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## Calculating Ethnicity Through the U.S. Census: The Basque Case

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## Calculating Ethnicity Through the U.S. Census: The Basque Case

William A. Douglass, PhD

### Defining “Basques”

Throughout recorded history, the status of Basques has remained ambiguous—at least as defined by outsiders. The Romans reported on a people known as the Vascones, inhabiting part of the present-day European homeland of the Basques—but only a part.<sup>1</sup> There were also other Iberian tribes sharing the ill-defined territory and it was a corridor for peoples entering Iberia from the north, like the Celts and the Romans, as well as the Muslims who came from the south. Segments of all of these outsiders settled in the Basque area and even ruled parts of it for a time, providing their own cultural overlays. During the Middle Ages, the Basque Country was a liminal zone between the Gothic and Frankish realms in southwestern Europe, at times denounced by both as a land of mountain barbarians who raided civilized lowlanders.<sup>2</sup> The only period in which the Basque Country as a whole was briefly under a single political jurisdiction was during a part of the reign of Navarrese King Sancho the Great (1004-1035).

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<sup>1</sup> Julio Caro Baroja, *The Basques* (Reno: Center for Basque Studies, 2009), 20-21.

<sup>2</sup> William A. Douglass and Jon Bilbao, *Amerikanuak: Basques in the New World* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1975), 44-45.

For the next half millennium, the various components of the Basque homeland were pulled in different directions by the emerging political orbits of adjacent territories that would eventuate in modern Spain and France, not to mention the more distant one of England. Navarra was an independent kingdom throughout the Middle Ages, but was conquered and incorporated into Castile in 1512 by the Aragonese King Fernando II—the surviving spouse of the marriage with Castilian Queen Isabella I that, in effect, created modern Spain.<sup>3</sup> While most of the former kingdom was now Spanish, Basse (or Lower) Navarre ended up within the French orbit.

Creation of the present French-Spanish border (1669) exacerbated the confusion, formalizing the political wedge through the Basque homeland into two components—northern Iparralde, or what is termed by some as the French Basque Country, and southern Hegoalde, its Spanish Basque counterpart (including most of Navarra). However, the Basques continued to enjoy a measure of political and economic autonomy as guaranteed by charters called *foruak* (*fors* in French and *fueros* in Spanish) or *lege zarrak* (“the old laws”). For patriotic Basque traditionalists, the charters were consensual and subject to revocation; for French and Spanish nationalists they were exemptions—privileges, as it were, accorded by the country’s center to its periphery that can be cancelled by the former, but not by the latter.

It should be noted that there is great disparity between Iparralde and Hegoalde. The former has only about a seventh of the territory with only approximately a quarter of a million inhabitants today. It constitutes an economic backwater—receiving more resources in subsidies from Paris than it sends in taxes. Conversely, Hegoalde is one of the most dynamic regions of Iberia. With the advent of the Industrial Revolution, its developing industries attracted migrants from throughout the Iberian Peninsula. Consequently, today’s approximately 2.5 million inhabitants of Hegoalde enjoy one of the highest per capita incomes in Spain.

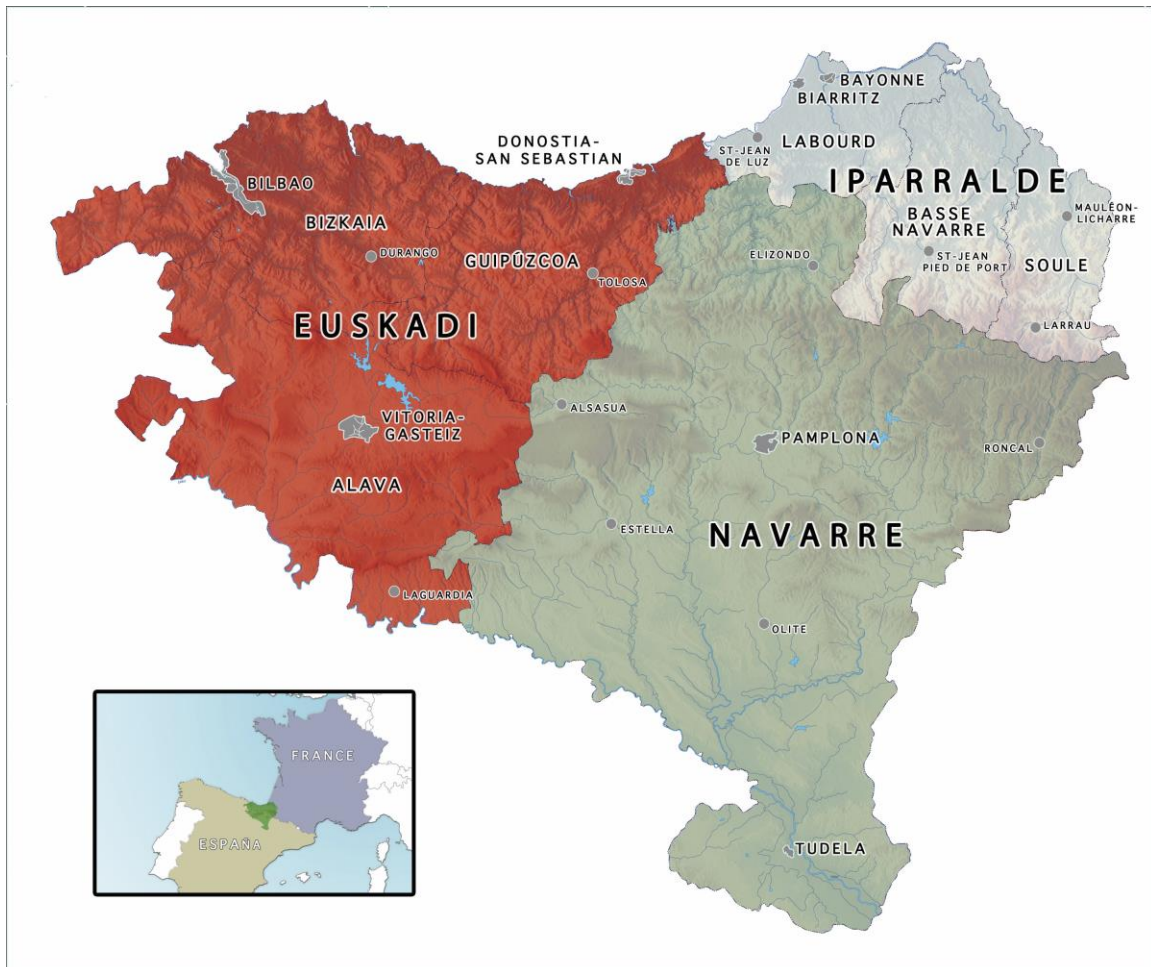
The *fors* were abolished by the Napoleonic government and the *fueros* were stricken by Madrid after Basque traditionalists lost all three Carlist Wars during the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the contestation of Basque identity continues at present, underscored by a

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<sup>3</sup> William A. Douglass, *Basque Explorers in the Pacific Ocean* (Reno: Center for Basque Studies, 2015), 64-67.

Basque nationalist movement launched more than a century ago. Its founder, Sabino de Arana y Goiri, invented the slogan *zazpiak bat*, “the seven are one,” referring to the three Basque territories of Iparralde and the four (including Navarra) of Hegoalde, to define Euskal Herria, or “the Basque Country.”

The modern Basque nationalist movement remains a significant force in Euskadi (the term for Hegoalde minus Navarra), considerably less so in Navarra, and practically not at all in Iparralde. However parsed, the political identity of the Basque people remains of the “nation without a state” variety. While at least some Basque nationalists (albeit not all) aspire to full independence and political sovereignty, at present Basques have neither a seat in the United Nations nor among the constituting powers of the European Union. It is therefore not uncommon to hear the questions “Who are the Basques? Are they French? Are they Spanish?”



[http://decouvrirlepaysbasque.com/wp-content/uploads/paysbasque\\_carte\\_large.jpg](http://decouvrirlepaysbasque.com/wp-content/uploads/paysbasque_carte_large.jpg)

Furthermore, counting “Basques,” whether in the homeland or in their many diasporas around the world, is an imprecise exercise that is at best fraught with definitional and computational issues. Neither France nor Spain elicits Basque ancestry in their census queries. It is commonly believed that the present population of Hegoalde is divided about evenly between persons of Basque descent and those without it. The current Wikipedia entry on Basques states that only a quarter of the population has both a Basque patronymic and matronymic. However, it is equally true that some descendants of non-Basque ancestors who migrated to Euskal Herria two or three generations ago now speak the Basque language and self-identify as Basques. There are some (though not all) within the ranks of Basque nationalism who accept and even welcome this cultural (rather than strictly biological) definition of Basque identity. Given that the largely agrarian economy of Iparralde has never attracted many outsiders, it may be assumed that the portion of the population with Basque genetic credentials is greater there than in Hegoalde. Still and all, the estimates remain nothing more than just that—estimates.

When it comes to calculating the number of Basques outside the homeland, the foregoing issues are exacerbated. Since at least the Middle Ages, Basques have been emigrating in substantial numbers. For the past half millennium, the destinations have encompassed several of the present-day countries of Latin America, including southern Brazil. There have been other emigratory movements to the United States, Canada, and even Australia. Today Basques are scattering throughout the European Union and further abroad to the Middle East and other parts of Africa and Asia (including China). In short, at some time or other there has been Basque emigration to every inhabited continent on the planet and many of its island nations as well. The majority of these migrations have left some sort of legacy behind.

Of late, then, it has become commonplace for some officials of the Basque Government (Eusko Jaurlaritza) to speak of the three million Basques in the homeland versus the diasporic six millions throughout the world. However, again if one consults Wikipedia, there is the claim that Chile alone has two and a half million persons of Basque descent (out of a national population of seventeen million)! The magnitude of the problem may be better appreciated if we consider that all scholars of Basque emigration history concur that

Argentina received the largest number of Basque emigrants over the centuries. Following the Chilean approach would place the number of diasporic Basques somewhere in the tens of millions. Yet it is legitimate to question whether the Cuban descendant of a single Basque conquistador, five centuries removed from her ancestor and with neither knowledge of--nor feeling for--her Basque heritage, is in fact a hyphenated Basque?

So, how do we calculate and count the Basque-Americans of the United States. The short answer is that we did not—at least not until the last two decades of the twentieth century.

### **Configuring a New American Census Schedule**

For students of American ethnicity, the 1980 U.S. census was a watershed document. For the first time, the Bureau of the Census decided to develop the so-called “long form” of the census, to be applied to one in six households, allowing respondents to specify their ancestral background. Previous censuses had limited treatment of such diversity to the birthplace, i.e. “national origin” of “foreign-born” respondents. Anyone born in the United States was American by definition, although there was separate reporting of “race,” i.e. whites, blacks, Hispanics, Asians and Native Americans. Furthermore, “national origin” referred to internationally recognized states rather than to culturally distinct “nations” within them. Consequently, even European-born “Basques” were not counted at all as such, but as either “French” or “Spanish.” A Basque from Havana was “Cuban,” one from Manila “Filipino,” etc. In short, prior to 1980, for the student of Basque immigration in the United States, the U.S. census was all but useless.

Enter the significant change introduced in 1980. For the first time information was elicited regarding the ancestry of persons irrespective of their birthplace. Householders responding to the long form were asked to specify, “What is this person’s ancestry?” and as an illustration:

For example: Afro-Amer., English, French, German, Honduran, Hungarian, Irish, Italian, Jamaican, Korean, Lebanese, Mexican, Nigerian, Polish, Ukrainian, Venezuelan, etc.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Twenty Censuses: Population and Housing Questions, 1790-1980*. Bureau of the Census, U.S. Department of Commerce, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979), 82.

So, with the exception of “Afro-American” and (at the time) “Ukrainian,” the list of suggestions still parsed the world by established countries. Critiquing this approach, M. Mark Stolarik, executive director of the Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies, wrote in a letter to the director of the Bureau of the Census:

The question the Census Bureau *should* have asked is the following: “What is your ethnic heritage?” As an illustration your staff might have written “For example, Afro-Amer., Appalachian, Basque, Chinese, English, French-Canadian, German, Gypsy, Hutterite, Jewish, Mormon, Norwegian, Puerto Rican, Scotch-Irish, etc.

The illustration would have made it clear that one’s ethnicity is *not* necessarily tied to the country of one’s ancestors. Ethnicity *may* arise from country of origin; it *may* be tied to language. But it can also arise from one’s religion (Jews, Hutterites, Mormons); it can arise from the region one grows up in (Appalachian); or it can result from one’s status as an outcast people (Gypsy). The point is that ethnicity is much more complicated than simply the country of origin of one’s ancestors.<sup>5</sup>

In response to such criticism, in the 1990 census the illustration was modified to read:

For example: German, Italian, Afro-Amer., Croatian, Cape Verdean, Dominican, Ecuadorian, Haitian, Cajun, French Canadian, Jamaican, Korean, Lebanese, Mexican, Nigerian, Irish, Polish, Slovak, Taiwanese, Thai, Ukrainian, etc.<sup>6</sup>

Clearly, this example, while still ignoring regional (e.g. “Appalachian”) and religious (e.g. “Mormon”) configuration of ancestry, moves away from “nationality.” Gone are such major categories in the 1980 prompt as “English” and “French,” though not “German,” “Italian,” and “Irish.” No longer do the examples flow in strict alphabetical order. The persistence of the nationality bias is still evident in that 14 of the 21 examples refer to the nationalities of countries with seats in the United Nations in 1990. It might be further noted that there is some redundancy in that question 4 elicits race, question 7 seeks to profile persons of Spanish/Hispanic origin separately, and question 8 asks the country of birth of the foreign-born.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> M. Mark Stolarik, “Director’s Corner: The Not-So-Accurate 1980 Census,” *New Dimensions* (Spring, 1984), 5.

<sup>6</sup> *Measuring America: The Decennial Censuses from 1790-1990*. Bureau of the Census. U.S. Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration. (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2002), 92.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 91. Question 4 encourages the respondent to check the appropriate box rather than to specify a different choice. The fixed boxes form two sections. The first includes “white,” “Black or Negro,” “Eskimo,” “Aleut” and “Indian (Amer.)”, in which latter case the form requests that “tribe” be specified. The second section regards “Asian or Pacific Islander (API) peoples. Those specified with their corresponding box are “Chinese,” “Filipino,” “Hawaiian,” “Korean,” “Vietnamese,” “Japanese,” “Asian Indian,” “Samoan,” “Guamanian,” as well as “Other API” offering the respondent the opportunity to fill in a blank.

While critiquing the foregoing nomenclature may strike some as scholastic hairsplitting, in fact the influence of such categorical designations and shifts upon outcome can be profound. Recently, James P. Allen analyzed the “For example” factor upon the responses and concluded,

Examples listed under the ancestry question have occasionally had powerful effects on ethnic group numbers. For example, over 49 million people reported an English ancestry in 1980 when “English” was shown beneath that question as illustrative of ancestry. In 1990, “English” was no longer listed, and only 33 million Americans reported English ancestry. Similarly, in 1980, when “French” was third on the list of ancestry examples, 934,000 people in Louisiana claimed it while only about 7,700 people in that state reported an Acadian or Cajun ancestry. In 1990, however, “Cajun” replaced “French” in the list of illustrative ancestries, prompting some 432,000 Louisiana people to claim Cajun ancestry, with only 550,000 still reporting French.<sup>8</sup>

In the 2000 census, the illustration to question 10 that now asked “What is this person’s ancestry or ethnic ancestry?” (rather than “ancestry” alone) was:

For example, Italian, Jamaican, African Am., Cambodian, Cape Verdean, Norwegian, Dominican, French Canadian, Haitian, Korean, Lebanese, Polish, Nigerian, Mexican, Taiwanese, Ukrainian, and so on.<sup>9</sup>

No longer were respondents prompted with *either* a “French” or a “Cajun” example. As a consequence (surprise!), only 44,960 Louisianans claimed Cajun ancestry/ethnicity while 545,429 self-identified as “French.”<sup>10</sup>

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Hispanics, no doubt in recognition of both their complexity and importance within American life, receive separate treatment. Question 7 asks “Is this person of Spanish/Hispanic origin?” (In the 2000 census the query was broadened to “Spanish/Hispanic/Latino”). If the response was not “no,” then the possibilities became:

--yes, Mexican, Mexican-Am., Chicano

--yes, Puerto Rican

--yes, Cuban

--yes, other Spanish/Hispanic. For example, Argentinian, Columbian, Dominican, Nicaraguan, Salvadoran, Spaniard and so on. \_\_\_\_\_. Note here that the list in the illustration is alphabetized and there is redundancy regarding “Dominican” (and the category “Mexican”) with respect to the specific examples given as possible responses for ancestry in question 13.

<sup>8</sup> James P. Allen, “Measuring Ethnic Trends with Recent U.S. Census Data: Some Cautionary Notes,” *The Immigration and Ethnic History Newsletter* (November, 2001), 8.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census 2002 Summary File 3, Matrices PCT15 and PCT 18, Ancestry Code List (PDF 35 KB), “Louisiana.”

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census 2002 Summary File 3, Matrices PCT15 and PCT 18, Ancestry Code List (PDF 35 KB), “Louisiana.”



There is also the phenomenon of the vanishing English. If removal of “English” in 1990 from the example illustrating the ancestry question seemed at least partly responsible for their decline from 49 to 33 million, in the 2000 census (and in light of the continued absence of an Anglo prompt) only 19 million reported English ancestry.<sup>11</sup>

“Basque” was not included in the “For example” illustration of the ancestry query in any of the four censuses under scrutiny. This is not to say, however, that that particular ethnic identity was precluded. Indeed, in one sense it was privileged—and not by accident. During the preparations for the 1980 census, as coordinator of the Basque Studies Program of the University of Nevada System, in 1979 I was contacted by Edward W. Fernandez of the U.S. Census Bureau. He was charged with sorting out the varieties of identity encompassed within the Hispanic world. He was having difficulty with Basques, since part of the Basque-American, foreign-born population had previously been counted as “Spanish” nationals, while others were in the “French” nationality category. He was leaning towards removing Basques from the Hispanic (and French) worlds altogether by establishing “Basque” as an accepted response in its own right to the ancestry question.

We discussed the internal distinctions within Basque identity (Bizkaian, Navarrese, Souletin, etc.). I then advocated separate treatment of them, but was told that such parsing was simply out of the question. Each internal distinction within the census supposed enormous complication (and cost) when it came to collecting and computing the data and reporting the results.

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<sup>11</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census 2000. Ancestry First Reported-Universe Total Population. PCT024.

It might be noted that, in the 2000 census, 58.1 percent of respondents specified a single ancestry, 22 percent listed multiple ancestry (of which only the first two were coded and counted, and 19.9 percent either failed to report or gave an “unclassified” ancestry. Given the coding and counting of two identities for those reporting multiple ancestry, 281,421,906 Americans reported 287,304,886 ancestries. Of these, 29.1 percent fell outside the classifications adopted by the Census Bureau for reporting the results. America’s ethnic diversity is far from captured by the ancestry exercise (question 10) if taken in isolation. Asians and Pacific Islanders are accounted for under the category of “race” (question 6) and Hispanics are accorded their own treatment in question 5. African Americans are counted by “race,” while sub-Saharan African identities are in “ancestry.”

Contrary to Stolarik’s earlier appeal, religious affiliation remains excluded as a basis for determining ancestry. “Jewishness” is therefore not accorded ethnic status. One could, however, claim Israeli descent, and 106,839 persons did so. They are clearly persons with links to the modern state of Israel (as are the 72,112 Palestinians counted under the “Arab” sub-category), rather than American Jews claiming descent from a biblical land. Indeed, the census remains particularly inept at profiling America’s Jewish community.

At that point, I argued as forcefully as I could that the census should at least distinguish between French and Spanish Basques. My interlocutor was skeptical, but asked me to provide him with names of individuals and organizations within the Basque-American community that he might contact for independent verification of my (obviously self-interested) scholarly opinion.

I was pleasantly surprised by the outcome. The discerning reader of *Ancestry of the Population by State: 1980*<sup>12</sup> will note that, not only are Basques included among the 50 European categories, they are further subdivided into “Basque, French,” “Basque, Spanish,” and “Basque, n.e.c.” (or “not elsewhere classified” and referring to the person who self-identified simply as “Basque”). Only two other European groups, the Cypriots and the Portuguese, received such special treatment. Consequently, numbering in the millions in the United States, “Sicilians” are treated in the 1980 U.S. census as “Italians.” In short, at a stroke the census had gone from being the bluntest of tools to a surgical knife for the scholar engaged in the study of Basque-Americans.



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<sup>12</sup> *Ancestry of the Population by State: 1980*. Bureau of the Census, U. S. Department of Commerce (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983).

### Understanding Basque Immigration in the United States<sup>13</sup>

If we ignore the remote and modest Basque presence within Spain's exploration and colonization of present-day Florida, Louisiana, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California, the latter's gold rush of the mid-nineteenth century is the historical baseline for Basque immigration in the United States. Basques from France and Spain, as well as persons of Basque descent immigrated into or born in any one of several Latin American countries, were an ethnic contingent within the ranks of the gold-seeking Argonauts. Several turned almost immediately (late 1850s) to livestock raising (particularly sheep husbandry)<sup>14</sup> on the vast open ranges of southern California and eventually in the Central Valley (1870s). From their foothold, Basque transient or nomadic sheep outfits<sup>15</sup> spread first to the Great Basin (1870s and 1880s) and then beyond.

French Basques settled primarily in California, where their ethnic roots reached back to the days of the substantial French contingent within the ranks of the gold-seeking Argonauts of the mid-nineteenth century. From there, French Basques dispersed to Nevada, Arizona, Wyoming and Montana. The pronounced Bizkaian Basque community, concentrated in northern Nevada and southern Idaho, resulted from a separate migratory stream of intending sheepmen that entered the region beginning in the last decade of the nineteenth century.

By 1900, then, Basques were the desired and near ubiquitous sheepherders throughout the American West on Basque and non-Basque sheep ranches alike, and there were literally hundreds of Basque "tramp" operators who competed with settled livestockmen for pasturage on public lands that were theoretically available to anyone on a first come basis.

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<sup>13</sup> For fuller treatment of the history of Basque immigration in the United States *cf* Douglass and Bilbao, *Amerikanuak* . . . , chapters five and six.

<sup>14</sup> Contrary to popular belief, the Basque livestockmen of southern California were applying skills acquired as the sheepmen of the expanding agricultural frontier of the pampas of Argentina and Uruguay rather than Pyrenean practices.

<sup>15</sup> Reference is to the operation that consisted of a man, a dog, a pack animal and about 1000 ewes, but lacking a home base. The itinerant outfit practiced transhumance exclusively upon the public lands, moving between the high-country summer ranges and the lower deserts during the colder months. The trek might traverse hundreds of miles during the course of the year. Any herder was a potential itinerant operator once he had identified suitable range. He might take all or part of his wages in ewes, run them alongside those of his employer and then eventually hive off to establish an independent operation.

The reality was somewhat more complicated, since the settled ranchers, in the main Anglo-Americans, claimed the public range adjacent to their private holdings and then harassed the itinerants with tactics ranging from outright violence to special interest legislation. Most of the latter, enacted at the county and state levels, and which sought to curtail access to the federal range, was subsequently declared unconstitutional. However, the “scourge” of the tramp sheep men was a key factor in a public relations’ campaign that facilitated passage of the bills that created the National Forest and National Park systems. This brought allocation of grazing rights on the critical high-country summer range under control of federal officials, “advised” by boards of local established ranchers.

While this was a telling blow to the itinerants, it was not downright fatal. There were still federal lands of at least marginal summer-range value outside of the precincts of the new national forests. However, there was consequent concentration and overgrazing that became so evident that, in 1934, with passage of the Taylor Grazing Act, the remaining public range of the American West was brought under control of the Department of the Interior to be administered by what eventually became the Bureau of Land Management. The era of the tramp sheepman was effectively over.

Nor was diminishing access to the open range the only cause of decline in Basque immigration. The entry of Spanish Basques was interdicted by the Spanish-American War, as was the transatlantic crossing of all intending European immigrants by World War I. Spanish Basques felt the anti-southern-European bias in the national origins’ quotas set by U.S. immigration legislation of the 1920s. In 1921, the number of Spanish nationals to be admitted annually was set at 912; in 1924, it was lowered to 131.<sup>16</sup>

Prior to closure to them of the public lands and the nation’s door, several hundred Basques had entered the United States each year, the vast majority making their way to the ranching

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<sup>16</sup> The French nationals’ quotas were considerably higher (5,729 in 1921 and 3,954 in 1924). Indeed, in some years it was not fully subscribed. Consequently, French Basques could continue to enter the United States with relative ease. However, the entire population of the tiny Basque region of France was around 250,000 and the U.S. alternative had to compete with the established French Basque presence in several Latin American, Caribbean, African, southeast Asian and Pacific Islander countries as the chosen destination of French national candidates for transatlantic emigration. The continued entry of French Basques simply failed to compensate for the severe constriction of Spanish Basque immigration. Between 1931 and 1950, 51,432 French nationals emigrated to the United States, whereas but 6,156 Spaniards did so (*Annual Report of the Immigration and Naturalization Service For the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1950*. United States Department of Justice (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1950), table 4.

districts of the American West. The typical immigrant was a young, single male intending to sojourn rather than settle permanently in order to save enough money out of a herder's wages, and possibly an itinerant sheepman's earnings, to eventually return to the Basque Country to marry and acquire a farm or small business. However, some changed their minds along the way and settled permanently to establish a family. In the immigrant generation this typically meant going back or sending back to Europe for a spouse, or, alternatively, marrying into a local Basque-American family.<sup>17</sup> By the second generation, such ethnic group endogamy is still discernible, but was eroding notably.

The Second World War exacerbated what was already a labor crisis in America's sheep industry. The hostilities interdicted the arrival of intending French Basque shepherders and conscription diluted the nation's male labor force. By then the restrictions upon the entry of southern Europeans had been in effect for two decades, effectively thinning the ranks of Spanish Basque herders through attrition.

The flow of intending shepherders from Spain into the United States had not been interdicted entirely. The Basques were on the losing side in the Spanish Civil War (by 1937 their homeland was under Franco's control) and many had become international refugees (relocated primarily in Latin America and several European countries). There was also a significant number of Basques in the crews of the world's merchant fleet. A few Spanish Basques managed to enter the United States illegally by either crossing the Mexican border clandestinely or jumping ship in U.S. ports. If they managed to make their way successfully to a sheep ranch (possibly owned by a relative or a friend of a friend), they were assured employment. The isolated nature of the herder occupation shielded them from official scrutiny. Eventually, their employer might impose upon his U.S. congressman or senator to introduce special legislation legalizing the status of an individual or two.

Under these so-called "Shepherd Laws," between 1942 and 1961 a total of 383 men received permanent residency status in the United States. However, this procedure was an

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<sup>17</sup> Informants recounted that American women were untrustworthy. In point of fact, the only contacts that most herders had with women were on brief visits to town and in bars or houses of prostitution. Then, too, under the Immigration Act of 1907, if an American woman married an alien she lost her citizenship. This was abolished by the Cable Act of 1922, also known as the Married Woman's Act. Caroline B. Brettell, *Gender and Migration* (Cambridge UK and Malden MA: Polity Press, 2016), 41-42. Nevertheless, while in effect, the provision presumably served as a damper on the herder's chances of even marrying a Basque-American as well.

inefficient way of addressing the labor crisis in the sheep industry. The sheep ranchers began to organize and, in 1950, prevailed upon Nevada's powerful U.S. senator, Patrick McCarran (an ex-sheepman), to introduce Public Law 587 under which 250 herders were to be allowed into the country for a one year stay without regard to the Spanish nationals' quota. In 1952, Public Law 307 was passed which accommodated an additional 500 men.

When it transpired that some of the immigrants abandoned herding for other employment, the program was modified to one in which there was no specific limit on their numbers, but the herders became, in effect, indentured. A man was given a contract that permitted him to stay in the United States (working only as a sheepherder) for a maximum of three years. He then had to leave the country (thereby obviating the possibility of his applying for permanent residency under the five-year-continuous-residency requirement of U.S. Immigration Law). He was eligible to reapply for additional stints.

Excepting the odd individual who managed to contract marriage while on a herder contract (quite unlikely given the social isolation inherent in the profession), the sheepherder importation program was not an avenue for permanent immigration of Spanish Basques into the United States. Eventually, under pressure from the Spanish government, the terms of the contract were liberalized to allow a man to remain in the United States once having completed three years of herding.

By the 1970s, the recruitment of herders in Spain was collapsing. Pronounced growth in the Spanish economy made the wages and privations of the sheepherding alternative increasingly unattractive. The sheep industry's Western Range Association redirected its recruitment to Mexico, Peru and Chile. The era of the Basque sheepherder was rapidly drawing to a close. If, in the 1960s, there were about 1500 contract herders in the American West (mainly Bizkaians and Navarrese), by 2000 there was but a handful of Basques remaining on the range (probably about two dozen). So, if by 1976, 2,161 former herders had attained permanent residency status, about that time this ceased to be a source of significant infusion of Old-World-born immigrants into the Basque-American community.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, changes in federal grazing policy and a depression in the world market for wool and mutton combined to reduce drastically the numbers of sheep on the public lands. By the mid-1970s, the numbers of herders under contract to the Western Range Association had been halved to about 750 (*cf.* William A. Douglass. "The Vanishing Basque Sheepherder," *The American West* (1980) 17(4): 30-31; 59-61).

Since the 1920s, the Basque-American community has been nourished by a small stream of French Basque immigration, largely insulated from its Spanish Basque counterpart. Until the second half of the twentieth century, then, one could discern two nearly discrete Basque-American communities in the American West that were but vaguely aware of one another's existence. It is only with the spread of Basque festivals and ethnic associations in the 1960s (as a part of America's love affair with its "roots") that the boundary evaporated—particularly after creation, in 1972, of NABO (North American Basque Organizations, Inc.) that overarches the now more than 30 Basque clubs throughout the country.

After the 1970s, or when the recruitment of Spanish Basque shepherders all but ceased, the entry of Basques into the United States has become more *ad hoc* than occupationally patterned, and is constituted by a trickle of students and professionals, as well as the odd individual effecting family reunion.



*A Basque shepherd on the range.*

<http://www.foodswinesfromspain.com/spanishfoodwine/wcm/idc/groups/public/documents/imagen/odg3/ndk3/~edisp/887497204.jpg>

### Counting Basques in the 1980, 1990, 2000, and 2010 U.S. Censuses

Before considering the actual reported totals in these four censuses, certain caveats are in order regarding the possible under counting *and* over counting of Basque-Americans. Given the dramatic effects of inclusion or exclusion of “French” and “English” from the illustrative example of ethnicity included in the census schedule, the fact that “Basque” was never listed explicitly as an ethnic alternative in any of the four censuses alone suggests under counting of Basque-Americans.

Conversely, while the long form of the census that included the ancestry question was to be applied to one in six households, with the estimates for a particular ethnic group then being extrapolated by multiplying the actual responses by six, it was provided to half of the households in census divisions with fewer than 2,500 persons. Given the concentration of a significant segment of the Basque-American community in the sparsely settled ranching districts of the American West, there is likely some resultant over counting of them vis-à-vis more urbanized ethnic groups.

Another source of error regards sample size. Obviously, the statistical unreliability (the parameter of error) is far greater when extrapolating a total from the 16 percent of respondent households of a small population (e.g. Basques) than is the case regarding larger ones. Thus, when first reporting the estimated figure for Basques in the 2000 census at 57,793 individuals, the U.S. Census Bureau placed the “lower bound” at 45,331 and the upper one at 69,133, a range of error approximating 20 percent! Regarding the estimated 20,575,998 Irish, however, the lower parameter is 20,381,493 and the upper one 20,770,503, a swing from the estimate on the order of but one percent.<sup>19</sup>

It should be noted that respondents could ignore the question altogether, opt simply for “American,” and claim multiple ancestries. Each of these possibilities obfuscates the results. Finally, we have no way of quantifying how many persons with Basque genealogical credentials chose to ignore the fact.

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<sup>19</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census 2000. Ancestry First Reported-Universe Total Population. PCT 024.



There is also the issue of identity prioritization and privileging. In answering the ancestry question in the four censuses, respondents were allowed to list multiple identities, although only the first two were calculated for reporting purposes. In the results of the 1980 census, 23,213 of the 43,140 Basque-Americans gave “French Basque,” “Spanish Basque” or “Basque” as their *sole* identity.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, approximately 46 percent of the respondents were “part” Basque in ethnic makeup.

The 1990 census did not distinguish between those claiming a single ancestry, but did list prioritization. Thus, of the 47,956 Basque-Americans in the nation, 37,842 (or 78.9 percent) listed some variation of Basque as their first choice (a category which would include those claiming it as their sole ethnic identity), while 10,114 respondents invoked Basqueness as their second identity (again those opting for it as tertiary or less are left out of account).<sup>21</sup>

Table One details the Basque totals by state in the last four U.S. censuses. Perhaps the best way to understand the profound impact of the new configuration of the schedules is to consider the status of our anecdotal impression of Basque-American demographics prior to 1980. It was then believed that Basques were distributed sparsely and mainly throughout the 13 western states. To the extent that there were concentrations at all, they were in the open-range ranching districts (and their servicing centers) where Basques, since the latter half of the nineteenth century, had worked as the ubiquitous shepherders. The existence of urban colonies in the greater San Francisco and Los Angeles areas was also known. The states of Idaho, Nevada, and California were believed to have the largest Basque populations, but their absolute numbers, and even their relative ranking, remained uncertain. New York City, as the major port of entry, and Miami, as the focus of both the Basque ball game *jai alai* and post-Castro Cuban refugee resettlement (including Basques), were also known to have Basque colonies.

In some regards, the 1980 census confirmed the foregoing impressions while fleshing them out. Prior to 1980, at least some scholars and many Basque-Americans privileged Idaho

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<sup>20</sup> *Ancestry of the Population by State: 1980*. Bureau of the Census, U.S. Department of Commerce. (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983), 12.

<sup>21</sup> *1990 Census of the Population, Detailed Ancestry Groups for States*. Bureau of the Census. ( Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992), 13.

with the distinction of likely having more Basques than any other state. In retrospect, it is now apparent that this was due to several factors. There was Idaho's "Bizkaian factor." That is, even prior to 1980, scholars could be relatively certain that the state's reported total among the foreign-born of "Spanish nationals" regarded Basques exclusively, and Bizkaians in particular. There was but a handful of non-Basque Spaniards in the state, and the same could be said for French Basques. Then, too, Boise and its hinterland constituted the epicenter of Basque settlement in Idaho. The Bizkaian sub-ethnic heterogeneity of the area's Basques facilitated their ethnic activism. By the mid-twentieth century, Idaho's capital city had a Basque club with its own Basque Center edifice and dance group that performed frequently (both in and out of state) and even represented Idaho at the Seattle World's Fair (1962), the New York World's Fair (1964), the Smithsonian's National Folk Festival (1968), and Expo '70 in Montreal. Such activity, emanating from the capital city of a state whose overall population was miniscule, gave Idaho Basques a high public profile well before those of other western states were even noticed, let alone acknowledged.<sup>22</sup> In sum, the evident significant population of foreign-born Basques in Idaho, in combination with vague calculations of the number of their descendants in light of the historical depth of its Basque-American community, combined with its public ethnic activism, led to some estimates of Idaho's Basque population that ranged into the low tens of thousands.

Therefore, the actual reported total of 4,332 Idaho Basques in the 1980 census was a bit startling. By comparison, California's 15,530 Basques, roughly three and a half times more than Idaho's total, were not even a blip on that state's demographic radar screen. Furthermore, California Basques encompassed greater Old World Basque regional heterogeneity, a fact that did not preclude (but neither did it facilitate) collective action. Finally, and utilizing 1990 totals, while Idaho's Basques were concentrated in the Snake River drainage (4,099), and with an epicenter in Ada County (or the Boise area with 2,242 persons), California's Basque-Americans had both southern (6,201 individuals in the greater Los Angeles area) and northern (4,200 persons in the San Francisco Bay area) epicenters that were quite distant from one another, as well as a Central Valley corridor of

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<sup>22</sup> A watershed event for the Basque-American community was the first national Basque festival held in Sparks, Nevada, in 1959. In its aftermath the national festival moved to Elko, Nevada (where it continues to be celebrated annually), and there was marked proliferation throughout the American West of Basque clubs, most with their own festival and folk dance group.

dispersed (yet relatively significant) Basque colonies in Kern (1,351), Fresno (987) and Sacramento (709) counties. San Diego County (1,449) had its own considerable Basque-American contingent.<sup>23</sup>

Mildly surprising in 1980 was the presence of Basques in all fifty of the United States. The real shocker, however, and one that was simply unacceptable to anyone familiar with the Basque-American scene, were the reported 2,754 Nebraska Basque-Americans—a figure that would have placed that state’s Basque population in fourth place nationally. When we consider that 2,707 of Nebraska’s Basque-Americans were listed as “French Basque,” yet in 1990 not a single French Basque is reported for the state, we can appreciate that there was obviously a coding error during the computation of the results of the earlier census.

Indeed, for the 1980 census there seems to have been a consistent problem in this regard when computing the results for the mid-section of the country. Table Two details the dramatic shift between the 1980 and 1990 censuses in the reported French Basque population of the upper Midwest. Every state in question experienced a dramatic decrease in “Basque, French” even though their overall Basque-American populations increased during the 1980s. Clearly, this coding error favored over counting of Basque-Americans in the 1980 census—the Nebraska discrepancy alone representing about 6.5 percent of its national total.

Another comment is in order regarding the French Basque results—even after purging them of the computational error. In both 1980 and 1990, nearly as many respondents claimed French Basque identity as did those opting for Spanish Basque. This is disproportionate when compared with Old World Basque demographic reality, where Hegoalde’s population outnumbers Iparralde’s by about six to one. It is, however, reflective of the somewhat differing histories in the United States of the respective sub-ethnic groups.

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<sup>23</sup> Figures for Idaho are derived from *1990 Census of Population. Social and Economic Characteristics. Idaho*. Bureau of the Census. U.S. Department of Commerce. (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993), pp. 168-172 and *1990 Census of Population. Social and Economic Characteristics. California*. Volume 1. Bureau of the Census. U.S. Department of Commerce. (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993), pp. 289-294. The Snake River drainage total includes Ada, Canyon, Elmore, Gooding, Owyhee and Twin Falls counties. The greater Los Angeles figure incorporates the totals for Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino and Ventura counties. The San Francisco Bay area includes totals from Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Sonoma and Solano counties.

As we have seen, French Basques have longer involvement in the region and their access to it was less impacted by evolving restrictive U.S. immigration legislation.

After factoring out the French Basque error, we might calculate the total of Americans reporting Basque ancestry in 1980 at about 40,000 individuals. Consequently, increase in the self-reported Basque-American population between 1980 and 1990 was on the order of 20 percent, a growth rate evident between 1990 and 2000 as well. Taken together, California, Nevada and Idaho host well over half of the Basque-American community in all three censuses—58 percent in 1980 (if we employ the 40,000 sanitized total for it), 62 percent in 1990, and 58 percent in 2000.

Between 1980 and 2000, at times all three states were among the nation's fastest growing ones (*cf* Table Three). In the 1980-1990 intercensal period, their combined growth rate of 25.8 percent surpassed that of the Basque-American community of the United States. However, between 1990 and 2000, while the rate of increase in Idaho (28.5 percent) and Nevada (66.3 percent) remained robust, that of California dropped to a more modest 13.8 percent, considerably less than that of the nation's Basque-American community. During the same decade, California's Basque-American population grew by 9.2 percent, less than one percent annually and less than half the growth rate of the nation's Basque-Americans.

Throughout both intercensal periods, Nevada was the fastest growing state in the United States percentage-wise. Between 1980 and 1990, its Basque-American community increased by 43 percent; from 1990 to 2000 the growth rate held at 25.8 percent. Nevertheless, that increase remained below that of the state's population as a whole. At 29 percent, growth was robust among Idaho's Basques during the first intercensal period, particularly in light of the state's modest 6.7 percent total population increase. During the second intercensal period, at 18.8 percent, the increase in Idaho's Basques was respectable, although less than that of the nation's Basque-American community and the growth in the state's overall population (28.5 percent).

By 2000, then, Nevada's Basque population (6,096) was beginning to challenge Idaho's (6,637) status as the second largest in the nation. Until the 2007 financial crisis and Great Recession, Las Vegas was the fastest growing city in the United States, but far removed from

Nevada's "traditional" area of Basque settlement (the ranching districts several hundred miles to the north). Nevertheless, by 2000, Clark County had 713 Basques, up from 341 in 1990.<sup>24</sup> It is perhaps indicative that there is now a Basque festival in Las Vegas.

There is also an urban immigration effect evident in several states. Indeed the attraction of Seattle in Washington, Salt Lake City in Utah, Denver in Colorado, Phoenix in Arizona, Atlanta in Georgia, several metropolitan areas in Texas, Chicago in Illinois and Miami in Florida seems to account for the increases in the respective Basque populations of those states during the last two decades of the twentieth century (*cf* Table Four). This likely reflects both the growth in New-World-born individuals within the Basque-American community and their progressive generational distancing from their immigrant roots. Increasingly, Basque-Americans pursue higher education, with the attendant mobility (physical and social) that it implies.

Another development worthy of speculation is the marked shift between 1980 and 1990 in the way that some Americans claimed Basque descent. In 1980, 22,686, or 57 percent, of the respondents opted for a "Basque" identity, meaning that 43 percent chose to specify a "French Basque" or "Spanish Basque" ethnic heritage instead. However, by 1990 fully 71 percent of Basque-Americans list generic "Basque" as their ethnic identity. To appreciate the significance of this development, as well as the conundrum that it poses for the scholar of Basque-American society, it is necessary to consider both Old World and New World Basque political and cultural developments.

The twentieth century was a period of marked ethnonationalism in the Basque homeland. However, its impacts differed in Iparralde (the French Basque area) and Hegoalde (the three Spanish Basque provinces and Navarra). Basque nationalism has never garnered more than single digit electoral support in Iparralde, consequently, for its inhabitants, "Basqueness" is more of a cultural than a political phenomenon. Conversely, in Hegoalde, during the first third of the twentieth century, Basque nationalism emerged as a significant political force throughout Hegoalde (even in Navarra of the time), a part of which even constituted its own independent state (briefly) during the early phase of the Spanish Civil War. Throughout the Franco years (1939-1975), Basque nationalists remained a

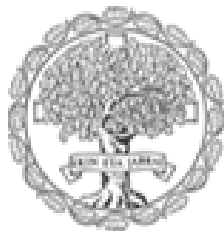
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<sup>24</sup> 1990 *Census of Population. Social and Economic Characteristics. Nevada*. Bureau of the Census. U.S. Department of Commerce. (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993), 159.

formidable political force in parts of the Basque diaspora (although not in the United States), as well as clandestinely within the Spanish state. The willingness of one sector of the movement to respond to Franco's oppression with violence gave rise to ETA, thereby triggering Western Europe's second most virulent and deadly (after Ulster) post Second-World-War ethnonationalist conflict.

In the aftermath of Franco's death, the Basques refused to ratify the proposed Spanish constitution, but then approved a Statute of Autonomy that constituted Eusko Jaurlaritza, an "autonomous" government overarching the three provinces of Araba, Gipuzkoa and Bizkaia (Navarra became its own free-standing autonomous region). While not endowed with full political sovereignty, Eusko Jaurlaritza has its president and parliament, as well as broad powers in domestic and fiscal matters. Throughout its existence, it has been dominated by the Basque Nationalist Party, usually as the senior partner within a ruling coalition with Spanish national (and nationalist) parties.

The twentieth century also witnessed a major development within the Basque cultural scene. Under the aegis of Euskaltzaindia, the Basque Language Academy, there was a serious effort to unify the several dialects of spoken (and written) Basque into a single language. So-called Euskera Batua now dominates the media and Basque educational system. While it has not entirely supplanted the dialects, and is arguably more dominant in Hegoalde than in Iparralde, it both nourishes and facilitates a common Basque identity.



**EUSKALTZAINDIA**  
REAL ACADEMIA DE LA LENGUA VASCA  
ACADÉMIE DE LA LANGUE BASQUE

*Academy of the Basque Language*

<http://lapersonnalite.com/blog/wp-content/themes/lpframeworked/images/clients/euskaltzaindia.png>

The influence of the foregoing upon the self-identification of Basque-Americans to the census taker is difficult to ascertain with precision. Clearly, in the Basque homeland to self-identify as “Spanish Basque” has become politically incorrect, although this is less so in the case of “French Basque.” However, as noted earlier, since the 1920s the Basque-American community has been largely isolated from Spanish Basque immigration. While not entirely insulated from Old World political and cultural developments, there has been considerable disconnection. Consequently, the majority of Basque-Americans are descended from immigrants who entered the United States as young bachelors from rural origins and with modest educational backgrounds and political formation, and at a time when Basque nationalism was still in its formative phase.

It is scarcely an exaggeration to state (with some exceptions) that Basque-Americans descended from Hegoalde have been unresponsive to Old World Basque politics (except to abhor the label of “terrorists” facilely associated with “Basques” in the international media), while Basque-Americans descended from Iparralde are positively indifferent, when not hostile, to Basque nationalism. Nor has Euskera Batua enjoyed overwhelming success in supplanting the dialects among the minority of Basque-Americans still fluent in the language.

In short, while we can demonstrate that the decade of the 1980s was a significant one in the evolution of Basque political and cultural consciousness in both Iparralde and Hegoalde, its impact upon Basque-Americans was minimal, although not altogether absent.<sup>25</sup> How then can we explain the pronounced shift toward a generic Basque identity among Basque-Americans during the 1980-1990 intercensal period? I would be inclined to ascribe it mainly to what might be called the “NABO effect.” That is, by the decade of the 1980s, NABO (founded in 1972) was hitting its stride. Virtually all of the Basque clubs of the United States had joined and NABO was facilitating the organization of new ones. It was organizing annual summer music camps where Basque-American children from throughout the American West were brought together to learn songs, dances, and to play traditional instruments. NABO was also sponsoring the U.S. tours of Old World Basque performing artists and an annual “national” mus (a Basque playing card card game) elimination to

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<sup>25</sup> This may account in some small measure for the decline during the 1980-1990 intercensal period in Idaho’s (overwhelmingly Bizkaian) population from 600 to 353 persons who self-identified as “Basque, Spanish” whereas simply “Basque, n.e.c.” went from 3,511 to 5,068 persons, or an increase of 44.3 percent.

determine the U.S. team at the annual international mus championship. NABO also interfaced with Eusko Jaurlaritza regarding the latter's efforts to stimulate Basque culture throughout the diaspora. From the outset, NABO's mission and activities have proclaimed that Basque-Americans are simply "Basque" irrespective of Old World regional distinctions.<sup>26</sup>



It was in 2002 that I wrote an earlier version of this article to be translated into Spanish and published in a collection of my essays.<sup>27</sup> At the time, I contacted the Census Bureau and was informed that the full results of the 2000 census had yet to be reported and that the three Basque categories had been aggregated under "Basques" in the preliminary results. I noted this fact in the translated article and decided to await the forthcoming tabulation before publishing the English version of my article. In the event, it never happened. Indeed, during the 2000-2010 intercensal period several decisions were made that affected adversely our ability to understand and track the evolution of Basque-American reality. It was about 2007 that I revisited the topic, and it was still not clear (at least to the ancestry specialist that I spoke with at the Census Bureau) that the full results for 2000 would never be released. So again I decided to be patient, in part thinking that the upcoming 2010 census could clarify matters. Also, by waiting I might have been able to include the 2010 results in my analysis, thereby improving it.

<sup>26</sup> This may be reflected in the California totals. During the 1980-1990 intercensal period, the reported numbers of French and Spanish Basques declines but slightly, yet the total of persons claiming solely a "Basque" identity increases by 51 percent from 8,098 to 12,227 individuals.

<sup>27</sup> William A. Douglass, "Calculando etnicidad mediante el censo de EEUU: el caso vasco," in William A. Douglass, *La Vasconia Global. Ensayos sobre las diásporas vascas* (Vitoria-Gasteiz: Servicio Central de Publicaciones del Gobierno Vasco, 2003), 264-82.



Table One in this article, insofar as it regards the 1980, 1990 and 2000 censuses, is identical to the one I published in the 2003 Spanish-language piece.<sup>28</sup> I have now added what I have been able to learn about the 2010 census reporting, apparently, like the reported results for the 2000 census, an aggregation of the three Basque codes into a single “Basque” category. That is certainly better than nothing (the situation before 1980), but is still somewhat disappointing.

What follows is what I have been able to glean from conversations with the government publications library specialist at my university and a very accommodating ancestry specialist at the U. S. Census Bureau. Both gave me leads; both struggled with my requests after working on them for several hours. Neither was certain that she understood fully what had transpired. So, even if the following is mainly accurate, it likely suffers from lacunae.

It seems that, in early 2003, it was decided to revamp the ways that Hispanics would be defined and calculated by the Census Bureau in its annual Current Population Survey. Henceforth you would be asked if you were Spanish, Hispanic or Latino? If you answered yes, you were then asked to select among Mexican, Mexican-American, Chicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Cuban-American (designations reflecting the Hispanic designations in the 1980 and 1990 census codes). You could also state that you were some other Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino group, in which case you were shown 42 prompt cards listing your possibilities--including “Basque.”<sup>29</sup>

It was about this same time that the Census Bureau instituted the American Community Survey (ACS), to be applied in every county in the United States to one in forty households. Some 250,000 questionnaires were to be mailed out monthly, the idea being that in every year 2.5% of American households would receive it. The goal is that, over a five year period, one in eight households of the nation would respond (versus the one in six that received the long form of the census in 2000). When failures to do so are factored in, thus far there is a response rate of about one in eleven recipients.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 280-81.

<sup>29</sup> Dianne Schmidley and Arthur Cresce, Tracking Hispanic Ethnicity: Evaluation of Current Population Survey Data Quality for the Question on Hispanic Origin, 1971 to 2004. Working Paper #80. Washington, D. C.: U. S. Census Bureau, nd). <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0080/twps0080.html>

<sup>30</sup> Cf <http://www.census.gov/acs/www> for more information.

Beginning, with the 2000 census, it was decided to no longer report the results for ancestry codes that fell below a certain minimum of numbers of responses. Ergo, it seems no longer possible to access the results of the former tripartite parsing of Basque-American reality.<sup>31</sup> This is true despite the fact that the three codes (most recently rendered as Basque 005, Spanish Basque 006, and French Basque 007) continue to be employed during the collection, if not the reporting, of Basque-American identity in the United States.<sup>32</sup> As if this were not confusing enough, the heading in the Code List under which Spanish Basque 006 occurs is “Western Europe (Excepting Spain).” French Basque 007 is apparently collected, but is then excluded from the French totals, given the caveat “ex. Basque” after the French entry in the final reporting.

It could be worse. At least aggregated Basques (presumably including the totals of French Basque 007) are still reported in the final results. Despite being on the code lists of both the CPS and ACS, and therefore presumably being collected, the Sicilian (068) designation continues to be excluded and is glossed instead under “Italians.” The same can be said for Berliners (034) who are then “Germans.”

My final comment on this muddle in our model regards the relative stasis in the numbers of Basque-Americans in the United States reported for the decennial 2000-2010. Utilizing the 40,000 figure for the sanitized 1980 results gives growth of 19.9 percent between 1980 and 1990; again, if the 2000 result is sanitized of its Puerto Rican factor, its 57,606 estimate represents a 20.1 percent increase during the 1990-2000 decennial. Conversely, the supposed growth during the 2000-2010 decennial from 57,606 to 59,586 represents an increase on the order of but 3.4 percent. There is no obvious explanation for this huge discrepancy. It may be that Basque-Americans are eschewing an ethnic identity and

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<sup>31</sup> To access the aggregated summary of Basques in the two censuses one enters through the American FactFinder site: [factfinder.census.gov](http://factfinder.census.gov). The summary for 2000 is comprehensive and is the source for that year’s listings in Table One: [http://factfinder.census.gov/bkmk/table/1.0/en/DEC/00\\_SF3/PCT018/0100000US.04000](http://factfinder.census.gov/bkmk/table/1.0/en/DEC/00_SF3/PCT018/0100000US.04000)[[factfinder.census.gov](http://factfinder.census.gov)]. It is astounding (at least to me) that the 2010 results exclude some states, including Idaho (which is obviously disastrous for present purposes): [http://factfinder.census.gov/bkmk/table/1.0/en/ACS/10\\_1YR/B04004/0100000US.04000](http://factfinder.census.gov/bkmk/table/1.0/en/ACS/10_1YR/B04004/0100000US.04000)[[factfinder.census.gov](http://factfinder.census.gov)]. Fortunately, the full results are available through state-by-state entries in *Ancestry & Ethnicity in America: A Comparative Guide to over 200 Ethnic Backgrounds* (Amenia, NY: Grey Publishing House, 2012), Volumes I and II, *passim*.

<sup>32</sup> Cf American Community Survey and Puerto Rico Community Survey. 2014 Code List [http://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/tech\\_docs/code\\_lists/2014\\_ACS\\_Code\\_Lists.pdf](http://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/tech_docs/code_lists/2014_ACS_Code_Lists.pdf).

reporting themselves as simply “American” in significant numbers. However, that is a counterintuitive assumption for a people who have maintained an ethnic identity against all odds for centuries without the reinforcement by others of either recognized nationhood or statehood. I rather suspect that the difference lies in the modifications in the ways Basques are now defined, counted, and then reported by the Census Bureau.

We might contrast the Idaho and Nevada results as further evidence that something is going on. The 2010 census reports an increase of 9.4 percent in Idaho’s Basque-American population since 2000. During that same period, the state’s Snake-River- drainage corridor (home to nearly two-thirds of Idaho’s Basque-Americans in 1990), increased on the order of 29.4 percent. Therefore one suspects that its increase in Basque-Americans was undercounted in the 2000-2010 decennial.

The situation is far worse regarding Nevada. Despite the Great Recession, during which the state led the nation in its unemployment and foreclosed home mortgages rates, during the 2000-2010 decennial the Nevada’s population still grew by 35.1 percent. The northern-tier counties (with their Basque-American concentration) all increased by respectable numbers. Indeed, their two key foci of Basque-Americans are Elko and Humboldt counties, where the economy was among the strongest in the nation due to their extensive gold-mining activity. Nevertheless, the 2010 report by the U.S. Census Bureau lists a decline in Nevada’s Basque-American totals on the order of 11.6 percent. Again, this is counterintuitive and is not supported by anecdotal evidence.

### **Conclusion**

It seems accurate to conclude that, in retrospect and for the foreseeable future, Basque-Americans constitute their own cultural reality—one sustained by reference to an Old-World “homeland” cultural legacy, but nurtured only minimally by continued immigration into the United States of its culture bearers. The facts that the country’s Basque immigration was all but curtailed six decades before Basque-Americans were first counted as such in the U.S. census (1980), and that during each of the two intercensal periods the number of Americans claiming Basque ethnic identity grew by 20 percent, seem to bode well for the Basque-American community’s future. While there is no such increase between

2000 and 2010, that may be more a function of the changes in the way the census data were collected and tabulated rather than Basque-American demographic trends. Furthermore, recent developments such as the capacity of the Internet to enhance “virtual” ethnicity, the growth in the number of the Basque clubs of the United States, the influence of NABO, and Eusko Jauriaritza’s efforts on behalf of diasporic Basque culture, all provide institutional underpinning to Basque cultural identity in the United States. In short, the elements favoring persistence of such Basque-American cultural awareness in the face of the formidable countervailing influence of assimilation into American culture seem to be in place. Ultimately, the fate of the Basque-American tile within the American mosaic will be decided by its as yet unborn generations.

A final caveat is in order regarding all of the foregoing. While a respondent who opts for a single Basque ancestry, as did 45 percent of those who ended up in the aggregated “Basques” total in the 2010 ancestry totals, is making some kind of statement, it is equally true that the census is not designed to document either the intensity of felt ethnic identity or its forms of expression. Indeed, while counting might seem in itself to be quintessentially straightforward, in fact, as we have seen, it is fraught with definitional and computational problems. To count noses one first has to determine how many faces there are in the crowd. When the assumptions are extreme (e.g. that the descendant of a single Basque ancestor many generations ago remains a bearer of the ethnic identity solely by virtue of that remote ancestry) it leads us to such conclusions that there are two and a half million Basques in Chile today. I don’t think so.

TABLE ONE: BASQUE POPULATION OF THE UNITED STATES, 1980,1990, 2000 AND 2010<sup>33</sup>

State	Basques, French		Basques, Spanish		Basques, n.e.c.		Total Basques			
	1980	1990	1980	1990	1980	1990	1980	1990	2000	2010
Alabama	36	24	0	44	46	14	82	82	107	68
Alaska	10	37	33	38	62	170	105	245	276	199
Arizona	152	53	199	298	749	965	1,100	1,316	1,655	1,969
Arkansas	34	20	0	21	39	63	73	104	71	288
California	3,619	3,387	3,813	3,508	8,098	12,227	15,530	19,112	20,868	20,606
Colorado	341	148	168	110	446	679	955	937	1,674	1,653
Connecticut	36	22	64	64	120	233	220	319	262	85
Delaware	18	0	0	7	3	6	21	13	12	81
Dist. Of Columbia	22	0	12	16	29	21	63	37	180	222
Florida	201	117	315	334	343	738	859	1,189	2,127	1,998
Georgia	87	11	59	27	77	90	223	128	282	135
Hawaii	10	19	4	29	55	121	69	169	175	310
Idaho	221	166	600	353	3,511	5,068	4,332	5,587	6,637	7,264
Illinois	422	49	66	75	165	321	654*	445	533	569
Indiana	94	55	48	0	18	135	160	190	168	81
Iowa	260	20	24	8	40	31	324	59	50	48
Kansas	92	10	18	24	50	36	160	70	146	99
Kentucky	81	11	15	15	36	68	132	94	55	113
Louisiana	133	73	57	38	65	115	255	226	354	171
Maine	22	2	0	21	28	13	50	36	57	150
Maryland	51	60	48	45	148	163	247	268	339	463
Massachusetts	34	37	80	73	187	227	301	337	383	206
Michigan	145	7	28	47	158	162	331	236	306	301
Minnesota	110	24	8	15	102	91	220	130	195	120
Mississippi	7	4	2	0	20	24	29	28	64	47
Missouri	164	27	18	10	61	114	243	151	180	258
Montana	116	66	6	46	268	357	390	469	564	633
Nebraska	2,707	0	6	0	41	45	2,754	45	85	310
Nevada	371	472	915	776	2,092	3,592	3,378	4,840	6,096	5,390
New Hampshire	3	0	0	0	29	53	32	53	158	46
New Jersey	98	72	134	143	265	319	497	534	643	520
New Mexico	87	63	83	61	291	378	461	502	600	685
New York	202	131	508	242	716	927	1,426	1,300	1,252	1,514
North Carolina	57	16	48	6	31	97	136	119	330	245
North Dakota	25	0	0	0	0	11	25	11	39	47
Ohio	207	33	31	15	85	155	323	203	230	63
Oklahoma	21	0	5	23	84	82	110	105	126	251
Oregon	369	172	224	298	1,660	1,787	2,253	2,257	2,627	3,233
Pennsylvania	138	23	14	13	68	214	220	250	278	521
Rhode Island	5	0	44	0	40	24	89	24	23	13
South Carolina	24	4	31	14	14	30	70	48	76	110
South Dakota	50	0	7	8	5	22	62	30	64	58
Tennessee	34	2	4	14	16	75	54	91	145	146
Texas	159	98	170	238	558	912	887	1,248	1,691	1,959
Utah	129	148	134	261	610	1,013	873	1,422	1,361	1,598
Vermont	0	0	0	0	28	2	28	2	34	102

<sup>33</sup> The results for the 2010 produced here were taken from *Ancestry & Ethnicity in America: A Comparative Guide to over 200 Ethnic Backgrounds* (Amenia, NY: Grey Publishing House, 2012), volumes I and II, *passim*.

Virginia	168	19	72	59	112	325	352	403	575	319
Washington	124	145	306	154	704	1,471	1,134	1,770	2,665	2,847
West Virginia	78	0	5	0	23	9	106	9	8	67
Wisconsin	189	8	5	8	49	85	243	101	98	235
Wyoming	155	146	103	21	241	435	499	602	869	1,170
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>11,919</b>	<b>6,001</b>	<b>8,534</b>	<b>7,620</b>	<b>22,686</b>	<b>34,335</b>	<b>43,140</b>	<b>47,956</b>	<b>57,793</b>	<b>59,586</b>

\* There is a compiler's discrepancy of one French Basque in the 1980 Illinois count.

\*\* Includes 187 Basques in Puerto Rico. It was not until the 2000 census that Puerto Rican ancestry totals were reported within the overall national count.

**TABLE TWO: FRENCH BASQUES IN THE UPPER MIDWESTERN UNITED STATES: 1980 AND 1990 COMPARED**

STATE	1980 CENSUS	1990 CENSUS
Illinois	422	49
Indiana	94	55
Iowa	260	20
Kansas	92	10
Kentucky	81	11
Michigan	145	7
Minnesota	110	24
Missouri	164	27
Nebraska	2,707	0
North Dakota	25	0
Ohio	207	33
South Dakota	50	0
Wisconsin	189	8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4,546</b>	<b>244</b>

**TABLE THREE: GROWTH IN THE POPULATIONS OF CALIFORNIA, IDAHO, AND NEVADA, 1980-2000**

	Population 1980	Population 1990	% of Increase	Population 2000	% of Increase
California	23,667,902	29,760,021	25.8	33,871,648	13.8
Idaho	943,935	1,006,749	6.7	1,293,953	28.5
Nevada	800,493	1,201,833	50.1	1,998,257	66.3
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>25,412,330</b>	<b>31,968,603</b>	<b>25.8</b>	<b>37,163,858</b>	<b>16.3</b>

**TABLE FOUR: BASQUES RESIDING IN SELECTED METROPOLITAN AREAS, 1990 CENSUS**

State	Number of Basques	Metropolitan Area	Number of Basques	Metropolitan Area as percentage of State Total
Arizona	1,316	Phoenix	628	47.7
Colorado	937	Denver	296	31.6
Florida	1,189	Miami	376	31.6
Georgia	128	Atlanta	103	80.5
Illinois	445	Chicago	331	74.4
New York	1,300	New York City	838	64.5
Oregon	2,257	Portland	658	29.2
Texas	1,248	Metropolitan*	833	66.7
Utah	1,422	Salt Lake-Ogden	1,105	77.7
Washington	1,770	Seattle-Tacoma	789	44.6

\* Dallas-Fort Worth; El Paso; Houston; San Antonio