Measuring "Context" when Studying Racial Identity and Family Decisions among Mixed-Heritage People in the US

Carolyn Liebler (University of Minnesota)

Christopher Levesque (University of Minnesota)

Miri Song (University of Kent - UK)

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Abstract of 150 words or less

How does a person's race and ancestry responses link to their choice of spouse and the racial identification of their children? Does the answer to this question vary by context? Does it vary across different mixed-heritage groups? We focus here on comparing various measures of "context" and how each measure speaks to individuals' self-identification, spouse choice, and child identification. We use the race and ancestry questions within Census data from 1980, 1990, 2000, and the American Community Survey to focus on mixed heritage American Indian/White, Asian/White, and Black/White individuals. We start with "context" as the shared history and culture of contiguous areas and show variation patterns in responses by census division. We then show the same statistics based on a "context" measure that takes into account county population composition (e.g., race and ethnicity, living arrangements, % in poverty), population density, and county race history.

Overview and principle question

As interracial unions and multiracial people are becoming more ordinary in the US, how important are racial and ethnic backgrounds to people with mixed racial heritage and their families? Contemporary studies of race and ethnicity increasingly conceive of "race" as a fluid concept which has been historically and socially constructed and maintained. Many analysts now recognize that racial statistics cannot always provide us with a picture of how race is actually experienced in "real life" social interactions (Roth 2016; Campbell & Troyer 2007; Song 2003).

While 2.9% of the US population reported two or more races in the 2010 US census (Jones & Bullock 2012), the Pew Center (2015) found that 6.9% of the adult American population is "multiracial" when one also includes the racial backgrounds of parents and grandparents. We use "mixed racial heritage" or "mixed-heritage" to indicate the latter population – people with mixed-race background, regardless of how they racially identify. Lee and Bean (2004) predicted that one in five Americans could self-identify as multiracial by 2050.

Identities are fundamental to self-presentation and often drive other choices such as who to marry or how to racially socialize children. How important are ethnic and racial backgrounds to mixed-heritage people and how do they influence these relationships and family choices? While there has been significant growth in interracial marriage and the multiracial population, our knowledge about what happens *after* intermarriage, especially, when multiracial people become parents, is piecemeal. Investigating what happens when multiracial people partner, and become parents, is critical for expanding our theoretical understanding of the mixed-heritage population and how we conceive of its status within a racially stratified country. How people of mixed racial heritage identify themselves (and their children) has ramifications for the implementation of affirmative action and the allocation of political resources (DaCosta 2007; Nobles 2000), as well as population size and composition.

Thus far, while many studies have investigated the identifications of multiracial people, no studies in the US have examined their racial identifications, spousal choices, *and* their upbringing of their children.

We ask: ***How does a person's race and ancestry responses link to their choice of spouse and the racial identification of their children? Does the answer to this question vary by context? Does it vary across different mixed-heritage groups?***

In the broader study of which this paper is a part, we understand three intertwined aspects of the lives of mixed-heritage individuals from three distinct racial backgrounds using both qualitative interviews and quantitative analyses of census data. The current paper is an exploration of the idea of "context" in our primary research question – we are comparing and contrasting the kind of information we learn (about self-identification, spouse choice, and child-identification) depending on which version of "context" we use.

Prior research and our contribution

In the sections below, we highlight two ways in which our proposed research extends beyond existing literature to improve theoretical and empirical understanding of the social construction of race through families, as well as experiences and decisions of diverse people with mixed racial heritage. We integrate the study of several key questions about mixed-heritage people and we include three diverse groups of mixed-heritage people. As discussed in the methods section, we also expand the scope of our results by using both qualitative and quantitative data.

Contribution: Integration of questions about identity and race within families and over the life course

There is now a very substantial body of research (both quantitative and qualitative) about the

racial identities and experiences of mixed-heritage people in the US, going back several decades. But most of this research has not considered the life course of multiracial people – their coming of age as they come to identify in particular ways, their choices to date or marry people, and their experiences and decisions as they become parents. In this research, we bring together three areas of life that have been generally studied separately by sociologists.

Self-identity and identification: Given the significant population of adolescents and adults in the US who have mixed racial heritage, researchers have focused on how mixed-heritage people racially identify themselves (e.g., Liebler & Zacher 2016; Gullickson & Morning 2011). The 2015 Pew survey, 'Multiracial in America', was an important contribution to our knowledge about this population. In particular, it was the first large-scale survey of mixed-heritage people to investigate the racial ancestries of this population. Rather than relying solely upon a respondent's self-reported race, the Pew survey enumerated the mixed-heritage population on the basis of the reported ancestries of parents and grandparents – thus adding generational depth to our understanding of this population. Qualitative studies have shown how physical appearance, parental upbringing and experiences of racial marginalization and/or prejudice can shape their identities (see Rockquemore & Brunsma 2002; Song 2010; Funderburg 1994; Khanna 2011; Root 1992; Root 1996; Spickard 1989).

A growing body of sociological research shows that ethnic and racial identity development is fluid (Song 2003; Harris & Sim 2002; Burke & Kao 2010; Aspinall & Song 2013) and that people can vary in how they report their race over time, according to age, gender and context such as region, parental race, and how others see them (see Liebler et al. 2016, 2017; Lee & Bean 2010; Campbell & Troyer 2007; Davenport 2016; Khanna 2004; Tashiro 2002; Renn 2000; Doyle & Kao 2007). These studies show that, over time, some individuals can change their response from monoracial to multiracial, and then change their response from multiracial to monoracial. Not only may an individual's identifications differ according to context (Harris & Sim 2002; Kana'iaupuni & Liebler 2005; Liebler 2016), but self-identity

and self-identification may continue to evolve over the life course (Burke & Kao 2010). The belief that ethnic and racial identities are relatively stable once individuals have gone through adolescence is increasingly examined in qualitative (and quantitative) studies of mixed people and families (Song 2003).

Racial homogamy and exogamy in marriage: A number of studies focus on marriage partner choices (see Kalmijn 1998; Bean & Stevens 2003, ch. 8; Qian & Lichter 2007), often with a demographic focus. In general, most studies on partner choices have been presented separately from studies on identity and they treat the spouses' races as given rather than as a point of internal negotiation. Cross-group comparisons are more commonly offered in these analyses, but mixed methods are generally not employed and marriage partner choice is not linked to identity decisions.

According to the Pew Center (2017), while Hispanic and Asian Americans are more likely to intermarry than African Americans, fewer Asian newlyweds were intermarried in 2015 (29% of US newlyweds) than they were in 1980 (33%). According to the recent Pew survey (2015), when 'they do wed, mixed-race Americans are more likely than other adults to marry someone who also is multiracial' (9). But as mixed-heritage people choose spouses, it is not clear what constitutes endogamous or exogamous unions for such unions (Song 2015). Song's (2016) qualitative study of multiracial people's White and non-White spouses, and the implications of their spousal choices, is one of the few to explore the link between the identities and spousal choices of people of mixed racial heritage. A qualitative study of the marriage choices of Latino Americans by Jessica Vasquez-Tokos (2017) in the US has expanded our understanding of not only intermarriage, but also the growing importance of studying intra-marriage, which can vary across ethnic/national groupings and generation. A key finding is that intermarriage with Whites does not necessarily result in the 'whitening' of the Latino spouse.

Racial socialization and race response given for a child of mixed racial heritage: Another line of research investigates the reported race(s) of children of interracial marriage. Quantitative studies predict the way a child will be described by his or her parent (e.g., Xie & Goyette 1997; Saenz et al. 1995;

Bratter 2007; Brunsma 2005; Lichter & Qian 2018; Kana'iaupuni & Liebler 2005; Liebler 2004, 2010, 2016). While not explicitly stated, the racial identifications of these children is often treated as a proxy for their assumed racial socialization – though this is not empirically substantiated (Aspinall & Song 2013). We build on Song's (2017) research on how multiracial people in Britain identify and raise their children, and whether they wish to transmit their minority ancestries to them.

Our contribution: In sum, while we know a great deal about how multiracial people may identify, racially, and what this may signify, we know very little about how choosing a spouse, and becoming a parent, impacts the identities and cultural attachments and practices of mixed-heritage people – after all, finding a life partner and becoming a parent are major life transitions (Vasquez-Tokos 2017; Song 2017). This broader life course perspective, in which racial identification, choice of spouse, and the identification and socialization of children, are all examined in relation to each other, will extend our existing knowledge and theory of this heterogeneous population. Our focus on generational change in the mixed-heritage population opens up an important and under-studied area of social research. As a new cohort of mixed-heritage people become parents themselves, we break new ground by investigating whether and how they, along with their chosen partners, transmit particular culturally and racially informed perspectives and practices to their children.

Contribution: Comparing three mixed-heritage populations

Until recently, studies of mixed-heritage people have tended to focus on one specific mixed group, especially people with both White and Black ancestors (e.g., Khanna 2011; Rockquemore & Brunsma 2002; Rockquemore & Brunsma 2007). Despite the historical legacy of the 'one drop rule' of hypodescent, a growing proportion of Black/White mixed people in the US are now asserting multiracial identities (see Korgen 1998; Rockquemore & Brunsma 2002; Campbell & Troyer 2007; Bratter 2007; Gullickson & Morning 2011; Herman 2004; Roth 2005; DaCosta 2007).

In comparison with Black/White people in the US, we still know relatively little about the attitudes and experiences of other mixed-heritage people who have different histories, stereotypes, and socioeconomic profiles. For example, the 2015 Pew study found that while 'biracial adults with White and American Indian backgrounds' comprise half of the multiracial population in the US, they are least likely to consider themselves as multiracial. Mixed-heritage Asian/White and American Indian/White people are said to be characterized by flexible racial identities, especially in comparison with Black/White people (Lee & Bean 2007; Qian 2004), and they are regarded as tilting toward their White, as opposed to Asian and American Indian ancestries, respectively (Alba et al. 2017; Lee & Bean 2007; Lee & Bean 2010).

But there is also emerging evidence, that with generational change, some mixed-heritage people in areas with a population of coethnic or other minority individuals do not choose White partners (Gambol 2016). Furthermore, what happens when mixed-heritage people partner with Whites remains an empirically open question, as there is very little data on their parenting, social networks, and day-to-day lives. Even in the case of mixed-heritage people with White spouses, there is likely to be variation in their ethnic leanings and attachments; their White spouses may be committed to cultivating minority heritages and affiliations (Song 2017; Jiménez 2010; Vasquez-Tokos 2017). Experiences likely vary depending on the particular combination of heritages, and regional and local contexts will also shape these dynamics and practices (Holloway et al. 2012).

To understand broader social patterns, we move beyond the traditional focus on Black/White biracial individuals. In all aspects of our study, we focus on people with three types of mixed-heritage backgrounds: American Indian/White, Asian/White, and Black/White. American Indians, Asians, Blacks, and Whites have long-standing but markedly distinct histories in the US, with quite disparate socioeconomic characteristics. Interracial unions between Whites and American Indians and Whites and Blacks were not uncommon centuries ago, while most interracial Asian-White unions are more recent.

This creates group-level variation in personal connection to single-race ancestors, within-group discussions of what it means to be "mixed," and societal pressures to identify in one way versus another (Song 2017; Morning & Saperstein 2018).

Leading researchers have begun to examine the social and political implications of the growing numbers of Americans of mixed racial heritage, and they point to the expansion of Whiteness (and see Gallagher 2004; Twine & Gallagher 2008): 'Based on patterns of multiracial identification, Asians and Latinos may be the next in line to be white, with multiracial Asian-whites and Latino-whites at the head of the queue' (Lee & Bean 2007:579). We argue that this hypothesis about the expansion of Whiteness needs more empirical investigation, as the evidence is still relatively slender.

Our research will examine the empirical evidence for the purported differences in the ethnic attachments and leanings of Black/White people, as opposed to Asian/White and American Indian/White people. We would expect that some mixed-heritage people's attachments and practices are not easily characterized in relation to the binary of White or minority 'sides' (Song 2017). This research can contribute to a fuller and more nuanced understanding of the diversity of the mixed-heritage population in different parts of the US, and via in-depth interviews, we will explore the particular practices and concerns that specific mixed-heritage parents report in relation to their spouses and their children.

Research design, data sources, and analytic strategies

Prior studies about racial and ethnic identities and self-representation tend to adopt either a quantitative or qualitative design, each of which has its strengths and limitations. The study of race and ancestry using census data is complicated by the fact that these data cannot tell us anything about the salience of respondents' reported races and/or ancestries. Respondents with the same ethnic and racial ancestries can report these differently, and the ways in which mixed-heritage people racially identify

may not 'match' their parents' actual racial ancestries. We adopt a mixed-methods strategy to deepen and broaden the understanding of racial identities.

We draw on two high-quality data sources: US Census data from 1980 to 2016 and 75 in-depth interviews. Both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of our work are ambitious in size and scope, allowing a rich and multi-faceted understanding of how individuals of mixed racial heritage variously translate their identities into decisions that impact their entire families. In both analyses, we focus on people with non-Hispanic family heritage that is American Indian/White, Asian/White, or Black/White. In project development, analysis, and writing, we interweave the two forms of data to build a triangulated picture of how decisions in one arena of life impact decisions in another for individuals and at a national level.

Quantitative analyses of census data from 1980-2016

In the analyses proposed for PAA 2019, we plan to use both public-use and restricted-use census data to trace the decisions of three groups of mixed-heritage people across their own identity, marriage mate choice, and child racial identification. We leverage two questions to identify people of mixed racial heritage; the race question and one on ancestry. In order to identify a person with mixed racial heritage while allowing variation in race response, we use the ancestry question, which asks "What is this person's ancestry or ethnic origin?" and offers a fill-in-the-blank area. The Census Bureau coded the first two responses. This question was first offered in 1980 and continues today in the American Community Survey (also a Census Bureau product). We follow other researchers (e.g., Gullickson & Morning 2011; Liebler 2016) and code individuals' write-in ancestry responses into broad race categories (as possible).

We start by demonstrating variation in the ways that people of mixed racial heritage report mixed heritage – as one race and another ancestry or as two races (with variation in ancestry responses); an example of this is shown in Figure 1, below. Then, within each personal response pattern,

we focus on the married individuals of mixed racial heritage and show patterns in the race of their spouse. Finally, within each marriage pairing and among those who have coresident children, we show how the couple identifies their child (as monoracial, as one race and a different ancestry, or as multiracial). In all stages of the analysis, we attend to variation by mixed-heritage group, over time, and across location.

Measuring context version 1 -- Census Division: We plan two strategies for measuring geographic context where people of mixed racial heritage are living, marrying, and raising children. The first strategy is to use Census Division, which divides the US into nine contiguous divisions. This measure of context allows us to see how regional history relates to the processes under study. Populations of Asians, American Indians, and Blacks are more concentrated in some divisions than others, allowing us to compare decisions in each mixed-heritage group across places with different general histories.

Measuring context, version 2 – groups of similar counties: The second strategy is to characterize each county into one of a few categories (using principal components analysis then cluster analysis in SAS) based on the demographic, social, economic, and immigration characteristics of the county in that year, as well as information about the county's race-related history.[1] We have begun the work of characterizing each county-year from 1980 through 2010, allowing counties to change clusters if they change characteristics. This way of measuring geographic context will allow us to see identification, spouse, and child response patterns that coincide with such contextual factors as urbanicity, numerical

[1] We plan to add the following county-level measures to this analysis:

- Was any part of this county a reservation in 1880, 1930, or 2000? (3 separate measures)
- Was slavery legal in this county after 1850?
- Were there any race riots in this county in the 1960s or early 1970s?
- Was this county a common destination for the first wave of post-1965 Asian immigrants (based on 1970 census)
- Was this county part of Mexico at any point?
- How many "sundown towns" (whites only towns) were in that county?
- Ratio of non-Hispanic white per capita household income to the rest of the county residents' per capita household income (by decade, 1980-2010)
- Percent of all marriages that are between people with different race answers (only exact matches count as "homogamy") (by decade, 1980-2010)

dominance of Whites, or high levels of immigration. The different groups have different distributions across counties in these clusters (e.g., American Indian/Whites are more often rural than Asian/Whites). County-level geographic information is not available in public-use microdata but is available in restricted-use data.

Dense, restricted-use data: Liebler is a researcher with an approved project in the Minnesota Research Data Center (MnRDC; https://mnrdc.umn.edu/) to use dense (17% sample) restricted-use decennial census long form microdata from 1980, 1990, and 2000, and the dense (1.5% sample) American Community Survey (ACS) data from 2005 to 2016 for this project. The density in the RDC gives much higher case counts than the public-use versions of these same data sets. The restricted-use versions also have greater detail on race responses and, importantly, give more geographic detail. We are completing descriptive analyses with the public-use data (IPUMS.org; Ruggles et al. 2017) to shorten the time needed in the RDC and to accommodate RDC limits on the release of descriptive results. We will apply the geographic measures in the RDC to estimate multivariate models assessing whether living in a particular geographic context predicts a response distribution significantly different from the national response distribution. Because the RDC datasets are dense samples, even relatively rare response decisions, spouse race pairs, and child race responses will be able to be included.

Results

We offer Figure 1, below, as an example of the first stage of analysis, when context is not taken into account. The figure contains the race/ancestry responses for the three mixed-heritage groups at five times, giving an example of how census data can be used to understand varieties of racial self-representation. The image shows distinct patterns at the national level for the three groups. The rate of multiple-race reporting (the green categories) for people of American Indian/White heritage is quite low and stable over the 36-year period. For people of Asian/White heritage, reporting *both races* is modal

from 2000, and a declining proportion report White race with Asian ancestry (the yellow bars). Among Black/White people, a Black race (and White ancestry) response was very common before multiple-responses were allowed, but since 2000, the modal response has been *both* White and Black races. This is a striking departure from the historical, externally-imposed rule of hypodescent.

In Figure 2, we present the same results split out by Census Division – our first strategy for measuring context. This gives an opportunity to look for ways in which regional history relate to patterns of self-identification of mixed-heritage people from the three groups. Figure 2 illustrates that White race (with American Indian ancestry) responses have been particularly common among American Indian/White people in the south (Divisions 31 and 32). Multiple-race responses are especially common for American Indian/White people west of the Mississippi (22, 33, 41, 42). Among Asian/White people of mixed heritage, the dominant response is multiple race, particularly in the most recent period (2011-16) and in the Northeast (Divisions 11 and 12) and the West (41 and 42). White race (and Asian ancestry) responses are more common in the South (32 and 33) but are still far from modal. Among Black/White people in New England (11) and the West (41, 42), White race (with Black ancestry) responses were relatively common. Multiple-race Black/White responses were especially common – even modal – in the upper Midwest (21, 22) and the West (41, 42). Only in the South (31, 32, 33) do single-race Black responses approach modal.

Further plans

If accepted to PAA, we plan to do substantially more work on this project before the conference. Using Census Division, we will show not only the first stage of the analysis as we have done in Figure 2, but will also show geographic context patterns in who mixed-heritage people marry and how they identify the children of their marriages. Descriptive results are limited using RDC data, so we will use

public use data first, then develop a multivariate strategy to generate information using the dense but restricted data.

Also before PAA, we will finalize our work on developing our second measure of context. We will use measures of the county's contemporary sociodemographic, economic, population density, and living arrangement patterns, as well as measures of the county's past. For the sake of visual depiction, we will apply principle components analysis and then cluster analysis (as part of a single procedure in SAS) to summarize these measures into a small number of categories (3 to 6). This will allow us to present separate statistics for each category. Using the restricted data, we will use the measures as independent variables intended to predict the race/ancestry response of individuals of mixed racial heritage, predict their spouse choices contingent on their own response, and predict their child's reported race given the first two choices.

The results of this work will be important both practically (e.g., for population projections) and theoretically (to understand how race is socially constructed differently in different contexts).

Figure 1

Distribution of race/ancestry responses in the United States among people in three mixed heritage groups

	White and American Indian/Alaska Native						White and Asian						White and Black					
race	**White**	**W&AI**	**W&AI**	**W&AI**	**W&AI**	**AI**	**White**	**W&A**	**W&A**	**W&A**	**W&A**	**Asian**	**White**	**W&B**	**W&B**	**W&B**	**W&B**	**Black**
anc	*AI*	*none*	*White*	*W&AI*	*AI*	*White*	*Asian*	*none*	*White*	*W&A*	*Asian*	*White*	*Black*	*none*	*White*	*W&B*	*Black*	*White*
1980	95	0	0	0	0	5	68	0	0	0	0	32	5	0	0	0	0	95
1990	95	0	0	0	0	5	74	0	0	0	0	26	13	0	0	0	0	87
2000	78	3	4	6	4	3	30	8	10	21	24	7	12	26	15	5	3	39
2005-10	83	1	3	6	4	2	34	4	8	25	22	7	10	18	18	6	3	45
2011-16	79	2	4	8	3	3	23	8	13	35	16	5	8	26	17	7	2	39

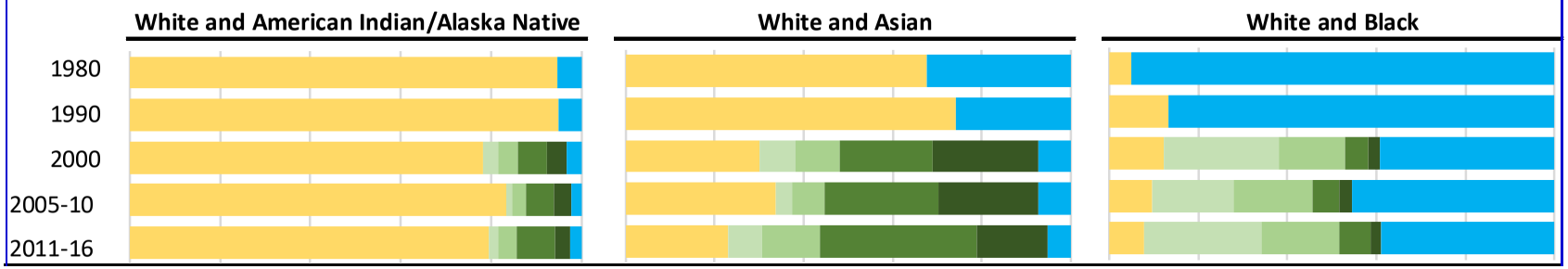
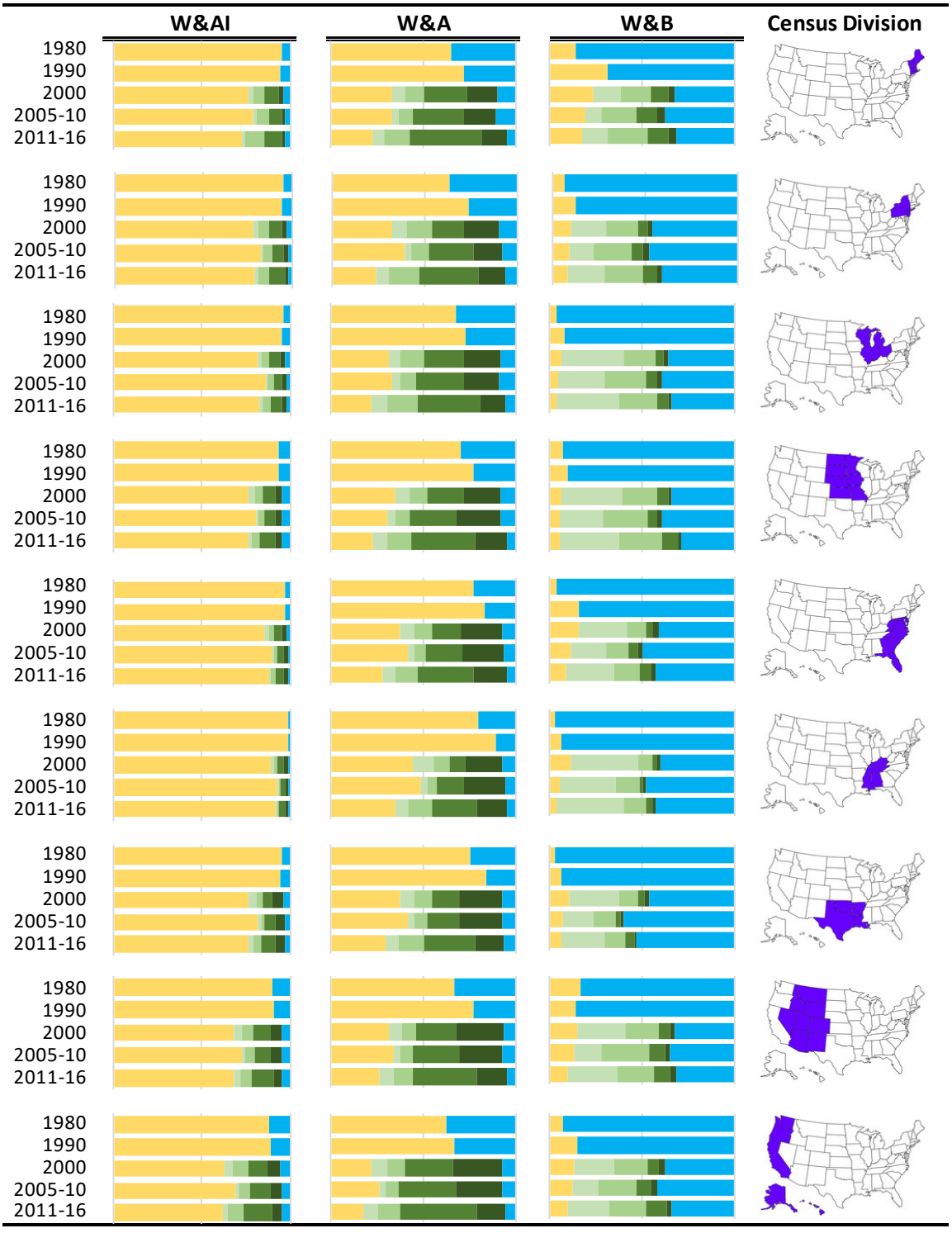


Figure 2:
Race and ancestry responses of mixed-heritage people, 1980-2016, by Census Division



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