their ancestry. How they choose to characterize themselves may depend on variables such as time and place, or even the power of suggestion (Yin 2001).

Statistical figures on ancestry must be interpreted with caution because of the difficulty of answering a question on ancestry, and because of the methodology used to gather the data. There is no guarantee that a person who chooses "American" as an answer to a question on ethnicity won't make an entirely different choice on another survey. (Yin 2001)

Ancestry is variable, it changes. People have multiple identities, and therefore it becomes difficult to pin down a person's origin or origins. A person can say he's an American, but when he visits his Finnish-American grandparents, he'll say he's Finnish. And what's true for young adults may change as they get older and want to share their family heritage with their children.

US Census 2000

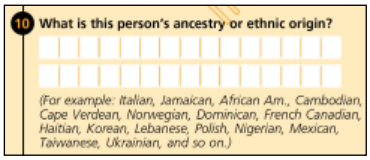
The US Census Bureau defines ancestry as a person's ethnic origin, heritage, descent, or "roots," which may reflect their place of birth, place of birth of parents or ancestors, and ethnic identities that have evolved within the United States (Brittingham & de la Cruz 2004).

In 2000, 58 percent of the US population specified only one ancestry, 22 percent provided two ancestries and one percent reported an unclassifiable ancestry such as "mixture" or "adopted". Another 19 percent did not report any ancestry at all, a substantial increase from 1990, when 10 percent of the population left the ancestry question blank (Brittingham & de la Cruz 2004).

The highest growth rates between 1990 and 2000 occurred in groups identified by a general heritage rather than a particular country of ancestry. For example, the number of people who reported Latin American, African, or European all more than quadrupled. The number who reported American

and no other ancestry increased from 12.4 million in 1990 to 20.2 million in 2000. (Brittingham & de la Cruz 2004).

The question "What is your ancestry" on the census form traditionally lists more than a dozen examples. It is a well known fact that these examples skew the response. In 2000, American or United States was not an example, but the category may have benefited from the omission of older European ancestry groups, such as German and English, from the list of examples provided that year (Yin 2001).



The question on ancestry from US Census 2000

Groups listed in the example in a given year often experience an increase in numbers claiming that ancestry. In 1990, for instance, the number of Germans appeared to leap from 49 million in 1980 to 58 million, when it was included in the example, only to fall again in 2000 to 46 million, when it was left out. Similarly, in 1980, the first year ancestry data was collected, English was included in the sample. Since then it has been omitted and the number claiming any English ancestry has dropped from 50 million in 1980 to 24.5 million in 2000. It's likely that many either migrated into the American category or simply didn't answer the question (Yin 2001).

One more example: For the first time, in the 2000 Census, a Scandinavian ancestry, Norwegian, was listed. As a result the number of Norwegian Americans increased from 3,869,395 in 1990 to 4,477,725 in 2000 (+15.7%) while in other "Nordic" groups it decreased (see Table 1). Noteworthy is also that in the supplementary censuses 2000 and 2001 the estimate of the people claiming Finnish ancestry was significantly higher than in the main census of 2000 (624,000 vs. 803,000/ 822,000).

The evidence suggests that there is no simple solution to the issue of self-identification. Part of the problem is that individuals are not consistent in how they identify their ethnicity. Most of this inconsistency arises from people who identify with more than one ethnic group in some way.

The number of Finnish North Americans

In the US Census 2000 the number of people claiming Finnish ancestry was 624,000. Of those 20,000 were born in Finland (including about 8,000 that had arrived since 1990, many staying in the US on

	1990		2000	
Ancestry	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
American	12,396,000	5.0	20,188,300	7.2
British	1,119,100	0.4	1,085,700	0.4
Danish	1,634,600	0.7	1,430,900	0.5
English	32,651,800	13.1	24,509,700	8.7
European	466,000	0.2	1,968,700	0.7
Finnish	658,900	0.3	623,600	0.2
German	57,947,200	23.3	42,841,600	15.2
Irish	38,735,500	15.6	30,524,800	10.8
Northern European	66,000	-	163,600	0.1
Norwegian	3,869,400	1.6	4,477,700	1.6
Scandinavian	678,900	0.3	425,100	0.2
Swedish	4,680,900	1.9	3,998,300	1.4
United States	643,600	0.3	404,300	0.1
Total population	248,709,900	100.0	281,421,900	100.0

Table 1. Selected ancestries in the US Census 1990 and 2000 (http://www.census.gov)

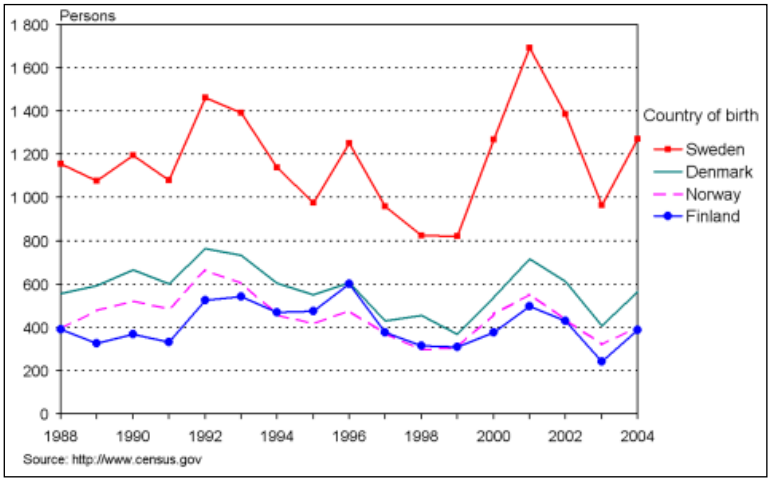


Figure 1. Nordic immigrants admitted in the United States in 1988–2004

a temporary basis). It is estimated that about 80,000 are second generation immigrants (first born in America). This means that over half a million third, fourth, fifth and even sixth generation Finnish-Americans recognize their Finnish roots at the census polls (as either the first or second ethnicity). In comparison, about ten million claimed Scandinavian ancestry, of which about 800,000 are still first and second generation (Westerberg 2004).

Forty percent of the respondents claimed a single ancestry (Finnish only). Of those claiming multiple (or dual) ancestry, half claimed Finnish first, and as many put it on the second place. For 100,000 the other ethnicity was Scandinavian.

The Census also asked "What language other than English is spoken at home?". In the year 2000 "Finnish" was the language given by 40,000 (over 6 percent of those claiming Finnish ancestry). 150,000 claimed Danish, Swedish or Norwegian language (only 1.5 percent of those claiming Scandinavian ancestry) (Westerberg 2004).

The ranking of the US states with most Finns in 2000 was as follows: Michigan 101,400, Minnesota 99,400, California 56,000, Washington 40,300, Wisconsin 36,000, Massachusetts 27,000, Florida 25,700, Oregon 21,400, Illinois 19,100, Ohio 18,000, and New York 16,800.

Currently about 400 persons a year from Finland are given permanent residence status (Green Card), mostly by being married to a US citizen (see Figure 1). At the same time, there are close to 10,000 Finnish non-immigrant visitors like students, trainees, exchange visitors, temporary workers and intracompany transferees admitted yearly. In addition, there are about 25,000 temporary visitors for business and 65,000 visitors for pleasure (US Census 1988–2004).

In the Census of Canada the question dealing with ethnic ancestry is practically similar to that used in the US Census. According to 2001 Canadian Census, about 115,000 claimed Finnish ancestry; of those 32,000 reported single ancestry and 83,000 multiple ancestries. Provinces with the highest number of "Finns" were Ontario 44,000, British Columbia 20,000, Alberta 10,500, Saskatchewan 3,000, Manitoba 2,600 and Quebec 1,500.

Sources

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