

# A CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE BRITISH CENSUS

Envisioning the Multitude  
in the Nineteenth Century

Kathrin Levitan



TAKING THE CENSUS



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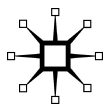
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Kathrin Levitan

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A CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE BRITISH CENSUS

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*For Jonathan and Azalea*



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# Introduction: Envisioning the Multitude

In no other age or nation has there been displayed such an analytical view of the whole frame of society, such an anatomical exhibition of the body politic, as these [census] volumes present.

—*Quarterly Review*, 1835<sup>1</sup>

In 1854, a British journalist reviewing the recently published 1851 census report declared that “the full and clear delineation of the state of our nation, presented by these books, carries back the thoughts irresistibly to the first recognized days of its existence.”<sup>2</sup> The writer went on to provide a survey of population, politics, and society in Britain since prehistoric times, following the story from the Celtic, Roman, Anglo-Saxon, and Norman periods through to the mid-nineteenth century. The reviewer understood the “nation” and the “race” as ancient and continuous, and referred repeatedly to a “we” that had existed for more than 2,000 years. Such a depiction of the country’s history is a perfect example of what scholars have recognized as national “imagined communities,” which in Europe found their origins and heyday during the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> But why was it the census that inspired such ruminations about the primordial nation?

The British census, first taken in 1801, played a crucial role in allowing people to visualize their nation in new ways during the nineteenth century. While the census began as an instrument of the government, it was increasingly accepted and appropriated by large numbers of British people, who used it not only to understand, control, and improve the population but also to recognize themselves and others as members of groups and to claim rights and privileges for these groups. The census was therefore involved in two major conceptual types of work. It isolated some people as “surplus,” or outside the ideal society, and designated others as within that ideal society, or deserving of representation. As a technology that described the nation as a whole, the census thus encouraged people to view the national population as an aggregate and at the same time to understand that population in terms of increasingly differentiated groups. By defining these groups as numerical proportions of the whole, the census also suggested that the health and harmony of the social body depended upon the maintenance of healthy proportions

of people. Through discussions about some of the most pressing social issues in nineteenth-century Britain, including urbanization, women's roles, and empire, British people used the census to understand the social body, work to improve it, and identify themselves within it.

Modern census-taking clearly has to be understood as an international phenomenon. Britain, France, and the United States all took their first censuses during the revolutionary period between 1790 and 1805. Other countries had taken censuses earlier in the eighteenth century. Census-taking is directly linked to Enlightenment notions of politics, governance, science, and technology, and by the middle of the nineteenth century, many Europeans considered census-taking to be obvious and universal.<sup>4</sup> Nineteenth-century statisticians both in Britain and elsewhere, however, believed that the British public played a particularly active role in the taking and the analysis of the decennial census, and that the census was of use and interest to many people besides government officials. By examining the census as a national, public project that developed in a broad discursive context, my study challenges views of "governmentality" that attribute extreme power to the state, and focuses on the census as a project that was firmly embedded in the public sphere.

Scholars who have studied the nineteenth-century British census often have been motivated by the needs of researchers who use census data for their work. Such data can be difficult to interpret, and understanding its limitations also requires an understanding of nineteenth-century census procedures and the motivations of nineteenth-century census takers. Thus, some of the most helpful overviews of the early census are studies meant as aids for using the census for research.<sup>5</sup> Other studies have arisen from the work of demographic historians, whose interest in population change connects in obvious ways to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century debates over population and census-taking.<sup>6</sup> Still others have examined the census in the larger context of nineteenth-century state formation, the development of the social sciences, and the rise of the statistical movement.<sup>7</sup>

In several ways, my study is different from all these existing studies of the census. I do examine the administrative and political development of the census, but my study goes beyond an institutional history of the census. I explore the rhetoric of census takers as well as the general public's reception of the census, in the context of prominent public debates about empire, capitalism, urbanization, and gender roles. I also move away from the census at times to examine broader debates about numbers, visibility, and representation. In short, I study the census from both a governmental and a public perspective, and I study it both on the level of administration and on the level of discourse. This book includes extensive analysis of press coverage of the census, which makes it unusual among books on the history of the social sciences or state formation. It is for this reason that my study is

a “cultural” history. While the census cannot be removed from politics, its role was also far wider than politics, and the boundaries between state and society were always blurry. The nineteenth-century census, therefore, was not simply a symbol of state power, but a much broader symbol of national formation.

## Statistics and the State

The basis for the establishment and success of the census as a government tool and a public project was a growing governmental and public reliance on numbers. The notion that individuals could be described as members of numerically defined groups, and that these descriptions would be meaningful to observers and would help the government in determining policy, relied on the broad acceptance of statistics as an authoritative form of knowledge. At the center of the new field of statistics was the census, which was unique in its ability to describe the entire nation.

The development of the authority of statistics in the modern world and its centrality to governance and power have been well documented by scholars such as Michel Foucault and Ian Hacking, and has also been addressed more specifically in the British context. Mary Poovey’s book *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* follows the history of statistics back over several centuries and places it in the wider context of the development of the sciences, while other historians, including Michael Cullen and Theodore Porter, have looked more closely at the nineteenth-century statistical movement.<sup>8</sup> These scholars have demonstrated what has now become so generally accepted as to seem intuitive: that statistics, rather than mirroring society, was an interpretive process that developed for specific reasons at specific times. They also point to the almost total success of the statistical mode: Ian Hacking argues that during the nineteenth century, “social facts simply became facts that are statistical in character.”<sup>9</sup> He also suggests that “many of the modern categories by which we think about people and their activities were put in place by an attempt to collect numerical data.”<sup>10</sup>

Historians have also noticed that statistics developed in conjunction with state bureaucracies, and have recognized the importance of information collection in the building of the modern state. The origins of “political arithmetic” can be found in the seventeenth century, and by the end of the eighteenth century, the British state was acquiring a great deal of information about various aspects of the economy and society.<sup>11</sup> Like national consciousness, the state bureaucracy developed through war, which created the need for a unified and fiscally efficient state that gathered information about the population and the economy.<sup>12</sup> Foucault has also emphasized the transition during the eighteenth century from a focus on land to a focus on population, or a shift from governing territory to governing people, and has noticed the new interest in “bio-power” as the crucial basis of national strength.<sup>13</sup>



However, eighteenth-century power structures tended to be local, and included numerous intermediaries between people and the state. Many historians have seen the 1830s, which saw a number of acts of administrative reform, as a centralizing moment that changed the dynamic by which information was collected, and ultimately, if gradually, took power away from local elites. The shift has been linked to industrialization, capitalism, and urbanization, as well as the Enlightenment.<sup>14</sup> The census was an increasingly ambitious central government project that nonetheless relied heavily on local structures and local support. In some ways, centralization made the state abstract, impersonal, and removed from the everyday lives of ordinary people, who had traditionally been accustomed to dealing with local elites rather than the central government. For the purpose of taking the census, however, the government sent agents to every house in the kingdom, thus making the state more present than ever before.

Many scholars have emphasized the darker side of such state power, and have noted the use of technologies such as the census for purposes of surveillance and control. Statistics, Hacking suggests, forces people into categories and allows the state to control them through that categorization.<sup>15</sup> Poovey also understands the process of “aggregation” as one that involved surveillance, and Linda Colley points out that nineteenth-century observers recognized “that a more united nation could also make possible the creation of a surveillance state.”<sup>16</sup> Bruce Curtis, in his study of the Canadian census, suggests that the census “serves to increase the possibilities for intensive administration.”<sup>17</sup> Many scholars also recognize, however, that only some sections of the population are the target of such surveillance. In *States of Inquiry: Social Investigations and Print Culture in Nineteenth-Century Britain and the United States*, Oz Frankel examines government-sponsored investigations and publishing projects in the middle of the nineteenth century, and argues that the state assumed a role as surveyor of people or places that were considered marginal to or outside the society, including the urban poor in Britain and American Indians in the United States.<sup>18</sup>

Statistics in nineteenth-century Britain were considered helpful for understanding and controlling the urban poor in particular. Census takers consistently invoked an image of people who were wandering, who did not fit into groups, and who were difficult to both control and count. They often described such people as “surplus” or “redundant”; in other words, unnecessary to the social body. The image represented social and political disorder, and the census can be seen as an attempt to understand a large, shifting, migratory population. As Giovanna Procacci argues, statistics were a technology: “the technique of decipherment enabling the chaos of pauperism to be disentangled.”<sup>19</sup> Many of the additions to the census over the course of the nineteenth century reflected anxieties about the changes wrought by industrialization, and new types of surveillance arose partly in response to a perceived disintegration of traditional social ties and modes of local control.<sup>20</sup>

Emphasizing the motivations of those doing the surveying, however, is perhaps inevitably going to result in an emphasis on surveillance. Looking beyond the state provides a more complicated view of the connection between statistics and power. While there is no doubt that the census provided information that was invoked for various schemes of regulation and control, and that the census's emphasis on "surplus" made marginalizing certain elements of the population easy, the census was not used only for purposes of surveillance. Information could be used not only to control or marginalize but also to enforce civil rights and empower citizens. The census and the office that conducted it, Edward Higgs suggests, were part of a "project of personal empowerment, and local medical and sanitary reform."<sup>21</sup> He also suggests that "rather than repression, the census and civil registration helped to underpin civil, political and social rights."<sup>22</sup>

Like Higgs, I am skeptical of the notion that the gathering of information was used solely for the purpose of social control. But unlike Higgs, I focus the bulk of my attention on the public uses and appropriations of the census. Proponents of statistics, many of whom were not connected to the government, believed that statistics were necessary to happiness, morality, and social improvement. Some, in fact, were skeptical of government motives and saw statistics as a useful safeguard against governmental corruption.<sup>23</sup> The expansion of British statistics during the nineteenth century was driven by a humanitarian concern for the poor and a liberal interest in social reform at least as much as by the fear of working-class revolt. Furthermore, while there were certainly close links between statisticians and the government, members of the scientific societies that contributed so much to the development of statistics were not always "professionals" or "experts." Rather, they were bankers, doctors, industrialists, and writers who saw statistics as a hobby and a civic duty. Seen this way, they were not coming out of a tradition of expertise so much as a tradition of urban intellectualism and gentlemanly scientific and literary pursuits. The same men were often members of literary and artistic institutions and trustees of libraries, schools, and charitable organizations. At least one of the messages that they relayed to the public was that anyone who was educated and diligent could do statistics, and that the more people doing it the more knowledge could be gained and the more the country could be improved. Statistics was both the domain of government and the domain of civil society.

Statistics thus came to be understood as something that all educated people ought to study in order to find out more about themselves and their country. And the census, while seen as increasingly unifying, also became increasingly contested. By the 1850s, members of the public understood themselves to have the right to ask for certain census questions and reject others. The government project had become a national one, and relied on a constant dialogue between civil servants, journalists, politicians, extraparliamentary organizations, and other individuals. As the census became a public project that was understood to be useful in all sorts of ways, it became evident that

people were as interested in counting themselves as they were in counting others.<sup>24</sup>

## **The Census and Identity**

If the census helped create a surveillance state, it also helped people to assert their identity and power. People used the census not only to count, categorize, and control others but also to count, categorize, and claim rights for themselves. The concept that censuses, through categorization, help to create or validate individual and group identities that are then used for the purpose of claiming power and representation has gained attention in recent years from both anthropologists and historians. Most scholars, however, have focused on colonial rather than metropolitan settings, with an emphasis on race, ethnicity, and language.<sup>25</sup> I believe that in a European context, the census helped not only in creating national identities but also in confirming and defining group identities within the nation, whether occupational, religious, or regional.

David Kertzer and Dominique Arel suggest that before the modern period, identities “had great fluidity and implied no necessary exclusivity,” but that censuses, by insisting on more precise categories, force people to identify exclusively with one group.<sup>26</sup> Benedict Anderson similarly suggests that the census insists on no ambiguity.<sup>27</sup> The argument arises from these scholars’ interest in national or ethnic categories, which have played such an important part in identity in the modern world, and which have usually been exclusive: according to nationalists at least, an individual cannot belong to more than one nationality.<sup>28</sup> But while the argument can be applied to other specific categories (the British census would not allow someone to define himself or herself as an inhabitant of both London and Yorkshire, for example), by creating multiple categories the census in fact allowed for a different kind of ambiguity and fluidity. The census, by the very number of its categories, allowed people to identify themselves as members of the overlapping identity groups that operated as fractions of the aggregate: each individual was a member of an age group, a gender group, a regional group, an occupational group, and a religious group, for example.

The census, therefore, not only allowed people to assert themselves as members of groups within the nation and as members of the national body itself but also encouraged them to differentiate themselves from others around them. The ability of the census to confirm identities is demonstrated by the fact that while a large part of the public accepted the census as crucial to nationhood, people also recognized the possibility that it could divide rather than unite. In an 1812 parliamentary debate about a possible question about religion on the Irish census, one MP “deprecated...any distinction being made between persons of particular religious sects and opinions, which could only have the effect of ranging as it were in hostile array those who being kindred in blood and nation, differed only in religious creeds.”<sup>29</sup>

The idea that differentiating people through the census could be harmful and divisive, especially among those who ought to be united “in blood and nation,” shows the other side of the assumption that many census takers had about aggregation leading to national unity. The census, through its capacity to define people as members of competing groups, could create either community or division; it could encourage nationhood or threaten it. Both concepts, however, relied on the assumption that people would recognize their own membership in groups through the census. The census could play a role in the “invention and legitimization of . . . categories of collective identity.”<sup>30</sup>

The most obvious way in which self-definition could be seen as a desirable aspect of census-taking was through political representation. In most cases, those who had held traditional status that was not based on numbers felt threatened by the census (thus the Irish Protestant view that counting religion in Ireland was destructive), whereas those who believed that their numerical strength legitimated a more powerful role in the society embraced the census. Advocates of the 1832 Reform Bill, for example, used census results to demonstrate the need for new parliamentary districts in urban areas, and to argue that the industrial middle class played as important a role in the society as rural landowners did. Such reformers were successful in relaying the idea that large numbers demonstrated power, and they helped to gradually replace the understanding that political representation ought to be based on interest groups with an understanding that it should be based on numbers.<sup>31</sup> The concept of representation based on numbers gained influence because of radical notions of equality that circulated during the eighteenth century, but the census made the full conceptual (and practical) shift possible. Seen this way, the expanding census was an impetus and a necessary precursor to the gradual democratization that Britain was experiencing. In an age when the traditional social hierarchy was being threatened, the census played a crucial role in defining the growing power of both national and subnational groups.

The state, in this view, can be understood as one among many agents that created identity: in Kertzer and Arel’s words, “state-defined identity categories can have a substantial impact on people, altering pre-existing lines of identity divisions within the society,” and the census reveals how “individuals came to assert certain collective identities for themselves, how they came to assign them to others, and the role that state authorities play in these collective identity processes.”<sup>32</sup> Yet the process by which these categories were defined was in fact a process of negotiation between members of the government and members of the public. Kertzer and Arel detail the “shift from census categories decided from on high to those crafted through a complex and messy process of political struggle, involving interest groups formed from the people being categorized.”<sup>33</sup> They see this shift as a twentieth-century development, but it applies to nineteenth-century Britain as well. By the 1840s, the British government was beginning to lose its control over the instrument that

it had created. Many British people came to a gradual realization that through the census, they could define themselves as members of particular interest groups, and while they might have referred to others as “surplus,” people usually understood their own groups to be central to the ideal social body. In this context, numbers were power.

### **Social Harmony and the Nation**

In 1851, the *Illustrated London News* suggested that information about social divisions was one of the most central things that the upcoming census would reveal. The census would “show us how many criminals we nurture among us, and the extent of the feud carried on by the ‘have-nots’ against the ‘haves’—that old and fierce war to which civilisation, amid all its triumphs, has hitherto been unable to put an end.”<sup>34</sup> One of the reasons for public fascination with the census was that the great social, economic, and political divisions within nineteenth-century Britain seemed extraordinarily dangerous to the ruling classes. The census, by defining different groups in terms of their position within the national population, both documented and influenced the struggle to achieve lasting uniformity and harmony.

As Linda Colley has argued, British national identity developed during the eighteenth century in opposition to a foreign “other.”<sup>35</sup> In this context, British people understood their own superiority to depend on their political liberty, their religious morality, and their military and commercial strength. But while these notions remained extraordinarily important during the nineteenth century, British national identity after 1815 took on a different emphasis. After the Napoleonic wars ended, the British turned inward, and became more concerned with domestic unity than international strength. The prolonged period of European peace, from the Congress of Vienna in 1815 until the outbreak of the Crimean War in 1854, provided the precondition that made this shift possible. The turn of the nineteenth century also provided the tipping point that made taking a census seem necessary for practical reasons, and it brought Enlightenment ideas about equality, democracy, and numbers into sudden relief. The process of industrialization, while more gradual, also played a fundamental role in bringing the attention of British people to domestic relations. The religious differences of the eighteenth century certainly did not disappear, but they were pushed to the margins by the French Revolution and industrialization, which instead helped to focus attention on divisions between the rich and the poor.

As Colley herself points out, in nineteenth-century Britain, class came to be seen as the central divider in the nation rather than religion, language, or race. Referring to the politician and novelist Benjamin Disraeli’s famous description of the “two nations” of rich and poor, Colley suggests that “Disraeli’s exclusive concentration on wealth and poverty as agents of national division” itself indicates Britain’s uniqueness.<sup>36</sup> While most European countries at the time took rich and poor for granted and focused

instead on regional, religious, or linguistic divisions, the British recognized class as the most divisive factor in their society. The attempt to create national unity in nineteenth-century Britain was largely about uniting hostile social, economic, and political groups, and in the British case it was the “ethnic” unity of the nation that received less scrutiny.<sup>37</sup> The war driving national formation was conceived of primarily as an internal class war rather than a foreign war.<sup>38</sup>

Although many nineteenth-century British people were involved in active and explicit attempts to promote national unity, scholars continue to debate whether such national unity was actually achieved. Mary Poovey, despite her acknowledgment that “many historians would quite rightly feel hard-pressed to define—much less defend—the notion of a single British culture,” goes on to argue that a process of homogenization and the creation of a mass culture did essentially occur in nineteenth-century Britain.<sup>39</sup> By the 1860s, Poovey argues, Britain saw itself as an aggregate, partly through the help of such technologies as the census.<sup>40</sup> In contrast, Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland, and Jane Rendall, in their book on the debates leading up to the 1867 Reform Bill, emphasize the fact that nation-building always involves exclusion as well as inclusion, and that defining the nation means drawing boundaries that leave some people out.<sup>41</sup> The census, through its emphasis on surplus and redundancy, was involved in an exclusionary process similar to that described by Hall, McClelland, and Rendall. The many public conflicts over the nineteenth-century census also suggest that antagonism and division were as much a part of the census as unity. However, I also believe that the census *was* involved in nation-building and *did* contribute to a unitary British national identity, even as it also cemented or even created divisions within the nation.

The census was begun both in order to determine strength on an international stage and to address domestic unrest. But as the eighteenth-century belief that national strength relied on a large population gradually gave way to a focus on social improvement and the well-being of society, internal unity itself came to be understood as strength: a healthy society would be one that was united and peaceful. Nineteenth-century Britons lived in the shadow of the French Revolution, and the census’s ability to unite the population was understood in the context of overt and dangerous social hostility. Industrialization and urbanization convinced many people that their society was too individualistic, and that people had to understand the nation as an aggregate if they were to maintain social harmony. As Friedrich Engels lamented in his 1844 study of the English working classes, “Society, composed wholly of atoms, does not trouble itself about them.”<sup>42</sup> The urban masses, Census Commissioner Horace Mann wrote in 1854, “form a world apart, a nation by themselves; divided almost as effectually from the rest as if they spoke another language or inhabited another land.”<sup>43</sup> Viewed this way, the census was taken out of necessity: to save the society from self-destruction. Census takers repeatedly pointed out that the census could

create community simply by making people aware of those who lived around them, and by describing the nation in a way that could generate sympathy and social cohesion.

The assumption that information could create sympathy and harmony relied in part on certain capitalist economic theories. Capitalist thinkers used the metaphor of the machine to describe both the economy and the society. In both cases, each element would do its necessary part so that the entire thing would work harmoniously, and every individual part was dependent on every other. Liberal economists believed that employers and employees shared economic interests, and that their fortunes would rise or fall together. They argued that if workers were simply better informed—made aware that their interests lay with those of their employers—they would be less likely to join trade unions or threaten revolt. Meanwhile, teaching the upper ranks about the problems that their poorer neighbors faced would spur charity and understanding, thereby diffusing anger on both sides. In his analysis of occupations on the 1861 census, census taker William Farr wrote that

social phenomena—like the phenomena of the heavens—are governed by laws. Nothing is accidental in the marvelous economy of society; and the investigation of its laws, while it will dissipate illusions and remove misapprehensions, will cherish just hopes, and lead to innumerable improvements. Errors will be dissipated. The workman, when the truth is known, will no longer fancy that he alone is the producer of wealth; and the master will learn that he can best win industrial victories with the aid of intelligent, healthy, contented men, and not with mere “hands.”<sup>44</sup>

According to this view, conflict could be obliterated by “investigation” of capitalist society. Masters and workmen would come to understand, presumably in part through their perusal of the census reports, that their interests were united because their society was one. The census would bring people together.

By counting people as members of the nation, the census suggested that national identity at least potentially could replace local and class allegiances, and could thereby promote social harmony. Yet, as I have already suggested, the census had the ability not only to create community but also to differentiate the members of this community in ever more detailed subdivisions, providing British people with an increasingly minute and complex understanding of their society. The census provided an image of a society made up of overlapping groups, each of which constituted a certain proportion of the whole. This way of envisioning the different elements of the nation and their interrelationships relied on numbers rather than estates, individualized hierarchies, or other pre-nineteenth-century modes. As Bruce Curtis suggests, census making “entails the grouping of subjects together to form a

‘population’ whose elements may then be selectively disaggregated and made the objects of social policy and projects.”<sup>45</sup>

The census, therefore, was understood as crucial to social harmony not only because of its ability to disseminate information but also because of the assumption that a healthy society depended on healthy proportions of people. A journalist in 1845 described a society *without* such healthy proportions:

Such a state of society resembles not a wooden pavement, where the constituent parts, nicely fitted, alternately support and rest upon each other, and where all goes smoothly and quietly; but is like a stone-paved street, where the materials are only temporarily rammed together, and all is hub-bub and public disturbance.<sup>46</sup>

The essential premise behind most nineteenth-century analyses of the census was that the society could not be united if there were too many or not enough of certain kinds of people. The census was crucial because the unit of investigation was the nation and because it was proportions of the whole that were important. People disagreed about what these healthy proportions would look like and about which groups of people were too large or too small. It was because of such disagreement about specifics (yet essential agreement about the premise) that the census was at the center of debates about the economy, politics, and social life. It was the vision of the ideal nation, as defined by its population, which was at stake.

Finally, the census was implicated in nation-building not only because it made the nation understandable as an aggregate but also because people were unified by the physical process of being counted on the same day. In this regard, the census, along with new forms of transportation and communication, was a technology that brought people together. As one journalist pointed out in an 1854 article about the census, the previous 50 years had seen a dramatic increase in British people’s knowledge about their own nation. The writer mused that in 1800, “Gray’s account of the Lake district was read by literary people as we now read books of Arabian or Brazilian travel.”<sup>47</sup> The world had become smaller, and British society was growing ever more closely united, through trains, telegraphs, and photography as well as the census. The census was unique, however, because it was the only time that government administrators interacted directly with every household in the kingdom. The government and the press often emphasized the democratizing tendencies of the census for exactly this reason: the taking of the census was an experience that the entire nation shared.<sup>48</sup> The shift from an understanding of the census as an aid to legislation to the understanding that the census would create national unity simply because it was a national project was a fundamental aspect of nation-building. This may not have been state-sponsored nationalism in the same way that the late nineteenth century saw state-sponsored nationalism across Europe; it did not involve



government attempts to standardize language, education, or other practices. But the census was in some ways exactly that: an official government attempt to bring the nation together and convince people to understand themselves as citizens of that nation.

## Sources and Methodology

By the middle of the nineteenth century, British people were using census results as evidence and inspiration for their discussions about a wide variety of topics. Analyzing all or even a fraction of these analyses would be impossible, for while in an earlier period we might be hard pressed to find ten works using statistics, by the 1840s they were ubiquitous. The census was mentioned regularly in the diaries and correspondence of influential politicians of the day, and was discussed frequently in the press. The census was particularly useful to those who were arguing the great political questions of their time, about free trade, political representation, industry, agriculture, urbanization, migration, and social change. Proponents of public health, factory regulation, municipal reform, and women's rights, to name a few, all used census statistics to buttress their arguments. The government also used census results for all sorts of purposes of legislation and policy formation, even, on occasion, ones for which it had promised the public that it would not use it.<sup>49</sup> The census, however, was not simply a source for nineteenth-century politicians and polemicists. Therefore, I am interested less in how writers used the census as justification than in how people understood the role that the census was playing in their society. For this reason, my sources include the census reports themselves, government correspondence and other documents related directly to the census, press coverage and other published works explicitly about the census, and private remarks about the census. While I do make use of materials that are only more indirectly related to the census, they are used either to provide context or to demonstrate the public pervasiveness and influence of the census.

In one sense, this study is about the British census and Britain as a whole. My interest is in what people throughout Great Britain had to say about the censuses of England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, and the colonies, as well as occasionally about foreign censuses. My source base, however, remains within mainland Britain, and the large majority of my sources are in fact from England. My sources were also, predominantly, written by people who considered themselves to be from the middle or upper social ranks of the society. With a few important exceptions, publications that were explicitly written by or aimed for the working poor did not devote a great deal of attention to the census. This is not to say that working-class newspapers and journals did not contribute to the debates about surplus, urban life, and political representation that I will examine. We do know that working people, on various occasions, were willing and able to use the census to defend their interests

or argue for change, but they were less likely to devote time specifically to analysis of the census. This is significant because the census was understood as complementing and justifying the rise of the middle class. It was seen as the domain, after the 1830s especially, of Whig economists and politicians. The census was relevant to everyone because it counted everyone, but it was controlled by, and received the greatest attention from, a specific subsection of the population.

I have chosen to focus on the period from 1801 to 1861 both because it was the formative period of the census and because it was a particularly dramatic era in the development of the modern British nation. The census began in the context of international war and domestic unrest. I follow the development of the census through the rise of the statistical movement, the dramatic expansion of census-taking during the 1840s and 1850s, and the cementation of the recognizably modern British census in 1861. It was also during the 1850s and 1860s that the overriding concern with internal unity that I have described was gradually supplanted by a focus on events in the wider world. After 1870, British national unity was largely taken for granted, and while the census was still of great interest to the public, its novelty as a unifying technology had begun to wear off.

Furthermore, statistics itself changed dramatically in the late nineteenth century. During the first 50 years after the statistical movement began in the 1830s, statistics implied knowledge of state and society rather than mathematical training. Statisticians were not expected to be experts, which is perhaps why statistics could play such a prominent role in the public sphere, and why journalists, politicians, health professionals, and any number of other educated individuals felt qualified to interpret the statistical data that was being collected by the government and by others. The way in which the public used statistics again challenges the notion of a powerful government and its "experts" with a monopoly on scientific knowledge. In the last quarter of the century, when statistics did become more mathematically complex and therefore less accessible to the general public, the census also shifted to a different realm. While numbers remained central to understandings of the nation and the public remained fascinated by census results, "amateur social scientists," in the words of Libby Schweber, lost much of their influence over state-gathered statistics.<sup>50</sup> This book covers the period during which both the process of census-taking and its results were deeply embedded in the public sphere.

The chapters in this book are arranged thematically. In Chapter 1, I discuss the political and administrative development of the census, and examine its transformation in the public sphere and the process by which it was appropriated by members of the public. Chapters 2 and 3 provide a survey of the two central types of conceptual work that the census was doing: isolating some segments of the population as "surplus," or unnecessary to the national social body, and designating others as deserving of representation. In Chapter 2, I examine the theory of overpopulation as it related to the

census, while Chapter 3 involves a discussion of the relationship of the census to the expanding representative system, and the role of the census in creating group and individual identities.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 serve as case studies of the tension between surplus and representation. In all these cases, certain groups could either be seen as problematic or could use the census to claim rights and privileges, and in all three cases, the concern for observers had to do with what were considered appropriate proportions of people making up the whole. Chapter 4 addresses what was for Victorians among the most striking aspects of the census: the evidence it provided of astounding urban growth. In Chapter 5, I explore the ways in which the census contributed to debates about family life and women's roles during the nineteenth century. In Chapter 6, I discuss the administration of the census in Ireland and in Britain's many far-flung colonies, as well as discussions about worldwide racial demographics, the strengths of different races, and the potential for selective breeding. Finally, Chapter 7 examines those who rejected the census, questioned its utility, or proposed alternative methods of examining the social body.

The census of 1801, although not the first attempt to gather information about the population in Britain, was the first to do so systematically on a national scale. What made the census distinct from other statistical studies, and what thus made the nineteenth century distinct from earlier periods, was its national focus. It was the national economy and the national body politic that was both depicted and constructed by the census. By representing the population of Britain as a united whole—something that could be described in a single document and with a single language, numbers—the census institutionalized the notion that Britain was defined by its people. The census was linked to some of the most visible debates of the nineteenth century, over such things as the growth of the state, and the extent to which the government ought to intervene in the economy, the society, and the private life of the family. The census was also increasingly understood by members of the government and members of the public as a powerful social and political tool. On the one hand, it was used to shape identities, claim rights, and empower people; on the other, it provided a means of controlling those whom it marked as problematic, redundant, or unnecessary to the society. The competing visions of the ideal British nation that emerged in the middle of the century relied largely on the assumption that the nation required certain proportions of people, and they therefore relied on the census as well.

# 1

## “A National Undertaking”: Taking the Census

It must indeed be obvious to every man conversant with the subject, that to ascertain the population of a country, was a grand desideratum in political economy, whether considered with regard to its physical force, its agricultural produce, or its financial capacities.

—Parliamentary debate on the Census, 1806<sup>1</sup>

The census of an empire is as huge an undertaking as the building of a pyramid or the elevation of a Colossus; and it must be admitted that the last census of Great Britain, taken in 1851, is equally entitled to be called one of the wonders of the world. Imagine a pile of schedules, seven millions in number, and forty tons in weight, and who will say that Egypt or Greece, Palmyra or Rome, ever reared a superstructure more imposing?

— *Manchester Guardian*, 1853<sup>2</sup>

### The Origins of the Census

On November 19, 1800, Charles Abbot addressed the British House of Commons proposing that “leave be given to bring in a bill to ascertain the population of Great Britain.”<sup>3</sup> Abbot declared, “It has long been a matter of surprise and astonishment, that a great, powerful, and enlightened nation like this should have remained hitherto unacquainted with the state of its population.”<sup>4</sup> He explained that at any time, the knowledge of the country’s population “must be serviceable for so many important purposes of wise legislation and good government, and without [it] no country can avail itself of the full extent of its resources, or effectually and permanently provide for its wants.”<sup>5</sup> However, it was in “times like these” that “this knowledge becomes of the highest importance,” and he then described the particular social and political conditions that made conducting a census of the British population so desirable at the present time. Abbot focused on the food scarcity that Britain had been experiencing as a result of bad harvests and a shortage of agricultural laborers; the dislocation of trade caused by the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars; and the need for troops to fight in these wars. He insisted that in order to provide food for the population, the government must know

"the extent of the demand," and "the proportion borne by the agricultural class to the other classes of his majesty's subjects," and if necessary, more land could be cultivated to meet the needs of the increasing population.<sup>6</sup> He argued that a knowledge of the precise population of the country would aid the government in its decision making about both army recruitment and agricultural policy, and would be of great help in the current troubled times of war, scarcity, and popular discontent.

After enumerating the various practical benefits of a census, Abbot provided several precedents of recent national censuses, including the United States' census of 1790, the two censuses conducted by the government of Spain in 1768 and 1787, and Sweden's especially early census of 1749.<sup>7</sup> Abbot cited these examples both in order to demonstrate that censuses were possible and beneficial and to suggest that Britain was being outdone by its neighbors. In a time of international competition, it was important for the British government to have as much useful information about its population as other governments had about theirs. The rhetorical devices that Abbot used in his speech suggested quite clearly that the census was an obvious measure. "Why," he asked, "should this great and powerful country choose to remain in ignorance of its most important concerns, when by an instantaneous measure it can at once dissipate every doubt?"<sup>8</sup> After Abbot's relatively short speech, the proposal was seconded, and the bill passed through Parliament without opposition the following day. The British government conducted its first census in 1801, and has repeated the measure once every ten years since that time.<sup>9</sup>

The ease with which the census bill passed was surprising given the recent history of population-counting in Britain. In 1753, the government had attempted to take a census, but opposition from men of property had prevented the bill from passing through the House of Lords. From its origins in the seventeenth century until well into the second half of the eighteenth century, "political arithmetic" had been associated with the government. Statisticians and arithmeticians often worked for the crown, and opponents viewed their work as an indication of government tyranny.<sup>10</sup> Opponents of the census expected the government to use the information that it gathered in order to impose taxes and to encroach on the local privileges and powers that most landowners enjoyed. In short, gathering statistics was something that a too-powerful and probably corrupt government would do for its own interests, and it was something that many British people associated with the absolutist and authoritarian states of continental Europe. A government that could use statistical information in order to control its population was precisely the sort of government that the British prided themselves on avoiding. Furthermore, counting the people implied a "leveling" of the different groups in the social hierarchy. Most landowning gentlemen in eighteenth-century Britain believed that they were meant to play a leading role in a socially hierarchical society, and they wished to define themselves not by their numbers but by their social interests, privileges, and responsibilities. One opponent of the 1753 bill insisted that

the census would reduce the people to "numbered vassals of indiscriminating power."<sup>11</sup> In every way, then, a census was an insult to and an infringement on the individual liberties of the British gentleman.

The second half of the eighteenth century, however, saw an increased interest in statistics. Scientific men undertook local statistical projects and a public debate arose over the question of whether Britain's population was increasing or decreasing.<sup>12</sup> During this period, a gradual shift also occurred in the political ideology that was associated with statistics.<sup>13</sup> The individuals most interested in political arithmetic were no longer tied to the government, and were in fact primarily religiously nonconformist intellectuals who were influenced by Enlightenment notions of economic and political liberty. These people, including the dissenting minister Richard Price, believed that the government's growing authority needed to be checked. But unlike the landowners who had blocked the 1753 census bill, Price argued that statistics would act as a safeguard of individual liberties, not as a threat to them. Price did have a specific political goal for his use of statistics, and it was in fact a leveling goal. He believed that if neutral and objective statistics could be used to describe society, then there would no longer be room for whimsical decisions and governmental corruption.<sup>14</sup> There would also be no opportunity for propertied men to maintain complete social control. Price believed that people who had gained their wealth by other means, particularly trade, ought to have as full a role to play in the governance of society as the landed.

It was the 1790s, however, that provided the crucial impetus to the taking of the first national census. By this point, several European countries as well as the newly founded United States had taken censuses. More importantly, the French Revolution, the Revolutionary wars, and internal unrest had made the government feel vulnerable on both foreign and domestic fronts, and helped to unite the ruling classes behind common political goals. Finally, there were two obvious practical needs that could be addressed by the census: military recruitment and agricultural subsistence.<sup>15</sup> The success of the 1800 census bill must therefore be understood as a response to a specific and dramatic moment of crisis, and the people most immediately behind the bill were Tories who saw the census as a way to cement the authority of the government in the face of radical opposition. Statistics had thus gained the support of people across the political spectrum.

The most immediate force behind the 1800 Population Act was a memorandum, titled "Thoughts on the Utility and Facility of a General Enumeration of the People of the British Empire," written in 1796 by John Rickman, who later became the private secretary to Charles Abbot.<sup>16</sup> Rickman began by justifying the gathering of information in general. "It will be intuitively granted," he wrote, "that an intimate knowledge of any country can be the only foundation of the legislation of that country, and also of its political relation to other nations."<sup>17</sup> With accurate information, Rickman went on, "legislation and politics must make proportional steps towards perfection" and "the human understanding cannot reason without proper data."<sup>18</sup>

More immediately, the census was necessary for addressing the food crises that had been occurring throughout the 1790s, for "no society can confidently pretend to provide the requisite quantity of food, till they know the number of consumers."<sup>19</sup> The series of bad harvests had provoked concern about importing food during wartime, when the disruption of trade made it difficult. The crises also led to high poor relief costs as increasing numbers of laborers required support from the parish, underscoring Rickman's point that while a large population was good for a country, it was "an industrious population" that "is the first and most necessary requisite to the prosperity of nations."<sup>20</sup> Rickman finally declared that "the grand basis of the power and resources of a nation" came not from land but from population.<sup>21</sup> He specified that "in every war, especially in a defensive war, it must be of the highest importance to enroll and discipline the greatest possible number of men."<sup>22</sup> He thus wanted to determine the population of each county for militia recruitment purposes, as well as the number of seamen in the country. Despite the anxieties facing the British ruling classes, Rickman believed that ultimately the census would be a source of pride because it would show a large and increasing population. "Can we hesitate to believe," Rickman asked, "that an accurate knowledge of population would be the most consoling gratification to every lover of his country?"<sup>23</sup> He reminded his readers that "France has certainly encouraged her own subjects, and alarmed Europe, by her vaunted 27 millions."<sup>24</sup>

Patriotism thus called for the measure, and Rickman explained that it would direct the public intellect in an important new direction: "A specimen of the kind proposed, might tend to make political economy a more general study in England. Certain it is, that, at present, too small a portion of the national intellect is engaged in patriotic speculations."<sup>25</sup> Rickman also recognized that "the execution of the proposed measure would much facilitate many other useful enquiries," about property, taxes, and life insurance.<sup>26</sup> He ended his article on a patriotic note. Whatever the census might decide about the population in mere numbers, it was safe to say that "the industry and value of our countrymen, is double that of our rivals, the French."<sup>27</sup>

Rickman's article established many of the themes and modes of talking about the census that remained important throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. The automatic association that Rickman made between "political economy" and "patriotism" and his related emphasis on productivity and usefulness were crucial to ongoing understandings of the census. The census as the basis for other statistical investigations was also a recurring theme. Finally, the census could not have been conceptualized or administered in the way that it was without an understanding of population as the central element in the power of the nation. As Michel Foucault argues, the recognition of population as the goal and basis of government arose in Europe during the eighteenth century, and Rickman's article is certainly a result of this recognition.<sup>28</sup>

The census of 1801 was the first attempt to systematically describe this population as a united whole. The census institutionalized the notion that Britain

was defined by its people, and it contributed to the production of what some scholars have called the "social": a realm that was subject to governmental and nongovernmental intervention, but that was neither explicitly economic nor political.<sup>29</sup> It did not take long before the "people" recognized their role and stake in this process. Members of the government and the general public worked to change and expand the census over the course of the nineteenth century. During this conflicted and complicated process, the census was transformed from a somewhat obscure government project to a widely publicized and avidly watched national event that relied on the cooperation of every family. Meanwhile, the census helped the British people to develop an understanding of their own society and the place of their nation in the wider world.

### **Counting Communities: 1801–1831**

The first four censuses were taken under the control of John Rickman, and they all followed essentially the same pattern. The Overseers of the Poor collected the information in their parishes, and then provided the returns to the Secretary of State for the Home Office who was officially responsible for the whole operation.<sup>30</sup> The first Population Bill specified that the census was to be taken on January 20, 1801, barely two months after the measure had been proposed in Parliament. The enumerators were allowed a number of weeks, however, to compile the information, and the results were not actually returned as quickly as planned.<sup>31</sup> The enumerators were paid out of the poor rates, and a fine was imposed on any overseer who refused to provide accurate returns.

The schedules sent to the overseers asked for the number of inhabited houses in the parish, by how many families they were occupied, the number of uninhabited houses, the numbers of males and females, and the total population. This did not include men in the army, the navy, or the militia, nor did it include merchants on registered vessels.<sup>32</sup> Since the census did not ask about ages, the initial goal of assessing military strength among the population was not met. The census provided an overall assessment of the country's population strength, but it did not provide firm numbers of potential military recruits.

The forms then asked how many people were involved in a general category comprising trade, manufactures, and handicraft, how many were involved in agriculture, and how many in other fields of work. There was space on the forms for enumerators to insert explanations about local conditions; some made observations about trades that had been hurt by the advance of machinery, for example. The information supplied was about the community as a whole, and provided no details about individuals. This meant that in a small community where the enumerator knew all of the inhabitants, he may have been able to fill out the form without requesting any information directly, and many people would likely have remained unaware that the census was being carried out.

Since the government was also concerned with determining whether the population was increasing or decreasing, it acquired returns from the parish



registers of baptisms and burials over various intervals of time throughout the eighteenth century.<sup>33</sup> The numbers of marriages were also listed for every year from 1754 (when Hardwicke's Marriage Act made the registration of marriages in England and Wales a law) until 1800. The final abstracts included summaries for England, Wales, Scotland, and a separate one for London. Rickman was "appointed by His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Home Department, to digest, and reduce into order, the above abstract."<sup>34</sup>

The government considered the 1801 census to be only partially successful, for some parishes did not send in returns. However, when George Rose brought the population bill before Parliament in 1811, he made "a variety of observations on the benefits which had resulted, both in a financial and in a military point of view, from the last measure of a similar nature."<sup>35</sup> The innovations established in the 1811 census were thus ones of method, not content, and were meant to address the confusions that had resulted in 1801. Instead of asking for the numbers of people involved in different trades, the new schedules asked for the numbers of families. This was because there had been uncertainty among the enumerators in 1801 about how to class women, children, and servants.<sup>36</sup> The concern indicates that the government was primarily interested in what the local economy was based on and the general strength of the wartime economy, not in what individual people did. It also depicts a family-based economy that was soon going to fall apart as industrialization picked up speed, and increasing numbers of both men and women left the home to work. Another question that had caused confusion on the first census regarded the numbers of empty and inhabited houses. In 1811, uninhabited houses were divided into abandoned houses and houses in the process of being built, since the latter were considered an indication of prosperity, whereas the former were thought to be a sign of economic hardship and decay.<sup>37</sup>

The innovations of 1811 were repeated in 1821. In 1821, the government also attempted to divide people into age groups. The motivation for this came largely from the needs of insurance societies, which based their calculations of annuities on statistics of life expectancy.<sup>38</sup> However, the question was left to the discretion of the overseers, who were instructed to ask for ages only if they could do so "in a manner satisfactory to yourself, and not inconvenient to the parties."<sup>39</sup> The results were therefore not complete enough to provide the conclusive abstracts that the insurance societies wanted. In 1831, the question of acquiring ages was brought up again, this time at a Parliamentary Committee on the census. Here, a conflict arose between Rickman, who wished to eliminate the question about ages in order to keep the census as simple as possible, and those representatives of the insurance societies who believed that ages were a fundamental aspect of the statistics of the nation.<sup>40</sup> In the end, the 1831 census only distinguished males older than 20 from those younger than 20.

In addition to the now standard question about the number of families engaged in agriculture, trade, and other occupations, the 1831 census asked for more detailed occupational information about males older than 20. The

census separated landowners from agricultural laborers, manufacturers and artisans from unskilled industrial workers, and made distinctions between a number of different trades. Servants, professional men, and retired people or others not working were also counted as separate groups. One reason for this breakdown of occupational groups again had to do with the needs of insurance societies, which hoped to combine information on occupation with information on age. The detailed subdivision, however, tabulated in conjunction with the older and simpler division of families, also indicates a government that was no longer interested simply in resources and subsistence, and a society in the process of transition. A new focus on distinctions of wealth, and a recognition that social and occupational categories could be useful for depicting and understanding society, had arisen. The decision to count only adult males as individual workers, however, discounted the fact that men, women, and children all left the home to work as wage laborers.

During the first 30 years of the census's existence, the government came to recognize its usefulness beyond the original goals of subsistence and military recruitment. The census technology could be used to describe the rapidly changing national economy, and it could provide data for other statistically based projects, such as insurance calculations. Rickman and his collaborators also worked to make the technical aspects of the information-gathering process smoother, so that by 1831 there were no longer worries about extreme undercounting or other inaccuracies. But the census was constrained by its basic format, which continued to focus on the community as a whole rather than on individuals. The early census was a product of an age that was essentially local and family-oriented. The newly complex and diversified economy could not be described until the statistical movement had triggered the greatly expanded census of the mid-century period.

## **The Rise of the Statistical Movement**

As early as the 1820s, suggestions were heard for a dramatic extension of the census. William Henderson, for example, the enumerator responsible for counting the population of the town of Yetholm in Scotland for the census of 1821, sent to the government his "observations on the method of taking an Accounting of the Population of Great Britain."<sup>41</sup> Henderson called for a faster method, better-constructed schedules, a more accurate description of occupations, and more information in general. "With a most trifling additional labour," he explained, "the return of each parish might contain considerably more information," on churches, schools, students, paupers, and poor rates.<sup>42</sup> He also hoped that information on marriages, baptisms, and burials could be procured for Scotland, which did not have the same parish registration system that England had, and he pointed out that "a census might be taken so as to subserve several of the general purposes of government."<sup>43</sup>

There were models for a more extensive census: various foreign countries had managed to obtain much more detailed breakdowns of society. The

British census, however, lagged behind. In 1829, the political economist J. R. McCulloch wrote an article titled "Proposals for an Improved Census of the Population"<sup>44</sup> in the *Edinburgh Review*. McCulloch wanted the census to provide a great deal more information than it did, including statistics that could depict recent changes in industry and their effects, as well as information about disease and epidemics. He also asked for a more precise categorization of occupations and class distinctions. McCulloch warned that the government ought not let pass the opportunity to take "a census worthy of the country and the age."<sup>45</sup>

Most of these suggestions were not implemented in 1831 as McCulloch had hoped, and in 1835 he wrote another article titled "State and Defects of British Statistics," in which he complained, "with the exception of its *actual amount*, our knowledge of most other particulars respecting the population is very limited."<sup>46</sup> He considered it a disgrace that Britain did not have accurate mortality statistics, and he lamented that the backwardness of British statistics in general was "discreditable to the country."<sup>47</sup> In fact, "no nation ever had such an opportunity of profiting by experience, and none certainly ever threw it so completely away."<sup>48</sup> For McCulloch, the census in its full form would explain nothing less than the progress of society, and would bring insight into fluctuations in trade, the rise and fall of different classes, and the healthiness of different occupations. He also expressed his desire for a religious census, and for some real knowledge about the condition of the lower classes.

For McCulloch and many others who shared his liberal outlook, the census was both a symptom of and an impetus for progress. Taking an extensive and accurate census was something that befitted a rational, industrializing, and technologically advanced nation such as Britain, and the census itself was one of the most impressive technologies of the day.<sup>49</sup> And while the census was fascinating to educated people, "these investigations are not calculated merely to gratify a rational curiosity, but...they may be made productive of the greatest utility."<sup>50</sup> Extending the census was part of becoming more civilized, or in the words of statistician Joshua Milne, "a taste for these inquiries would gradually be formed among the thinking part of the community, with benefit to the country."<sup>51</sup> Then, as McCulloch said, "we shall no longer be the only civilized nation in Europe which has made no progress in this highly interesting science."<sup>52</sup>

The statistical movement in Britain took off during the 1830s. The Statistical Society of London and its counterparts in the provinces, of which the most influential was the Manchester Statistical Society, were formed in the early years of the decade. The immediate impetus for the founding of the Statistical Society of London came from the well-known Belgian statistician Adolphe Quetelet, who attended a meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1833, and inspired a group of men to form a statistical section of that society.<sup>53</sup> Soon after, the Statistical Society of London was created as a separate body. From the beginning, it had close links with the government. Its meetings were attended by many members

of Parliament and other people with political influence, often prominent Whig reformers who had a longstanding interest in political economy. Its first members included such well-known economists and writers as Charles Babbage, William Sykes, Nassau Senior, and Thomas Malthus, as well as the politicians Lord John Russell, Lord Brougham, and Francis Jeffrey. The Manchester Statistical Society counted writers, industrialists, and doctors such as William Rathbone Greg, James Kay, and Benjamin Heywood among its founding members.

The first volume of the Statistical Society of London's journal explained that it was "a Journal devoted to the collection and comparison of Facts which illustrate the condition of mankind, and tend to develop the principles by which the progress of society is determined."<sup>54</sup> Statistics was not an abstract science, the writers suggested; rather, it was about social and political government and it was useful and relevant in the most direct and obvious of ways. The journal argued that "the knowledge and proper appreciation of those facts which determine and explain the civilization, riches, power, and happiness of our own and of other nations, is not inferior in usefulness to any other science" and "statistical data must constitute the *raw material* of all true systems of economy and legislation, local and national."<sup>55</sup> The goals of the society, therefore, were ambitious and lofty yet eminently practical at the same time.

The methods of the statistical societies were twofold. The members provided analyses of particular social or economic problems based on official government statistics of various kinds, especially the census, and they also undertook their own statistical surveys on a local scale. They saw the census as the root and the basis of all other statistics, since it was the only complete and national survey of the population, and they were aware that a survey of that scale could be done only by the central government. The journal declared that

a national census is among the most important statistical operations which a government can execute, as its results must form the base for administrative and economical measures of the highest importance, and supply the elements of almost every statistical investigation.<sup>56</sup>

As census administrator Edmund Phipps wrote in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1844, the census was "a body of information upon which every question in social economy must, in some degree, depend for its solution."<sup>57</sup> Statistics of things such as criminality could mean nothing without an accurate knowledge of the whole population, because it was only as a proportion to the whole that a particular subgroup could be understood.

Influential statistical works of the period, such as G. R. Porter's *The Progress of the Nation* and McCulloch's *A Statistical Account of the British Empire*, emphasized the same link between statistics and the nation.<sup>58</sup> In the context of this focus on the entire social body, the statisticians of the 1830s called on the government to provide both national and local statistics. McCulloch declared that "it is impossible to legislate wisely for any country, or for any

particular department of industry, or for any class or order of society, without being thoroughly acquainted with all the circumstances peculiar to such country, department, or class."<sup>59</sup> McCulloch envisioned a system whereby local statistical agents would constantly report back to a central board, resulting in a full, ongoing, accurate picture of society.<sup>60</sup>

The statisticians of the 1830s assumed that legislators would be among the first to benefit from the data that they were collecting and organizing, but that they were not the only ones who would find them of interest. Statistics had become a more public enterprise; instead of a state secret, they were now open and available to whoever wished to make use of them, and many people outside of government could help in the great work of reforming and improving society.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, another goal of the societies was to disseminate statistical information and to extend the public interest in statistics: "The Journal will become an important instrument for developing and diffusing the knowledge of truth, and for detecting and removing error and prejudice."<sup>62</sup>

The surveys of the statistical societies focused on a few pressing issues such as education, the conditions of the urban poor, and crime. The societies also reported on foreign statistics and censuses. The Statistical Society of London claimed that rather than taking any political stance of its own, its goal was "limited to the collecting of facts which may form the groundwork for investigations concerning the various and complicated circumstances which influence the happiness and progress of social existence."<sup>63</sup> McCulloch, in fact, saw one of the prime benefits of the census to be its ability to answer controversial questions. "Facts and experience," he pointed out, are better than "hypothesis and conjecture."<sup>64</sup> Phipps agreed that without statistics, "almost all political questions, would be solved only by doubtful guesses, or tedious and often unsuccessful experiments."<sup>65</sup> With statistics, one could see "the simple rules of arithmetic, which no political bias or party object can bend to its purpose."<sup>66</sup>

Despite their claims of neutrality, however, the statisticians were moralists as well, and they arrived on the scene just as the heated debate over the "condition of England" was taking off. Statisticians believed that their science would aid the humanitarian project of improvement: "It is to [the Statist's] labours chiefly that the discovery of social evils, and of their appropriate remedies, is to be attributed."<sup>67</sup> The *Journal of the Statistical Society of London* declared in 1839 that

when the system of registration shall have been perfected..., and when the census of 1841 shall have been taken...we shall possess a mass of Statistical data relating to our population which will open a new and vast field of improvement to the legislator, the actuary, and the physician, and is calculated to bring about results of important advantage, not only to this country, but to the whole human race.<sup>68</sup>

Such improvement, however, could happen only in certain ways. Most of the men involved with the statistical societies had politically liberal tendencies

and were advocates of free trade, and they did not support factory legislation as a means to better conditions. Rather, they wanted to improve society through education and moral reform. Statistics was thus believed to have the capacity to improve social harmony without threatening political economy, which stressed the unity of economic goals.<sup>69</sup> Economic theory that followed Adam Smith usually held, by definition, that the economy served the interests of everyone, and that conflicts between the different segments of society were not due to fundamentally opposing economic or social interests, but simply a lack of understanding and a lack of sympathy. Through impartial, unbiased numbers, statisticians argued, different classes and different interests could learn about one another and society would be improved.<sup>70</sup> At the same time the census, especially in its potentially expanded form, both depended on and was directed toward exactly the type of bureaucratic state that liberal political economists wished to avoid.<sup>71</sup>

### **Counting the People: The Office of the Registrar-General and the Extension of the Census**

The close links between the statistical societies and the government meant that it was not long before several new statistical departments of the government were founded.<sup>72</sup> But many people believed that the process could not be complete without a department devoted to the collection of "vital statistics." Until this time, records of births, marriages, and deaths were those kept by parish clerks. This meant that people who did not undergo rites in the Church of England were in many cases not registered at all, and the parish records were patchy and inaccurate for other reasons as well.<sup>73</sup> When the act founding the Office of the Registrar-General (RG) was passed in 1837, it was seen as a triumph for Dissenters, who had been unrepresented under the previous system.<sup>74</sup> But another goal of the civil registration system put in place by the act was to obtain the accurate and centralized registration of causes of death that would allow for a systematic compilation of mortality statistics, which could then be used by medical professionals and local authorities to improve public health and by insurance societies to compile their actuarial tables.<sup>75</sup> The founding of the RG can thus be understood as one of the important 1830s acts of reform, following the Reform Bill of 1832, the Factory Act of 1833, and the New Poor Law of 1834. Although emerging from various (sometimes conflicting) political ideals, all of this legislation in some way increased the power and the administrative coherence of the central government, and at the same time granted rights or power to certain social groups.<sup>76</sup>

The act was passed for England and Wales only; Ireland's General Register Office was formed in 1844, and Scotland received its own system of civil registration in 1854. The government constructed new registration districts, in cooperation with the Poor Law Board, for the purpose of collecting the statistics, and these districts were ultimately used for the census as well. A hierarchy of civil servants was also formed, in which the Registrar-General

at the central office in London had control over a number of superintendent registrars in the provinces, who likewise were in charge of a number of registrars whose duty it was to conduct the actual registration on a local level. The RG began to publish weekly reports of mortality for London in 1840, and quarterly reports for the nation in 1842. The Office also issued special publications at times, such as a report on the cholera epidemic of 1848–1849. The census was seen as closely tied to the other duties of the RG. As a Treasury report of 1855 noted, “The objects of the Census, and the machinery by which they are obtained, are so analogous to the ordinary operations of the registration system... that there are many obvious advantages in both being conducted by the same department.”<sup>77</sup> The 1841 census and those following were conducted by this office, and the men who worked there had a great deal of control over the directions in which the census developed.

The individual who had the greatest influence over the mid-century censuses was Dr. William Farr, an epidemiologist who had become interested in medical statistics and had been active in the Statistical Society of London since its origin.<sup>78</sup> He joined the RG as the head of the Statistical Department almost immediately after it was founded, and his duties there encompassed the preparation of the Office’s abstracts as well as the writing of most of the weekly, quarterly, and annual reports. Farr also spent much of his time and energy on the census. The 1851, 1861, and 1871 censuses seem to have been almost entirely under his management.<sup>79</sup>

The association between medicine and statistics was considered a natural one at this time, and Farr was like many other liberal doctors of his age in his faith in medicine as an improving force in society. Farr, a committed advocate of public health, believed that mortality and disease statistics would make it possible to quantify the causes of death for the society as a whole, and that a great many deaths could be prevented if hygiene and sanitation were improved. Furthermore, Farr believed that statistics could be used to serve his reformist political goals. John Eyler explains that

Farr was keenly interested in the sciences... that dealt with aggregates. He was convinced that quantitative approaches would both advance medicine and assist the process of social reform. He was one of an important group of Victorian social activists who believed that the reform of society might be made scientific. Statistics would become the positive science of the state. Through the quantitative analysis of current circumstances and problems the means of effecting progressive orderly social change could be found.<sup>80</sup>

This was the “medical face of Victorian liberalism,” or the idea that doctors had a particular responsibility to their society.<sup>81</sup> Statistics was useful because “large bodies of men, like masses of matter, always obey the same laws.”<sup>82</sup> This was tied to an idea that had arisen in statistical thinking: that while the choices made by individuals were not open to prediction, “the acts of numbers of individuals can be predicted with sufficient certainty for practical

purposes."<sup>83</sup> The numbers had to be large enough; it was therefore nations that had to be studied, not individuals. Or, as McCulloch wrote, the economist "has to deal with man in the aggregate—with states, and not with families—with the passions and propensities which actuate the great bulk of the human race, and not with those which are occasionally found to influence the conduct of a solitary individual."<sup>84</sup> For Farr, hygiene would preserve the health and strength both of individuals and of the nation as a whole.

Like most proponents of statistics, Farr believed that one of its advantages was neutrality. He argued that statistics "does not discuss causes, nor reason upon probable effects; it seeks only to collect, arrange, and compare, that class of facts which alone can form the basis of correct conclusions with respect to social and political government."<sup>85</sup> It was more impartial than politics, and would serve the creation of policy and ultimately the happiness of humanity. Farr explained that

empirical treatment of symptoms, without this [statistical] knowledge, must be as vain in its effects upon the body politic as upon the human frame, for it has no guide but "opinions," under which name may be couched the wildest or the most rational notions, the truth or fallacy of which is as yet equally unsusceptible of proof from scientific data.<sup>86</sup>

Statistics, Farr believed, was the science to be used for the social body, just as medicine was the science to be used for the human body. Statistics was thus always meant to have practical policy implications. Farr had great faith in legislative intervention, and his statistical investigations usually inspired him to demand greater national or municipal control.<sup>87</sup>

Other members of the RG also belonged to the Statistical Society of London and were close to the Whig government, and they often wrote public articles on statistical and scientific matters. One can thus speak of a recognizable community of people interested in political economy, statistics, health, and government, who were in frequent dialogue with one another. The 1841 census, the first to be conducted by the RG, shows the influence of this new statistical community. An 1840 committee of the Statistical Society of London, in which Farr participated, addressed the question of the upcoming census. The committee lamented the limited scope of the British census in comparison to continental censuses, and recommended a number of changes. But the statisticians involved also believed that their own government had broader goals than many other European governments. While the Prussians, the *Journal of the Statistical Society of London* claimed, were interested only in administration, the British were also concerned with collecting facts about the conditions of the people, which would eventually aid in solving a wide variety of social problems.<sup>88</sup>

The most obvious and important innovation of the 1841 census was the shift from returns of communities to returns of individuals. For the first time, the head of every family filled out a census form, on which the names and particulars



of every member of the household were listed. The new procedure meant that the census underwent an immense logistical expansion, and its cost increased accordingly. During the months leading up to the census, the registrars in each district identified enumeration districts and appointed enumerators, being careful to give no enumerator more land or houses than he could cover in one day's travel. The registrars were also admonished to choose men who were educated and respectable enough to do the important job at hand. The enumerators were to be paid a reasonable rate for their day's work, and clergymen and other professional men were among those who volunteered for the job.<sup>89</sup>

The week before census day, the enumerators went door to door in their districts leaving census forms with every family. The forms themselves included detailed instructions and explanations of the questions posed, and householders were asked to complete the forms before census day itself, when the enumerators would return to collect them (Figure 1.1). Upon returning, the enumerator was required to read over the completed schedule and ensure that the information was entered fully and accurately, and for those householders who could not read or write, the enumerator was to ask the questions out loud and fill in the answers himself. Once the enumerator had collected all the schedules from his district, a multi-leveled process of tabulation and fact checking began. The enumerator filled out his own summary of the results, listing the population and all its breakdowns for his district. All the papers were then sent to the office of the local registrar, who looked over the enumerators' work and combined the results of all the enumeration districts within his registration area. He then forwarded the papers to the office of the superintendent registrar, where the process of ensuring accuracy and combining results was repeated. Finally, the tabulated results were sent to the central office of the RG in London, at which point the long process of abstracting and interpreting the national statistics began.

The recording of individuals rather than communities had a crucial impact on public and official understandings of the role and descriptive power of the census. The 1841 census suggested that there were a number of possible traits by which to identify and classify people other than locality, and a single individual was to be a member of a number of different categories. The conceptual shift was accompanied by a great deal more information than any census had previously acquired, including details on the birthplace, occupation, and age of every individual in Great Britain. Finally, while the overseers conducting the earlier censuses had had several weeks or months during which they were permitted to collect their results and send the forms to London, this census was to be done on a single night. The latter procedure was continued in later censuses, and was a sign of the increasing geographic mobility that accompanied the extension of the railroad during the 1830s and 1840s. As a writer for the *Westminster Review* explained in 1854, "Our national portraiture must be taken by daguerreotype process, and not by gradual finishing. Formerly, John Bull sat still, day after day, till the picture was finished; but now he must be caught in the attitude of the moment."<sup>90</sup>

As the Statistical Society of London's committee on the 1841 census pointed out, "A census...extending...beyond the mere counting of heads, contemplates various purposes besides the mere ascertainment of numerical strength."<sup>91</sup> If numerical strength was important on the international scale, the other particulars would be important domestically, and would aid the government in legislating for the population. Since the administrators of the census were aware that the new method might be considered intrusive and would prove unpopular with some people, they promised that the individual results would be kept entirely confidential and would not be used for any purpose other than compiling an abstract of the whole. Individuals were thus important as members of the whole, or as parts of the aggregate. Individual characteristics were relevant only insofar as they identified people as members of groups, and determined the proportions that different groups constituted in relation to the nation as a whole. One individual would belong to multiple and overlapping groups, including an occupational group, an age group, and a gender group, as well as various local and regional groups. By deemphasizing geographic communities, the census essentially defined the nation as the primary locus of identification and analysis, and weighted each individual within that nation equally and anonymously. This meant that most of the aggregates to which individuals belonged were not located anywhere other than the nation, an abstract rather than a geographical location.

This is not to say that the local ceased to be important in mid-nineteenth-century Britain. On the contrary, many British people were far more interested in what the census had to say about their local community than in any national trends, and as Edward Higgs argues, "Victorian official statistics in the British Isles were used to reveal local differences rather than simply to give a unitary picture of the nation."<sup>92</sup> He also suggests that even after 1841, the Census reports had a "local bias."<sup>93</sup> But as Higgs also points out, the preindustrial state was "a localised state that collected information locally, and attempted to pin individuals down to those localities."<sup>94</sup> The census after 1841, rather than pinning individuals down, extracted them from their local communities into various nationally based demographic groups, even if those national groups could then be broken down again into local ones.

Despite the dramatic expansion of the census in 1841, some of the suggestions made by the committee of the Statistical Society of London, including questions about marital status, religion, and health, did not make it on to the census. In part, this was because Rickman himself had been involved in the preparations for the census until his death in 1840, and he was resistant to many of the suggestions given by a younger generation of statisticians.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, a general consensus among census administrators was that "as Inquiry cannot be infinite, prudence must confine it to the most promising facts," for "the more Questions you put...the less chance you have of valuable information."<sup>96</sup> The first Registrar-General, Thomas Lister, also believed that enumerators would not be able to handle their heavy load on the day of the census if too many questions were asked, and that householders could not





be trusted to fill up the schedules accurately themselves.<sup>97</sup> The administrators of the census always recognized that census procedure was inseparable from the information to be obtained, or as Census Office clerk Thomas Mann wrote, "One must be guided not merely by what is desirable in the abstract but what is practicable with the machinery at command."<sup>98</sup>

Yet this conflict between Rickman and the statisticians of the 1830s is also indicative of a larger political division. Significantly, the founding of the RG and the 1841 census marked a general political transition in the control of the census. Both Charles Abbot, the original sponsor of the 1801 census, and John Rickman, who controlled the first four enumerations, were Tories. Abbot had supported William Pitt's repressive legislation of 1795.<sup>99</sup> Rickman was an anti-Malthusian and a close friend of the conservative romantic writer Robert Southey, with whom he collaborated on numerous *Quarterly Review* articles during the first decades of the nineteenth century. The statistical movement of the 1830s, in contrast, was dominated by Whigs who had largely accepted the Malthusian variety of political economy and supported free trade. So while Rickman had lauded his version of "political economy" in his 1796 article, he was unhappy about the ways in which that science had developed in the 40 years since. Rickman was also dismayed by the Reform Bill of 1832 and by the dominance of political reformers in statistics.<sup>100</sup> In short, while both Rickman and his successors were worried about the stability of society and believed that statistics could work to improve it, their understandings of how exactly that process would work were very different.

After Registrar-General Lister died in 1842, partway through the process of abstracting the census returns, Major George Graham was appointed to the post. Graham was the brother of Sir James Graham, the Home Secretary in Robert Peel's government at the time. Although the economist Nassau Senior had recommended Edwin Chadwick as second Registrar-General, government patronage over the office retained its hold. Graham served as Registrar-General until 1879, and thus presided over the censuses of 1851, 1861, and 1871. Graham delegated a great deal of power over the census and other statistical matters to Farr.<sup>101</sup> Farr and Graham together were the public voice of the census, and their names were widely known. While Graham was often hesitant to put pressure on the government, he had a great respect for Farr's abilities and did his best to put Farr's suggestions into practice. Graham was the most important intermediary between the statistical profession and the government during the mid-century period, and he was often the ultimate arbiter when conflicts arose over the extent or direction of the census.

When Graham took over the office, he found himself in the position of defending the time that it took to complete the census report, for the process of abstracting the 1841 returns dragged on for years. Graham insisted that the differences between the 1831 and 1841 censuses were so great that it was inevitable that the latter would require more time and money than the former. As his census commissioners explained in a letter to the Home Office, "In 1841, the whole of the machinery was novel, the form in which the returns were to be made was entirely different, and the enquiries involved minute

particulars never before attempted to be collected."<sup>102</sup> Instead of one return for each parish, the census had collected "a separate return of the name, sex, age, occupation, and birth place of every living person."<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, the population had increased to such a degree that there was a great deal more information to abstract. And finally, because the new enumeration districts did not match the old ones, the only way to compare between censuses was to rearrange the results in order to make them comparable with older divisions of the country.<sup>104</sup> The commissioners insisted that "the mode in which the census was directed to be taken by Parliament is alone the cause of the length of time which is now made a matter of complaint" and "whatever advantage the system adopted on the present occasion may have in comprehensiveness, in minute details, in superior correctness... it has the unavoidable drawback of requiring time and labour for its completion."<sup>105</sup> Those members of the government who were complaining, the census takers implied, were unfamiliar with statistical processes and did not understand the nature of the work involved. Such tension between elements of the central government and the administrators of the census continued throughout the mid-century period. During the years leading up to and following the decennial censuses, Graham was forced to expend a great deal of time and energy soliciting the Home Office and the Treasury for needed funds and for the authority to hire and pay the employees in his own office.<sup>106</sup> He insisted repeatedly that census enumerators had to be paid well if they were to be willing to do the job at all.<sup>107</sup> He also seems to have been under the almost constant necessity of defending his expenditure to his superiors in the government, and of insisting that he was fulfilling his duties with the strictest possible economy.<sup>108</sup>

The conflicts within the government over the scope, the cost, and increasingly the content of the census were indicative of a larger paradox. The most active supporters of the census and the most tireless campaigners for its expansion were liberal economists and Whig reformers. Most of them believed that a good government was one that interfered in the economy as little as possible. They also advocated the expansion of the representative system—something that could be done only with the help of accurate census data—and believed that the central government should have limited authority. Yet the census was both dependent on and directed toward the growth of the state.<sup>109</sup> The same reformers usually interpreted the results of the census in ways that encouraged further state intervention. The large state was thus necessary both for democracy and for the liberal consensus, even as democracy and classical political economy theorized that the economy and the polity could run themselves.<sup>110</sup> The census, as its growing publicity made evident, relied on the state but was increasingly understood as necessary for the ongoing maintenance of civil society.

### The Mid-Century Censuses

Little changed in the administration or the content of the census from 1851 until as late as 1911, and the innovations of 1851 thus deserve close

scrutiny.<sup>111</sup> Furthermore, many contemporary observers saw the 1851 census as the culmination of census-taking technology. When the 1851 bill was first proposed, however, a controversy arose almost immediately. The original bill “proposed to obtain the same particulars as were obtained by the last census,” but left power to the Home Secretary to add more questions at a later point. Some felt that he was overstepping his bounds. As Charles Newdegate told Parliament after the reading of the census bill,

the House were as yet in the dark as to the mode by which the government proposed to correct these admitted defects [of the previous census]. The House were, therefore, by this Bill, conferring powers without the slightest knowledge how they were to be exercised.<sup>112</sup>

Lord Stanley agreed that this was “an excess of power and authority on the part of the Secretary of State.”<sup>113</sup> Moreover, some considered the proposed plans for censuses of education and religion “of a most inquisitorial character.”<sup>114</sup> It was at this point that conflicts over the details of the census took on a markedly public and political character, as conflicting interest groups within the society increasingly recognized the power and implications of numbers.

Most of the additions to the 1851 census, including a question about marital status and a decision to count the members of public institutions, originated with William Farr, although he had many foreign examples and professional recommendations from which to draw. Farr also suggested “that returns should be made of Deaf and Dumb, Blind, Insane, Idiots, and all persons disabled by severe illness or infirmity.”<sup>115</sup> Finally, there were recommendations both from Farr and from the statistical societies to ask about religion and education, as well as for a great deal of information regarding wages and the quality of houses. George Graham was tentative about asking the government to do all of this. “If these proposals be acceded to,” he wrote, “much valuable information upon a great variety of subjects will doubtless be obtained, but it is not clear to me that it is the wish of Parliament to take so wide and extended a view of the proposed Census of 1851.”<sup>116</sup> In the end, Graham suggested that the census ask about birthplace, the relation to the head of the family, and marital status. He also agreed that returns should be made of the blind, deaf, and dumb, as well as schools, hospitals, and workhouses. Separately, censuses of religion and education would be taken. Finally, the census administrators would construct abstracts of the growth in population since 1801, and of the population of each parliamentary and municipal borough and every ecclesiastical district.<sup>117</sup>

Even with these more limited additions, Graham warned that the census would require a great deal more labor and money than that of 1841, because of both the increase in information and the larger population. For Graham, preparing for this more extended census meant communicating in advance with individuals involved with the army, the navy, the canals, the merchant shipping board, the prisons, the Poor Law board, and

lunatic asylums, all of which sent returns directly to the Census Office instead of being counted by enumerators. Returns were also required from public offices such as the Department of Forest Work and the Customs Department.<sup>118</sup> Otherwise, the census was taken using the same method as in 1841, with enumerators leaving schedules at each house and returning the following week to collect them.

The public and political interest in the 1851 census was great, and the 1850s saw the creation of two new forums for the discussion of social and statistical matters: the first meeting of the International Statistical Congress was held in Brussels in 1853 and the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science first met in 1857. The International Statistical Congresses were initiated by Quetelet, Farr, and Babbage, and the report of the first meeting claimed that 150 statisticians from 26 countries were in attendance.<sup>119</sup> As Farr explained to Graham, "The general object [of the Congress] appears to be, to secure some greater uniformity and completeness than now exists in the statistical publications of the various countries of Europe;" this would "be a great public and scientific advantage."<sup>120</sup> The Congress defined itself as "a body organized to promote uniformity in national statistics, and to secure excellence in the mode of procedure."<sup>121</sup> The British government paid for Farr to attend the various statistical conferences during the 1850s as the official British representative.<sup>122</sup>

The 1860 Congress was held in London, and its participants included most of the prominent statisticians of the day, including the census administrators, as well as important political and public figures such as Lord Brougham, Earl Shaftesbury, and Prince Albert. The Congress included a lengthy session on the census, at which questions of both procedure and content were discussed. As Census Commissioner James Hammack explained in his paper there, certain questions were asked on the censuses of all "civilized" countries.<sup>123</sup> The particulars that were considered indispensable in every state included name, sex, age, relation to the head of the household, civil condition, occupation, birthplace, and whether individuals were blind or deaf and dumb. Depending on the peculiarities of the country, it was also possible to obtain information about language, religion, education, sickness, and the insane. The proceedings of the Congresses in fact show that the represented countries had such different political and social circumstances that "uniformity" was almost impossible to achieve.<sup>124</sup> Nonetheless, international discussion of the census contributed important elements to the debates within Britain.

The National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, like the statistical societies of the 1830s, counted influential politicians, economists, and writers among its founding members. Unlike the earlier statistical societies, however, it also welcomed women to attend, present papers, and participate in the discussions.<sup>125</sup> The association emphasized the unity of the nation and the importance of solving each social problem that "strikes its roots into the substance of the nation, ramifying through a hundred secret crevices into classes apparently the most removed from its influence."<sup>126</sup> In 1859, census administrator Horace Mann presented a paper titled "What Information, as



to the Social Condition of England and Wales, would it be most Desirable to Collect at the Census of 1861?"<sup>127</sup> Mann stressed that the expensive machinery of the census was available only once every ten years, so it was crucial to make full use of it: "Perhaps no opportunity is ever presented so favourable to an extensive collection of facts upon many points of social importance as that which is afforded by the decennial census."<sup>128</sup> Furthermore, Mann believed that the government could not be depended on to put much effort into improving the census; thus, it was statisticians and social scientists who must advise them.<sup>129</sup> Mann himself was a civil servant for the government, and his complaint is indicative of the tension between different government offices that often arose over such costly enterprises as the census.

Mann raised the possibility of obtaining information about orphans, small-pox vaccinations, and sickness, as well as an account of all charitable institutions.<sup>130</sup> He also proposed, with Farr's support, an "industrial" census, which took into account the wages in different trades and areas, and he believed that agricultural statistics would be useful as well.<sup>131</sup> Others called for statistics about labor and capital, crime and its relationship to education, the condition of the female population, and "the moral and social effect of the internal migrations of the population."<sup>132</sup> The census, Nicholas Waterhouse claimed, "contain[s] unbiased information regarding the various social problems which are now in operation, such as we can nowhere else obtain."<sup>133</sup> It was generally agreed that the census should be conducted "with especial reference to the social condition of the kingdom."<sup>134</sup> Mann and his colleagues also recognized, however, that if the census asked too many questions that were considered intrusive it would become unpopular, and the accuracy of the whole venture would be threatened. Questions about wages, for example, "when put by Government authority are not unlikely to be regarded with suspicion by the ignorant; and it would be unadvisable to run the risk of creating the least hostility against the form intended for universal distribution."<sup>135</sup> The census, as usual, was in the delicate position of gathering as wide a range of facts as possible while simultaneously testing the boundaries between public and private, state and society. Keeping the census within feasible and popularly acceptable limits was therefore crucial to its success.

Various suggestions for improving the 1861 census were also made in Parliament, but the most dramatic controversy revolved around the proposed question about the "religious profession" of every individual. Complaints of undercounting had been raised by Anglicans after the 1851 census of religion, which had counted church and chapel goers on a designated Sunday. The new method proposed was simply to include a question on the general form asking people to state the religious denomination to which they belonged. The proposal offended Dissenters, in part because they were aware that the new method would make their numbers seem much reduced. After a public outcry and an extended debate in Parliament, Graham took the side of the protesters and succeeded in convincing the Home Office that the census should in all essentials be confined to the limits of the 1851 census. The expense and the

work involved would already be great enough without questions on religion or education, Graham said, and if the question made people angry then they might refuse to answer or might answer other questions falsely as well, consequently threatening the success of the entire enterprise.

While the controversy over religion was the most publicized one, as the census took on a more generally public role, Graham was bombarded with suggestions on how to further expand the information collected. These requests indicate the recognition among members of the public that the census was the only technology available that could provide information on a national scale. Some of the suggestions were particularly ambitious; the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, for example, wanted the census "so conducted as to throw as much light as possible upon our social evils, and their probable remedies."<sup>136</sup> In response to this request, Graham somewhat sarcastically remarked that "as to throwing light on our social evils and curing them as suggested by the General Assembly, there is no machinery in Great Britain that I am aware of and which I can use on 7<sup>th</sup> April 1861 for effecting that object."<sup>137</sup> So, while at times Graham's own language concerning the census was as lofty as that of any zealous social reformer, as the census approached his practical side predominated: "To me... another consideration presents itself, which perhaps may be thought of no moment by great Statesmen intent on gaining information which they deem important."<sup>138</sup> His concern was that if the schedule had so many questions as to require a second piece of paper, then the millions of extra pages to be printed and circulated would greatly add to the cost of the enterprise. Graham repeatedly reminded the government and the public that every additional question meant more work, more time, and more expense for those administering the census, in everything from the cost of paper to the clerks necessary for tabulating the results. It was Graham who retained the census within feasible limits, while at the same time justifying expenditure and responding to charges of inaccuracy. Under Graham's charge the census indeed seems to have become more efficiently managed. The years that it took to complete and print the results of the 1841 census were decreased in 1851, and despite the greater population and increased questions, the expense was not much greater.

Finally, in 1861, the Scottish census was for the first time taken separately from the English and Welsh censuses. The Scottish Registrar-General, W. P. Dundas, created his own census form in consultation with Graham, and the bill for Scotland allowed for several additional questions: the numbers of children attending school were counted, and houses were categorized on the basis of the number of windows per room.<sup>139</sup> Tension between Graham and Dundas arose, however, over how much control each was to have over the Scottish census. Dundas insisted that the "Census Returns should, in as far as possible, be adapted to the peculiarities, whether these arise out of the geographical configuration of the Country, or out of the habits, customs, and modes of living which prevail in this part of the Empire."<sup>140</sup> His administrator Dr. Stark agreed that "Scotland has so many peculiarities which distinguish it from

England, ...it would not subserve the interests of the public, nor accomplish the end for which the census was taken" to follow England exactly.<sup>141</sup> Graham, both in his attempt to maintain uniformity between the two countries and in his focus on cost efficiency, wanted only absolutely essential details to be printed, and was frustrated with what he saw as Dundas's carelessness in this regard. On the other side, Dundas and Stark accused Graham of being miserly: "He seems even willing to make considerable sacrifices in order to save a few pounds in printing the abstracts."<sup>142</sup> Here was yet another situation in which the perceived power of the census caused ongoing conflicts over its details, particularly in the context of English hegemony within the United Kingdom. But such conflicts were also arising because it was no longer only civil servants and professional statisticians who were expressing their opinions on the issue.

### **"A National Undertaking": The Census, Civilization, and the Public Sphere**

As we have seen, the statisticians of the 1830s succeeded in transforming the census from a relatively narrow instrument of government into a public project that was understood to work in the service of social and economic progress. The public sphere in which the census was discussed during the 1830s was that of intellectual and civic-minded men, usually associated with the statistical societies in both London and the provinces. It was not until the 1840s, however, that information about the census consistently began to reach a wider public. When beginning with the 1841 census every "head of a household" was required to fill out a census form and interact directly with a government-appointed enumerator, a new relationship between the public and the census emerged. As both the government and the press repeatedly emphasized, the census could be a success only if every household in Great Britain was willing to cooperate. The reward for such cooperation was to be the wealth of knowledge about society and the British people that would be compiled, and this knowledge was conceived of as a public legacy. As *The Times* wrote in 1850,

it is only by learning what as a people we have been doing that we can learn what remains for us as a people to do. The command of data is the one circumstance which separates our legislation from the legislation on crude or mistaken principles which even great men were compelled to accept in former times, ...there is no doubt that in this case as in others knowledge is power, and that we acquire by our self-inquisition a larger grasp of the future.<sup>143</sup>

The notion that the entire country ought to be involved in this process of "self-inquisition" was central to the expansion and the success of the mid-century censuses. And as the census developed during the mid-century period, it operated in interaction with public perceptions and desires. As the

reading public grew and statistics and political economy became ever more accessible to educated Britons, a great many people began to recognize that the census affected them, and to voice their own opinions respecting its operation. Census administrators were accordingly forced to acknowledge "public opinion" as one of the most important influences affecting the census. At the same time, through its emphasis on population as the essential basis of the nation, and through its provision of ever more detailed knowledge about the "we" that was thought to make up that aggregated population, the census helped many British people to become more aware of their own power as members of the aggregate.<sup>144</sup>

It was primarily through the press that most people obtained their information about the census. National and local papers both prepared people for the taking of the census and publicized its results. While mentions of the first two censuses exist, it is not until 1821 that one finds a systematic recounting of results in the press. At this point, local papers were primarily interested in the population growth in their own areas, as well as in the dramatic increase in the national population.<sup>145</sup> In 1821, however, John Rickman warned that the results published in newspapers were not official and could not be trusted.<sup>146</sup> Such a division between the government and the press was soon to disappear, at least as far as the census was concerned. By the 1840s, the census office was sending information about procedure and results directly to the daily papers and assuming that the press was needed to ensure that the enterprise would succeed. While it tended to be liberal, middle-class papers that were most fascinated by and supportive of the census, papers of all political stripes were likely to mention it at times. And while opponents and critics of the census certainly made their opinions known during this period, these critics were far less noticeable than the many vocal supporters of the census.

The British census had been taken, the *Quarterly Review* declared in 1835, "to enable the legislature to exercise an enlightened justice in their fiscal, political and moral enactments; and . . . to afford to individuals authentic data for the regulation of some of their most important mutual transactions."<sup>147</sup> In 1845, the same journal described statistics as "accumulations of facts by which all practical reasoners are bound to dress their arguments, and all philosophers to readjust their theories."<sup>148</sup> Many other writers also focused on the census as a provider of public knowledge. After a number of articles on the results of the 1851 census, the *Manchester Guardian* said, "From the space we have devoted to . . . the census, we have shown our estimation of its great importance as a storehouse of facts connected with the people."<sup>149</sup> The *Illustrated London News* wrote that the 1851 census "will throw a flood of light on the real condition and progress of the British people;" it would be "a vast storehouse of social knowledge," which "suppl[ies] authentic data for the philosopher, the historian, the politician, and the legislator."<sup>150</sup> The census was "the proper basis of all statistics, and of all reasoning on the progress of society."<sup>151</sup> Legislators and any number of other people, the paper suggested, would benefit from examining the census results.

The writer went on to explain that the first goal of any census is “the mere numbering of the people in the gross and bulk,” for “it is instructive to know how large a family or nation we are.”<sup>152</sup> The other particulars “shall prove our poverty as well as our wealth, our social vices and crimes as well as our virtues, and our ignorance as well as our knowledge.”<sup>153</sup> Thus, the census was a clear call for action and improvement:

Upon the whole, there can be little doubt that the results of the census will afford reason for national gratitude and for some national reproach, and give our statesmen something to think of, far more useful and urgent than the recent ... squabbles in which they have been so unprofitably engaged.<sup>154</sup>

The *Westminster Review*, in a brief history of census-taking, wrote that “it was soon found, by a self-governing people, that a Census ought to be a thorough survey and record of society, by which every sort of social experience might be embodied for social guidance.”<sup>155</sup> The census represented the fullest picture of society that was available, and as the *Manchester Guardian* wrote in 1854, “We take it for granted, there are few people who do not like to know what their neighbors are doing, and how they pretend to live.”<sup>156</sup>

After each census was taken, the results were publicized gradually. First, the total population and the number of houses emerged, and further details were printed as they became available. Registrars and superintendent registrars in the provinces may have sent their results to local papers prior to forwarding them to the central office, for figures were often published locally almost immediately after census day.<sup>157</sup> It was understood that people would be interested in both the national and the local results. The 1861 report argued that “the Census is a topographical as well as a national survey, and ... as far as is practicable, it is desirable to supply the inhabitant of each district with that information in which he is most particularly interested.”<sup>158</sup> George Graham also received numerous requests for local results.<sup>159</sup> After the 1861 census, the Mayor of Bradford wanted returns of sickness made available for local purposes, while the curate of an impoverished parish in Sheffield believed that a copy of the original returns for his area would assist him in fulfilling his duties, for he wanted to visit every house.<sup>160</sup> Graham believed that it was most important to get the abstracts to parliament first, for, as he wrote, “the public after so large an expenditure [105,000 pounds] have a right to expect to see published with the utmost dispatch” the national results, instead of “partial abstracts for local purposes.”<sup>161</sup> The one exception that Graham made was for medical officers, who urgently required information for the districts in which they worked, and it was also generally acknowledged that clergymen would benefit from local returns.<sup>162</sup>

In 1861, Graham finally announced that he wanted one copy printed for the clerk of peace in each county, copies for some foreign countries, for some lords lieutenant, some for the RG's private use, some for MPs, and some for sale.<sup>163</sup> Graham also realized the utility in publishing different parts of the census reports for different readerships. After the 1861 census, he suggested printing some copies comprising only the national results, and some with

only county results, for different people had different interests and uses for the census. As the *Manchester Guardian* wrote in 1854, "We are desirous to turn from the general and national results...to the provincial and local details, most nearly interesting our readers in this part of the kingdom."<sup>164</sup>

In their own articles on the census, many newspapers quoted the official government reports.<sup>165</sup> The census reports themselves, published by the government several years after the census was taken, reveal the same shift in the census from government project to public project. The mid-century censuses had extensive introductions attached to the tables of figures, which explained and interpreted the statistics for the benefit of a general readership. Beginning in 1841, copies were printed to be sold to the public, and increasingly, cheap summaries were also published through private publishers.<sup>166</sup> As Graham explained in 1862, the census "is a matter in which the public, every householder having been compelled to assist in furnishing the material, take much interest; as was evident in 1853, when upwards of twenty thousand copies of an abridged epitome were quickly sold."<sup>167</sup>

One condensed version of the 1851 report began with the promise that the census.

cannot fail to yield information, not only essential to all who take part in the political questions of the day, but of interest and value to every one who bestows any attention on the progress and position of the country, or desires to possess even the most elementary knowledge of the numbers and social condition of its inhabitants... In reproducing... in a convenient form, and at a moderate price, the most material and interesting portions of the high-priced official folios, the Editor feels that he has been engaged in a work of utility, and that much valuable information connected with the general results of the Census, now brought within a small compass, will find its way into the hands of many to whom it would otherwise be inaccessible.<sup>168</sup>

The editor went on to explain that the RG had encouraged "this somewhat novel and adventurous enterprise" to "adapt the book for popular reading."<sup>169</sup> The book itself simply reprinted sections of the official report, retaining the original language of the census commissioners, but omitting many of the lengthy calculations. Another pamphlet that included the results of the 1851 census was published cheaply in order "to make [the results] available to the general reader of any or every class."<sup>170</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* recommended it

as a work, which should be in the possession of every one, whatever his position, who has a rational curiosity respecting the present condition and future prospects of that wonderful portion of the population of this earth, usually implied in the terms, "the people of England," or "the British nation." We know no work, which within the same "pocket" limits, comprises so much information on the vital and other statistics of Great Britain.<sup>171</sup>

While the census commissioners claimed that they were simply presenting the statistical “facts,” the reports included a great deal of moralizing, speculation, and historical information. William Farr’s medical and political interests were evident, and the evidence that he provided often combined statistics, anecdotes, and citations from other sources.<sup>172</sup> The 1851 report on the census of religion, written by Horace Mann, included pages of history and explanations of doctrine for all the major religious groups in Britain, as well as footnotes citing recent works on the subject. William Gladstone, who at the time was Chancellor of the Exchequer, objected to all this background information being published at public expense: “Connected with the elaborate and very valuable statistics,” he pointed out, there is “history and theology which I apprehend as entirely out of place. . . . [The] progress of religious opinions in England” was “as much in place as would be a Treatise on the Art of War prefixed to the Army estimates.”<sup>173</sup> Home Secretary Cornwall Lewis later said that Mann’s report, “although, no doubt, a work of considerable research and ability, goes into matters quite foreign to the Statistical precision and dryness, if I may say, suitable to those returns.”<sup>174</sup>

Many members of the public, however, did not want “dryness.” And in fact, political arguments about the census were often framed in terms of the interests and curiosities of the public. The census takers defended the religion and education censuses in 1851 by pointing out that these subjects occupied a great deal of the attention of the public, and the returns would help “to determine many of the problems recently the subjects of much controversy.”<sup>175</sup> Like the statisticians of the 1830s, the census takers of the 1850s invoked statistics as a neutral authority with the ability to solve political and social controversies. The controversies, however, had moved to a far more public realm, and the fact that every household participated in the taking of the census meant that its results had become a public commodity.

Members of the public, therefore, were thought to deserve access to census results not only because of their interest in them but also because of their cooperation in the process of acquiring them. For many people, it was not only the results but also the process of taking the census that indicated the state of civilization that the country enjoyed. If people displayed “unwillingness” to cooperate, the census administrators were quick to say, it arose “from prejudice or ignorance of the nature and importance of the objects required.”<sup>176</sup> In 1861, Graham went so far as to say that the people who refused to give information were not worth prosecuting because “these cases of abstaining [are] more or less connected with insanity.”<sup>177</sup>

Anecdotes in the public press, however, suggest that opposition to the census lasted throughout the period in question. While I will explore such opposition in more detail in Chapter 7, here I am interested primarily in what census takers had to say about it, and how they interpreted it in reference to their understandings of civilization and progress. Census takers generally considered poor and uneducated people to be the most suspicious of the census. Alternatively, if the general populace supported the census, it seemed to signify education,

rationality, and understanding. Many of the individuals or groups of people with whom the census takers encountered difficulties matched the groups that were considered problematic in the society as a whole. One of the most troublesome procedural issues during the nineteenth century was how to count the "houseless population," as well as "those vagrant and criminal classes who may have no acknowledged home," as one administrator wrote before the 1841 census.<sup>178</sup> No adequate solution to this problem was advanced during the period, and the homeless population was largely estimated rather than counted. This category "compris[ed], with some honest but unfortunate people out of employment or temporarily employed, gypsies, beggars, strollers, vagabonds, vagrants, outcasts, criminals," or "some of the victims as well as some of the outcasts of society."<sup>179</sup>

The government administrators were also frightened of what they saw as a volatile and dangerous working class, particularly during the highpoint of Chartist agitation during the 1830s and 1840s. Census takers assumed that it was the duty of the educated portions of the population to help less educated people understand the purposes of the census. In 1841, the census commissioners sent a circular letter to all the Anglican clergy in the nation, pointing out that "the successful execution of this great National work, although enforced by penal clauses, must be materially affected by the degree of willingness and accuracy with which the requisite information is given to those who are appointed to collect it."<sup>180</sup> The census needed "the assistance of influential persons in removing and counteracting any unwillingness to give information, or any erroneous impressions of the objects for which it is sought which may possibly exist among the uneducated portions of the Community."<sup>181</sup> Although the census was a secular undertaking,

as it is of importance to the Public welfare that the information required by the Legislature should be given fully and correctly, and that truth should be disseminated instead of error, we trust the [clergy] will not regard it as a matter of indifference and one in which they have no concern.<sup>182</sup>

In addition to direct opposition, there were organizational problems. A man wrote a letter to the *Manchester Guardian* a few weeks after the census of 1851 complaining that his census form had not been picked up. He went on to say

during a conversation upon the census, the difficulty of collecting returns from the factory people, whose houses are often closed during the whole day, was alluded to, and I was told that boys were ... employed in collecting the returns, and it was ... likely that where parties were not ... found, no second call would be made.<sup>183</sup>

A different problem arose in the Scottish highlands where sparse population meant that enumerators had to travel long distances on census day. It was nearly impossible to take the census on the remote islands off the Scottish northwest coast. There were also occasionally problems of



communication: in isolated areas of Scotland, some people spoke only Gaelic, while the enumerators tended to be monolingual English speakers.<sup>184</sup>

Thus, we see that the groups that were hardest to count were also often viewed as the hardest to rule, the hardest to control, and the greatest threat to order. The ability to take the census over time also mirrored shifts in the larger society: enumerators expected to encounter difficulties in 1841 because it was a time of class antagonism and an unstable economy, while in 1851 it was noted that more people were literate and could fill up the schedules themselves. Pride in the impressive procedure of the census culminated in 1851, when the machinery was extensive and when other forces were at work to make many British people especially pleased with their progress and civilization. In particular, the conjunction of the census with the Great Exhibition in London fueled a great deal of self-congratulation and pride. As *The Times* wrote in the days before the census was to be taken, "The present year will be distinguished in our annals by two great operations. The Great Exhibition and the Great Census may fairly be received as compensations for a considerable amount of political activity and Parliamentary cross-purposes."<sup>185</sup> Another journalist described the census as "a wonderful achievement of civilization."<sup>186</sup> There was an "army" of enumerators, as well as armies of "penmen and mathematicians."<sup>187</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* explained in 1853 that

the enumerators were the privates of a great census army, officered by registrars and superintendents; and... whatever mighty accomplishments may await such an army as that recently encamped upon the plains of Chobham, it would only have sufficed to enumerate one-fourth of our population on the 30<sup>th</sup> of March, 1851.<sup>188</sup>

After the first results had been publicized, the *Illustrated London News* pointed out that neither France nor the United States was able to tabulate its census results nearly so fast: "We may infer, therefore, that England stands higher in some branches of administrative efficiency than either of those two states."<sup>189</sup>

By 1861, the census takers suggested, opposition to the census had almost disappeared: "A more intelligent appreciation of the objects and uses of the inquiry, combined with the utmost willingness to furnish the returns, was evinced by the poorer population."<sup>190</sup> An enumerator who wrote to the *Times* after the 1861 census agreed that the work had been much easier than in 1851, largely because the press had helped to prepare people for the census, and the newspaper-reading public had become larger.<sup>191</sup> The 1861 report spoke of the "general good-will of all classes of the community" that made the census a success.<sup>192</sup> Thus, a successful census could be understood as a sign not only of improved education but also of a greater sympathy between social classes, that abstract benefit that was so lacking in the earlier decades of the century. The census, which could potentially help to create social harmony by teaching people about their neighbors, also relied on that harmony for its initial success.

The press indeed played a major role in the process of educating the public about the upcoming censuses. In 1841, the *Hull Advertiser* wrote that

those who can see the value and necessity of this great national work will require no other inducement to help as much as they can its speedy and correct performance. There may possibly be some not so much disposed to trouble themselves about it, and to them we would just hint that any party refusing to make the required returns, or making false returns, will... be fined not less than 40s, the highest penalty being £5.<sup>193</sup>

And the following week:

We understand that nearly all the householders' schedule papers were filled up when the enumerators called for them last Monday, a circumstance highly creditable on the part of the inhabitants, who thus showed their good sense in assisting to carry out the great national undertaking.<sup>194</sup>

The *Manchester Guardian* also called for cooperation:

We will only express the hope that every head of a family will do his best to make his return as correct as possible; for it is a matter of national importance, and lying at the basis of all statesmanlike legislation, that the numerical "progress of the nation" should be carefully ascertained at stated periods.<sup>195</sup>

The head of the household would only be "performing his share of a duty incumbent upon every citizen."<sup>196</sup> The *Morning Chronicle* agreed that "a very moderate degree of pains-taking on the part of every individual is all that is needed to the smooth and punctual performance of this great national work."<sup>197</sup>

By 1861, the role of the press as the primary facilitator of the census was completely established. Graham sent "to the Editors of all newspapers, who amount in number to 750, some remarks on the Census... by Mr. Farr, hoping through the press to inform the public generally of the objects and use of the census and thus to induce them to make full and accurate returns."<sup>198</sup> Farr's memorandum explained the history and the purposes of the census, and emphasized the importance of "self-knowledge." "The injunction, 'Know Thyself,'" Farr explained, "is as binding on nations as on individuals," and "the population of a country is not only of great interest in science, but it is a piece of information with which every educated person is familiar."<sup>199</sup> Farr also stressed that no one had anything to fear from the census; it would not be used for taxation purposes, and the individual facts would be kept entirely private. Finally, Farr pointed out that while ancient censuses did not count working people at all, "in England they are all taken down in the Census Books by name, and treated precisely on the same footing as persons of the highest rank."<sup>200</sup>

Others also focused on the democratizing capacities of the census. The *Westminster Review* explained in 1854 that the taking of the census was a moment "when not only the exiles but the outcasts were, for once, treated as of us... if sleep is, as is said, the great leveler, surely a census is the only loadstone which agglomerates us all, leaving no stray particle to be lost."<sup>201</sup> Over the

century that had passed since 1753, the census had thrown off its status as a dangerous leveler and a sign of tyranny, and become a proud symbol of democracy. And as one politician acknowledged in 1851, "The main object is not merely to collect information, but to distribute the information collected."<sup>202</sup> Something was to be achieved by educating the public about the statistics of the nation. The benefits of the census that John Rickman had outlined in 1796 continued to be understood as benefits, but they had come to be understood as benefits for the British people as well as for the government.

\* \* \*

The British census was never the most innovative in terms of the questions that it asked. Other countries were always more willing to demand information that was considered intrusive in Britain, and the British themselves obtained far more detailed particulars in local censuses, colonial censuses, and censuses of things such as prisons and workhouses than they did in their national census. When a population was in a position of subordination, the government was able to obtain whatever information that it considered useful. But the national census was developing in a public realm that was only partially under the control of the state. A new act of Parliament was needed before each census was taken, thus leaving room for debate and limitations. Michael Drake argues that while the British government recognized the advantage of the census as a legislative and regulatory tool, "the extreme reluctance to extend the range of enquiries, the refusal to set up a permanent census office, the marked emphasis on the costs of the operation, all indicate a deliberate unwillingness to exploit the full potential of the census."<sup>203</sup>

The other side of this story is that the census was increasingly seen as a source of pride and a sign of progress and of civilization. As Drake also points out, "It was not only the detailed results of the census that fascinated the Victorians; they appeared to be equally enthralled by the detailed mechanics of the operation itself."<sup>204</sup> The epigraph at the beginning of this chapter betrays the interest in the physicality of the census, and the numerous contemporary descriptions of procedure confirm it. Procedure and results were of complementary interest. As the *Illustrated London News* wrote in 1851,

The scene which was enacted on Monday morning last, throughout the length and breadth of the United Kingdom, was an event of the highest interest in itself, and, in its future results, will be not only interesting but important. The numbering of the people, at regular intervals, is a duty which the people owe to themselves, and to the generations that are to follow them.<sup>205</sup>

Had Britain taken a census before 1801, the writer went on to say, "the world would have been both the wiser and the better."<sup>206</sup> The census, because it was relevant to all and supposedly inclusive of all, had come to be understood as crucial to modern nationhood.

## 2

# The Census and Surplus

On no one subject are the opinions of men more divided than on that which relates to the evils or benefits likely to accrue from the decrease or increase of the population of any given country.

—The *Times*, 1841<sup>1</sup>

One of the most striking aspects of the census during the early nineteenth century was simply the astounding rate of population growth that it indicated. The population of Great Britain more than doubled between 1801 and 1851, with the highest rate of growth occurring during the 1810s and 1820s. The census made these dramatic trends statistically visible, transforming what might have been anecdotally observed into a confirmed phenomenon that could be measured with exactitude and charted over time. Yet at least as important as the big picture that the census provided was the way in which it subdivided the population. If the overall size of the population could be imagined as an expanding sphere, then the census dealt with both the external dimensions of this sphere and the complex internal composition of its changing bulk. The census, through its emphasis on the comparative numerical strength of various groups within the nation, raised questions about which segments of the population were increasing the fastest and what effects these increases would have upon the nation as a whole. The census empowered people by allowing them to recognize themselves as members of groups that were numerically larger than other groups; in that sense, the census suggested to people that more was better, and such interpretations can be understood as “positive”: they encouraged optimism about large numbers. Subdivision of the population, then, was of vital importance to developing group subjectivities.

The census also, however, isolated supposedly problematic groups on the basis of understandings of their lack of productivity or their threat to the nation, and it described these groups in terms of their disproportionately large size. “Surplus” can thus be understood as the negative or the pessimistic side of the census, the side that demonstrated weakness, disunity, and a lack of productivity. The notion of surplus population arose alongside and in dialogue with the development of the census, the dramatic population growth that it documented, and the increasing sophistication by which that

population was internally differentiated. The differentiation allowed specific segments of the body politic to be marked as unnecessary or harmful, and, therefore, in the words of contemporaries, as “redundant” or “superfluous.” While notions of redundancy had been common in the period before 1800 as well (and were in fact central to the ideology behind the Elizabethan Poor Laws), national enumeration changed the way in which redundancy was imagined. An unproductive individual could now be understood not only as a threat to or a burden on his or her local community but also as a member of a quantifiable national group.

Until the late eighteenth century, the general consensus had been that a large population meant both military and economic might. In a primarily agrarian nation, people were needed to work the land, and a large population was also crucial to imperial expansion. As D. V. Glass argues, however, in the late eighteenth century problems of subsistence began “to erode the earlier mercantilist belief in the advantages of a large and increasing population.”<sup>2</sup> The most well-known and influential treatment of the notion of surplus was Thomas Robert Malthus’s *Essay on the Principle of Population*.<sup>3</sup> The first census, though not inspired directly by Malthus, was taken only three years after the first edition of the *Essay* was published, and it was immediately concerned with many of the same issues as the *Essay*. The political and intellectual life of Malthus’s concept of surplus population can be traced through the first half of the nineteenth century through the perspective of the census. The census, as a technology that described the nation as a whole, helped make surplus a national concept that was understood in terms of proportions of people and national productivity.

Economists, statisticians, and social reformers, as well as other members of the public, attempted to make sense of the unprecedented population growth that they were witnessing in the context of social unrest and class antagonism. The fear of overpopulation, although articulated by Malthus in terms of the food supply, was also driven by anxiety about poverty and discontent. It was evident from the moment of its origin that surplus was not only a numerical concept; instead, political economists constantly made judgments about which people were “redundant” and which were not. Those whom they considered redundant were usually those whom they believed were failing to contribute to the strength of the nation. As Mary Poovey argues, in early nineteenth-century Britain the metaphor of the social body was used to refer both to the poor “in isolation from the rest of the population” and to the nation as a whole.<sup>4</sup> Unproductive people both had a problem and were a problem, and national welfare called for the problems of the poor to be solved because these problems, in a unified society, would affect everyone.

By the 1840s, most people were more interested in differentiating the productive from the unproductive than in worrying about overpopulation as a whole, a shift that was paralleled by the shift in census administration from the counting of communities to the counting of individuals. By the 1850s,

the notion that Britain simply had too many people had largely dissipated, and fears of overpopulation were transformed into fears of depopulation. But this did not mean that concepts of productivity and redundancy disappeared. Political economy in the mid-nineteenth century was largely concerned with escaping the specter of Malthus, but even as “surplus” disappeared, its implications for understandings of the nation remained strong.

### **Malthus, Overpopulation, and the Poor**

In 1801, the census was taken to determine Britain’s overall fighting strength and to assess the agricultural capabilities of the country in relation to the numbers needing to eat. It was clear to the government that fighting the continuing war with France required people. Yet the 1790s had seen failed harvests, food riots, a wartime dislocation of trade, and political unrest. In the midst of such scarcity, the British government was as worried about disorder at home as about the war in Europe; too many hungry bodies, the French Revolution had made clear, could easily turn to violence. In the first parliamentary debate about the census, the competing understandings of its purpose were summed up in a single sentence: “Although we may find that an increased population adds to our strength in war, it is evident that it requires a vigilant attention to the means of supporting it.”<sup>5</sup> The British government, it seemed, wanted both a large and a small population, and the census was inspired as much by questions of internal stability as of international strength. For the next half century, the tension between a fear of having too many people and a fear of not having enough people continued to exist.

The population growth of the early industrial period was on a dramatic and unprecedented scale, and once census-taking began, the question of surplus gained its own intellectual momentum. When the second census was taken in 1811, the population increase since 1801 was literally unbelievable. Henry Brougham argued in the House of Commons that the 1801 census must have underestimated the population: “Indeed, looking to the state of war in which the country had been so long engaged, the number of emigrations, and various other circumstances, he could not comprehend how the population could have increased in such a surprising manner.”<sup>6</sup> John Newport agreed that “it never could be credited that the immense apparent increase of a million and a half was owing to natural causes,” and insisted that “it was only to be accounted for by supposing, that the people in 1801 thought that the census was required for purposes of taxation, and therefore then, designedly, omitted a great number of persons.”<sup>7</sup> While the early censuses may indeed have been inaccurate, by the 1820s people had recognized that for better or worse, extraordinary population growth was real. During periods of economic decline and social unrest, such as in the years after Waterloo, the numbers themselves seemed alarming. Could the country really support such a large population and at the same time maintain order?

From the beginning, statisticians and politicians also recognized the potential that the census had for determining which kinds of population growth were most beneficial for the country. The question on the first census about gender addressed the need for soldiers, while the division of the population into agricultural and manufacturing dealt with the nation's subsistence capacity. In both cases, the government was looking for indications of power. And while the nation needed people, it was evident that if a large proportion of the population was drawing on the nation's resources rather than contributing to its economic expansion, then population growth could be dangerous. In an 1812 debate over the census, MPs called for more evidence about the increase in the poor rates, which "perhaps, would have shewn, that the comfort and happiness of the people had not increased with their numbers."<sup>8</sup> In 1812, the *Quarterly Review* argued that

the first result [big population] taught us our strength, the second [pauperism] discovered our weakness.... When we knew that there were in Great Britain alone, more than 2,700,000 men capable of defending their country, it became apparent that we might defy the world in arms; but the fact, that nearly one person in nine of the whole population was dependent upon parochial aid, made it but too evident, that there was something rotten in our internal policy.<sup>9</sup>

The reviewer summed up

This...increase of the working part of the community is in its effects just what we make it. If the duty of providing for this increase, and of instructing the people be neglected, it is danger, and ultimate destruction; but if these duties be performed, population then becomes security, power, glory and dominion.<sup>10</sup>

A writer four years later similarly explained that "a numerous population is...the greatest of evils or the greatest of blessings, according to the government which wields it."<sup>11</sup>

While it was evident that certain kinds of growth were better than other kinds, politicians discussing the recent census results in 1811 generally found the large population to be "a matter of great congratulation."<sup>12</sup> George Rose "had great pleasure in stating to the House, that...since the Census of 1801, an increase of population, to the amount of more than one million and a half, had taken place."<sup>13</sup> Although

the employment for the lower orders had fallen off,...taking the circumstances and situation of the country into consideration, it was of more importance to the empire that the population was in a state of progressive increase, than that partial instances of a failure of employ had occurred.<sup>14</sup>

It is apparent that until the end of the Napoleonic wars, anxiety about military strength tended to trump other possible responses to the census. But during the 1820s, after economic distress and social unrest had become more visible, many accepted Malthus's notion of surplus. Observers of industrial change recognized that at least some of the laborers who had been replaced by machinery were unlikely to find work, and the changing economy meant that certain regions and trades underwent sudden and serious periods of depression.<sup>15</sup>

Malthus's theory of population was never unchallenged. But he did have an immense influence in creating a public understanding of the national economy that relied on notions of scarcity and productivity. Malthusian political economists frightened people into a belief that the population would always grow at a faster rate than the food supply, and that the checks on population growth would arise from disease, famine, and war. If social and economic life were to be understood as a constant struggle for limited resources, then certain elements of the population were clearly more threatening than others. Those who were unproductive, or consuming the resources of the nation without contributing to them, came to be seen as especially problematic. Early in the nineteenth century, the government began to gather detailed statistics of able-bodied and non-able-bodied paupers, in proportion to the total population, in order to evaluate the extent of the problem.<sup>16</sup> The census was crucial because it was national economic productivity that was at stake, and it was only as a proportion of the whole that such statistics could be understood. The census had the power to represent the productivity and health of the nation in numerical terms.

Malthus, because of his emphasis on productivity, also helped alter the ways in which people thought about the poor and unemployed. Malthus reconciled his belief in God's benevolent plan with his rather grim emphasis on what he called "positive" checks to population—death rates—by arguing that competition and scarcity were necessary for people to overcome their natural propensity to indolence.<sup>17</sup> Followers of a Malthusian approach argued that the existing poor law (which provided cash relief to those who needed it) encouraged procreation among the poor and created paupers who were capable of working but chose not to. In the memorandum that served as the impetus for the first census, John Rickman noted that from the time that laborers became dependent on the parish, "their spirit is extinguished with their independence," and "the genius of slavery consigns them to the habitual sloth which ever benumbs her debased subjects," thus affecting the long-term abilities of the nation.<sup>18</sup> In the early 1830s, the statistician and physician James Kay described "a poor law operating as a direct bounty on the increase of an indigent population—depriving the virtuous poor of the incentives to industry, and glutting the market with labour."<sup>19</sup> Another observer said that the poor law gave "an artificial stimulus to the increase of Population, by holding out an encouragement to early and improvident marriages."<sup>20</sup>



Early modern discussions of the poor had also relied on notions of the deserving and the undeserving, and anxieties about “idleness” had been prevalent before 1800.<sup>21</sup> A particular conjunction of events, however, made the Malthusian argument particularly persuasive at the turn of the nineteenth century. The French Revolution made the educated classes in Britain forcibly aware of the relationship between poverty and political upheaval, and the effects of industrialization became dramatically more visible during the first decades of the century.<sup>22</sup> Finally, the census put the new economic circumstances and the extraordinary population growth that people were witnessing into a new, national framework. While individuals may have been understood as unproductive before 1800, and while observers could certainly take anecdotal evidence and arrive at the conclusion that there were too many unemployed, the anonymity of an industrial, especially urban, society helped put numbers at the center of discussions about the poor. A lack of productivity was no longer a vague moral danger; rather, it was a quantifiable threat to the economic well-being of the country.<sup>23</sup>

The debate over Malthusian principles was complicated and shifting, and it did not break down along clear political lines. Anti-Malthusians included both conservatives and radicals, who were suspicious of Malthus for very different reasons.<sup>24</sup> And although Malthusian political economy eventually came to be understood as the domain of liberal supporters of capitalism, those very liberals often lauded a large population as a prerequisite to industrial expansion, and berated Malthus for his pessimistic understanding of the progress of society.<sup>25</sup> The fluidity of the debate over Malthus is revealed by the fact that single individuals often shifted between support for and suspicion of Malthusian principles, and census takers in particular were often, although very affected by Malthus, also unable to completely reject the late eighteenth-century concern about depopulation that they had inherited.

Surplus was a disputed concept in part because it arose from a contradiction in industrial society. Even as the economy expanded as never before and political economists theorized about limitless growth, the changes created new types of poverty, scarcity, and conflict. The notion of surplus arose at least in part because of fears about social disharmony and class hostility—fears that themselves were products of new economic circumstances. Those who opposed Malthus continued to insist that labor was wealth, and as one MP insisted, “Within our population, now so much complained of, we possessed mines of wealth, compared with which the gems of India and the metals of America were utterly worthless.”<sup>26</sup> Malthusians, however, believed that the wealth in question was being squandered when able-bodied laborers were not working. The factory owner himself faced a paradox: a “surplus” of laborers meant lower labor costs, which favored the employer. But a surplus of population meant that not everyone could be employed, and too many unemployed threatened the entire industrial system.

If fears about surplus arose not only because of economic scarcity but also because of social dislocation and conflict, those who worried about surplus

were explicit that too many unemployed people not only raised the poor rates but also were a threat to order and could start a revolution. "Such a population made every institution insecure, and endangered property itself," explained one MP, and a journalist for the *Quarterly Review* agreed that "want of work renders [the unemployed] not only burthensome, but dangerous to society."<sup>27</sup> It was therefore imperative to find a solution to the problem of redundancy. The unproductive did not necessarily have to remain so permanently, and the notion that the redundant could become useful was central to understandings of surplus. One author, advocating better popular education, insisted that "while the poor continue what they are, continuing also, as they must, to gain in number upon the more prosperous classes, the materials for explosion will always be under our feet."<sup>28</sup> It was therefore a combination of numbers and condition that made the poor dangerous, and a moral education could prevent redundancy. Others called for state resources to help the poor "become useful members of the community," and "by encouraging early habits of industry prevent them from reverting upon society in the unhappy character of parish paupers."<sup>29</sup> They also argued that there was nothing wrong with a large population in itself, as long as it was a moral and well-governed population. As a writer for the *Quarterly Review* said in 1812, "The true policy of governments is not to prevent their subjects from multiplying, but to provide uses and employment for them as fast as they multiply."<sup>30</sup>

It was also evident that the population was not increasing at the same rate in all parts of the country. Economic changes resulted in migration, and while some rural places actually lost population between 1801 and 1811, urban places invariably gained. Some people always understood surplus as a local, seasonal, or occupation-specific phenomenon rather than a national one, and debated whether unemployment was particularly prevalent in manufacturing or agricultural districts, urban or rural areas. Agricultural laborers' distress, one MP said "was not to be attributed to redundancy of population" because "labour was exceedingly scarce in summer, and exceedingly superabundant in winter."<sup>31</sup> One possibility was therefore to cultivate more land and to move people around within the country, thus putting redundant people in places where they would no longer be redundant.<sup>32</sup> One *Quarterly Review* author suggested that moral, educated people "can never be too numerous while any portion of their own country remains uncultivated, or any part of the habitable earth uncolonized."<sup>33</sup>

Others, however, understood redundancy as a national problem. "It was most desirable to know," explained one MP,

what was the proportion of redundant population to employment in every part of the country. If it were true, that the agricultural population was excessive, it was plain that our manufacturers, whenever they were out of employment, could find no resource in our agricultural districts.<sup>34</sup>

In the early 1820s, people therefore began to debate the controversial solution of state-funded emigration, whose most vocal advocate was the MP Robert Wilmot-Horton. Emigration to the colonies had long been understood as a mode of ridding Britain of criminals, as well as those who were thought likely to become criminals, such as pauper boys. Increasingly, it also came to be seen as a way to rectify the ratio between the supply and demand of labor and to rid the country of its unemployed. Proponents understood emigration to be both “a blessing to the object, and a blessing to society.”<sup>35</sup> Not only would it provide a livelihood for those who could not find work, it would also save Britain from high poor rates and social disorder. Using census data, Wilmot-Horton worked tirelessly to convince his fellow MPs that emigration was the only solution to high unemployment and economic distress, and sometimes, the unemployed themselves also came to see emigration as a solution to their problems and the nation’s problems.<sup>36</sup>

The understanding of labor as a commodity meant that workers could be moved around and described as though they were subject to the laws of supply and demand like other goods. Those who supported emigration insisted that “both labour and population are redundant—...the supply is greater than the demand for labour, and...no improvement can take place in the condition of the labourer until the proportion between the supply and the demand is corrected.”<sup>37</sup> Wilmot-Horton also pointed out that

when the supply of labour is more than in proportion to the funds applicable for its profitable employment, no improvement whatever can take place in the condition of any particular class, until the proportions of demand and supply of labour are so far restored in that class as to prevent the necessity of any such labourers exchanging their labour for wages only sufficient to secure to them the minimum of subsistence.<sup>38</sup>

At least as important as the well-being of the laborer, however, was the state of the country. Wilmot-Horton explained “that excessive population was a great tax on the wealth of the country; it deteriorated the wages of labour, and as long as the population was redundant, that deterioration would continue greatly to the disadvantage of the country.”<sup>39</sup> Emigration advocates also believed that “a well-regulated system of colonisation...would be the only way of relieving parishes from this evil,” and in effecting a “diminution of crime that would follow on the removal of many troubled spirits, who now disturb the peace of society.”<sup>40</sup>

Not everyone agreed with Wilmot-Horton either about the urgency of the problem or the “new scheme of compulsory emigration” that he proposed.<sup>41</sup> Some believed that problems of unemployment came from an inefficient use of land, and that a solution needed to be found at home. Others argued against emigration on grounds of humanity; they believed that the dangers of the voyage and life in the colonies resulted in high mortality rates among emigrants.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, many believed that publicly funded emigration was simply

impractical; that "for the state to undertake to carry the pauper population from this country to other lands, was a step surrounded by difficulties."<sup>43</sup> Finally, in some areas of Britain, emigration could be seen as disaster, bringing large-scale depopulation. One early observer of emigration wrote that "a very great calamity will befall this country from the progress of the spirit of emigration."<sup>44</sup>

But even if depopulation as a whole was not feared, the people who emigrated may not have been the ones who were the most "redundant." It was clear that only healthy people would benefit from emigration, for life once they arrived in the colonies would be difficult. Therefore, "the lame, the blind, the aged, the infirm and lunatic poor must be left a burthen on the public."<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, the state could not afford to help entire families emigrate, and if able-bodied men emigrated and left their families behind, "we shall have wives and families, without husbands and fathers, to provide for them, and to perform our work."<sup>46</sup> These families would themselves become a burden on the parish, reversing the initial benefits of the emigration. Those opposed to emigration, therefore, were often worried about losing the most productive segment of the population. One MP "objected to the deportation... not only because of the amount of expense and suffering which attended it, but also with reference to the class of people deported. The persons selected were not the halt and the blind, but the select portion of the community."<sup>47</sup> Another expert on the topic "perceived no effect, except that [emigration] had deprived them of a certain portion of their most industrious labourers and cleverest mechanics."<sup>48</sup>

The discussions of surplus and emigration often focused on Ireland, where unemployment and distress were particularly prevalent. However, it was also understood that a redundancy in Ireland caused a redundancy in England, as the impoverished Irish workers entered England and brought down wages there.<sup>49</sup> Although the population of Ireland was not increasing as quickly as that of England during this period, it was viewed as the place with the greatest surplus, again suggesting that not just numbers were at stake. In the eyes of many British observers, Ireland was redundancy epitomized, an unproductive district writ large. The entire social and economic structure there could be understood as one of poverty and surplus, and Ireland as a drain on and therefore as a threat to the United Kingdom. Peasants in Ireland "are neither in a political or financial point of view, of any benefit whatever to the state," wrote one observer in 1824, and with emigration, "Ireland would cease to be a blot in the British Empire."<sup>50</sup> James Kay wrote that it was only by providing public works for redundant labor in Ireland that "England would then cease to be... the receptacle of the most demoralized and worthless hordes of the sister country."<sup>51</sup> As we will see, Ireland's ambiguous position on the outskirts of the nation, as not quite colony yet not quite metropole, continued to place it at the center of debates about national strength.

Anti-emigration activists, often members of workers' groups and others who did not accept the *laissez-faire* tenets of political economy, recognized that emigration excused the government from other ways of addressing the

problems of the poor. It provided a solution to unemployment and low wages that did not involve regulation of labor, thereby allowing free trade to flourish and working in the interests of the factory owners. Some people also realized that compulsory emigration could result in cruel decisions about who was redundant. During one debate over emigration, Michael Sadler used historical evidence "to show how prevalent the complaint of a redundant population had been from the earliest periods down to the present day," and cited Thomas More and Francis Bacon as examples of philosophical thinkers who had believed that notions of redundancy could lead to cruelty.<sup>52</sup> He also said that "with respect to the alleged redundancy of human beings in this country... This complaint was universal in uncivilized countries."<sup>53</sup>

Those who were opposed to Malthus also increasingly associated the census with Malthusian-influenced control of the lower classes. In an ironic article titled "The Census and Non-Sensus of 1841," the *Monthly Magazine* provided a humorous critique of the theory of overpopulation, and made the relationship between census-taking, emigration, and surveillance of the poor explicit. "An accurate acquaintance with the movement of the population," the writer explained,

may be the means of preventing many other popular movements, with which the wise and the peaceable would gladly dispense.... It is by a frequent recurrence to the census, that statesmen may best ascertain the number of those who sit below the salt at nature's table,—a perverse and impracticable race; and therefore may graduate the scale of high-pressure legislation, necessary for keeping them in good working condition.... so noisy and clamorous a set have that within them well calculated to make their presence and effective strength sufficiently plain to all whom it may concern, without the direct intervention of a numerical table; but this spontaneous species of announcement has the manifest disadvantage of coming a day after the fair, and of not arousing public attention until the danger is actually present.... the census, on the contrary, deals with the offenders in their nascent state; and leaves the philanthropist due time to determine how they may be disposed of, with the least possible inconvenience to themselves and the public at large; whether it shall be by emigration, transportation, ejection, sending them to be shot at abroad, or starved at home.... The census in this matter does the duty of the watch at the most top, and by its "breakers-ahead" announcement gives the provident statesman time to put the national ship about....<sup>54</sup>

The writer also made fun of Malthusian understandings of natural checks on the population, and berated those who used Malthus to argue against public health and other state regulations. Diseases, the ironic writer noted, were "so happily established for the diminution of an overstocked population."<sup>55</sup> Finally, the writer described the alarmist discussions among Malthusians about "the railway pace at which population is moving," and the way in

which “every trade and profession is overstocked, the people taking themselves off to the antipodes by thousands; while villages are nevertheless growing into towns, and towns swelling into cities.”<sup>56</sup> To this writer, at least, it was evident that anxiety about numerical surplus was a cover for other, more controversial fears.

## **Productivity and Redundancy**

Although it was always evident that some types of people could be described as “superfluous” while others could not, during the 1820s and 1830s, redundancy was essentially synonymous with unemployment. “Surplus” simply referred to wage laborers, usually poor and unskilled, who could not find work, whether in manufacturing or agricultural districts. But increasingly, the emphasis on productivity eclipsed the emphasis on surplus population as a whole. The government again began to focus on emigration as a solution to domestic problems from the early 1840s, responding in part to the Chartist crisis and the depression in trade of the late 1830s, and continuing through the Irish famine. But by 1845, the *Quarterly Review* claimed to have disposed of the index of numbers altogether: “We . . . have learned from experience that a land is prosperous and powerful, not so much in proportion to the multitude of its inhabitants, as to their moral and physical condition.”<sup>57</sup> In more strictly economic terms, “The happiness of a country does not depend on the circumstance of the inhabitants being few or many, but on the proportion which they bear to the supply of necessities, conveniences, and enjoyments at their disposal.”<sup>58</sup> In this context, the census was useful only if it counted a great deal more than population.

Beginning in 1841, the government greatly expanded the census. Instead of simply listing the numbers of people in each parish, broken down into sex, age, and general occupation, the census now counted every person by name and listed specific characteristics about each. In 1851, information about the birthplace, marital status, occupation, and disabilities of every individual in the country was gathered, separate censuses of education and religion were taken, and the inmates of all public institutions, including schools, workhouses, and insane asylums, were counted. While the census takers did not necessarily devise these questions specifically for the purpose of determining relative levels of productivity, analysts of the census results saw productivity as an obvious focus. With the shift from communities to persons, it became possible to understand the nation as an aggregate of individuals, some of whom were more productive than others. It was through the census question on occupation that such understandings of productivity were made most explicit.

William Farr was particularly interested in the question of occupations, and throughout his career he struggled to develop a better classification system. For him, the organization of occupations was another opportunity to use the skills that he had devoted toward developing a taxonomy of diseases

and causes of death.<sup>59</sup> By the time he was involved in the census much had changed since the 1801 distinction between those communities that subsisted from agriculture and those from manufacturing. Occupational groups and their specialized labor were now seen as important, and the census made the effort to ascertain the strength of different occupational groups within the society by asking about such things as the number of masters and farmers employing different numbers of laborers. The early census questions about occupation had emphasized the communality of economic production: the men, women, and children within a family, the farm laborers and the land-owners, the mill-owners and the hands were assumed to be working together to achieve efficient subsistence and production. The mid-century censuses of occupation, in contrast, allowed the head of each family to identify his or her own profession and that of everyone else in the house in whatever terminology he or she wished: rather than being given categories to choose from, the process was one of self-definition (figure 2.1).<sup>60</sup> The process of *taking* the census therefore divided the population into thousands of minute categories and encouraged people to think of their jobs as specialized. But while people had the ability to self-identify on the form, the census takers played a major interpretive role in deciding how these different professions would be categorized and presented to the public. The abstracted results of the census, which interpreted the language of the householders and created overarching categories, encouraged people to understand themselves as members of groups.

The change in census procedure reflected the reality of a mobile and class-based society, but it also was a method used by census takers to make sense of and organize that society. The necessity for a clear occupational classification system was thought to arise in part from democratizing tendencies in society, for as Farr explained, "In the present day costume is not in extensive use to distinguish one class of people from another."<sup>61</sup> While literary sources and personal accounts tend to suggest that much information about social and occupational background could still be inferred from dress in mid-nineteenth-century Britain, Farr's statement is significant. The census was used in many contexts to address anxieties arising from what was understood as a more anonymous population. Farr's anxious efforts to develop a classification system that was accurate, descriptive, and detailed can be seen as a response to various new "problems" of identification, including those surrounding productivity.

In a parliamentary enquiry of 1830, census taker John Rickman spoke of distinguishing "a Negative class of Superannuated Labourers, of diseased and incapable persons, and other nondescripts."<sup>62</sup> By 1841, census takers had made the distinction between productive and unproductive explicit. The census commissioners acknowledged that "there is so much difference of opinion as to the strict bounds of productive and unproductive labour."<sup>63</sup> Yet the unproductives were sure to include "accidental classes of paupers, lunatics, almspeople, and prisoners," all of whom were supported by the

BRITAIN.]

OCCUPATIONS OF THE PEOPLE.

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ALPHABETICAL LIST OF OCCUPATIONS.

TABLE XXXIII.—OCCUPATIONS of the PEOPLE of GREAT BRITAIN in 1851, arranged in ALPHABETICAL ORDER.

OCCUPATIONS.	TOTAL of both Sexes.	Under 20 Years of Age.		20 Years of Age and upwards.		Reference to Classified Arrangement.	
		Males.	Females.	Males.	Females.	Class.	Sub-Class.
Her Majesty THE QUEEN - - - - -	1	-	-	-	1	I.	I.
Other members of the Royal Family - -	14	4	5	2	3	I.	I.
Accountant - - - - -	6,605	459	1	6,138	7	VII.	1
Accoutrement-maker - - - - -	279	14	20	133	112	VI.	3
Actor, Actress - - - - -	2,041	113	130	1,285	513	XI.	2
Actuary - - - - -	45	-	-	45	-	VII.	1
Advocate, Barrister, Special Pleader, Conveyancer - - - - -	3,111	-	-	3,111	-	III.	2
Agent, Factor - - - - -	6,747	308	-	6,419	20	VII.	1
Agricultural implement, machine-maker -	653	91	-	550	12	XI.	16
Agricultural implement proprietor - -	55	-	-	50	5	IX.	1
Agricultural labourer (out-door) - - -	1,077,627	198,226	14,826	808,502	56,073	IX.	1
Agricultural student - - - - -	164	94	-	70	-	IX.	1
Agricultural Society, officer of - - - -	7	-	-	-	-	IX.	1
Alabaster-miner, manufacture - - - - -	12	1	1	6	4	XIV.	2
Ale, Porter-merchant - - - - -	470	16	2	438	14	XIII.	2
Alkali, Soda-manufacture, merchant - -	818	102	8	701	7	XI.	17
Almsperson - - - - -	8,589	98	177	1,920	6,394	XVII.	1
Alum manufacture - - - - -	682	102	-	564	16	XI.	17
Anchorsmith, Chainsmith - - - - -	4,222	1,245	226	2,516	235	XIV.	14
Animal, bird-dealer, keeper - - - - -	319	29	3	241	46	X.	1
—preserver, Taxidermist - - - - -	94	3	-	88	3	XI.	5
Anatto-maker - - - - -	5	1	-	3	1	XI.	17
Annuitant - - - - -	146,096	362	1,480	23,032	121,222	XVI.	1
Anti-Dry-rot works - - - - -	6	-	-	6	-	XIII.	4
Anvil-maker - - - - -	184	35	-	149	-	XIV.	14
Apiarian, Bee-dealer - - - - -	2	-	-	1	1	X.	1
Apothecary, Surgeon - - - - -	15,163	-	-	15,163	-	III.	2
Apparitor - - - - -	2	-	-	2	-	III.	2
Appraiser, Auctioneer, Valuer - - - - -	3,996	249	-	3,747	-	VII.	1
Apprentice (not otherwise described) -	938	776	78	77	7	XV.	2
Archery-goods maker - - - - -	45	11	-	32	2	XI.	6
Architect - - - - -	2,971	502	-	2,469	-	IV.	2
Armourer - - - - -	11	-	-	11	-	XI.	10
Army agent - - - - -	45	-	-	45	-	II.	1
—clothing - - - - -	128	4	3	72	49	VI.	3
—officer (a) - - - - -	4,516	191	-	4,325	-	II.	1
—Non-commissioned officer, and private -	40,241	5,349	-	14,892	-	II.	1
—Half-pay officer (a) - - - - -	1,735	1	-	1,734	-	II.	1
Artificer, Labourer—in H. M. Dockyards	5,032	303	-	4,729	-	I.	1
Artificial Flower maker - - - - -	3,510	90	1,452	427	1,541	XI.	5
Artificial Limb and Eye maker - - - - -	20	2	1	13	4	III.	6
Artificial Stone, Scagliola-manufacture -	139	25	-	114	-	XIV.	2
Artist in Hair - - - - -	210	20	100	40	50	XI.	5
Artist (Painter) - - - - -	5,444	365	61	4,550	468	IV.	2

Figure 2.1 Page from the list of self-identified occupations from *The Census of Great Britain in 1851...Reprinted in a Condensed Form* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1854), 125.

community.<sup>64</sup> Those who were classified as unproductive may have been viewed as a danger to the society for various reasons. But most important, they were always discussed as a proportion of the whole, and it was the productivity of the entire nation that was at stake. What was important was the “comparative numerical importance of each class.”<sup>65</sup>



In 1851, Farr divided the people into 17 classes, each with subdivisions. Members of the government made up the first class, and members of the army (both “effectives” and “noneffectives”) constituted the second. The learned professions made up the third class, teachers, artists, and writers made up the fourth class, and the fifth class comprised wives and mothers. The sixth class was made up of those providing domestic service of some kind, such as servants, innkeepers, and restaurant owners. The seventh class included merchants and those who worked in finance, while the eighth class comprised those dealing in “conveyance.” Farmers constituted the 9th class, and those who worked with animals the 10th. The 11th class involved the mechanical arts, and included builders and engineers. The 12th class included those who dealt with animal food, the 13th class those who dealt with vegetables, and the 14th class those who dealt with minerals such as iron and steel. The 15th class comprised general laborers, the 16th class those who were independently wealthy, and the 17th class “dependent” people. The report also provided a table of the most numerically important jobs within these classes, as well as a full alphabetical list of the thousands of different self-described occupations in the country. For Farr, the occupation results indicated “that the British people are very ingenious, and very industrious; as there is scarcely a mineral, a plant, or an animal on the earth or under the earth, that they have not undertaken to move, to modify, or to make subservient to some use.”<sup>66</sup>

The 1861 census report announced that “two great classes of persons have been distinguished by political economists: those who are unproductive; and those who create products.”<sup>67</sup> In accordance with this conclusion, Farr created a new, greatly simplified system that classified workers “in reference to the nature of these products.”<sup>68</sup> This time only six major classes were identified, with more numerous subdivisions. The first class was the professional, or those who contributed “intellectual products.”<sup>69</sup> This included members of the government and civil servants, the army, intellectuals, clergy, lawyers, and doctors. Second was the domestic class, including wives and mothers, as well as innkeepers, domestic servants, nurses, children, and students. The third class was commercial, and included those in trade and those in the business of transport. The fourth class was agricultural, or what the report described as “the great central productive class of the country.”<sup>70</sup> The fifth was industrial, and the sixth class, finally, was composed of the “indefinite and nonproductive.”<sup>71</sup> This last included both those who were independently wealthy and the poor, including vagrants, beggars, and “gypsies.” Farr suggested that “the utility of all products depends upon the services which they can render man,” but he was also clearly concerned with the contributions made by various types of labor to the national economy.<sup>72</sup>

Not all who were officially classified as unproductive were considered a threat. Children, for example, could “render no useful service” but were taught by others who “contribute to the building up of the civilized man, capable of rendering his fellow men valuable services.”<sup>73</sup> Farr wrote that

children's "playful acts, and the joys which they give to their parents, like the sunlight, the fresh air, the songs of birds, and the beauties of nature, have no exchangeable value."<sup>74</sup> Others, however, were thought of largely in economic terms, and even if they could not avoid their lack of productivity, they were a problem for society. Farr explained:

The infirm and the sick are often unproductive. Gipsies and vagrants produce nothing valuable. Certain ladies, like the lilies of the field, neither toil nor spin; and as many gentlemen would perhaps find equal difficulty in pointing out anything of value which their heads or their hands produce.<sup>75</sup>

While the unproductive certainly caused anxiety, for Farr the classification of occupations was primarily a source of pride and a sign of advancement, for "the progress of civilization introduces changes in men's occupations" and "there is a tendency to subdivision of labour in the professions."<sup>76</sup> Since in advanced civilizations there were more steps to every production process, Farr said, "The economy of labour is exceedingly intricate, and its results are marvelous."<sup>77</sup> Farr argued that the occupation returns were also a sign of the strong prosperity that Britain enjoyed, for "who can tell what varieties of pleasures wealth can command; what innumerable comforts the middling classes enjoy; and what precious privileges civilization places within the reach of the humblest handicraftsman!"<sup>78</sup>

Farr also believed that through his development of an accurate and descriptive categorization of the jobs that people held, he could provide the public with an image of an entire capitalist economy working in harmony. For Farr, such a depiction would not only work to increase economic productivity but also would promote social harmony and national unity. In 1851, he explained that in such a complicated and advanced society as Britain, "a complete knowledge of the organization of the labour...[would] tend at once to extend science, to promote production, and to dissipate subversive theories."<sup>79</sup> The classification system itself represented the perfect workings of a capitalist society, for "universal order reigns in nature, and it is not likely to be absent from the regions of human industry."<sup>80</sup> And again, "order pervades the societies of men."<sup>81</sup> What Farr saw in the census results was a completely orderly national economy, with "all...rendering services to all on equitable terms. It is this part of the national life that is to be described (figure 2.2)."<sup>82</sup>

Other census questions also contributed to the discussion of productivity, usually by identifying those who were unable to work. Beginning in 1851, the census asked a question about disabilities, which identified the numbers of (in the words of a *Westminster Review* author) "blind, deaf mutes, and other imperfect beings."<sup>83</sup> The 1851 census report dwelled on the disadvantages that had previously existed because of the lack of accurate statistics on the subject.<sup>84</sup> Suffering from Britain's alleged backwardness in this area were both the society and the afflicted themselves, "on whose behalf the appeals



and efforts of philanthropy, unsupported by a reference to facts illustrative of their numbers and condition, have lost much of their intended effect."<sup>85</sup>

Most observers agreed that unproductive people who could not work at all needed to be supported by the state. Farr explained that "classes of the population, which in uncivilized societies are often without fixed dwellings, are now lodged, voluntarily or involuntarily, in public institutions," and the more public provision for the people, in his opinion, the more enlightened the nation.<sup>86</sup> He wrote that "one of the most unerring tests of the civilization of a State is to be found in its Public Institutions."<sup>87</sup> Besides caring for those who could not work, Farr believed, the government had a duty to intervene in order to transform unproductive people into productive ones whenever they could. This was so they would cease to be a burden on ratepayers, and so they could "be fitted to become useful members of the community [which] is a part of the relief to which [they] are entitled."<sup>88</sup> The notion that individuals had not only a duty but also a right to be productive pervaded such discussions, and it was assumed that most people would not be happy if they were a burden on others. In the case of the disabled, the government was under an obligation to help them gain "pursuits which sweeten the life of man by increasing his usefulness."<sup>89</sup>

The census reports included especially lengthy discussions of the blind and deaf, which incorporated various medical hypotheses, statistics about the exact incidence of the disabilities in different regions and countries, and other information. But the focus was always on possible ways of making the disabled useful. The blind usually could not support themselves, the census determined, and many went to the workhouse. Although schools had trained some to hold certain jobs, "a large number of the blind amongst the humbler classes are a burden on the parish or their friends, or wander about in hopeless mendicancy, often for want of the opportunity of learning a simple trade."<sup>90</sup> Farr mused upon possible solutions such as a standardized Braille system and training for certain jobs, but he also emphasized that the blind should not overcrowd the few jobs available to them. He quoted a report from a school for the blind, for example, that suggested that if the blind were trained only in music, they "will probably become a burden to [their] friends."<sup>91</sup> Deaf-mutes were more likely to hold useful jobs, but many were supported by the community. Farr believed that "the Guardians of the poor are under a moral, if not a legal, obligation to send poor deaf-and-dumb children to the special schools, in order that they may become self-sustaining and not burdensome members of the community."<sup>92</sup>

Yet political economists who were influenced by Malthus were cautious about providing direct help to any except the truly disabled. The 1851 census, one journalist wrote, would show "how many subsist idly on the compulsory dole of the nation, as paupers—how many of these are able and willing to work, if work could be provided for them, and how many are impotent and deserving of all help and commiseration."<sup>93</sup> Farr at one time pointed out that artisans with relatively high wages did not deserve free hospital treatment,

because it encouraged their improvidence.<sup>94</sup> We can thus see yet again the tension between calls for regulation and the Malthusian emphasis on the need for self-help. Both impulses were motivated in part by fears about social disorder.

Yet another way in which industrial society altered understandings of productivity and work had to do with understandings of the life cycle, and in addition to those who would never be productive, statisticians were concerned with the productive and unproductive periods of life. In a capitalist system, people's labor was a commodity. During the period that they were productive, or capable of contributing to the economy, they were also justifying the investment that their society made in them during their unproductive periods, during which they were fed, clothed, and housed by others.<sup>95</sup> An early report of the Statistical Society of London mentioned that information about ages could be used to determine "period[s] of active and productive existence."<sup>96</sup> In the 1851 census report, Farr assumed that people younger than 10 and older than 70 should be classified as unproductive, since the great majority of these "ineffectives by age" were supported by the "effective population."<sup>97</sup> High child mortality rates, therefore, meant that the nation's resources were being spent on people who never became useful. Commentators spoke of the "numbers of the serviceable ages" and the "effective portion" as opposed to the "helpless portion of the community," and most were pleased that the results of the 1851 census indicated that "the principal increase has taken place among the most energetic classes, as well as among the most effective ages of the population."<sup>98</sup> As Farr wrote, "Tested by these facts, the strength of the nation has increased faster than its numbers."<sup>99</sup> Similarly, a writer for the *Manchester Guardian* assumed that children and the elderly "are chiefly sustained by the industry of the population living in the middle periods of life," and that since fewer "ineffectives" were being sustained now than had been the case ten years earlier, when a smaller proportion of people had been in prime ages, the nation as a whole had become more productive.<sup>100</sup>

The emphasis on productivity that is evident in the census reports was also prevalent in nongovernmental analyses of work. Journalist Henry Mayhew, who famously divided the poor of London into four categories—"those that will work, those that cannot work, those that will not work, and those that need not work"—tried, like Farr, to develop a logical and informative classification of occupations.<sup>101</sup> Mayhew explained that a certain proportion of the population in every state was unable to work, whether for "intellectual" ("lunatics and idiots") or "physical" ("the infirm, the crippled, and the maimed—the old and the young") reasons.<sup>102</sup> But, he continued,

A third, and a more extensive class, still remains to be particularized. The members of every community may be divided into the *energetic* and the *an-ergetic*; that is to say, into the hardworking and the non-working, the industrious and the indolent classes; the distinguishing characteristic of

the *anergetic* being the extreme irksomeness of all labour to them, and their consequent indisposition to work for their subsistence.<sup>103</sup>

This last class depended on the “exertions of the rest [of the community]” not because of a physical or intellectual “defect,” but because of a “moral defect,” and it included “the indolent, the vagrant, the professional mendicant, and the criminal.”<sup>104</sup> Mayhew concluded that “in all civilized countries, there will necessarily be a...number of human parasites living on the sustenance of their fellows. The industrious must labour to support the lazy, and the sane to keep the insane, and the able-bodied to maintain the infirm.”<sup>105</sup>

The language of productivity also crossed political lines. While political economists focused on the poor and sick, radical and workers’ groups employed the language of productivity and redundancy to claim rights and privileges for laborers. *Carpenter’s Monthly Political Magazine* used published statistics from the works of well-known political economists to argue that the “total of Useless classes” consisted of the royalty, nobility, gentry, pensioners, paupers, vagabonds, and thieves. Workers and laborers, the journal declared, were entirely useful, while other elements of the society were at best only partially useful.<sup>106</sup> The article called for more land to be cultivated in order to sustain the population, and used statistics of land and population to indicate the average number of acres that should belong to each family in Britain. This was both a call for land redistribution and a challenge to the entire notion of redundancy: people were redundant, the author argued, only if wealth was unequally distributed. The journalist explicitly rejected political economy, and instead spoke of “social economy”: “that science which treats of the internal arrangements of a society or community, and of the method by which the greatest quantity of wealth and happiness may be secured to the greatest number of individuals, at the least possible expense.”<sup>107</sup> The example demonstrates that even those who had not accepted political economists’ version of surplus found the language of statistics and productivity useful. Debates over the nature of the nineteenth-century nation often revolved around the question of who was contributing most to it, and those who the state and its supporters labeled as unproductive could turn the notion of redundancy back on their opponents.

## The End of Surplus

In 1842 Farr wrote that “while the study of the doctrine of population is fraught with instruction and is suggestive of prudence, it is calculated to inspire a calmer confidence in the ordinances of nature, and confirm our faith in the destinies of England.”<sup>108</sup> In other words, it was not a cause for alarm. By the 1850s, the fear of overpopulation had nearly disappeared. The shift had to do in part with a more stable economy and an actual leveling out of population growth, both of which gave the public a sense

of security after the crisis of early industrialism. It was also related to the entrance of Britain into the Crimean War, which brought back the wartime mentality that population is strength, as well as British comparisons of their own increasing population to the relatively stagnant population of France. Finally, the devastating nature of the Irish famine, which appeared so quintessentially Malthusian and at the same time too horrific for most people to imagine as positive, helped to dramatically discredit Malthus. In short, the highpoint of Malthusian anxiety had passed along with the high point of class conflict, and with the prolonged period of European peace.

Some had always insisted that a large population was necessary for industrial and imperial growth, and that Britain's greatness came from its increasing and urbanizing population. Understood this way, support for a large population naturally accompanied support for science, industry, and progress. Anti-Corn Law activists, for example, often argued that free trade would solve the problem of surplus, because people would naturally migrate to the places where labor was needed. The census taker Edmund Phipps wrote in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1844, "Stop not up the natural channel for that stream of population which, if not allowed to escape, will inundate and ultimately overwhelm you!"<sup>109</sup> The *Illustrated London News* argued that "the increase of population is naturally more rapid when not impeded by unjust legislation," and Farr insisted that "population as it improves in England will not increase faster than the requirements of industry in all its forms at home or the new openings of colonial enterprise abroad."<sup>110</sup>

The Corn Laws were repealed in 1846, and for liberals who had long supported population growth, industry, free trade, and urbanization, the census of 1851, which indicated an ever-growing and urbanizing population, operated as a final justification of the manufacturing way of life. Agricultural improvements and the free circulation of goods, they argued, meant that the country had plenty of food, and in a time of war and increasing international competition, population growth could only be positive. As one journalist wrote, "Now that our supplies of food are as ample as the world, there is no other limit to the growth and prosperity of the people."<sup>111</sup> Another writer spoke optimistically about the great improvements that had occurred since the time of Malthus:

Prudent, anxious, and stern as were once our economists of the last generation, about the increase of numbers in our then ill-governed and pauper-ridden and war-stricken land, there is, we hope, no one of them who does not rejoice—as Malthus himself certainly would, if he were here to see it—at the increase of life and enjoyment issuing immediately from an augmented supply of food, and proportionate expansion of manufactures, commerce, and popular command of the necessities of life.<sup>112</sup>

These new anti-Malthusians pointed out that the dire predictions of the pessimistic political economists had failed to be realized: the economy had improved and there had been no violent political upheaval. It was instead France and Ireland, with stagnant or declining populations, that had experienced unrest in 1848. A *Manchester Guardian* article comparing the censuses of Britain and France mused that “when civilization has always gone hand-in-hand with increasing people, and fled with every declining and dying-out race, it seems extraordinary that theorists should ever have imagined that an increase of people was a source of danger.”<sup>113</sup> In fact, “with an extension of population, . . . the moral and physical condition of the people of this country [have] advanced in improvement,” and “the increase of population carries with it a curative and healthy moral effect.”<sup>114</sup> Another journalist comparing England and Ireland wrote that

the Census returns, . . . have amply confirmed the previously prevalent belief, that prosperous and peaceful England had, during the last ten years, been rapidly increasing in people, while the disturbed, agitated, and insurrectionary sister island had been even more rapidly depopulated.<sup>115</sup>

The embrace of a large population, however, did not mean that the concept of redundancy disappeared; it simply became more targeted. Farr argued in the 1851 census report that while population was not redundant in general, “the idle who will not work, the unskillful who cannot work, and the criminal classes who cannot be trusted, are . . . whether numerous or few, always redundant.”<sup>116</sup> Redundancy, then, was no longer about quantity but about quality. During the 1850s, people began to focus on specific emigration schemes for single women, orphans, and other groups that were understood as problematic because of their lack of productivity.

The emphasis on productivity and the at times contradictory understandings of redundancy were especially evident in the ongoing debate about the Irish famine. Irish population decline was understood by the census takers and most of the press as a disaster. Yet for many it was not the decline itself that was the problem, but the fact that during the massive wave of emigration sparked by the famine, Ireland had been

deserted . . . by the young, the healthy, the able, and the industrious, and resigned to the orphan, the widow, the sick, and the aged. . . . Thus the decayed and barren stocks are left behind, and the prolific young shoots are taken away in the fullness of their bearing and growth.<sup>117</sup>

The “feeble classes,” who were less likely to produce children, were even worse off when “the healthier element has been filtered away, and they are left as the dregs behind.”<sup>118</sup> Another writer argued that

the progress of depopulation is now more rapid than ever in Ireland, and carrying off the whole solvent and well-doing part of the community. . . . A



quarter of the Irish peasantry is already on the opposite shore of the Atlantic, and that quarter represents a much larger proportion of youth, strength, energy and skill.<sup>119</sup>

Others, who defended the government's actions during the famine, also focused on the quality of the population, although in their view it was Ireland as a whole that had been unproductive and dangerous to the United Kingdom as a whole. A writer for *Fraser's Magazine*, who used census results to argue that Irish population decline had occurred because of emigration and a low birth rate rather than starvation, went so far as to say that by promoting "vast emigration," the famine did Ireland a vital service.<sup>120</sup> Ireland before the famine, the writer explained, "seemed hopelessly afflicted with a long train of incurable disorders."<sup>121</sup> Crime and hostility between the rich and the poor had been pervasive, and the Irish peasantry was a "mass of threatening poverty."<sup>122</sup> Before the famine there was

a population too great for the means of actual subsistence, and incompatible with the safety of property....In their squalid and miserable dwellings, and in their haggard and sullen features, too many of them bore a close resemblance to the peasantry of France before the Revolution.<sup>123</sup>

Even worse, "Ireland was the difficulty of the empire, and the withered and distorted member of the State."<sup>124</sup> It had been a "country swarming with beggars, overrun by squalid pauper tenements," and a "land, infested by these locust-like swarms."<sup>125</sup> The "roads were darkened with these teeming hordes" and "this gigantic mass of pauperism."<sup>126</sup> Since the famine, in contrast,

society in Ireland has at last been set free from the curse of a population in excess....[and has been] relieved from the swarms which wasted it..., [the] deluge of pauperism....thick hamlets of paupers and cottiers which formerly overspread the country...lanes of beggars...[and] crowds of wretched peasants.<sup>127</sup>

Such images of crowding, with language that evoked "swarming" animals and thus utterly dehumanized the population, emphasized both numbers and condition. The statistics, the writer went on to argue, indicated that Ireland after the famine had fewer paupers, less crime, more education, and more wealth. Overall, "the census of Ireland is a witness to the great material progress of that nation," and "we cannot doubt that this remarkable event [the Famine] must be looked at as a fortunate circumstance."<sup>128</sup> Another journalist, writing in 1855, shared the assumption that a surplus in Ireland (where people were thought to be poor and uneducated) may have existed even when surplus in Britain no longer did: "We are not disposed

to regard a rapid augmentation of the population of a country as...necessarily, a matter for congratulation. It may even be sometimes, as in Ireland, a matter for regret and alarm—at once an indication and a cause of social wretchedness.”<sup>129</sup> These contemporary analyses raise more questions than they answer about changing understandings of surplus in Ireland. Was it simple overpopulation in Ireland that resulted in poverty, or was it the Irish themselves who were to blame for their problems? Did the bad quality of the population lead to distress, or was the bad quality itself a result of too large a quantity? Surplus, it is evident, was a concept that could be mobilized to a number of different ends.

Conflicting understandings of the benefits and drawbacks of emigration were also present within Britain. By the 1850s, even as targeted emigration schemes multiplied, emigration from Britain had come to be seen as potentially “dangerous to the future prosperity and strength of the country.”<sup>130</sup> One politician in 1860

feared that...the country had lost a great portion of its military strength. Those who emigrated were principally the strong and hale, who would...have become soldiers if they had remained in the country; while those who stayed behind were largely made up of the old and very young. If it should be found that in proportion to the total number the most valuable portion of the inhabitants had left the country, it would be time,...for the Government and Parliament to determine whether it was any longer advisable to take measures for the encouragement of emigration.<sup>131</sup>

*Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* took the 1851 census results to signify the downfall of the population and the society. “Emigration then becomes the great running sore which weakens, and at length destroys the state,” the writer explained, because when people of child-bearing age left the country the future population was cut off, and “the state is stript of all its useful citizens.”<sup>132</sup> Meanwhile, the 1851 census, which was the first to gather information about marital status, indicated that there was a large “surplus” of single women in the country. The “surplus woman” problem, which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 5, sparked a massive debate about the best way to make single women productive, whether by opening educational and career opportunities or sending them to the colonies, where there was a “surplus” of men. A primary reason that single women were considered unproductive, however, was that they were not bearing children and were thus contributing to depopulation. Single women who were not fulfilling their duties of reproduction were now among those who produced nothing of value, and were therefore the ones who ought to leave.

During the 1860s, as commentators increasingly engaged in discussions about the relative strength of different races and the possibility of improving the British or the English race, concerns about quality coexisted with concerns

about quantity.<sup>133</sup> Population decline in general was a sign of “senility and decrepitude” while growth was “unmistakable proof... of vigorous health.”<sup>134</sup> But while the seeds of late nineteenth-century pessimism about the continuity and strength of the race were certainly visible during the 1850s and 1860s, the mid-century was generally a period of optimism in Britain. One census commissioner argued that population growth had slowed down after 1851 largely because of emigration. But

notwithstanding this exodus and other circumstances calculated to retard the rate of increase, ... we have a solid addition of more than a million and a half to the population of the United Kingdom—a fact sufficiently significant of the perennial vigour and progress of the country.<sup>135</sup>

Repeated comparisons of Britain and France also served to confirm British pride in both their quantity and quality.<sup>136</sup> The *Times* wrote in 1867:

The spirit and character of a nation alone determine the limit to its numbers; and the increasing power and prosperity of England and her colonies, resulting from a high rate of increase of population, have proved the fallacy of the doctrine “that the increase of the human race should be restricted, so that it may not outstrip the means of subsistence.”<sup>137</sup>

By this point, “the population is only limited by its skill and industry, so long as its valour is unshaken, and its merchants have access to the markets of the world.”<sup>138</sup>

We here sense a confidence that certainly did not exist during the troubled years of the early industrial period. With determination and free trade, people now suggested, population could be both large and stable. Farr explained that Malthus had reversed the nation’s previous (eighteenth-century) population policy, and now, happily, Malthusianism itself could be abandoned. Cheerfully dismissing Malthus’s theory about the arithmetic growth of the food supply, Farr wrote that “future generations of Britons, if they have genius, science, skill, and industry—and if they are more numerous—will necessarily produce more than the country now yields.”<sup>139</sup> In fact, “the power of societies of men always increases directly with their numbers.”<sup>140</sup>

By the 1860s, most people had accepted that population was a sign of prosperity. The 1861 census report stated that while “population is often out of the place where it is wanted, or could be most productive,” it was no longer redundant in general.<sup>141</sup> The *Westminster Review* asserted that maps provided “evidence... of the room there yet is for future millions in our modestly-sized islands.”<sup>142</sup> And the *Manchester Guardian* acknowledged the dramatic changes that had taken place in political economy and views of surplus. Only

a few years ago, English journalists, pamphleteers, and public speakers were nearly all busied in inculcating the necessity of a large emigration

from England, for the purpose of reducing a population which was alleged to exceed the means of employment for its labour.<sup>143</sup>

But now, the writer worried, discussions of emigration and population decline were “eagerly seized and commented upon as actual fact by Irish and continental journalists to whom the weakness and the abasement of England would be most welcome.”<sup>144</sup> The realities of international and imperial politics required Britain to make a strong stand, and in its call for optimism, the *Manchester Guardian* writer argued that population growth

has already shown itself to some extent, as a consequence of the general prosperity and well-being of the labouring classes; and every improvement in their condition will certainly give a fresh impetus to its progress, and tend to fill up the gaps which may have been caused by emigration.<sup>145</sup>

The active fear of surplus in Britain existed only from 1815 to 1850, noticeably a period of European peace. When Britain was not at war, the government and the public could afford to worry about internal stability, the growth of the economy, and the unity of the country. The conception of surplus, it is worth noting, was not a European-wide phenomenon. While other countries certainly dealt with urban poverty, the possibility of working-class revolt, and other effects of industrialization, no other nineteenth-century census was associated with prolonged discussions of overpopulation. Fear of surplus was unique to the nation that industrialized first, grew the fastest (for a time), and was more preoccupied with class divisions than with ethnic or linguistic divisions. For this relatively brief 35-year period, the British looked inwards, and concerned themselves largely with their own national unity rather than with strength on the international stage. Viewed this way, the period from 1815 to 1850 can be seen as an aberration: a period of European peace but domestic unrest, when strength at home was more important than strength abroad, and therefore surplus was a problem.<sup>146</sup> In hindsight, overpopulation appears a short-lived problem, although to contemporaries it seemed highly significant. The census, as a central nation-building project concerned directly with social harmony and unity, helped transform political economy into a science that was, for a time, explicitly about the health of the national population and therefore the nation itself.

Thinking about early nineteenth-century notions of surplus is important in part because such discussions laid the foundations for late-nineteenth-century eugenics.<sup>147</sup> While eugenics relied on the premise that a large population meant a strong nation, it, like Malthusian political economy, was concerned with the contributions that various groups of people made to the overall health of the country. Fears of overpopulation and depopulation were motivated by similar worries about national strength, and thinking in terms of surplus allowed for an easy shift to fears of depopulation, which

themselves relied on eighteenth-century precedents. The assumption that a large population was important to the strength of the nation was not new to the late nineteenth century, but that assumption took on a new valence in an age of international competition that was more industrial, global, and militarized than eighteenth-century competition had been. Meanwhile, as fears about surplus gradually decreased, census analysts and much of the wider public began to focus on a more positive aspect of the census: its capacity for representing people. The census alerted British people not only to the proportion of the population made up by “others” but also to the proportions that they themselves constituted.

# 3

## The Census and Representation

Rise like Lions after slumber  
In unvanquishable number,  
Shake your chains to earth like dew  
Which in sleep had fallen on you—  
Ye are many—they are few.

—Percy Shelley, *The Mask of Anarchy*, 1819<sup>1</sup>

When the government proposed to take a census in 1753, the landowners of Britain refused to be counted. They claimed that the measure was intrusive, that it would be used by the government to collect taxes or to otherwise interfere with the inherited liberties of an English gentleman, and that it was a pernicious sign of encroaching “continental” despotism. They also believed that as elite property owners, their stake and their power in the country could not be described by numbers. They argued that they were worth more than their numerical strength would suggest, and that a census would have “leveling” tendencies, implying that all people had equal worth.<sup>2</sup> In 1753, the concern about the leveling nature of the census was social rather than explicitly electoral: the fear was not about who would be able to vote, but about who ought to be “represented” as leaders of the country.

From a modern perspective, one of the most obvious implications of census-taking is political representation. In many countries, census returns determine electoral districts and the distribution of representative seats, and they often play a major role in causing political realignments of the most significant kind. In Britain, the census was not initiated for the purpose of determining political representation, but it quickly came to be understood as connected to that representation, whether for better or worse. Through a gradual process, the government and members of the public began to recognize the census as a tool that brought political power and a public voice both to individuals and to groups. In the context of nineteenth-century democratization, a gradually expanding electorate, and accompanying shifts in understandings of parliamentary and extraparliamentary politics, the process by which the census was appropriated by the public was fraught with controversy.

The census had a dialectical relationship with the expanding representative system, the redistribution of parliamentary seats, and the ongoing

debate over whether political representation should be based on “numbers” or “interests.” Ultimately, the census helped to complete a gradual shift in British political discourse. A dominant understanding of the social hierarchy that relied on a notion of “interests” gave way to a dominant understanding that relied on numbers; this process can itself be understood as democratization. Although a “one man one vote” political system was not in place by the 1860s, it was becoming increasingly clear that numbers were gaining precedence over interests as the basis for representation. At the same time, the increasing association between the census and representation was related to abstract understandings of power that were not directly tied to elections or parliamentary seats. In the early nineteenth century, many people were suspicious of the census and the potential government uses of it. By the 1850s, most British people had come to understand the census as crucial to their own security and interests. People realized that they needed the census in order to be “represented,” so that their interests would be recognized by the government. Groups claimed that their interests ought to be represented because of the numerical proportion of the population that they constituted. Thus, there was increasing competition between different cities and regions as well as between different “parties,” such as urban and rural, to have their numbers appear as large as possible in the census, and it was primarily those who identified themselves with small or declining groups who expressed continuing distrust of census procedures.

Finally, the 1851 census of religion sparked a heated debate between Dissenters and Anglicans over their respective numbers and the census methods used to represent them. What became evident through the course of the debates over representation was that the census could both unite and divide: it allowed people to define themselves as members of particular groups, but it also encouraged people to differentiate themselves from others around them.<sup>3</sup> Whether dividing people into categories was ultimately beneficial for the health and harmony of the nation was disputed in mid-nineteenth-century Britain. What is clear is that many British people began to realize that through the census, they could recognize not only others but also themselves as members of particular interest groups, and while they might have referred to others as “surplus,” people usually understood their own groups to be central to the nation.

The census, therefore, “represented” the society and the people in it in more ways than one. It helped to provide political representation for people who were members of (some) groups that made up large numerical proportions of the national population. At the same time, the census represented the society in that it described it. In some cases, the census confirmed already existing notions of belonging, while in others the census may have encouraged people to identify in new ways, or perhaps disrupted older ways of identifying. As David Kertzer and Dominique Arel argue in *Census and Identity: The Politics of Race, Ethnicity, and Language in National Censuses*, in many modern states

the “prize is a census category which will ‘scientifically’ legitimate the existence of a socially imagined group.”<sup>4</sup> The power that would come from being counted was not only emotional, however, but also practical: “The very possibility of linking group identities to political benefits can provide incentive for ‘groups’ to mobilize and demand recognition. Far from merely reflecting what is ‘out there,’ the census can be transformed into a mechanism of identity formation.”<sup>5</sup> In modern times, the most prevalent assumption is that people want to be counted because of the rights, privileges, and power that they will gain from that counting. That assumption originated during the early years of census-taking, and looking at nineteenth-century Britain allows us to watch the process occur.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Power of Numbers: Political Representation**

When the first British census was taken in 1801, its proponents and administrators did not mention the determination of political representation as either a purpose or a possible result of the census. They were far more interested in what the census would indicate about the overall strength of the nation, in terms of military might and economic subsistence. It is hard to imagine that the census’s implications for representation did not occur to them; after all, the United States’ census had been instituted ten years earlier for the explicit purpose of determining the distribution of seats in the House of Representatives. Furthermore, radical Enlightenment ideas about the equality of man and political participation were all too visible to the British ruling classes during the 1790s. But at this moment of domestic and foreign crisis, the relationship between the census and representation was not a public topic of discussion.

It did not take long, however, for it to become clear to proponents of political reform that the census could be used to their advantage. By the 1820s, when the reform of Parliament had become a topic of heated political debate, it was evident that population figures could serve as justifications for all kinds of needs. As the national, and especially the urban, population multiplied at an astounding rate, people began to argue that communities or groups incorporating large numbers of people deserved amenities, services, and power. In 1821, the Home Secretary Lord Sidmouth received a request for a new church to be built in an area that had seen a large population increase. Sidmouth pointed out shrewdly that the same argument would apply to many places with fast-growing populations, and if he set a precedent of acquiescence it would be impossible to answer all the demands.<sup>7</sup> His understanding of the implications of population statistics would eventually become commonplace. Around this time, local newspapers began to express pride in the population growth in their own towns or counties, with the assumption that a large population was a sign of commercial vibrancy and prosperity.



As discussions of reform increased during the 1820s, the link between the census and electoral power became explicit. The debate over reform centered on the growing yet unrepresented towns, whose inhabitants believed that they deserved more of a voice in national politics. On the other side were the so-called rotten boroughs, small or depopulated places that held a traditional seat in Parliament, which was often under the control of a single landowner or a small number of electors. Those in favor of reform argued that the new realities of population and economic power required a redistribution of seats, and that people who had gained their wealth from trade or industry deserved representation as much as the landed did. Reformers suggested that the burgeoning industrial elite needed a voice both because it was an economic group with particular needs and because it constituted a growing proportion of the national population. Representation, according to this view, ought to be based on both numbers and interests.

Prominent reformers such as John Russell believed that population statistics would serve as the most persuasive evidence for change. They used census figures both to determine the best plan for reform and to provide proof of its necessity.<sup>8</sup> Population figures accompanied discussions of Manchester's greatly increased wealth, for example, and were used to indicate the current unbalanced state of representation.<sup>9</sup> Letters from unrepresented citizens also cited the census, and reformers consistently noted that the current electoral system was unfair to the "trading community inhabiting large towns."<sup>10</sup> As one angry correspondent wrote in 1830, "There are fewer members returned within the county of Durham, in the ratio of its population, than from any other English county."<sup>11</sup> During the years leading up to the Reform Bill, petitions that employed population figures were also regularly submitted to Parliament. A petition complaining of heavy taxation "referred all the evils of the country to a want of proper representation in parliament," and "one of the most important features in the petition was the statement applying to the population of England."<sup>12</sup>

The parliamentary debates about reform also relied heavily on population statistics. Thomas Creevey explained in 1823 that

between the year 1700 and the present time, our population had increased from five to twelve millions; and yet, . . . the elective franchise (as regarded the number of persons enjoying it) had been stationary, if not abating. For instance, 1900 men in . . . Cornwall elected more members among them than were elected by one half the other counties in England; and this while new towns of immense consideration had sprung up, which were kept without any elective franchise at all. If these . . . towns, with populations of three or four hundred thousands—towns which contributed largely to the income, to the power, to the security of the state—if the inhabitants of these towns were totally shut out from the elective franchise, while 1900 . . . of the most worthless individuals in the country enjoyed an enormous monopoly of it, surely all this called for . . . revision.<sup>13</sup>

Creevey's fluid transition between population statistics and notions of the "worth," "consideration," and "contributions" of the new industrial towns is indicative of the unresolved debate between numbers and interests.

In the months immediately preceding the passage of the Reform Bill of 1832, another debate in Parliament explicitly raised the question of the authority and relevance of census evidence. In March of 1831, Lord John Russell moved for "a return of the population in each borough in England and Wales returning members to serve in Parliament, of which the population in the year 1821 did not exceed 2000 souls."<sup>14</sup> In other words, he was interested in determining which towns could be legitimately disenfranchised on the basis of a small population. Those opposed to reform immediately expressed their belief that there was nothing to be gained from seeing the returns, and reformers then attacked their opponents for their aversion to the "truth." One reformist MP noted that "they were objecting to the production of information—to the production of intelligence—and why? Because they feared the light."<sup>15</sup> Yet an opposing MP "denied that those who opposed the measure were the enemies...of knowledge and information....the more light was thrown on the measure, the more it would be scouted by all intelligent men in the country."<sup>16</sup> Debates over the census and representation continued to revolve around the truth and the authority of statistics for many years to come. But by 1830, it was becoming increasingly difficult to reject statistics outright, and both sides attempted to argue that they were basing their conclusions on a more complete use of the available evidence.

The question about whether representation should be based on numbers or interests, however, continued to be debated, including among those in favor of reform. In 1831, John Campbell said that "each of the towns to which an additional Member was to be given, was an important town and had important interests to defend," again suggesting that reform was needed not just because of population growth.<sup>17</sup> Russell's papers concerning the reform bill show that it was to be based on statistics of both population and wealth, for taxes and property values were listed in conjunction with tables of population and proposed representation for various towns.<sup>18</sup> Eventually, the reform party decided that

having adopted the principle of the amount of population, as the surest proof of the necessity of disfranchisement in some cases, and an increase of the number of members in others, we could discover no test more fixed and recognized than that of the last Parliamentary Census of 1821. Upon which therefore our measure, both with regard to counties and Cities, is founded.<sup>19</sup>

The Bill that was eventually passed itself reflected the continuing power of both interests and numbers. While many industrial towns gained seats, traditional seats belonging to the universities and to many small towns remained.

In practice, the Bill was a pragmatic compromise that was successful only because it worked to appease various opinions.

The parliamentary proponents of reform in 1832 were not necessarily radicals; most wanted a slight extension of the franchise to educated and propertied men. Few of them were advocating a "one man one vote" reform, and most retained the longstanding notion that only propertied men were entitled to the franchise. In this view, numbers alone were not enough to justify the vote; interests and education had to be taken into account as well. But while the Reform Bill was a disappointment to many radicals who believed that it had not gone far enough in expanding the electorate or redistributing parliamentary seats, it was the first time that population statistics were successfully used on a large scale for the purpose of deciding political representation in Britain. During the 1830s and 1840s, those who had not received the representation that they hoped for continued to use census figures to support their cause. Chartist newspapers often focused on what they saw as statistics of underrepresentation, which indicated large numbers of people in certain regions without rights. The unrepresented also called into question census methods themselves, which they believed did not "represent" everyone. In 1841, one Chartist newspaper related how unemployed workers took a local census of themselves with their own enumerators, to indicate the problems that working people faced.<sup>20</sup> This subsection of the population had accepted the concept of census-taking but not the government version of it, and the participants in the project believed that in order to be accurately represented, they had to take the census into their own hands.<sup>21</sup> The example suggests that the census was not solely in the hands of the government and elite statisticians. The census had been successfully popularized not only in terms of public awareness and analysis of results but in the taking as well.

The connection between the census and representation also raises larger questions about what representation means. Large cities received representatives in 1832 because of their population growth, but if not everyone living in those cities were allowed to vote, then the question of who was being represented remained. Were the people chosen to represent each city representing the entire population of the city, or certain interest groups within it? How could enfranchised citizens claim the entire population of the city as justification for representation if most of that population could not vote? Such unresolved questions as these contributed to continuing discussions, and by the 1850s a push for further reform had begun. At an 1853 meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, population statistics of large but unrepresented towns were displayed along with returns of electors, taxes, and property values as evidence of the need for reform.<sup>22</sup> In 1857, the dilemma over interests and numbers was still unresolved. While the politicians Sir James Graham and Lord John Russell both wanted to extend the franchise, they were unwilling to contemplate a total shift to

numbers. Graham wrote that he did not want

electoral districts dependent on population....I should view with great apprehension the success of any such project. It would destroy altogether the balance of interests...and it would give undue preponderance to numbers....the ancient divisions between counties and towns must in the main be upheld.<sup>23</sup>

Graham wanted certain interest groups to have greater electoral power than others, and he called "registration exclusively dependent on numbers, a Principle dangerous in the extreme, if it be universally applied."<sup>24</sup> Among moderate reformers such as Graham, the fear of democratic tendencies and its relation to majorities and numbers did not die easily.<sup>25</sup>

The 1867 Reform Bill continued the process of democratization, in the end expanding the electorate and moving British politics ever closer to a numbers-based system. The debates leading up to the 1867 reform were largely about which elements of the population could exercise the vote responsibly, and eventually came to center on the perceived respectability of various subsections of the male working classes.<sup>26</sup> The nineteenth-century census, ultimately, was only indirectly related to the expanding representative system, because the districts used for census-taking were not parliamentary but rather separately created registration districts. But this did not mean that the census's implications for representation were obscure to contemporaries. The Reform Bill of 1832 was passed at the same moment that the statistical movement picked up steam and began lobbying the government for a more extended census. By the end of the 1830s, the census had become firmly associated with liberal political economy and industrial progress. To the dismay of Tory statisticians such as John Rickman, the architect of the first four censuses, it had also become tied to reform-minded politics. Meanwhile, the representation of interests and the representation of numbers came together in more abstract understandings of identity and power.

### **The Shifting Representation of Interests: Local, Urban, and Rural**

In 1853, the *Manchester Guardian* observed that "it is important to notice, at a time when a new reform bill is about to be discussed, that the town and country populations are equally balanced."<sup>27</sup> While the newspaper might have been advocating an increase in political representation for specific towns, it was also making a more general point about population and power. As people began to realize that in order to be represented they needed to be counted, they also realized that this was true not just in terms of electoral representation. As the century progressed, a more abstract understanding emerged among particular groups that if the government realized how many of "them" there were, their interests would be addressed.

The conflicts that arose from the changes of the nineteenth century, between rural and urban, agricultural and industrial, protectionist and free trade, were all discussed with the aid of census statistics. While eighteenth-century landowners were less interested in their numbers than in their wealth and influence, by the middle of the nineteenth century few kinds of power could be publicly justified without numbers. Numbers came to be connected to local, regional, and national loyalty, and one of the most obvious ways to express pride was to focus on numerical strength. Significantly, this embrace of large numbers was happening even while many political economists continued to worry about overpopulation, confirming that surplus was never a truly general concept, but rather one that could be applied to specific, supposedly problematic groups.

Beginning in the 1820s, towns celebrated their population growth and increasingly conflicted with one another in the pages of the public press over the administration of the census. The ways in which enumeration districts were divided proved particularly ripe for conflict. Local rivalries, such as that between Liverpool and Manchester, increasingly turned on population, but what if the enumeration districts were not parallel? As the social topography of towns changed, further anxiety was generated. More and more people commuted into large towns such as London and Manchester from suburbs, which were counted as separate communities in the census. But to those who wanted to celebrate the economic or political importance of their own city, suburban dwellers who were contributing to the life and work of the city ought to be counted as part of it. In 1851, the *Manchester Guardian* pointed out that Manchester's population had in fact increased even more than the census indicated, because so many "commercial" people lived in the suburbs and commuted into the city by train.<sup>28</sup> Liverpool seemed bigger at first glance, the writer explained, but if the community of Salford, which was essentially continuous with Manchester, was included in Manchester's statistics, then Manchester was in fact larger than Liverpool. As people adjusted to the dramatic changes wrought by the railway and other inventions, their anxiety about boundaries was expressed partly through the census: where people "belonged" was no longer obvious, and what constituted the community had become blurry.<sup>29</sup> By 1861, the census administrators had recognized the importance of the census in this regard, and they emphasized the need for clearly defined enumeration districts in the comparison of different towns.<sup>30</sup>

One example that demonstrates the high stakes of local population figures involved the financial district known as the City of London, whose advocates were angry at what they considered the census's underestimation of their importance. Because the City had few residential areas, nearly everyone who contributed to its vibrant economy arrived there in the morning and left in the evening. Since the census counted people where they slept at night, this large commuter population was counted as resident elsewhere, and the City, despite its centrality to Britain's economic life, was portrayed as having very few inhabitants. Representatives of the City therefore decided to conduct their own census during daytime hours, a project that much amused the reporters for the *Times*. A journalist pointed out that the

people who were not counted as inhabitants of the City were counted somewhere else, and received the privileges of being citizens in the communities where they lived.<sup>31</sup> The incident raises a great many questions, and suggests that British people had not agreed upon exactly how representation worked or what the census was meant to do. Was it the community that was supposed to benefit from being “represented,” or the individual citizen? The resident, by being counted wherever he or she lived, would presumably gain privileges through that counting, whether that meant more representatives in Parliament, a new church for the neighborhood, or a larger local police force. But what if a community of importance, in this case the economic community of the City, lost representation as a result? And what were the implications for the census’s emphasis on the household if the middle-class family was in fact split up for purposes of representation: the man claiming privileges in his community of business, while his wife and children were counted in the suburb where they lived? The incident also serves as another example in which people conducted their own census because they were unhappy with the official one, although in this case, rather than unemployed workers, it was local leaders who felt threatened by the low returns for their area, and, like rural landowners, were worried about the threat to traditional power structures.

Census results were disputed in part because of fairly intangible rivalries and emotions, but they also had practical results. There were financial implications to population results, as parishes were often provided with money from charities based on their population, and local police departments were also funded on the basis of numbers. Where the borders of districts were placed was thus important. In 1862, the Mayor of Grantham wrote to the government complaining that when the inmates of the Union workhouse were returned separately from the rest of the town, it left the population at just under 5,000, which meant that the town was allotted less money for its police force than it would have if the population was over 5,000.<sup>32</sup> Parishes often used population statistics to demonstrate the need for new churches.<sup>33</sup> Finally, private schemes and projects used population statistics as justification. Railroad companies took censuses of their own, in which they counted population and road traffic, both to determine where there was need for a new railway and with the hope that they could receive a charter from the government if they proved that need.<sup>34</sup> When the new Manchester–Leeds railway was to be built in 1836, the advocates of the railroad argued that they were serving the most populous and wealthy provincial district in the country, and they used information from the 1831 census to indicate the aggregate population of all the towns on the proposed line. They then used statistics to prove that the region had a greater population density and a faster rate of growth than almost any other region in the country. They promised that the “facts respecting the Population, Manufactures, Exports, Traffic (in passengers and goods) of the District, are compiled from official documents, and authentic information.”<sup>35</sup>

Even as towns and regions argued over their relative populations, there occurred a shift from an emphasis on local divisions such as counties and cities to more national divisions, such as that between city and country. The census itself reflected the shift when it moved from counting communities to counting individuals. By the 1840s, administrators and politicians had come to see the economy as a national one, and the most significant divisions as between “parties” rather than places. The occupation tables, the 1841 census commissioners claimed, “teem with materials for deciding upon many questions which have already divided, or may hereafter interest, the different parties in this country.”<sup>36</sup> These parties rallied around free trade or the Corn Laws, industry or agriculture, city or country. As political fortunes ebbed and flowed (primarily ebbed for the protectionists and flowed for the free traders), discussions over the census became ever more impassioned.<sup>37</sup>

Since census figures were believed to bring legitimacy to certain ways of life, numbers both reflected economic power and suggested that certain groups of people were deserving of more power. Many articles about the census were in fact protectionist or anti-Corn Law treatises, which invoked the authority of statistics as justification for their cause. In 1845, the protectionist newspaper the *Morning Herald* claimed that the occupation returns from 1841 had been manipulated to serve the Anti-Corn Law League, and insisted that more people were in fact employed in agriculture than in manufacture even though the census had indicated the opposite.<sup>38</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* responded, “Thus, by false comparisons, they have circulated the numerous statistical fallacies which have been too readily swallowed up by their credulous supporters.”<sup>39</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* admitted that the Irish statistics would turn the statistics for the United Kingdom in favor of agriculture. But, the writer insisted, the British should not be associated with the Irish to that extent, for “would they not also turn it in favour of pauperism and unparalleled destitution?”<sup>40</sup> The paper then quoted the census report itself as the highest authority: “a book with which the *Herald* ought to be familiar, when it assumes the office of public instructor on this subject.”<sup>41</sup> The writer ended the article on a haughty note: “Very little purpose is served by perverting the truth so grossly as it has done in the article we have quoted. Indeed, we incline to think that its wisest course would be to refrain statistics altogether.”<sup>42</sup> Such discussions indicate not only the high stakes of the census returns but also a growing savvy about statistics and a willingness to critique statistical methods and interpretations. The numbers could evidently be made to support more than one cause, and the contest was over the most persuasive use of those numbers.

Debates between the two great interests of trade and agriculture were also heard in Parliament, and they often revolved around census method. Lord Malmesbury “dwelt on the erroneous results which were deduced from dividing the population returns into two such classifications as the agricultural population and the commercial, trading, and manufacturing population.”<sup>43</sup> Returns should be correct, he continued, because “they had been frequently

quoted in defence of the policy recently adopted on all great questions affecting agriculture."<sup>44</sup> Lord Stanley agreed that

the manner in which the population returns were drawn up was calculated to mislead the public with respect to the relative proportion of the manufacturing and agricultural interests. In the country towns and villages every tradesman and artisan was dependent on the agricultural interest, and yet in the returns those classes were ranged under the head of manufacturers.<sup>45</sup>

In the course of such arguments over how to do the census, it became clear that those who were losing their power were also those who were most critical of census methods and who put the least faith in statistics. In a letter of 1851, Benjamin Disraeli wrote sadly that

the returns of the census will not benefit us. I attribute very much the stationary, or diminishing, amount of our rural population to the influence of our law of Settlement. . . . a law, wh-, under all its mitigations tends to the diminution of the rural population ought not to be a favorite with a territorial aristocracy, if they saw further than their noses.<sup>46</sup>

Understandably, it was the "territorial aristocracy" that was most unhappy about the deterritorialization of identities that came with centralization and urbanization.<sup>47</sup>

The public recognition that the census could be put to various personal uses connected to power and representation is finally evidenced by the many letters that the government received before each decennial census, requesting that various additional questions be asked. One such example involved the British Temperance League, which wrote a letter requesting that the 1861 census include a question about whether people were teetotalers or not. The organization suggested that those who wished to could write "teetotaler" next to their occupation, "as there will probably soon be a hard struggle in, as well as out of Parliament on this drinking question it may be found of service in estimating the strength of the party opposed to the drink traffic."<sup>48</sup> This question and others like it were not included in the census; census administrators continued to insist on simplicity and practicality, and pointed out that each additional question could be asked only at great expense. Nonetheless, it is highly significant that the census was viewed as a technology capable of identifying the members of particular groups on a national scale, and it was clear that the census could potentially provide information of use not only to the government but also to individuals and groups outside it.

### **The Controversy over the Census of Religion**

The growing understanding that the census could represent different interests within the society culminated in the heated debate over the religious



censuses of 1851 and 1861, which raised questions not only about representation but also about privacy and the limits of state power. As the most public census controversy of the nineteenth century, the religious census deserves close attention. In 1851, the census bill left power to the Home Secretary to ask whatever additional questions he saw fit. Under this authority, the government proposed censuses of religion and education. Immediately, complaints flew in Parliament and the press. Opponents believed that the education census was “inquisitorial,” because “it even demanded the income and expenditure of each school.”<sup>49</sup> Politicians described questions about private literary and scientific institutions as “a most inquisitorial and vexatious inquiry, which was not at all warranted by the statute.”<sup>50</sup> Many citizens believed private, self-supported institutions to be outside the jurisdiction of the state, and the proposals provoked great anxiety about the relationship between the government and the people and between public and private enterprise.

But the greatest anger was reserved for the census of religion. The government proposed to count the churches that had been built in recent years, the absolute numbers of Anglican churches and dissenting chapels of different denominations, the number of “sittings” available in these places, and the number of attendants on the Sunday before census day. The census administrators had designed the census to determine the religious “provision” available, especially for the working classes, and to provide a field for further action by missionaries and philanthropists. But another implication was immediately obvious: the returns would indicate which religious “party” (Anglicans or Dissenters) was the more powerful. More specifically, Anglicans were aware that the census would likely make their recent decline public, and they were worried about what this would mean for the future of the established religion.

Prominent Anglican MPs immediately raised a challenge to the bill. They claimed that the Secretary of State was overstepping his authority, and they worried that “the returns would draw an invidious distinction between the Church and the Dissenters.”<sup>51</sup> Some people clearly recognized that the census could divide as well as unite, and that by defining people as members of potentially competing groups it could create or exacerbate that competition. But while anxiety about strength and competition underlay the entire debate, the Anglicans couched much of their opposition in technical discussions about census methods and in language about intrusion and authority. The whole debate, then, while fundamentally about issues of religion and the state, outwardly revolved around the census itself.<sup>52</sup>

Those in favor of taking the census employed arguments about the importance and authority of knowledge, and appealed to the “public” as the body that deserved the information. Earl Granville insisted that

the queries . . . had been introduced because complaints had been made . . . of the extremely meagre nature of the information afforded by the former

returns.... Considering the enormous expenses to which the country would be put, they thought it would be a pity not to profit by that opportunity to gain most valuable information respecting...matters in which the country took a great interest.<sup>53</sup>

And "with reference to the statistics of the spiritual and secular education of the people of this country, it would be a great disappointment to the public if no effort was made by the government...to obtain information on so important a subject."<sup>54</sup> Granville also argued that while the census would gather financial information about clergy incomes and church endowments, such figures were not nearly as important as those concerning the overall religiosity of the country.

The government had carefully investigated the legality of taking a religious census, and had come to the conclusion that the questions about religion should not be compulsory.<sup>55</sup> A letter would be written to the clergy explaining that the questions were optional "but pointing out that it was important to ascertain whether the spiritual instruction afforded had kept pace with the increased wants of the population of 1851."<sup>56</sup> Politicians in favor of the measure said that they trusted that people would comply simply because they would understand the value of information. Supporters also warned that if other religious groups cooperated "it could not but redound greatly to the disadvantage of the ministers of the Established Church if they were...to persist in their disinclination to make these important returns."<sup>57</sup>

Anglicans, however, argued that optional responses would result in misleading figures. The Earl of Harrowby observed that "questions which could not be legally enforced would only be partially answered, and had better therefore not be put at all, otherwise the public would be led astray."<sup>58</sup> Meanwhile, the Bishop of Oxford commented that "the general result must be conducive to the propagation of error rather than truth" and it was "better that they should have no information of this kind rather than imperfect information."<sup>59</sup> In this view, technologies such as the census could be successful only if they were universal, standardized, and clear.

Despite the vocal opposition, the 1851 census was taken the way that the Home Secretary and the Registrar-General's Office had hoped: by counting Churchgoers and chapelgoers on a particular Sunday. The results were tabulated and analyzed in a separate report, which was of great interest to the public, and continues to be used by historians of Victorian religion today.<sup>60</sup> But when the report appeared in 1854, Anglicans who believed that they had been undercounted insisted on an investigation, and the Registrar-General, George Graham, was forced to field questions about the accuracy of the census. The census showed nearly as many Dissenters as Anglicans nationwide, and the statistics were immediately understood as a major threat to the Established Church: if it was losing its majority, then it was also perhaps losing its unique position as the state-supported and state-sanctioned religion. Accusations circulated, both in the press and in Parliament, that Dissenters

had deliberately exaggerated their numbers in order to make the Established Church appear weak.

The issue of conflict was the method used by the census takers. In the report, Census Commissioner Horace Mann defended the chosen method as less inquisitorial than asking people directly for their religious affiliation, and thus more fitting for Britain. He also argued that "the outward *conduct* of persons furnishes a better guide to their religious state than can be gained by merely vague professions."<sup>61</sup> In other words, people, especially irreligious people, could not be trusted to tell the truth if asked directly about their religious habits. The method injured the Anglican cause precisely because of the many irreligious people in Britain, particularly working-class people. Large numbers seldom or never went to Church, but would most likely have declared themselves Anglican if asked. Dissenters, on the other hand, enjoyed a very large fraction of church-going people.<sup>62</sup>

Some pro-Anglican MPs saw the census as an outright conspiracy against the Established Church, and argued that that "the greatest mis-statements in the reports occurred, not from our own numbers being lessened, but from the numbers of the Dissenters of nearly all denominations being greatly exaggerated and set forth."<sup>63</sup> MPs provided various anecdotes of willful manipulation, describing Dissenters who planned special sermons and employed especially popular preachers to attract extra people, and took children out of their Sunday school classes to fill the seats in the chapel.<sup>64</sup> One MP claimed that some dissenting chapels returned double the number that the chapel could actually hold at a given time, and "the returns of persons attending the different chapels in many parishes exceed their whole population."<sup>65</sup>

The assumption behind these accusations was that Dissenters had explicitly understood the census as "a trial of strength between the Church and the Dissenters."<sup>66</sup> One MP suggested that "any day...appointed for the taking of the Census would be sure to be considered by the Dissenting bodies as the occasion for a trial of strength, on which...they would endeavour to make a grand demonstration of the growing success of their cause."<sup>67</sup> In contrast, claimed the Bishop of Oxford, Anglicans had made no special effort, and bad weather on census day had kept many people who normally attended Church at home. Anglicans "were careless and indifferent about [the census], having no notice of the use to which the returns would be put, and looking upon many of the questions as impertinent or intrusive, and they either neglected them, or else had no means of giving an accurate statement."<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, claimed the Bishop, those who had tabulated the results were in some cases hostile to the Church, and the only way to ensure accuracy would be to check for errors on the original returns themselves.

In response to this request, Granville pointed out that the census office was now closed, so it was impossible to procure the original returns. Furthermore, he reminded the House, the details of the results were supposed to remain private: census procedure specified that only the abstracts were to be published, not individual returns. Granville blamed whatever problems may

have existed on those MPs who had complained about the census before it was taken, thus making Anglican Clergy unwilling to answer the questions.<sup>69</sup> He concluded that the accuracy of the census ought to be left to the public to determine, and he expressed satisfaction in the efficient manner in which the census had been taken and the great interest that it had evoked: 21,000 copies had been sold.

In July of 1854, Registrar-General Graham joined the fray by issuing a "memorandum on the objections urged against the accuracy of the Census Returns of religious worship." He insisted that respectable clergymen had been the ones filling in the returns, and the results could therefore be trusted.<sup>70</sup> He dismissed the claims that Dissenters deliberately formed large congregations on the day of the census, and that people went to more than one chapel in the course of the day. He also pointed out that it made logical sense for dissenting chapels to have higher attendance than Anglican Churches, because their congregations survived only through their numbers, while Anglican ones were supported by the state.<sup>71</sup> Finally, in response to the accusation that "the returns may have been tampered with at the census office, to the disadvantage of the church of England," he answered that those employed by his office were primarily members of the Church of England, and would have had no reason to skew the results.<sup>72</sup>

Politicians as well as census takers were clearly aware of the lasting and public nature of the information that had been gathered. As one MP said,

It must be allowed that a great public document such as this . . . , which professed to fix the relative number of the members of the Established Church and of those dissenting from it . . . , in proportion to its importance ought also to be accurate, and . . . such documents, if they came at all stamped with the weight of public authority, should be accurate, and not misleading documents.<sup>73</sup>

And further, "there should not forth to the public, on mistaken facts, a statement as to the relations of the different religious bodies in this land."<sup>74</sup> The Bishop of St. David's said that he wished Anglicans had not made returns at all, "for by doing so they were not assisting to ascertain truth, but were appearing to lend their countenance and sanction to that which was in the end an imposition on the public."<sup>75</sup>

The census takers themselves assumed that one of the reasons that the census results were of interest was because they provided people with more information about the groups with which they identified. As Horace Mann wrote in the report, "Religious parties of every denomination, in the estimates they have endeavoured to form of their comparative strength in this country, have hitherto felt the great disadvantage resulting from the absence of official returns on the subject of public worship."<sup>76</sup> Official returns were needed precisely because members of different denominations did not trust one another, and statistics could serve as a supposedly neutral and unbiased

arbiter. Abridging the report for sale was also justified by an appeal to the public:

In consequence of the deep interest known to be taken in the subject, and the general wish to possess impartial and authentic information upon it, arrangements have been made for placing within the reach of the public generally all the more important parts of the Report, ... at a price which should secure the object of its wide diffusion with the least possible delay.<sup>77</sup>

The report also pointed out that the census was the only possible opportunity for asking questions about religion, because the complicated machinery was already in place. The general assumption among census takers was that the census always ought to be expanding, within practical limits, to acquire further information about the national aggregate. The commissioners, however, also demonstrated their awareness of the potential for competition between denominations, and they recognized that opposition had been voiced not only on the grounds that the questions were “too minute and inquisitorial” but also because of the fear that they would cause division within the nation.<sup>78</sup> Mann insisted that while religious freedom was important, social harmony was as well.

While the debates over the results of the 1851 census subsided over the following few years, the tensions between Church and chapel did not, and in 1861 the conflict returned with full force. The writers of the bill for the 1861 census proposed a new method: they would ask every head of household for his or her “religious profession” and for those of all the inmates of the house. This would appease Anglicans by including the majority of nonchurchgoers in the Anglican faith, but it provoked an immediate protest from Dissenters, who in this case realized that their numbers would be threatened. Like the Anglicans in 1851, Dissenters, in their public opposition, focused primarily on questions surrounding census method itself instead of the underlying issue of religious competition. They claimed that the question about religious profession would encourage falsehood from irreligious people, resulting in inaccurate data, and they insisted that religious belief was not under government jurisdiction. Once again, an argument about respective strength became an argument about the census itself.

Throughout May and June of 1860, the Home Office was bombarded with petitions against the measure. The petitions came from individuals, from dissenting congregations of all types, and from large associations of congregations. Most of the petitions acknowledged the capacity of the census to depict and to further the “moral and religious progress of the community,” but they argued that the proposed method would be misleading and unfair.<sup>79</sup> Generally, the protesters agreed that there ought to be no human authority in religious matters, and they argued for either no religious census at all or one that was taken along the lines of 1851.<sup>80</sup>

An underlying assumption of many of the petitions was that the goal of taking a religious census was to determine "the amount of spiritual destitution for which provision had to be made," or in other words, to bring religion to the people.<sup>81</sup> A group of Dissenters in Plymouth avowed that "they fully appreciate the value of a correct and careful Census of the population both in relation to its civil and its ecclesiastical state."<sup>82</sup> However, they believed that the 1851 census had already provided information on this topic, and the new question would not "distinguish between the actual attendants on religious worship and the large class who neglect it."<sup>83</sup> Many people who never went to church, the petition pointed out, would say that they were members of the Established Church, and the census would not indicate that Dissenters made up a large proportion of the religious people in the country.<sup>84</sup>

The most common argument employed by the dissenting opponents of the census, however, was about religious freedom and privacy. A group of Baptists from Bristol insisted that religion was "a department of human life into which the intrusion of human governments is wholly unwarranted," while a congregation of Unitarians argued that the religious question would "be an infringement of the sacred rights of conscience."<sup>85</sup> Another association of Baptists called the proposal "an unwarrantable exercise of legislative authority—...a vexatious interference with religious liberty," and the Congregationalists said that it would be "an unwarrantable and needless interference by the State with personal opinion."<sup>86</sup> The Presbyterians warned ominously that the measure would likely "alienate many...friends of the present government."<sup>87</sup>

In the beginning of July, George Graham made a pragmatic decision to put his support behind the Dissenters.<sup>88</sup> He concluded that the 1861 census ought not to have direct questions on either religion or education, and since the 1851 census had counted churches and seats, doing it again would be too much work and was hardly necessary. Graham pointed out that if the question was made optional, as legal experts suggested it ought to be, then "what could be deduced from so imperfect a Return?"<sup>89</sup> Graham was also concerned about the success of the census as a whole, and worried that if the government alienated so much of the public, "thus the accuracy and completeness of the entire census is in jeopardy, costing the country considerably above 100,000 pounds."<sup>90</sup>

But before the government could fully retreat on the census, a prolonged debate in Parliament took place. The influential dissenting MP Edward Baines noted the public interest in the issue and insisted that "it was felt not alone by Dissenters, but by Churchmen, that to inquire into the religious profession of individuals was objectionable, both on the grounds of feeling and of principles."<sup>91</sup> "Although he was a Dissenter," he continued, "he had not taken up this question merely on the grounds of the Dissenters," and he simply "desired to see perfect fairness and...equity for all religious bodies in this country."<sup>92</sup>

Dissenting MPs argued that the census ought to be done as it had been ten years earlier, and they focused on national religiosity. The returns of

churches and other public institutions had been “of use to the historian, the statesman, and most of all to the philanthropist and man of religion,” and they had shown the “comparative progress of the population, and of their means of religious accommodation and observance.”<sup>93</sup> The progress the country had made, Dissenters claimed, could be determined only if the same methodology was used again. They quoted Horace Mann, who had noted that “between 1831 and 1851, there was an increase in population in England and Wales of 27 per cent, and in the accommodation for religious worship of 42 per cent, showing a most gratifying amount of religious activity in the different churches.”<sup>94</sup> The census had also provided a

less gratifying, but more salutary, knowledge of the deficiency still existing of religious accommodation. It could be learned also how far a defective attendance at places of worship was caused by want of accommodation, and how far it was to be ascribed to a want of disposition to attend.<sup>95</sup>

New returns would also show “where the existing deficiencies existed, and serve as a guide to the efforts to supply them.”<sup>96</sup>

The lack of religiosity among the working classes was central to Dissenters’ argument. Baines pointed out that in 1851 “a very painful revelation was made of the number of persons, no less than 5,000,000, who did not attend religious worship at all. He feared that amongst this class either no answer, or even indecorous answers might be given.”<sup>97</sup> Baines also argued that the proposal did not address the religious realities of the country. The truth, he claimed, was that many people were either irreligious or went to religious services based on the convenience of the moment: some went to Church in the morning and chapel in the evening, in fact, and could not answer a question about religious profession with any accuracy. The question, he urged, would encourage the “very large proportion [who were] habitual non-attenders” to lie, and “he feared answers might be given of a very undesirable character, such as outrageous protestations against religion, which no one could desire to see recorded upon a public document.”<sup>98</sup>

Finally, if the question were left optional, “the majority would give no answer, and returns obtained under such circumstances would be utterly destitute of all value.”<sup>99</sup> Dissenters quoted the 1851 census report, which claimed that the “conduct of persons furnishes a better guide to their religious state than can be gained by merely vague professions.”<sup>100</sup> A direct question, they insisted, was not only “inquisitorial” and “continental” but inaccurate as well: the time and money that people put into their places of worship could tell more than a vague profession of affiliation.

Cornewall Lewis, who was the 1861 census’s greatest advocate, disagreed. He insisted that the “the system adopted on the former occasion was one altogether more lax and less accurate than was requisite for statistical purposes.”<sup>101</sup> The method of counting churchgoers on a single Sunday, he believed, failed to determine who actually “belonged” to each religious denomination. Lewis

argued that the government did not want to interfere with behavior, it simply wanted to find out how people self-identified. Lord Palmerston also saw the “value and utility in a religious census,” and agreed that the government was not interested in the intensity of people’s belief, but simply where they were married and buried.<sup>102</sup> The conflicting understandings of the purpose of the religious census—to determine the ways in which people identified their religion or to determine what their religious practice looked like—raises questions about how people understood the concept of religious belonging. Both methods could be viewed as misleading because of their inability to describe people’s “real” religion. Simply asking people for their religion left open the possibility that they could falsely represent themselves, while ascertaining their religious practice meant that people who did not practice at all could not be easily defined.

Dissenters’ emphasis on churchgoing, in contrast to Anglicans’ emphasis on affiliation and rites of passage, is also suggestive of theological and social differences between Anglican and nonconformist Protestantism. While Anglicans of the nonevangelical variety may have thought, as Palmerston did, that being married and buried in the Church made one a member of that Church, Dissenters tended to believe that regular religious worship was necessary. Such a division had its roots in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century conflicts over religion, when those who believed that the Established Church was not disciplined or fervent enough formed separate denominations. Eighteenth-century stereotypes that distinguished “enthusiastic” Methodists from calm, dignified Anglicans demonstrated a similar split.

The argument over the census, however, was not only about differing views of religious belonging but also about the boundaries of state power. Dissenters, said Baines,

deemed it a duty to resist an authoritative demand on the part of the Government upon a point which they regarded as beyond the legitimate scope of civil interference. The civil governor had a right to inquire into the particulars of the civil condition of the people, such as age, sex, occupation, birth-place, etc., but he had no right to intrude into the domain of the conscience.<sup>103</sup>

The understanding of the census as a government instrument that ought to ask only about “facts” is significant. What the government was proposing in this case was a subjective question about self-identity. One MP noted that “when statistics attempted to deal with things which were not positive and certain, they were almost sure to go wrong.”<sup>104</sup> Statistics, according to this view, were useful for describing facts, but opinions were not describable with numbers.<sup>105</sup> The goal, another politician noted, ought to be “to ascertain facts which would be important as the foundation of legislative action.”<sup>106</sup>

The argument about “truth,” however, could go both ways. Cornewall Lewis suggested that in their rejection of the census, the Dissenters were also



rejecting statistical authority and rationality more generally. He innocently observed that the numerous petitions that the government had received entailed a contradiction, because their signatories professed their religion directly on the petitions themselves even as they vowed that the government had no right to such information. This “instinctive feeling” on the part of Dissenters, Lewis said, could not be reasoned with, and “the taking of the census is a process for the success of which it is necessary to obtain the general and cordial co-operation of the people.”<sup>107</sup> This time, Lewis implied, the Dissenters were the ones to blame that the country was not acquiring the statistics that it needed: “The country would now know that it was Churchmen who wished for facts, and Dissenters who did not.”<sup>108</sup> Baron Monteagle believed that Dissenters were “actuated by an apprehension of some loss of their own importance if the truth were accurately made known,” and he “manifested a belief that the notions entertained as to its numbers and influence were at present exaggerated.”<sup>109</sup>

The debate over the limits of state authority revealed the sensitivity that surrounded Britain’s fraught religious history. Those who argued in favor of the religious question used international precedent as justification, but such references allowed Dissenters to invoke a notion of British superiority that was based on old ideas about liberty. “The general practice of civilized states in which differences of religion exist is to make an inquiry as to that fact,” Lewis explained, and he pointed out that the recent International Statistical Congress of 1860 had formally recommended that every European census ask for the name, age, sex, language, occupation, and religion profession of every person.<sup>110</sup> This set of questions had already been adopted in Austria, Bavaria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Prussia, Saxony, Sweden, and Wurtemberg, according to Lewis, and he claimed that in Prussia, “there is a perfect system of religious toleration rendering that country a model for imitation in that respect, and showing that there was no necessary connection between intolerance and a religious census.”<sup>111</sup> Yet the list of countries was greeted with “ironical cheers” by those MPs who considered the examples autocratic and inappropriate as models.<sup>112</sup> Baines observed that while “similar inquiries were made as to religious profession in various European countries;... these countries were either despotic or the Government paid the clergy of every denomination.”<sup>113</sup> Dissenters in Britain, he continued, with their long history of persecution and eventual emancipation, wished to be independent, and wanted nothing to do with the government: “It was with Dissenters a matter of principle to maintain the freedom, independence, and purity of the Church of Christ, by keeping it free from state control.”<sup>114</sup> People in Britain were resisting, he said, “with what seemed to be an instinctive feeling in the minds of Englishmen.”<sup>115</sup> Those who challenged the measure, therefore, took great issue with Lewis’s use of the continental model, which they believed was utterly inapplicable in Britain.

Opponents who focused on the threat to privacy were concerned with practical as well as abstract notions of liberty. Dissenters pointed out that

some servants would be afraid to tell the truth because it might prejudice their employers against them, and as one MP said, "If people were compelled to make a public confession of their religious opinions, the result would be in some cases to inflict upon them great hardships in a social, and even in a legal point of view."<sup>116</sup> The suggestion that people could suffer for their beliefs because of prejudice from employers or neighbors raises the possibility that the census could cause local conflict. Individual census results were supposed to remain private, but privacy was never complete. There was no privacy on the level of the household, since the "head" of the household was asked to fill out the census form for everyone in the house. A live-in servant, therefore, could not keep his or her religion a secret from an employer. Household discussions about such a sensitive topic as religion could result, if not in the loss of a job, at the very least in domestic disharmony. Furthermore, local clergymen often served as enumerators, meaning that one's census information was visible to the very people with whom discussions about religion could be the most fraught. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that enumerators sometimes shared local results with the press, suggesting that the census-taking process was not as confidential as the government promised.

Eventually Lewis agreed that rather than jeopardize the entire census he would give up the offensive question. He concluded his speech, however, with the hope that Dissenters would be more reasonable in the future. "This is not the only country in which the proposal of a census has been met by an unreasoning objection," he hinted, and proceeded to describe the history of anticensus sentiment both in Europe and elsewhere.<sup>117</sup> The situation, Lewis said, reminded him of "uncivilized" countries where people were frightened of census-taking, and he provided an example of Muslims in India who finally changed their views and admitted the necessity of the census: "That example shows... that the progress of inquiry and the increase of intelligence may lead to the removal of prejudices which, at a given moment, are invincible."<sup>118</sup>

The argument that British people were naturally averse to government intervention in personal matters was old and well established. But by 1860, these arguments against government interference were not entirely convincing, especially when coming from the liberal advocates of census-taking. The census, with all its intrusiveness, had been accepted by the educated public to a great extent, and those who were opposed to it were usually deprecated as ignorant, superstitious, or stubbornly conservative. There was already a quaint old-fashionedness associated with people opposed to the census. It was for this reason that both sides in the debate over the religious census used arguments about the importance of statistics, and blamed their opponents for hindering the acquisition of those statistics.<sup>119</sup>

In fact, to the extent that Dissenters represented the urban industrial elite, which gained power through the census, they were its greatest supporters. In this case, they were opposed not to the census *per se* but to a particular method, which they argued was offensive because of its intrusiveness. Anglicans in 1851 also criticized what they considered an intrusive method.

When census results were likely to threaten the public power of a particular group, usually by suggesting that its numbers were not as large as those of a competing group, two arguments tended to be deployed: one about the accuracy of the method and the other about the limits of governmental inquiry. Given the long history of religious conflict in Britain and the privileged status of the Church of England, it is not surprising that religion would be a site of deep contention in the larger movement toward transparency and representation. Dissenters who wished the 1851 census results to hold argued that the balance between Anglicans and Dissenters ought to make them respect one another and “the efforts each was making to advance the grand cause of religion and the welfare of the country.”<sup>120</sup> In this light, competition was healthy and beneficial, for the returns would “stimulate both Churchmen and Dissenters to a wholesome and honourable competition, highly favourable to the general interests of the people of this country.”<sup>121</sup> However, another MP said, “I think it both unwise and unworthy of any Government to get up sectarian differences among the population...which would be the effect of this clause.”<sup>122</sup> The census, it was clear, could be divisive, and “Churchmen and Dissenters had a higher duty than quarrelling as to their relative numbers,...instead of...quarrelling as to which was the most important body, let them coalesce to bring back these wandering sheep to the fold of Christ...let them act together for the benefit of the entire community.”<sup>123</sup> Competition and division, in this case, could be more harmful than ignorance.

\* \* \*

The successful opposition to the religious census of 1861 marks one of the very few times that the public managed to influence census procedure so dramatically. But by this time, civil servants and politicians assumed that the census was influential in the public realm, and that the information it reported would have an impact on public perceptions and actions. The arguments over the religious census and other aspects of census representation demonstrate that by the 1850s most people also assumed that the census must be embraced. The acceptance of the census was a process that occurred simultaneously and in dialogue with democratization. By mid-century, representation was understood by many as a positive and necessary aspect of government, even though the large majority of the population remained electorally unrepresented. And the census, simply by dividing people into groups, clearly was concerned with representation and strength. In 1861, William Farr wrote of the census results, “If a class thus sometimes obtains more constituents than it deserves, it on the other hand often sustains counterbalancing losses.”<sup>124</sup> It was by this point obvious that the census could isolate different “classes” and indicate their numerical strength.

The debates over representation suggest that Tory landowners were the first to understand the connection between numbers and power as a threat to the status quo. But the census also helped hasten a process of delocalization

that caused anxiety on a number of different levels. Even for those who had embraced population growth, urbanization, and the power of large numbers, the census was connected to unease about the newly blurry boundaries of places and populations that had been created by the railroad and other technological changes. Before the census was begun, those who worked or lived in the City of London knew that their community was important to the wealth of the nation simply because it had a long tradition and reputation of economic power. When numbers were needed to justify that power, however, the census itself became a threat because it counted some things (resident population) but not others (economic growth).

The census, while it helped to erase certain divisions that were already disappearing, also underlined other divisions that were developing. The census played a major role in the replacement of geographic community with other notions of community (occupational, for instance), which were ultimately subsumed under the notion of national community. A key tension in the national community, however, revolved around religious difference, and because of Britain's history of religious warfare and eventual toleration, the acceptance of this difference had perhaps unique historical privilege. By indicating numerical power, the census undermined inherited interests, and in this way the debate over religion was parallel to the earlier more explicit debate about parliamentary reform. In the case of religion, however, the trend toward representation stopped short: religion was too politically sensitive an issue and the religious status quo could not be formally threatened. The debates over religion imply that many people were simply unwilling to accept the continuing advance of the census; the state apparatus, they insisted, did have limits. No one attempted to gather information about religion on the census within Britain again until 2001. Knowledge, if it presented too much of a threat to the stability and harmony of the country, could not be fully embraced.

While concrete implications to the religious census certainly existed, the bitterness of the debate was a result of abstract emotions too. The importance of having large numbers was tied to an emerging awareness of a paternalistic state that was there to protect and help the population, and a sense that amenities would be provided at the national level as well as at the local level. It was also connected to the notion that groups needed to be clearly visible in the public sphere. If being revealed or "represented" in that public space, however, was likely to hurt the overall image of a particular interest group, then privacy was better than publicity. The debates over religion suggest that non-numerically defined privilege was fast losing favor, and the only argument that could be mobilized in its support was about privacy. Anglicans in 1851 suggested that they were the ones who valued privacy while the Dissenters thrust themselves into public view. The site of the private, however, was different for the two groups. For Anglicans, it was the sanctity of the church building (despite its official and state-supported status) that ought not to be intruded on by the government, while Dissenters described the even more internal life of the mind, or the conscience, as sacred.

The growing recognition that the census could provide representation raises broader questions about what it means to be a part of a majority. At one point in the debate over the religious census, the Bishop of Oxford said, "Thank God, the great majority of the people in this country do still belong to the Established Church."<sup>125</sup> But why was it so important to Dissenters and Anglicans to be members of a numerically more significant group? As Kertzer and Arel point out, "Census politics undoubtedly has a strong emotional dimension, for it matters a great deal to many people that the groups they identify with are granted official recognition."<sup>126</sup> Yet the results are practical too: in a democracy, the census is the "most important means by which 'majorities' and 'minorities' can be officialized.... Groups fear a change of proportion disadvantageous to themselves, as this often directly affects how political and economic power are allocated."<sup>127</sup> Not all numerically significant groups had gained political representation by the middle of the nineteenth century. Women and working-class men together made up the vast majority of the population, yet neither group could vote by the 1850s. But it was precisely because of the ongoing fight for political power that the discussion of interests and numbers could occur. In the next chapter, I will discuss what was gradually coming to be understood as the true majority in the country: the urban working class.

# 4

## Urban Growth, Urban Problems, and the Census

"It is the fate of mankind to multiply and everywhere to gather in towns."

—*Manchester Guardian*, 1851<sup>1</sup>

"A town, such as London," wrote Friedrich Engels in 1844, "where a man may wander for hours together without reaching the beginning of the end, without meeting the slightest hint which could lead to the inference that there is open country within reach, is a strange thing."<sup>2</sup> Engels' puzzlement and fascination with London, this "heaping together of two and a half millions of human beings at one point," was shared by many of his contemporaries, both British and foreign.<sup>3</sup> As a writer for the *Quarterly Review* said in 1854, London's "close-packed millions" was "the greatest camp of men upon which the sun has ever risen."<sup>4</sup>

London was indeed unique during the nineteenth century: no city on the European continent approached it in size or wealth. And during the first half of the century, Britain's rapidly growing industrial towns were also essentially unknown in other countries. For Victorians, one of the most striking aspects of the census was the evidence it provided of urban growth. This seemingly uncontrollable urbanization was related to some of the most fundamental political and social controversies of the day, about the role of the government in society, and the fate of the British economy as a whole. It was clear that the growth of the cities represented more than a physical migration from country to town. It represented a shift from an agricultural to a manufacturing way of life and from a localized and rural economy to a national economy that was based on industry and commerce. It also reminded people of the drastic social changes that had accompanied industrialization, particularly the creation of a new and in many ways unified working class. Observers sensed that there was no turning back from this immense change.

Urbanization brought unmatched prosperity to some, but many eyewitnesses would have agreed with Engels that "these Londoners have been forced to sacrifice the best qualities of their human nature, to bring to pass all the marvels of civilisation which crowd their city."<sup>5</sup> London may have been the richest city in the world, Engels thought, but it was also a scene of alienation and greed. These negative qualities, Engels believed, increased

in direct ratio to the density of population: "The brutal indifference, the unfeeling isolation of each in his private interest becomes the more repellant and offensive, the more these individuals are crowded together, within a limited space."<sup>6</sup>

Large cities were therefore both a source of extraordinary pride and a cause for great alarm, a symbol of the country's prosperity and a portent of its destruction. Such a dichotomy was not new to the nineteenth century; Europeans had been having mixed feelings about cities for hundreds of years. Nor were problems of urban order or urban poverty new phenomena. But nineteenth-century cities saw population on a scale hitherto unknown, a new organization of labor, and a rate of growth that seemed unstoppable and uncontrollable. Furthermore, while during the eighteenth century London had dominated discussions of urban growth, the nineteenth-century landscape was one of multiple, rapidly growing cities that were entirely different from London. Not seats of government or centers of culture, cities such as Manchester seemed to exist solely for the purposes of work and accumulation of wealth. Meanwhile, factory life and the solidarities that it created for workers made observers aware of the working-class community in a way that eighteenth-century London did not.

The census alerted people not only to the increasing population of the cities and to the problems that population faced but also to the increasing proportion of the whole that it constituted. Urban workers were increasingly seen as the majority, and as such the group that was going to make or break British wealth, power, and social stability. In 1830, Joshua Milne told the Parliamentary Enquiry concerning the upcoming census that more information was needed about the working classes "who form the bulk of the people (and their state is a sure index of the state of the country)."<sup>7</sup> Or, as Thomas Carlyle wrote, "The condition of the great body of people in a country is the condition of the country itself."<sup>8</sup>

Living in the shadow of the French Revolution, many middle-class British observers believed that the urban poor were far more dangerous than the rural poor. As Engels wrote, "The great cities have transformed the disease of the social body, which appears in chronic form in the country, into an acute one, and so made manifest its real nature and the means of curing it."<sup>9</sup> If a revolution happened in Britain, observers thought, it would begin in the cities, where the poor lived in close proximity to one another and were comparatively free from middle-class surveillance. High population density could be positive, prourbanites argued, because it meant better communication and an increased level of mental activity.<sup>10</sup> But most middle-class observers also agreed that a dense population was detrimental to both public health and social stability: the city was the breeding place for epidemics and for subversive politics because people were simply crowded too closely together.

The city was also, like the social body more generally, a space that was increasingly viewed as susceptible to intervention. Mary Poovey has demonstrated

that in nineteenth-century Britain the “great body of the people” could refer both to the poor as an entity separate from the rest of society and to the national population.<sup>11</sup> The cities, which were increasingly understood as working-class domains, were both part of and potentially a threat to the nation as a whole. One of the reasons that it was so important to maintain the moral and physical health of the cities was so that the larger nation would not be harmed. The census, along with numerous other government, charitable, and private projects, was a means by which the educated classes could survey and control the supposedly anonymous and unknowable laboring population of the cities. The census, however, through its ability to describe population density and to define people in terms of their membership in groups, gained a privileged position among other technologies of surveillance. The closely packed urban masses had to be counted and defined using statistics because many older means of surveillance were no longer available.<sup>12</sup>

In this chapter, I will analyze social reformers’ explicit use of the census, as well as census takers’ own analyses of urban growth and urban problems, to demonstrate the extent to which middle-class surveillance of the cities was dependent on statistics. In their discussion of urban problems, census takers and reformers drew largely on notions of surplus. They emphasized the overcrowding and the social unrest that arose from haphazard growth, unemployment, and a lack of moral control, and they suggested that a rapidly growing urban population was a source of danger. But the census also, as we have seen, empowered people by allowing them to recognize themselves as members of groups. Middle-class urban dwellers gradually came to understand themselves as central to the nation’s prosperity and as people whose strength came from numbers. As it became clear that Britain would never again be a predominantly agricultural society, the proponents of the city can be said to have triumphed. Yet at the same time, the fight for control over the cities continued. Census takers and reformers tended to believe that urban workers, despite their majority status, did not deserve the power to govern the cities themselves.<sup>13</sup> Rather, they had to be continually controlled in order to preserve the capitalist and industrial society that the cities represented.

### **The Quest for Knowledge about the Urban Poor**

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was already evident that the social landscape of Britain was dramatically changing. The population was growing at a staggering rate, and the growth was concentrated largely in the towns. Manchester’s population doubled between 1801 and 1831, and some smaller towns grew even faster. As rural laborers moved into the towns to work in factories and mills, these towns became more and more crowded, and problems became visible quickly. Factory pollution and unsanitary living conditions made the towns seem dirty and chaotic,



and anecdotal evidence suggested that life expectancy among the urban poor was low compared with that in the countryside. Fluctuations in trade during the early industrial period meant that at times the cities saw high unemployment and economic distress. At the same time, some wealthy town-dwellers were alarmed at the independence that they saw the urban poor enjoying. The nation's experience of distress and radicalism during the 1790s and again in the 1810s brought foreboding and fear to the ruling classes. United and distressed, the urban poor seemed to bring the reality of revolution frighteningly close.

Part of the problem, many early-nineteenth-century commentators thought, was that the upper ranks of society knew little of urban conditions. It was common to point out that the wealthy were as unfamiliar with the slums in their own towns as they were with the "savages" of New Zealand or southern Africa. The working districts of Manchester, Leeds, or London were foreign countries that had to be visited and described, and increasingly, statisticians, social critics, and novelists did exactly that.<sup>14</sup> The census, along with other statistical studies, literary works, and government investigations, provided the reading public with information about the urban poor and eventually fueled reform movements and legislation directed at the cities.

Most observers who wrote about urban conditions, whether in fiction or in nonfiction form, emphasized the need to educate the public about working-class life and agreed that the government and the wealthy segments of the society were not fulfilling their obligations to the poor. The problems of the poor, they argued, were eventually going to come back to haunt the rich, either through epidemic disease or through social revolution.<sup>15</sup> Knowledge, both statistical and otherwise, was understood to be vital to the process of improvement and to the ultimate stability of society.

Much of the early social investigation focused on Manchester, which became the symbol of both all that was impressive and all that was dangerous about industrial Britain.<sup>16</sup> Manchester was growing at an astounding rate, and its extended area, the census indicated, was the most densely populated part of Britain. It is worth examining closely two well-known studies of Manchester, both of which used a combination of statistics, personal observation, and polemic to make very different cases for the reform of urban conditions. James Kay and Friedrich Engels both recognized the urban working class as a new majority with both untapped power and endless troubles that had to be addressed. But while Kay took a Malthusian approach that emphasized the need to purge the city of certain unwanted inhabitants and provide a moral education for those who remained, Engels saw urban growth as having a hidden benefit. While Kay thought in terms of surplus, Engels thought in terms of representation: the urban masses would come to recognize their own power through numbers, and the city would become the home of the world's first labor movement.<sup>17</sup>

James Kay published *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester* in 1832. He described the

"importance of minutely investigating the state of the working classes," and explained,

Self-knowledge is a precept not less appropriate to societies than to individuals. The physical and moral evils by which we are personally surrounded may be more easily avoided when we are distinctly conscious of their existence, and the virtue and health of society may be preserved, with less difficulty, when we are acquainted with the sources of its errors and diseases.<sup>18</sup>

Like the census takers, Kay understood the unit in question to be the nation, and he used the common metaphor of a human body to describe it. Like a human body, the social body was capable of acquiring "self-knowledge" and then acting upon it. Statistics were necessary because Britain needed "a perfect portraiture of the features of each individual part of the social body," and Kay agreed with other statisticians of the 1820s and 1830s that British statistics were inferior to those of other European countries.<sup>19</sup>

Kay's book was inspired by his experience as a physician in the cholera epidemic in Manchester in 1830. As he explained in his letter to Thomas Chalmers at the beginning of the second edition, he was accustomed "in the exercise of public professional duties and for purposes of local observations and inquiry, to frequent the precincts of vice and disease."<sup>20</sup> Kay became convinced of the need for an organized response to epidemics, and in order to make his case he sent out his own inspectors to gather statistical information. Kay saw himself as part of a fast growing movement of investigation and social reform: "I offer the statistical evidence contained in this pamphlet, as a humble contribution to the fund of information concerning the moral and physical condition of the poor, throughout the kingdom."<sup>21</sup> He anticipated the work of the soon to be founded statistical societies by pointing out that inquiries like his were needed for every large town in Britain, and his methods and goals remained highly influential for many years to come.

Kay believed that "the public welfare will be most powerfully promoted by every event, which exposes the condition of the people to the gentry of England."<sup>22</sup> Even cholera was useful if it could alert the educated public to the conditions in which working people were living. The wealthy, Kay suggested, had to realize that it was in their own interest to act; otherwise, their way of life would be destroyed either by cholera or by revolution. "The pestilence," wrote Kay, "is in their cities—at their very doors—daily it smites in the crowded manufactories, and snatches its victims from their very side."<sup>23</sup> In an urbanized society, both the city and the nation had to be imagined as one. There could be no complacent separation in a society where people lived so close to one another, as they did in large towns, and where the national economy depended on intimate links between town and country.

Kay visualized the urban space as dangerous and shifting: while poor and rich might be separate now, in a fast growing city they could not expect to

remain separate. Those who lived on the outskirts of Manchester would not enjoy their healthy country air or their social exclusivity for long, for the city would expand faster than they could relocate. In Manchester, wrote Kay, "the dense masses of the habitations of the poor, . . . stretch out their arms, as though to grasp and enclose the dwellings of the noble and wealthy."<sup>24</sup> For Kay, overcrowded conditions were tied to both disease and social disorder, and he took his readers on a voyeuristic and threatening journey through

the crowded courts, the overpeopled habitations of wretchedness, where pauperism and disease congregate round the source of social discontent and political disorder in the centre of our large towns, and behold with alarm, in the hotbed of pestilence, ills, that fester in secret, at the very heart of society.<sup>25</sup>

Although secret, these "ills," like cancers, would soon take over the entire social body.

Kay also understood the urban poor as a majority, in terms of both numbers and power. "The operative population," he wrote, "constitutes one of the most important elements of society, and when numerically considered, the magnitude of its interests and the extent of its power assume such vast proportions, that the folly which neglects them is allied to madness."<sup>26</sup> Kay's work therefore served as an urgent call to action: it was the duty of the upper classes to avoid revolution. But as an advocate of laissez-faire economic policy, Kay did not believe that the government should intervene in the economy in order to solve the problems of the urban poor, nor did he believe that workers ought to "combine" in order to pressure their employers. Like other liberals of his time, Kay believed that class conflict was unnatural, and that it was only by understanding the economy and the nation as one that disharmony could be removed. With knowledge would come understanding and sympathy. Then, government action could be taken, not in the realms of trade or labor but in those of public health, education, and morality.

Kay used statistics "to prove the concomitance of pauperism with moral and physical degradation."<sup>27</sup> Scientists did not know at the time how cholera was spread, but Kay certainly believed that unsanitary conditions made people susceptible to disease, and that there was a clear connection between the cleanliness of public spaces such as streets and the cleanliness of the houses and people on the street. Amenities that could be provided by the municipal or national authorities, such as sewers, could therefore improve the private conditions in which people lived. Kay, who later became known for his writings on education, also believed that ignorance, immorality, and filth were all related. "Cholera can only be eradicated," Kay insisted, "by raising the physical and moral condition of the community, in such a degree as to remove the predisposition to its reception and propagation, which is created by poverty and immorality."<sup>28</sup> Thus, legislation could have a direct influence on both the morality and the physical well-being of the people. Paupers, whom Kay

claimed were both prone to disease and active in its diffusion, "ought to be as much the objects of a careful vigilance from those who are the guardians of the health, as from those who protect the property of the public."<sup>29</sup> For disease and social unrest to be eradicated, Kay argued, the working poor needed such middle-class virtues as domesticity, self-respect, prudence, industry, forethought, and sobriety.<sup>30</sup> Improving sanitation alone was not enough.

Kay's argument was ultimately about the need for free trade in economic life and government regulation in civic life. Writing as he was in the years leading up to the Factory Act and the debates over the first regulation of industrial labor, Kay confidently took up a position that would continue to hold weight for many years. According to Kay, reducing hours of labor was not an option; what was needed was a new kind of urban planning. In this, Kay anticipated the census takers and dominant social reformers of the 1840s and 1850s, who may be thought of as liberal regulationists. According to these thinkers, the government needed to take responsibility for sanitation and education, but factory legislation ought to be avoided. Kay's goal was in fact to prove that the problems of the poor did not come from commerce in general but from "foreign and accidental causes."<sup>31</sup> In order to preserve the manufacturing way of life and the order of society, Kay thought, something must be done. "The minute personal interference of the higher ranks is necessary to the physical and moral elevation of the poor," Kay wrote, but this interference would be in domestic and moral life.<sup>32</sup>

In 1833, Kay and several other prominent men founded the Manchester Statistical Society. The society, unlike the Statistical Society of London, was made up not of politicians but of bankers, physicians, industrialists, and writers. It set the tone for the other provincial statistical societies, and immediately began conducting numerous studies of housing, health, education, and other urban issues. Statistics, it seemed to many, was especially appropriate as a mode of interpreting the city because the city's fast-growing and constantly changing nature made it difficult to understand in other ways. In such an uncontrolled space as the one that Kay described, individuals had become invisible and indecipherable. The people had become "masses" that could be described only with numbers.<sup>33</sup>

By 1844, when Friedrich Engels first published *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, statistics had been widely accepted as a mode of description, but Engels used the statistics to come to a very different political conclusion. When the young Engels arrived in Manchester from Germany to take part in his family's manufacturing business, he was already familiar with St. Simonian Socialist and radical philosophical theories.<sup>34</sup> While in Manchester, he came to know Chartist leaders and mingled widely with both industrialists and factory workers. Although his study was ostensibly of the English working classes in general, his data and observation came primarily from Manchester. Since Engels wrote his book in German and it was not translated into English until 40 years later, he did not have the same immediate influence within Britain as Kay did. However, the impact that this early book

had on the later writings of Marx and Engels and on the labor movement makes it worth examining. The notion of the majority took on very different implications when understood from a socialist perspective.

Engels, with his disgust for the liberal economic policy and industrial elite that Kay championed, had a very different solution to working-class problems in mind. But although Engels and Kay proposed different remedies, they described similar symptoms. Engels, like Kay, was distressed by the lack of town planning in Manchester. The working-class areas had expanded so haphazardly that instead of the order and regularity of affluent areas, the poor lived in a "labyrinth, a planless, knotted chaos of houses."<sup>35</sup> Since the working people's districts were separated from the wealthier areas, the upper ranks knew nothing of the chaos. Engels was also concerned about disease, and found the anonymous and impersonal nature of Manchester alarming. In cities, people could move around uncontrolled, and Engels explained that "infection was carried by wandering beggars with fearful rapidity from one locality to another."<sup>36</sup> He also described "districts [that] shelter the poorest, most depraved, and worthless members of the community, and may be regarded as the sources of those frightful epidemics."<sup>37</sup> Much like Kay, Engels saw Manchester as a constantly shifting space: too crowded and disorderly to pin down and understand.

Like Kay's work, Engels' survey was a call to action. He used official statistical sources (of which there were many more than when Kay had been writing 12 years earlier) to prove that the government was aware of the problems yet was not doing anything to help. The population density in Manchester was the primary focus of his ire. The ratios of people to houses and people to lavatories were especially alarming, as were the numbers of people living in cellars. Engels also described the overcrowding in his own words. The streets themselves, he said, are "crowded literally one upon the other [in a] . . . tangle."<sup>38</sup> Houses were (in the words of one of his sources) "literally swarming with inhabitants."<sup>39</sup> And while the town was too dense in general, it was the poor who were "packed into the least space."<sup>40</sup> Engels also emphasized the strangeness of urban life through visual descriptions that dehumanized the population. People became animals: they lived in "cattle-sheds for human beings," they were "crammed . . . swarms of workers," and "a horde of ragged women and children swarm about here, as filthy as the swine that thrive upon the garbage heaps and in the puddles."<sup>41</sup> The poor of Manchester, in Engel's view, had reached the lowest possible level of humanity. "In [their] dwellings," he wrote, "only a physically degenerate race, robbed of all humanity, degraded, reduced morally and physically to bestiality, could feel comfortable and at home."<sup>42</sup>

But Engels, ultimately, saw hope in this great conglomeration of oppressed people. He believed that as the center of manufacturing, Manchester was also the place where the labor movement would arise. It had the most developed working class, and Engels warned ominously that "if the centralization of population stimulates and develops the property-holding class, it forces

the development of the workers yet more rapidly."<sup>43</sup> Workers in cities, Engels explained, "begin to perceive that, though feeble as individuals, they form a power united."<sup>44</sup> Much like others who recognized themselves through the census as members of groups, and who interpreted their power through numbers, workers would realize that they were the majority and thus had power. Like the cities themselves, this fact could provoke either excitement or fear.

Whether Manchester workers indeed understood themselves to be a majority in the 1830s and 1840s is not easy to determine. But certainly the sense that this was a possibility sparked further calls for reform among the middle classes. Engels and Kay were only two among many who observed and described urban conditions, and by the 1840s, urban life was a central topic of public debate. The debate took practical form with calls for municipal reform, the public health movement, and the ongoing push for factory regulation. As the census was expanded during the 1840s and 1850s, it gathered further information about urban life and provided numerous statistics that lobbyists used to buttress their arguments. Like Kay and Engels, census takers focused on population density and its effects on both physical and moral health. The debates over urbanization and all its implications were also premised on the understanding that the city required healthy proportions of people, and that the social harmony of the nation depended on the health of the city.

### The Overcrowded City: Housing and Health

"Next in importance to the actual increase in the numbers of the people, is the state of its mortality," wrote the *Manchester Guardian* in an 1851 article on the census.<sup>45</sup> Mortality rates, the census indicated, were dramatically higher in the towns than in the country, and the public health movement that eventually gained a great deal of public support was based in the cities. The relationship between health and statistics was firmly established, in part because physicians had been prominent in the statistical movement since its origins. More specifically, the important role that the Office of the Registrar-General played in collecting mortality data and linking it to the census meant that the census was intimately connected to the public health movement. Edward Higgs, in fact, argues that much of the mid-century expansion of the census can be attributed to the growing interest in sanitary reform.<sup>46</sup>

William Farr, the most influential of the Victorian census takers, brought his early interest in mortality statistics to bear upon both the administration and the analysis of the census. Using statistics of deaths, disease, and disabilities, Farr examined the "relative salubrity of the professions," the rates of occurrence of various disabilities in different parts of the country, and other questions of sickness and health.<sup>47</sup> He explained, in the census reports, current medical theories about the causes of everything from cholera to blindness. Farr's general attitude was that many deaths and diseases were avoidable, that average life expectancy in Britain could and should be increased, and that one of the

purposes of gathering mortality statistics was to determine how far various diseases and disabilities were preventable by sanitary measures and other government regulations. "The prolongation of the life of the people," wrote Farr, "must become an essential part of family, municipal and national policy."<sup>48</sup>

Farr used healthy districts, usually in the countryside, as a standard to show that the excessive deaths in cities were preventable.<sup>49</sup> Farr did not accept the Malthusian notion that disease was necessary or beneficial. He believed that disease was wasteful because potentially productive adults were lost to the public good, decreasing the strength of the nation as a whole.<sup>50</sup> Farr argued that sanitary reform would extend productive life, thus increasing the possibilities of subsistence and proving Malthusian theory incorrect. He wrote that in certain "wretched districts, nearly eight percent are constantly sick, and the energy of the whole population is withered to the roots."<sup>51</sup> Farr made it clear that both humanity and the nation's productivity called for the improvement of public health.

Farr saw a clear correlation between high population density and the high mortality rates in cities, and he continually worked to educate the government and the public about the ways in which urban conditions undermined people's health.<sup>52</sup> Although he was dismayed by the poverty evident in the cities, he tended to suggest that it was density that caused disease rather than poor habits or lack of resources.<sup>53</sup> Farr spent time calculating not only the numbers of people per house and room but also the numbers of people per square mile and the mean proximity between people. In Farr's mind, physical space was essential to public health.<sup>54</sup> Others agreed that overcrowding was what made cities unhealthy. In London, wrote Engels,

two and a half million pairs of lungs, two hundred and fifty thousand fires, crowded upon an area three to four miles square, consume an enormous amount of oxygen, which is replaced with difficulty, because the method of building cities in itself impedes ventilation.<sup>55</sup>

The assumption that overcrowding and polluted air were detrimental to people's health reflected not only ideas about sanitation but also middle-class values of privacy, exclusivity, and stability. For most middle-class city-dwellers, it was the recurring cholera epidemics of the 1830s and 1840s, and the immediate fear of epidemic disease in general, that served as the most pressing impetus to reform. As Kay argued, disease tended to spread from the poor overcrowded districts of cities to the wealthier areas, and it was thus necessary for all urban dwellers to be concerned about public health. Even though it was the rich who would have to pay for sanitary improvements through their taxes, reformers insisted that it was entirely in their own interest to stop epidemics before they got out of control. The fear that when too many people crowded together their health was undermined was underlined by the fear that when workers were crowded together they could become politically subversive.

Kay, as we have seen, explicitly described disease and social unrest as interlinked results of dense living conditions. More generally, descriptions of crowding are ubiquitous in discussions of the census, urban conditions, and poverty. While some reformers recognized that crowding happened out of necessity, others blamed it on the poor themselves, suggesting that their improvidence resulted in too many children, and that they were then so dehumanized that they did not mind living almost on top of one another. As one newspaper wrote after the 1841 census, "Heedless Lancashire fills up every nook and cranny with a swarming multitude."<sup>56</sup> Kay described "the noisome court and thickly peopled barrack of pauperism" and Engels mused "when one thinks how crowded their dwellings are, how every nook and corner swarms with human beings, how sick and well sleep in the same room, in the same bed, the only wonder is that a contagious disease... does not spread yet further."<sup>57</sup>

The public health movement focused on such things as water supply, waste disposal, and responses to epidemic disease, but poor housing was thought to be one of the prime obstacles to improving health. As Census Commissioner James Hammack said in 1859, "The houses of a country are a sure index to the condition of its inhabitants. This is especially true with respect to the working classes, whose physical condition is greatly dependent on the state of their dwellings."<sup>58</sup> Overcrowding occurred partly because housing could not keep pace with the population increase, the argument went, and those who analyzed the census almost always focused attention on urban living density.

Before the 1851 census was taken, an article in the *Illustrated London News* explained that the census would show "in what manner we are all enabled to live;... how many in huts or hovels not much better than the wigwams of savages, and how many in comfortable or luxurious houses."<sup>59</sup> But in fact, the census did not answer this question at all, because while it indicated the numbers of people per house as well as the proximity of houses to one another, it did not address the quality or the size of houses. Since the cities had expanded so rapidly, many buildings had been constructed quickly and poorly, with no provision made for proper ventilation or cleanliness. As the census takers acknowledged, the fact that all kinds of houses were counted simply as houses made the average number of people per house extremely difficult to interpret. As Hammack explained to the Association for the Promotion of Social Science, the census was faulty because "the same numerical value is assigned in the returns to the palace of the sovereign and a Highland bothy—to a large public institution, with its hundreds of inmates, and a single sleeping-room over a stable—each being counted as an 'inhabited house.'"<sup>60</sup> This was one place where numbers by themselves were not good enough.<sup>61</sup> In a parliamentary discussion about the upcoming 1861 census, it was suggested that the census ask about the numbers of rooms with windows in each house. "There could be no better means of coming at accurate information as to the material improvement



of the people than by inquiry as to the improvement that had taken place in their dwelling-houses," one politician said.<sup>62</sup> The question was never asked, however, in part because it was considered too intrusive to count windows.

Although difficult to interpret, on the question of housing density depended "both health and moral purity."<sup>63</sup> It was partly in response to some of the deficiencies in the census that statistical societies and individuals conducted their own surveys of housing. Hector Gavin's survey of 1850, for example, was titled *The Habitations of the Industrial Classes: Their Influence on the Physical and on the Social and Moral Condition of These Classes: Showing the Necessity for Legislative Enactments*. Gavin focused on London, which by the 1850s was joining Manchester as an important object of urban investigation, and he based his analysis on the census and other official statistics. Low-quality housing among the poor, Gavin insisted, influenced "the general welfare of society."<sup>64</sup> Like earlier social reformers, Gavin believed that the public needed to be educated about housing and its effects on the working classes; he was convinced that if urban housing conditions were generally known, the public and the government would already have done something.

Like Kay and Engels, Gavin believed that the poor were isolated from the rich in cities, to the detriment of the whole society. Gavin vowed to focus on the "overwhelming necessities of many millions of human beings congregated in the towns and cities of this kingdom."<sup>65</sup> He repeated the emphasis on sheer numbers of people, but using census data to make his point, Gavin also focused on proportions: on the proportion of laborers in society and the increasing proportion of the urban population to the whole country. Gavin used statistics to demonstrate that the urban population was increasing at a faster rate than houses were increasing, resulting in an ever more densely populated situation. The "necessary consequence" of such density was a deterioration in general health.<sup>66</sup> Gavin quoted a source who had observed in the cities "a system of overcrowding that would not be tolerated in the farm-yard, the stable, or even the dog-kennel."<sup>67</sup> Like Engels, Gavin saw these people who were "congregating in swarms in foul abodes" as hardly better than animals.<sup>68</sup>

Like Kay, Gavin was unwilling to blame urban problems on industrialization or urbanization in general, and he believed that with proper management populous cities did not have to be unhealthy places. "Such evils," he explained, "are undoubtedly the consequence of increasing population, but they are not the necessary and inseparable effect."<sup>69</sup> With government regulations that limited the number of houses built, for example, health could be improved. Gavin was aware that such regulations would offend builders and speculators, for at the moment, "each person who finds himself in possession of a plot of ground considers how he can best crowd upon it walls, roofs, window, and doors."<sup>70</sup> Houses also needed enough rooms so that different families did not have to live in one room together, and the numbers of people per house should itself be regulated, Gavin said. Gavin shared a common

middle-class view of the unruly and irrational nature of the poor. Just as builders, if left to their own devices, would build without limit, "human beings, uncontrolled, will pack themselves in rooms and cellars."<sup>71</sup> He insisted that "the most impoverished, overcrowded, and filthy [dwellings] will always be found the most unhealthy."<sup>72</sup> He also believed that "a population deteriorated both morally and physically, by living in crowded and inferior dwellings, is likely to be far more improvident, and therefore to multiply faster."<sup>73</sup> Overcrowding, therefore, would lead to more overcrowding.

Improving housing through municipal regulation was difficult because of the strong public opposition to any kind of intervention in the economy. Other aspects of the public health movement, such as attempts to provide compulsory vaccination and quarantine in times of epidemic, were complicated by related worries about intrusion. In all these cases, one question was whether the government had the right to intervene in the health of individuals for the sake of the larger society. Although vaccination against smallpox became compulsory in the mid-nineteenth century, the law was nearly impossible to enforce because there was no way to determine who had in fact been vaccinated. Before the 1851 census, one vaccinator wrote to the Home Secretary to make a plea for such information to be required on the census. "I consider it a matter of the greatest importance to the public health that some steps should be taken to render vaccination more general," he explained, and he particularly acknowledged "the great difficulty there exists, in getting the lower orders to bring their children to have the operation performed."<sup>74</sup> The case reflects the ambitious notion that the government, with the help of the census and an organized bureaucracy, had the ability to completely eradicate smallpox if it tried. A pamphlet on the subject noted that "by vaccination being made universal, Small Pox would be entirely banished from the country," and suggested that every person vaccinated by an authorized medical officer ought to be registered and issued a certificate. The question about vaccination, like so many others, did not make it onto the already expensive and complicated census form, but it serves as another example in which members of the public realized the potential public uses of the census. In this case, the census had the potential to serve as the most central mechanism in the improvement of public health, but as always, it was on precarious ground between the rights of the individual and the rights of the society.<sup>75</sup>

Statisticians and census takers almost always supported national and municipal regulations regarding health. For Farr even economic liberty was not as important as the right to health. John Eyler points out that for Farr, "the limits of individual freedom were passed when public health was threatened. Air and water were public trusts which no man might own or abuse."<sup>76</sup> Farr energetically promoted various public health programs, including (after he arrived at the conclusion that cholera was spread through unclean water) a sewage system and clean water supply. He also advocated more parks and open spaces in cities. Finally, Farr believed that public health had wider implications than mortality; he thought that death rates could be directly correlated

with more abstract indicators such as morality and happiness in order to determine the overall health of the society.<sup>77</sup> Thus, statistics of behavior and respectability were also gathered in the city, and similar questions about the rights of the individual and the society arose.

### **Morality in the City: Domesticity, Education, and Religion**

In an article about the upcoming 1851 census, the *Illustrated London News* noted that "it is not simply to the physical, but to the moral and intellectual condition of the people to which those who framed...the Census of 1851 have devoted their attention."<sup>78</sup> The morality of the people had already been a long-established topic of study by the 1850s. As the *Journal of the Statistical Society of London* explained in the first decade of its existence, "Few subjects deserve more serious consideration than the moral condition of a population."<sup>79</sup> "Moral condition" encompassed such diverse aspects of life as crime, sex, religion, and education. Many middle-class observers assumed that morality was difficult to enforce in the cities, where the educated classes had little ability to control the population, where poor and rich lived in proximity yet with little contact, and where all types of people, moral and immoral, could intermingle. Engels was concerned by what he described as "the worst paid workers with thieves and the victims of prostitution indiscriminately huddled together."<sup>80</sup>

Discussions of immorality served several purposes in nineteenth-century Britain. Blaming social disorder on ignorance or spiritual destitution helped the propertied classes make sense of urban unrest without explicitly addressing the questions of poverty and politics. Yet it was hard to ignore the link between supposedly immoral behavior and radical politics. Ideas about urban crime came largely out of the experience of the French Revolution and the disorder of the 1790s. The urban mob was thought to be especially dangerous because it was large, dense, and uncontrollable. In 1844, Engels wrote that "with the extension of the proletariat, crime has increased in England, and the British nation has become the most criminal in the world."<sup>81</sup> Engels and others cited statistics that showed that there was more crime in densely populated areas, and population statistics were used, among other things, to indicate the need for more police.<sup>82</sup> Observers disagreed, however, about whether immoral behavior arose from poverty or natural depravity. Opponents of the public health movement and government intervention usually preferred to blame health and sanitation problems on the behavior of the poor themselves, insisting that ignorance and vice were what led to bad health. On the other side of the debate were those who argued that only in healthy living conditions could the poor be expected to behave as respectable and moral members of the society. Most anxious observers agreed, however, that immoral behavior was contagious. Like infectious disease, it could spread quickly because of close urban living conditions and a lack of respectable oversight. In 1812, the *Quarterly Review* wrote that "physical diseases are

not more surely generated by crowding human beings together in a state of filth and wretchedness, than moral ones by herding them together in a state of ignorance."<sup>83</sup> Another observer agreed that "the progress of vice in such circumstances is almost as certain and often nearly as rapid as that of physical contagion."<sup>84</sup>

Housing remained central to questions of morality, primarily because of middle-class assumptions about appropriate domestic behavior. Overcrowded housing conditions, in which, as Engels observed, "men, women, and children [were] thrown together without distinction of age or sex," were great sources of alarm to middle-class observers who believed that families should live separately and that men and women should not share sleeping rooms.<sup>85</sup> Both the method of taking the census (which involved counting families and houses) and the official analysis of its results emphasized middle-class domesticity and betrayed middle-class fears of unrestrained sex among the working classes. Hector Gavin's call to improve the dwellings of the poor, for example, although motivated primarily by issues of health, also arose from his desire for "the possession by the industrial population of—'the modest comforts of an English home.'"<sup>86</sup> He further explained that "prudence and foresight, and virtuous habits, are not to be generated among a people by forcing them to herd together like swine in a sty."<sup>87</sup> Engels agreed that "the social order makes family life almost impossible for the worker. In a comfortless, filthy house . . . a foul atmosphere filling rooms overcrowded with human beings, no domestic comfort is possible."<sup>88</sup> In 1861, when the census revealed that fewer people lived in each house than previously, Farr wrote that "this is a satisfactory movement, for the isolation of families in separate dwellings is in every way salutary."<sup>89</sup>

More and better housing was therefore needed not only to reduce disease but also to better maintain families. Local examples of shocking living conditions were often leaked to the press after census day, and the educated public's sense of domestic morality was outraged by anecdotes about whole families sleeping in one bed and multiple families living in one room. Some poor families also kept pigs or other animals in their houses, a habit (attributed to the Irish) that both spread disease and further offended those who believed in separation between men and women, children and parents, and humans and animals. The consistency with which commentators noticed the sexual danger among the working class must be emphasized. Engels quoted a government commissioner who noticed "persons of both sexes, all ages and various degrees of nakedness, sleep[ing] indiscriminately huddled together upon the floor."<sup>90</sup> Underlying the general fear of pre- and extramarital sex was an even greater fear of incest. Engels quoted one description of a house in Leeds where "brothers and sisters, and lodgers of both sexes, [were] sharing the parents' sleeping-room, whence arises consequences at the contemplation of which human feeling shudders."<sup>91</sup> Kay made a clear connection between refinement and domesticity when he described "the ingress of a disease, which threatens, with a stealthy step, to invade the sanctity of the domestic

circle; which may be unconsciously conveyed from those haunts of beggary where it is rife, into the most still and secluded retreat of refinement."<sup>92</sup>

Middle-class discussions of illicit sex among the urban poor were often linked to general debates about moral restraint and overpopulation, and were thus heavily dependent on statistics. Most people believed that despite disease and high mortality, population would explode in cities, not only through immigration but also through the lack of "restraint" among a largely lower-class population. If the poor were most likely to have large numbers of children, the logic went, then areas with high proportions of poor inhabitants would have overwhelmingly rapid rates of growth. According to this view, already overcrowded and dangerous cities would become even more so. Kay argued that "morality would afford no check to the increase of the population: crime and disease would be its only obstacles."<sup>93</sup>

While many middle-class commentators agreed that the working poor were sexually immoral, they differed on what exactly ought to be done to improve the situation. Immorality, in Engels' opinion, came partly from the fact that working people had no entertainment available to them aside from sex and alcohol. To support his claim, he provided figures of the number of pubs and taverns per unit of population, as well as statistics of drunkenness. He also observed, however, that "in the work-men's dwellings of Manchester, no cleanliness, no convenience, and consequently no comfortable family life is possible."<sup>94</sup> Gavin agreed that "it is...impossible to raise a high-minded intellectual population out of the race of men who inhabit the dwellings we have provided for them in our towns."<sup>95</sup> Comfortless, unclean homes, some argued, resulted in alcoholism, prostitution, and other vices, because the working men had no incentive to come home at night.<sup>96</sup>

The poorer the people, observers often noted, the less likely they were to live in nuclear families, and the anxiety over explicitly nonfamily situations such as lodging houses was particularly extreme. In his journey through the poorest districts of Manchester, Kay noticed that "without distinction of age or sex, careless of all decency, [paupers] are crowded in small and wretched apartments."<sup>97</sup> Gavin also described "those unregulated lodging houses where the wretched and suffering poor, as well as a large portion of the out-cast, the criminal, and the migratory population, are unavoidably compelled to reside."<sup>98</sup> Subversion of proper domestic relations and political subversion went together, because if people were not living in families, they were potentially associating in far more dangerous combinations. It is evident that a fear of the urban and potentially politically active mob, too big and chaotic to understand or survey, could be alleviated if people were understood and confined in families. In this light, the census administrators' insistence on families or households as the essential unit of the population can be understood partly as a response to the conditions of modern urban life.

By 1851, however, the economy had improved and crime seemed to be decreasing. The extreme fear of revolution was gradually leaving the public

consciousness.<sup>99</sup> Concerns about morality shifted at this point from social unrest to the spiritual and intellectual conditions of the masses. In 1851, the government took the first and only nineteenth-century censuses of education and religion, and the reports on these topics, both written by Census Commissioner Horace Mann, suggested that much still needed to be done to improve urban, working-class life. The reports were widely read by politicians and the public, and they sparked renewed efforts by religious organizations, the government, charitable associations, and individuals on behalf of the urban poor.

The education census counted the numbers of schools and students attending these schools. The most striking aspect of the results was the fact that large numbers of children were neither at school nor at work. These "idle" youths (also referred to by one author as "the Arabs of the streets") could easily resort to illicit activities of various kinds, and they would grow up, some feared, to be disrespectable, ignorant, and possibly revolutionary.<sup>100</sup> While conservatives in the early part of the nineteenth century had often insisted that the laboring classes should *not* be educated because of education's democratizing tendencies, by the 1850s the opposite was almost universally believed to be true: the most dangerous were the uneducated. Most people also agreed that Britain had not made the same progress as other countries in the realm of education. Despite such general agreement, however, the debate over public education was one of the great controversies of the nineteenth century and took many years to resolve, largely because it was linked to religious sectarianism within society. Dissenters were opposed to any education system that would favor Anglican teaching, and they believed that a national education system would threaten independent religious activity and give too much power to the government in questions of theology.

The census takers themselves were supportive of public education, just as they were to be found in the public health camp, and they believed that people would be more productive workers, as well as more morally upright people, if they were educated. In this way, they countered the argument that compelling children to go to school would lessen the overall productivity of society by taking them out of work. The most immediate result of an education system, an author for the *Edinburgh Review* wrote, was that "the vagrant children of large towns would be swept into the schools."<sup>101</sup> The large "class" of juvenile criminals could then be reduced, and pauper children would grow up to be workers rather than becoming paupers themselves.<sup>102</sup> Like other problematic groups, the uneducated were threatening because of the proportion of the whole that they constituted, and it was the safety and productivity of the society that was at stake. The *Edinburgh Review* referred to "the aggregate of ignorance, that was made visible by the census."<sup>103</sup> But, as with other national aggregates, the total number was misleading because the uneducated were not distributed evenly throughout the country. Rather, the problem was especially acute in "populous places."<sup>104</sup> It was there, as Mann wrote, that one could find "those very classes of our population whose repeated criminality

and gross obtrusive vice provoke the loud demand now heard for further education."<sup>105</sup>

Mann himself saw the census as a clear call to action. In the report, which was in some ways an extended rumination on the best means of improving the educational state of the country, he focused partly on the progress that had already been made. He suggested that popular education was almost entirely a creation of the nineteenth century, and that 50 years ago people were on the whole more ignorant and more immoral than at the present. He also acknowledged the importance of charity; Sunday schools, after all, had arisen almost entirely from "neighbourly responsibility."<sup>106</sup> And he praised the "ragged school," of which "the primary object... is to convert incipient criminals to Christianity. Without the ragged school, the dangerous mass of ignorant depravity would probably continue long impenetrable by moral influence."<sup>107</sup> The other advantage of Sunday Schools was that they had created "a constant kindly intercourse between the different classes of society."<sup>108</sup> Education, therefore, would decrease class hostility, not only by teaching morals to the working classes, but simply by bringing people together so that the workers could be influenced by their betters. Mann insisted that education would cause "the sad estrangement, now too visible, between the different sections of society, [to] be gradually healed," and would "[bind] up in harmony the various orders of the people."<sup>109</sup> Education would help not only the individuals in question but also the society as a whole.

The obstacles facing education, however, were more extensive than religious rivalry or a lack of governmental and public support. Another problem, according to Mann, was that many working-class parents were themselves ignorant of the benefits of education, and the possibility of child labor made education unappealing to many urban families. Mann thus argued that better incentives were needed to convince people to educate themselves and their children. But he and others also believed that the government had a duty to intervene to protect the society from crime and conflict, even if that meant intruding in the private lives of working-class families: "The parent thus failing in a duty to his child, the discharge of which is necessary to the well-being of society, society should intervene to protect itself and the child from the results of the parent's neglect."<sup>110</sup> Society had the right to interfere because "as the effects of ignorance are *social* injuries, society must needs possess the right of self-defense."<sup>111</sup>

Much like the census data about housing, the information about education was itself lacking. In order to gain an accurate picture of the education of the nation, information was needed not only about how many people were going to school but also about the efficiency and quality of the existing schools.<sup>112</sup> Mann suggested asking questions about the material resources of schools such as books and maps; the number of teachers and their qualifications; the size and cost of buildings; questions whose "answers should be susceptible of fair statistical analysis, warranting some general inferences... To facts of this nature the public attaches greater weight than to the reports of

official visitors."<sup>113</sup> The public nature of the census called for statistical facts that everyone, not only experts, could understand. Ultimately, however, the census takers agreed that such information was too difficult and expensive to acquire. And as it turned out, the education census was a one-time experiment. No information was gathered about education in 1861, and after 1870 the School Boards began to acquire their own statistics separately from the census. Yet the 1851 education census was significant not only in the role that it played in furthering public education but also in its depiction of the moral and intellectual well-being of the people as tied to the population and productivity of the nation. The 1851 census of religion was similarly concerned with the aggregate of morality, especially in the cities.

The statistics of church building and religious access that were revealed in the 1851 census were, like the education statistics, cause for both alarm and activity. As Mann wrote in the report, the reason that the British had taken a religious census was that they lived "in an age so prone to self-inquiry and reform."<sup>114</sup> While the most prominent issue related to this census on the national scale was the conflict between Anglicans and Dissenters, for many the more crucial point that the census revealed was the "alarming number of the non-attendants."<sup>115</sup> Mann wrote that "a sadly formidable portion of the English people are habitual neglecters of the public ordinances of religion. Nor is it difficult to indicate to what particular class of the community this portion in the main belongs."<sup>116</sup> The way to determine this "class" was through where nonattendance was happening: the cities. The upper and middle classes generally went to Church, "but while the *labouring* myriads of our country have been multiplying with our material prosperity, it cannot, it is feared, be stated that a corresponding increase has occurred in the attendance of this class in our religious edifices."<sup>117</sup> As a result, "the field for future operations is distinctly marked: the *towns*, both from their incessant and prodigious growth, demand almost a concentration of endeavours."<sup>118</sup>

The census results, wrote Mann, gave "a vivid picture of the destitute condition of our great-town population."<sup>119</sup> He provided figures of the increase in the general population as compared with the increase in churches and chapels, as well as the number of available "sittings" per capita. A table showing the most "destitute" districts made the call for action explicit. Although churches had been increasing, Mann warned, they were not keeping up with the growth in population: "Our actual supply of spiritual ministration is inadequate to the demand."<sup>120</sup> The conception of religion as a product, equivalent to food or public pumps or public lavatories, confirmed the image of the city full of needy people. The uneven distribution of religious activity was referred to as "Spiritual Provision and Destitution," and towns were short on churches as they were on other resources. If the inhabitants of the towns did not get what they needed, Mann suggested, the society as a whole would be harmed.<sup>121</sup>

The census report did not celebrate one religion over another; in fact, it hardly mattered to Mann which denominations were providing seats for



the urban masses. He portrayed the working poor as so desperate for religion that any church would suffice: "The destitute condition of this vast proportion of our countrymen appeals to the benevolence of Christians indiscriminately."<sup>122</sup> The moral teaching that the poor would receive, Mann implied, was more important than the theological teaching, and any kind of religion would help improve social order in the cities. "The melancholy fact is thus impressed upon our notice," wrote Mann, "that the classes which are most in need of the restraints and consolations of religion are the classes which are most without them."<sup>123</sup> By providing a detailed description of the problem, the census takers saw themselves as making inaction inexcusable: "That, having thus displayed before it the precise requirements of the times, the Christian Church will fail in adequately meeting the emergency, is what the many recent proofs of its abounding liberality and zeal forbid us in the least to fear."<sup>124</sup> The social role of religion was as important as its spiritual role because "no inconsiderable portion of the secular prosperity and peace of individuals and states depends on the extent to which a pure religion is professed and practically followed."<sup>125</sup> Religion would bring stability on a national scale, Mann argued, and provide "those fixed views and habits which can scarcely fail to render individuals prosperous and states secure."<sup>126</sup> Mann extrapolated this into a general principle: "The history of men and states shows nothing more conspicuously than this—that in proportion as a pure and practical religion is acknowledged and pursued are individuals materially prosperous and nations orderly and free."<sup>127</sup>

The lack of religion in cities was explainable in a more general context of urbanization, alienation, and change. Mann believed that people did not build churches in cities because they felt no local attachment or sense of intergenerational continuity. "Our modern populous towns," he explained, "—erected more for business than for residence—mere aggregates of offices and workshops and over-crowded dwellings...are inhabited by none whose means permit them to reside elsewhere."<sup>128</sup> It was only "the innumerable multitudes who do and must reside within the compass of the enormous hives in which their toil is daily carried on."<sup>129</sup> Thus, "new churches...spring up naturally in those new neighborhoods [suburbs] in which the middle classes congregate; but, all spontaneous efforts [are] hopeless in the denser districts peopled by the rank and file of industry."<sup>130</sup> The problem of religious apathy was thus connected to other urban problems such as health, domesticity, and education. Mann argued, for example, that separate dwellings encouraged religious reflection, and so the poor and crowded urban workers were already at a great disadvantage.<sup>131</sup> Mann was also forced to acknowledge that even if there were enough churches, there was no guarantee that people would attend them. In fact, he admitted, somewhat in contradiction to his earlier point about supply and demand, that "teeming populations often now surround half-empty churches."<sup>132</sup> The urban population, again portrayed here as completely out of control, required not only church-building but also aggressive missionary activity.<sup>133</sup> Through such activity, argued Mann, the

cities and indeed the nation would become more moral, more respectable, and more orderly. Mann understood conversion, like other things, in terms of proportions: "For every convert added to [religion's] ranks, society retains one criminal, one drunkard, one improvident the less."<sup>134</sup>

### The Triumph of the City

Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, many British people saw the evidence of urban growth as inherently disturbing, whatever the conditions in the cities might be. Advocates of a rural way of life often argued that a society in which the majority was involved in industry rather than agriculture was an unhealthy one. In 1812, a writer for the *Quarterly Review* argued that the *rural* poor needed to be educated because "their numbers are the strength, and their knowledge is the security of states."<sup>135</sup> In its discussion of the 1841 census, the same journal expressed concern about the "proportion of the manufacturing and trading to the agricultural population, and on their respective importance in the production of national wealth."<sup>136</sup> The writer asked rhetorically, "Is such a [manufacturing] species of wealth of as stable a nature as that created by agriculture?"<sup>137</sup> The writer in fact believed that the proportion of agriculture to manufacturing was "fearful" because "such a preponderance exists in the *least stable* and *most dangerous class*," and "this class (as a preponderating one) is also the most *dangerous*, because ready congregated, and accustomed to combine."<sup>138</sup>

The assumption underlying both the 1812 and the 1841 statements was that numbers were strength, and the stability of the nation depended on the distribution of people. It was only as a proportion of the entire national body that the urban, working-class population could be understood. As we have seen, the urban working class was understood as an especially dangerous majority because of its densely populated nature, and like Engels, the *Quarterly Review* writer believed that it was in cities that the working classes would unite. Conservative critics of the manufacturing system believed that population density and its accompanying evils came from the system itself, and it was only through a return to an agricultural way of life that disaster could be averted.

The dense living conditions in cities could be viewed quite differently by those in the opposing political camp. A writer for the *Manchester Guardian* wrote in 1853 that "one of the moral effects of the increase of the people is an increase of their mental activity; as the aggregation of towns brings them oftener into combination and collision."<sup>139</sup> In towns, explained a writer for the *North British Review* in 1855,

people are more congregated into masses; there is more combination of labour, more collision of intelligence, more of that mental activity which stimulates progress and develops power...It is not the slow, plodding, comparatively unimproving inhabitants of *country* districts that have

multiplied most rapidly, but the enterprising, intelligent, aspiring, inventive dwellers in *towns*.<sup>140</sup>

Such optimism about "combination," which had until this point signified dangerous trends such as trade unionism and socialism, is significant of the new confidence of the 1850s. It was only through large numbers that Chartists and trade unions could hope to make their power known, and their numbers became far more powerful when they were condensed into cities. So, it was only once the Chartist movement had lost its force that middle-class observers could express such faith in the cities.

Ultimately, the statistics suggested that whether towns were good for the nation or bad, their growth was inevitable. As the *Manchester Guardian* noted in 1844,

The existence of large towns seems to be an essential condition of the present state of English civilization. Every year sees a larger and larger proportion of our countrymen become inhabitants of towns; and there seems every probability that the increase of the civic, and comparative decrease of the rural population, will continue.<sup>141</sup>

The great debate between urban and rural interests during the first half of the nineteenth century culminated in an apparent triumph for the proponents of the city. After 1850, the advocates of city life concluded that the fate of Britain as a commercial, industrial, and urban nation was solidified. The 1851 census demonstrated that the British population was almost exactly half rural and half urban, and there was every reason to believe that the urban population would continue to grow.<sup>142</sup> Furthermore, the dire predictions of the antiurbanists had failed to be realized: the economy had improved and there had been no revolution, no violent social disturbance. It had been the agricultural nations of France and Ireland that had experienced social upheaval and economic disaster in 1848, while Britain remained peaceful and prosperous.

For liberals, the census of 1851 thus operated as a final justification, and served to vindicate the urban and manufacturing way of life. While most of Europe suffered the contortions of revolution, Britain during the period from 1846 to 1851, despite a large increase in population, "was uninterruptedly tranquil and almost uninterruptedly prosperous."<sup>143</sup> A *Manchester Guardian* article comparing the censuses of Britain and France explained that

it was not, therefore, an increase of population - not the growth of a town and wealthy population; but the reverse which immediately preceded the revolution of 1848. Ireland, too, be it remembered, was the prey of great distress, considerable turmoil, and an incipient rebellion.<sup>144</sup>

The problems that France and Ireland faced, the argument went, were the result of a lack of urbanization and a lack of free trade. These agricultural countries

had not joined the march of progress, and the French census, according to liberal British observers, indicated that the government of Louis-Philippe was "incompatible with the national progress and the national welfare, and so its destruction ensued."<sup>145</sup> The census was a warning, to politicians all over Europe and especially at home, and the message was clear: governments that imposed trade restrictions and hindered the expansion of industry ultimately would fall from power. "Statesmen," wrote the *Manchester Guardian*, "gathering confidence from the past, will not again plot restrictions on the future greatness and industry of towns."<sup>146</sup> Over the previous decade, the writer argued, London had been "peaceable and orderly and well-disposed," with steady population growth, while Paris had seen chaos.<sup>147</sup>

The triumph of the city was closely tied to shifting understandings of population and national strength as a whole. During the period when overpopulation was considered a problem, the rapid growth of the cities seemed to many to signify a dangerous and unsustainable trend that would ultimately harm the nation. But while antiurbanists claimed that the cities were increasing faster than the countryside because of a lack of moral restraint, defenders of urban life always insisted that the increase was due to immigration.<sup>148</sup> It was actually the "agricultural counties," claimed Phipps in the 1840s, that "have not the means of supporting the population they raise—of providing labour or food for the additions they annually make to the disposable hands, and the craving mouths within their limits."<sup>149</sup> The cities, "these seats of busy industry, instead of increasing upon the country (as is often assumed) the evils of over-population, are actually our safeguards, by relieving and maintaining within their limits large additions to our numbers."<sup>150</sup> It was the towns, he argued, that were supporting their own population as well as the surplus from the agricultural districts. By the 1850s, statistics of growth had become a source of pride rather than a cause for alarm and there was no longer a need for such justifications. Observers proudly remarked that London was nearly as populous as Scotland and bigger than all ancient cities. In fact, wrote the *Manchester Guardian*, "we have no credible record of two millions and a half of citizens congregated within the streets of the same town."<sup>151</sup> The gradual success of the public health movement and the economic stability of the 1850s cemented the increasing confidence in the towns.<sup>152</sup>

For the Manchester manufacturers, the statistics were therefore sufficient proof of the country's fate: Britain was meant to be a nation of traders and manufacturers, not farmers. Britain's greatness, this party asserted, would come from continuing to let cities grow and focusing the country's human and material resources on urban places. People would continue to move to the towns simply because that was where the economy was centered, and such growth was not incompatible with prosperity and morality. In fact, claimed the supporters of the city, urbanization encouraged ingenuity and technological invention: "Coincident with the growth of our towns, an immense variety of physical improvements have come into existence."<sup>153</sup> Furthermore, "men have become more regular and more orderly."<sup>154</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* in

fact, engaging in its own interpretation of crime statistics, argued that “the comparison of the population tables and the criminal tables together justifies the conclusion, that criminality is not in general so great in well-peopled districts...as in the districts where the population is thinnest and increases the slowest.”<sup>155</sup>

In 1851, the *Illustrated London News* summed up the urban triumph.

The increase of the town population—the most skilful, the most intelligent, and we will venture, rather in opposition to an opinion that was prevalent, to assert, the most respectable and the most virtuous—assures of the continual progress and continual improvement of society...On the increase of the town population...must statesmen rely for the future growth and strength of the State, and to that population must they adapt their measures. The continued increase of the town population is now synonymous with national power and national prosperity.<sup>156</sup>

In 1861, Farr could optimistically write that “men have a natural inclination to live in communities, and in the state of society their powers are exercised with the greatest effect.”<sup>157</sup> Anxiety about cities certainly still existed, and a new wave of urban investigation and reform found its heyday during the last decades of the nineteenth century. But after the 1850s few would have seriously suggested that Britain ought to return to its preindustrial past. City dwellers had recognized themselves through their numbers as the most powerful elements in the economy and the society.

The civil servants involved with the census were invariably supporters of industry and urban life, yet they claimed a neutral authority for the statistics. Census taker Edmund Phipps, for example, believed that the 1841 census indicated an improvement in overcrowded living conditions, because the number of houses was increasing faster than the population.<sup>158</sup> Yet he asked rhetorically,

Do we bring forward these calculations with any party purpose;—with a view to make out what may be called a case in favor of the Towns? Far from it. Our object is to show the real circumstances, illustrated as they are by information which had not been before at the disposal of candid enquirers. We wish to guard against exaggerated ideas, of the necessary mortality, among the large masses collected together in these seats of industry.<sup>159</sup>

Yet despite their support for the cities, census takers also used the data that they gathered to plan for the physical and moral improvement of the urban working classes. As Kay suggested in 1832, the cities could be forces of good only if the people in them were orderly and submissive. The conflict between surplus and representation was not resolved in the context of the city. Middle-class urbanites saw themselves as central to national prosperity and

as deserving of representation, but they also saw the cities as potential sites of overpopulation. Engels, meanwhile, suggested that working-class urban dwellers could recognize themselves as a majority, and that the recognition would serve as the first step in the quest for power. The vindication of the city, then, was not only about the triumph of urban over rural or industrial over agricultural. It was also about a struggle for power within the cities, and the at least temporary success of the middle classes in their attempt to keep the poor from gaining any genuine political power.

In her novel *Ruth*, Elizabeth Gaskell sympathetically described her protagonist's existence in "that large, populous, desolate town."<sup>160</sup> Here, there is a sense that urban life was alienating simply because of the large population. One's individuality and even humanity could be threatened by a population so big that it created not communion, but desolation. Yet while novels of the 1850s and beyond often celebrated the countryside, for most authors it had become a nostalgic celebration rather than a programmatic one. Gaskell, who spent most of her life in Manchester, herself understood the towns as the basis of the nation's wealth, even as she yearned for an older way of life in the country. The census played an extraordinarily multifaceted role in describing the urban and industrial society to which people of Gaskell's generation were adapting. At times a means of surveillance and control, at times an instrument of reform, the census ultimately came to serve as a justification of urbanization itself.

# 5

## Marriage, the Family, and the Nation

Neither in relation to his age, his occupation, nor his residence is the Great Briton so interesting an object of study to many of our readers as in relation to his wife. The great question is, are we a marrying nation.

—*Manchester Guardian*, 1854<sup>1</sup>

In 1862, the British writer William Rathbone Greg published his article “Why are Women Redundant?” in the *National Review*. Greg noted that there were 500,000 more women than men in Great Britain, but the women about whom he was really concerned were the unmarried ones. As Greg wrote,

There is an enormous and increasing number of single women in the nation, a number quite disproportionate and quite abnormal; a number which, positively and relatively, is indicative of an unwholesome social state, and is both productive and prognostic of much wretchedness and wrong.<sup>2</sup>

Greg believed that the only real remedy to the problem was large-scale emigration from Britain. He referred to the “deficiency” of women in Canada and Australia, contrasted it with the “excess” of women in Britain, and praised the “natural rectification of disproportions” that would ensue from emigration.<sup>3</sup> His ultimate goal was to “transport the half-million from where they are redundant to where they are wanted.”<sup>4</sup> Greg’s emigration scheme was immense: sending 500,000 women overseas, he calculated, would require 10,000 ships.

Greg’s article was a contribution to the debate over what was known as the “surplus woman” problem, which began during the 1850s and lasted through the rest of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. The debate, over what to do with the large numbers of single women in Britain who could not support themselves, divided those who, like Greg, believed that single women should emigrate to the colonies, from those who ultimately came to believe that expanding women’s educational and occupational opportunities in Britain was more important. The debate was sparked by the census of 1851, which asked for the marital status of every inhabitant

of Great Britain for the first time. The census revealed that out of a population of 20 million, there were 500,000 more women than men in Great Britain, and there were two and a half million unmarried women. The census sparked concern about the decline of the family as the moral and reproductive basis of British society. At a moment when a large population had come to be seen as crucial for maintaining Britain's industrial, imperial, and military strength, women's duties as wives and mothers were exalted, and women who did not fill these roles were viewed as increasingly problematic. Greg's emphasis on healthy proportions and on the nation as a whole relied heavily on the census.

As discussions surrounding the census suggest, statisticians and commentators tended to define particular groups as problems when they saw them as unproductive or inefficient. Almost all the nineteenth-century writers on the subject, male and female, feminist and antifeminist, argued that single women were unproductive and therefore problematic members of the society. Where commentators differed was on the question of whether it was possible to make single women productive or not: while some argued that women could never be useful if they remained single, others insisted that it was a lack of educational and occupational opportunities that forced single women to be burdens on society.

Historians of the surplus woman problem have focused primarily on the ways in which women dealt with being single, the attempts to increase women's options outside of marriage, and the eventual successes of the feminist movement.<sup>5</sup> The 1851 census has been described as a catalyst for British feminism and as a vital moment in the history of women's changing roles. This approach has provided a much-needed corrective to years of historical blindness about women's experiences, but by looking backward from the development of feminism rather than forward from earlier nineteenth-century rhetoric about the nation, it leaves us with a lack of discursive context. What have not been explored in enough detail are the ways in which the debate fit into larger Victorian discourses about population, surplus, and empire, and the ways in which feminists themselves were informed by the census. The 1851 census must be viewed as a moment in the history of debates over surplus population as much as a moment in the history of feminism. The discussion about single women appropriated the language and the theoretical frameworks of already existing debates about other problem populations, and the census, concerned as it was with national strength and proportions of people, allowed British people to view single women as one among many unproductive groups. Of all the "redundant" populations isolated by the census, however, single women were the most articulate in the public sphere, the ones who most explicitly challenged the label of "surplus" that was attached to them, and the ones who were ultimately the most successful in redefining the debate about nationhood and population.



## **Marriage, Singleness, and the Ratio of the Sexes**

Nineteenth-century census takers took it for granted that rates of marriage were directly related to rates of population growth, and marriage and the family were therefore of central concern to people involved with the census. One of the few things that the census of 1801 did was to distinguish males from females. In part, this was an obvious distinction for the census administrators to make because they wished to determine who could fight in the Napoleonic Wars. But census takers and analysts were also interested in the proportions between men and women, and they tended to consider the importance of the issue to be self-explanatory. Writing in 1801, census taker John Rickman discussed the imbalance between the sexes and predicted that when the wars were over and the men returned home, the proportions of men and women would even out. The "supernumerary females of Scotland and Ireland," he explained, would "balance when there will be no army or Navy."<sup>6</sup> A healthy society, it was assumed, at least in a state of peace, would have a relatively even ratio of men to women.

Equal proportions were needed, Rickman assumed, because marriage was the ultimate goal of nearly all men and women, and the family was the most essential unit making up the society and the nation. Long-standing religious precepts as well as contemporary writers emphasized the importance of the family. Theologians and philosophers had long insisted that marriage was the highest moral and social condition attainable, and that it was also central to individual happiness. Finally, it was essential for the population to increase.<sup>7</sup> In his 1796 article calling for a national census, Rickman spoke of marriage as "the sum total of human felicity and increasing population (fated eternally to accompany each other)."<sup>8</sup>

The first census was taken with the assumption that people lived in families. The overseers who collected the information were asked to list the total number of males and females in their parish, the number of houses, and the number of families that occupied these houses. The early censuses provide us with no way of knowing how many people were in fact living in one-person households, as they would simply have been counted as families. When beginning in 1841 the census takers began collecting information about the numbers of people in each house, the family remained the central unit of analysis. It was the "head of the household" who filled out the census form, and his "dependents," be they wife, children, or servants, were designated in relation to him. As we have seen, census takers often considered people who did not fit into the categories that they had created to be both difficult to count and threatening to society. Much like vagrants with no fixed homes, those who did not live in well-defined families caused practical problems for census enumerators and government statisticians. In 1821, John Rickman raised the question "what is to be deemed a distinct family?"<sup>9</sup> He acknowledged the necessity of defining individuals who lived alone as families, despite the

more common understanding of the family as something comprising at least two people. He also recognized the difficulties in defining those who lived in the same house but were not actually related: servants, lodgers, and guests were all potentially unclassifiable.

Despite the statistical interest in marriage, the early censuses provided little information beyond the proportional numbers of men and women. But in the debates during the 1820s and 1830s over the extension of the census, the question of marriage often arose. In his 1829 article on possible improvements to the census, political economist J. R. McCulloch wrote that "in attempting to trace the circumstances which determine the condition of man in society, the proportion which the sexes bear to each other, becomes an object of research not less curious than instructive."<sup>10</sup> He went on to make the optimistic claim that nothing was left to chance in this area: "The proportion between the sexes seems to be determined by a general law of nature; and the balance to be preserved at that precise point which is most favourable for human happiness."<sup>11</sup>

McCulloch's desire for statistical information on marriage may have stemmed partly from the increasingly visible fact that large numbers of people in Great Britain were not marrying. The absence of marriage could be partially accounted for by a simple disproportion of the sexes. Statisticians were aware that at least in European societies, women consistently outnumbered men. Wars and emigration depleted the male population at home, and colonial administration and international commerce also took large numbers of men away from Britain. Even among those left at home, there was a higher child-mortality rate among boys than among girls, and women on the whole lived longer.<sup>12</sup> The "problem" of singleness also resulted, however, from men's increasing unwillingness to confine themselves in marriage. Industrialization and the growing economy of the eighteenth century encouraged extravagant living for both men and women of the upper classes, and in justifying the decision to remain single, men sometimes expressed fears that their wives would be too expensive. Furthermore, wealthy men could find companionship and sexual satisfaction by taking a mistress, thus avoiding both the cost of marriage and the confining nature of it.<sup>13</sup> The imbalance of the sexes, therefore, was defined largely in terms of women's inability to marry. Men could find wives when they wanted to, both because of the actual ratio of the sexes and because of women's far greater dependence on marriage.

The problem of single women was also labeled as a middle-class problem, because of the specific challenges that middle-class women faced in attempting to support themselves. Poor women had always worked, and they continued to do so in the industrial age. Some of the jobs that they did, particularly that of the domestic servant, made them essential in the labor market. Commentators on marriage and the family, however, often viewed middle-class single women as dangerously unproductive because of their failure to contribute to society as wives and mothers. Thanks to the work of such historians as Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, we now

know that throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the English middle classes were articulating separate and carefully defined roles for men and women.<sup>14</sup> As they did so, those women who did not marry were increasingly viewed as failing to perform any sort of useful function. By the beginning of the Victorian period, the ideally anticipated life course for middle-class women consisted almost entirely in marriage, child-rearing, and domestic management. The wife was expected to provide physical comfort, emotional companionship, and a moral example for her husband, who was forced to spend his day in the potentially corrupt public world of work. The woman could expect her own emotional satisfaction to come from caring for her husband, her children, and her house. Much of the writing on the subject spelled out the "natural" differences between men and women, and described the duties and roles that were thought to result logically from such differences.<sup>15</sup>

For a woman, fulfilling her "natural" duties depended on finding someone to marry, and those who did not were often objects of either pity or scorn. The specific issues that the single woman faced varied depending on social background, education, and family situation. Many people believed that financial dependency was the most humiliating aspect of spinsterhood. In 1816 Jane Austen's heroine Emma asserted that "it is poverty... which makes celibacy contemptible... A single woman with a... narrow income must be a ridiculous, disagreeable old maid!... but a single woman of good fortune is always respectable, and may be as sensible and pleasant as anybody else!"<sup>16</sup> The options available to a middle-class woman who did not marry were limited. Unmarried women without independent incomes often were supported by their married brothers or their brothers-in-law, or kept house for their widowed fathers or unmarried brothers. If a middle-class woman had no other means of supporting herself, she might have become a governess, a teacher in a girls' school, or a companion to a wealthy woman. Although respectable in theory, this type of work was commonly assumed to bring numerous humiliating and difficult circumstances. And while it afforded basic subsistence, wages were low enough so that it did not usually provide a life of comfort or even real financial security.<sup>17</sup> Many single women were also worried about the more personal problem of emotional fulfillment. Since women were generally taught that their emotional lives would be satisfied through caring for others and managing a house, many women feared the loneliness of spinsterhood.

During the 1830s and the 1840s, no data were available on the numbers of single men and women compared with the numbers of married people. But as an anecdotal problem, the impoverished middle-class single woman was the subject of numerous sympathetic novels and treatises, and the object of various philanthropic societies such as the Governesses' Benevolent Institution, which was founded in 1843. The middle-class single woman often appeared in literature as a governess, most famously in the novels of the Brontë sisters. But in 1851, the census quantified the question of marriage and singleness,

and the cultural centrality of domesticity and the family in middle-class Britain became even more evident.

### **Marriage, the Family, and the 1851 Census**

On the 1851 census form, every member of the household was listed as married, single, or widowed, and his or her "relation to the head of the household" was also determined. Statisticians had suggested for many years that such a question be included on the census, and several foreign countries had been gathering the information for some time. But it was not until the government agreed to expand the census in general that the marital status question (suggested most immediately by Census Commissioner William Farr, and supported by Registrar-General George Graham) made it onto the form. The 1851 census report claimed that until the new question was asked, legislation had been enacted "without exact knowledge of the facts" and "the solutions which [these facts] afford of some social questions [are] interesting in a practical as well as a theoretical point of view."<sup>18</sup> The returns on marital status "open a new field of philosophical inquiry into a subject which has hitherto been treated lightly."<sup>19</sup> Calculations about marriage, wrote the census takers,

will serve, not merely to gratify idle curiosity, but to guide the course of men's lives, to make provisions for children who marry as well as for those who do not marry, and to direct the establishment and conduct of social institutions which may mitigate the calamities of premature death.<sup>20</sup>

The discussion of marriage in the 1851 census report is worth examining in detail, in part because its writer, William Farr, used the opportunity to provide one of the clearest expositions of Victorian domestic ideology existing. Farr, like so many of his contemporaries, believed that the institutions of marriage and the family were fundamental aspects of what it meant to be English.<sup>21</sup> More specifically, the institution of marriage in its peculiarly English (Protestant) form distinguished nineteenth-century, progressive, English people both from their own ancestors and from people of other nations, particularly continental, Catholic nations. The census, concerned as it was with population and productivity, provided ample opportunity for a treatise on both the moral and the demographic implications of marriage.

Farr began by explaining that families, which were ideally ruled and supported by men, were the units making up the town and ultimately the nation.<sup>22</sup> The concept of the family as the microcosm and at the same time the most essential social unit in the polity can be traced back for centuries, but the emphasis on the nation in the report's language is worth noting closely:

Marriage is therefore generally the origin of the elementary community of which larger communities, in various degrees of subordination, and

ultimately the nation, are constituted; and on the conjugal state of the population, [the nation's] existence, increase, and diffusion, as well as manners, character, happiness, and freedom, intimately depend.<sup>23</sup>

Farr admitted the difficulty in defining a family, but insisted that "it is so much in the order of nature that a family should live in a separate house."<sup>24</sup> The English character, Farr suggested, which consisted of individualism, independence, and freedom, originated in the habit of living in separate houses. Farr remarked upon the very different customs current in France and Germany, and proposed the theory that these other countries enjoyed less freedom than England did precisely because of their lack of well-bounded families. A separate house, he explained, "throws a sharp, well-defined circle round his family and hearth—the shrine of his sorrows, joys and meditations."<sup>25</sup>

Farr insisted that this feeling was natural and universal. Yet it was an ideal that only the relatively affluent could meet, and as we have seen, census takers often viewed working-class people who did not live in separate houses as threatening. Or, as the report claimed, the census had discovered "an excess of families in the houses."<sup>26</sup> Farr made the link between poor housing and immoral family life explicit: "The crowding of the people in houses in close streets, and the consequent dissolution of families—arising out of defective house accommodation—are evils which demand attentive consideration."<sup>27</sup> An ideal family, Farr continued, had a head and dependent members, and was preferably made up of a husband, a wife, children, and servants. "Or less perfectly, but more commonly," he admitted, "of husband, wife and children."<sup>28</sup> He thus portrayed the middle-class situation as the ideal one, the one through which Englishness was defined. In its discussion of the 1851 census, the *Westminster Review* explained that while "a happy household is considered to be that where there are parents, children, and servants," only five percent of households were actually found to meet these criteria.<sup>29</sup>

The 1851 report provided a general survey of the state of marriage in the country, including such figures as the proportions of married people to the whole population, and the ages at which women and men typically married.<sup>30</sup> Unmarried people older than 20 were designated as bachelors and spinsters, even though, as Farr was aware, many of them would go on to marry later in life. Farr went on to compare English marriage with both the Scottish and the French institutions of marriage, to praise the particular benefits that English people enjoyed, and to detail much of what is familiar to historians of Victorian Britain about the sanctity of the home and the family. Scotland had a particular problem with regard to marriage, Farr claimed, because of the Scots' "alleged proneness to wander from the land of their birth, and to settle in southern latitudes."<sup>31</sup> It was primarily men who were "wandering," and there was thus a very large, "unnatural" disparity of the sexes in Scotland.<sup>32</sup> "Scotchwomen are forsaken in greater numbers than English women—by their countrymen," Farr explained, and the problem "well deserves careful investigation, in connexion with the law of marriage, the household manners,

and the occupations of the people."<sup>33</sup> In Farr's opinion, Scottish marriage law resulted in common law marriages, seduction, polygamy, "concubinage," and general immorality. "The women of Scotland," Farr concluded, "have some right to complain of the working of the Scottish marriage law, which is not adapted to their present state of civilization."<sup>34</sup> Besides the disparity between men and women, Scotland was underpopulated in general, and Farr believed that in order to repopulate and be stronger, Scotland needed new laws relating to marriage.

The report went on to argue that the large and continually increasing population in England, and thus England's industrial and commercial strength, could be largely attributed to a superior system of marriage. A lengthy history of marriage, manners, and gender relations followed. Farr began this history with a description of the ancient roots of moral family life. He found evidence of true wives and mothers among the Romans, the Germans, and the Anglo-Saxons. He then provided a detailed history of British marriage over the two centuries since the Restoration of 1660. As Farr saw it, a long period of immorality had marred the century from 1660 to 1750. This began with the excesses of the court of Charles II, where very loose ideas of marriage prevailed, and it affected the upper ranks of society more generally. During this period, most women "ingloriously discharged the duties of English wives and mothers."<sup>35</sup> As a result of these bad manners, "the institution of marriage was unsettled to its foundations," as was evident from the fact that "the plays, novels, poems, and memoirs, down to 1751, exhibit the licentiousness of opinion."<sup>36</sup>

Fortunately, "although a large portion of the population suffered more or less from this state of things, a part remained unaffected; and a great improvement began, and became visible, about 1741."<sup>37</sup> Here Farr returned to the idea, emerging from statistics, that every age and every body of people had exceptions: "It is not from singular instances that the manners of a people can be inferred, but rather, where facts cannot be defined in numbers, from the general tone of opinion: and the tide of public opinion now set strongly against licentiousness."<sup>38</sup> At this point, both morality and population began to increase. In 1753, Hardwicke's marriage law (which attempted to end common law and clandestine marriages) raised a debate about the effect that marriage laws had on population, and while many people at the time believed that the law would slow population growth, Farr sought to demonstrate that it actually had done the opposite.

Farr claimed that the improvement in sexual manners was also brought about by the good example of the British royal family. The virtuous and domestic George III was secure in his rule even during the French Revolution and other crises "because, as if by some admirable instinct, the people of England felt that he had faithfully discharged all the duties which every head of an English family is bound to perform, and had thus contributed to the establishment of principles that are the sure foundation of the nation's happiness and greatness."<sup>39</sup> Farr's suggestion that English people had a natural love

for domesticity that people of other nations did not have led him to his grand point: as manners improved, "the idea of the English family lived again in all its old beauty."<sup>40</sup> Although according to Farr's history there was another brief moral regression during the Regency period, by the Victorian age marriage had become drastically better: "Improvements in manners, neither recorded nor easily expressed in figures, unquestionably distinguish this century."<sup>41</sup> Yet Farr's argument was in fact partly based on figures, for the dates of improvement were conveniently chosen to coincide with shifts in population, the theory being that when manners changed, population started to increase.

Farr summed up his history of marriage with a description of the moral and the immoral segments of society:

We have seen and traced two numerous classes of the population, like great rivers flowing through two centuries; the one has dwindled away, although it still exists, without beauty on its sterile banks; the other has grown wider and deeper every year, and now sheds abundance over the land.<sup>42</sup>

This was a triumph of morality over immorality, and Farr explained proudly that

the time, the energies, and the earnings of the people, which had in 1651–1751 been wasted in intrigues, in riotous assemblies, on gin, and in gambling, were devoted in the next century (1751–1851) to the establishment and support of quiet industrious families.<sup>43</sup>

He defined marriage in its ideal and "natural" form in contemporary Victorian terms: "Under this institution, in its natural state, the health, education, and fortune of their children, occupy the care and thought of two faithful parents; and successive generations are connected in families by indissoluble affections and associations."<sup>44</sup>

Ultimately, this story of improvement led to the contemporary domestic morality on which Victorians prided themselves, and even the years of emphasis (1651, 1751, 1851) were read backward from the taking of the census rather than from any historical event. Farr did caution that there were still problems: "It cannot be pretended that the conjugal relations or the manners of the present age are perfect, if we look at the interests of the great number of children who are still unfortunately born out of wedlock."<sup>45</sup> This was important to Farr because while population grew with marriage, it was diminished by "celibacy and licentiousness."<sup>46</sup> But the discussion of marriage in the 1851 census report was at least on the surface almost entirely a self-congratulatory one. From the prosperous perspective of the 1850s, Farr could say with satisfaction that "the increase of marriages and of population in the century after 1751 was followed by more than a corresponding increase in the strength and in the external as well as internal action of the kingdom."<sup>47</sup> Such a disregard

for the traumatic upheavals of industrialization, as well as the long-lasting anxieties attached to the idea of overpopulation, allowed Farr to imply that England had been on a road of continual progress, always gaining more people who would be useful for defense, industry, and colonization. But the satisfaction may have been underpinned by anxiety. Even as Farr ardently praised Britain's moral family life and demographic strength, concern about their decline caused public consternation.

### The Surplus Woman Problem

The information about marriage that the census acquired in 1851 fascinated the public. In a general article about the census, the *Manchester Guardian* proclaimed that "neither in relation to his age, his occupation, nor his residence is the Great Briton so interesting an object of study to many of our readers as in relation to his wife. The great question is, are we a marrying nation."<sup>48</sup> The answer, alarmingly, was no, or not enough. Single women were certainly not a new problem, and the census of 1851 only confirmed what politicians, economists, and novelists had been writing about for several decades. But the census provided statistics to back up a formerly vague concern, and it sparked a massive increase in the volume of opinions on the problem as a whole. Writers for the press anxiously discussed such possible solutions as female emigration, improved female education, and the opening of certain professions to women. A problem that previously had been spoken of in an anecdotal and incidental manner was suddenly defined as a social problem that the country as a whole was forced to recognize. In its new form, the discussion often focused on the census itself, and nearly all of the writers on the subject used statistical figures to sharpen their arguments.

Farr wrote in the 1851 report, "In every part of Great Britain a large number of men and women who live to advanced ages never marry."<sup>49</sup> Farr's habit of statistical reasoning compelled him to admit that "celibacy... is therefore to be considered the natural state of a portion of the population; for under no circumstances that can be conceived will the whole of the population marry."<sup>50</sup> He also acknowledged that "certain duties of the most exalted as well as of the humblest kind in the world are most efficiently performed by these [celibate] classes."<sup>51</sup> Thus, single people were not inevitably useless to society. However, their numbers in 1851 were alarming, Farr believed, as were some of their reasons for not marrying. While some may have been truly and naturally inclined to remain single, and others may have had a good reason prohibiting marriage, the rest were simply not fulfilling their duty.

Writers for the press disagreed about how much of a problem single women were. The *Manchester Guardian* claimed that the "excess" of females "would have filled the Crystal Palace four times over."<sup>52</sup> Statistics about which men were marrying and which were not sparked humorous remarks about women's desperate search for husbands. The census returns showed that "civilians afford a much easier capture than either of the services, and the navy appears



to surrender somewhat more readily than the army...the general result is fairly creditable to the force of female suasion in these islands, as well as to the forethought and prudence of the male creature."<sup>53</sup> The *North British Review*, meanwhile, insisted that an excess of females was in fact

an arrangement fitted to call forth our gratitude. How many families are there which are dependent on the services of those supernumerary women, who, if mated and engrossed by more immediate ties, would be unable to render the aid required where a wife and mother is incapacitated by sickness or by death.<sup>54</sup>

But while this writer believed that single women could be useful, he or she also thought that at the moment there were far too many of them: "Too many for their own peace—too many for the preservation of a sound social and moral state."<sup>55</sup> The article condemned those men who refused to marry, and argued that it was their extravagance, or perhaps their erroneous assumption that their potential wives would be too extravagant, that was at fault.<sup>56</sup> These men, the article explained, force women "to live without love rather than expose her to live without a carriage."<sup>57</sup> The women then "pine away existence in desolate and dreary singleness."<sup>58</sup> If men readjusted their priorities, spinsters would be reduced, and the country could "raise into the condition of honoured happy wives the vast majority of those 'beautiful lay nuns,'...whose sad, unnatural, objectless existence, whose wasted powers of giving and receiving joy, it makes the heart bleed to witness."<sup>59</sup> "The causes and the consequences of this state of things," the article explained, "are alike to be deplored."<sup>60</sup>

The census returns indicated that the proportions of married and unmarried were not uniform across the British Isles. Farr pointed out that there was an "accidental congregation in certain towns of women living on small annuities."<sup>61</sup> There were high numbers of widows in seaport towns because their husbands had died serving in the army or the navy, and spinsters were disproportionately present in London because there was great demand for them as domestic servants there. Scotland and the islands were also lacking men, because many of those men came to England in order to find work. These proportions were reversed in specific regions, such as those involved with coal mining. The assumption behind this discussion was that unequal proportions could be realigned by internal migration. As with the general redundancy of labor that had caused so much anxiety during the 1820s and 1830s, the surplus of women was both national and localized.

It was the national problem, however, that caused the most concern, and that called for a national readjustment either of population or of ideologies. Victorian Britain's values and assumptions about gender roles were threatened by the fact that a large number of women could not find men to marry. Finding a way to make single women productive within British society would inevitably mean altering expectations about the ideal female role. Calls for

education and career openings were heard, but as the "Woman Question" gradually gained publicity, it also became clear that for many men and women, the overturning of an ingrained system of cultural values was a difficult thing to accept. It is for this reason that a number of political and social commentators and activists could see no alternative but to simply get rid of surplus women through large-scale population management, usually taking the form of emigration schemes.

Emigration had long been an accepted solution to unemployment and overpopulation, but the 1851 census shifted the focus on emigration to single women. In her article "Emigration as a Preventive Agency," published in 1859 in *The English Woman's Journal*, Isa Craig explained that "emigration is one of those wider causes which operate in the prevention of crime," and that alleviating a general unemployment problem was important because "crime is plentiful when employment is scarce."<sup>62</sup> She then turned specifically to working-class women, and described how "the dire lack of employment, and consequent debasing struggle for the bare necessities of life, has told frightfully on the social condition of the humbler women of this country."<sup>63</sup> Craig implied that if women who could not support themselves in respectable ways at home were to emigrate to where more jobs were available, prostitution would decrease and the women would be able to lead happy and upright lives. Many people saw single women as the ones who should emigrate if Britain was suffering from an unemployment problem. These women were viewed as a threat to the already crowded male labor market at home, because in many people's minds, they should not have been working anyway. As a satirical reviewer wrote in 1862, when people "inaugurate schemes of emigration for the relief of overstocked labour markets, it is always the least estimable portion of the superfluity who are selected for the operation."<sup>64</sup>

Craig focused on working-class women who could not find work at home, and emigration had traditionally been seen as a solution for lower-class unemployment in general. But by mid-century, the emphasis had begun to shift to middle-class female emigration. It was widely accepted that the British colonies in Southern Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada had a shortage of women that would make emigration desirable for everyone involved. Britain's disproportion would be remedied, and an entire population of unproductive bodies would be eliminated. The colonies, besides gaining a more equal proportion, would benefit from the increased morality that would arrive with the respectable and educated women.<sup>65</sup> The idea of a female "civilizing mission" tied the domestic space, British society, and the empire together: the woman would serve as the moral guardian of each.<sup>66</sup> Sending Britain's excess of women abroad would thus benefit both the mother country and her colonies.

Furthermore, the women themselves would be able to avoid the poverty and humiliating dependence of the single life in Britain. Numbers of women, primarily of working-class origins, emigrated throughout the 1830s and the 1840s with government assistance, and various private organizations were founded to help such women. The assumption was that both

work and marriage would be easier for women to find in the colonies than at home. In the early 1850s, however, as the surplus woman problem was transformed from an anecdotal into a statistically confirmed problem, a parallel shift in the discussion of female emigration can be detected. While earlier advocates of female emigration had focused on the single woman's problems and the happier life she would find in the colonies, the activists of the 1850s and 1860s created what can be called the first real emigration schemes for women. An example of the new approach can be seen in *Punch Magazine's* 1850 statement: "The daughters of England are too numerous and if the Mother cannot otherwise get them off her hands, she must send them abroad into the world."<sup>67</sup> The focus on emigration had shifted from the woman herself to Britain's need to eliminate the woman, or as Rita Kranidis argues, "the 'superfluous' woman[s] . . . removal came to be considered essential not only for her own well-being but for England's as well."<sup>68</sup>

Most women did not see emigration as the most desirable option. Besides the aversion to leaving family and friends and arriving as strangers in an unfamiliar place, many women were concerned about the dangers of the ship voyage. Several organizations, such as Caroline Chisholm's Family Colonization Loan Society, aimed to help single women emigrate safely by matching them up with respectable families who could provide protection on board and upon arrival in the colonies.<sup>69</sup> But even assuming that the woman could reach her new country safely, there were more dangers and hardships to face upon arrival. Women raised in comfort and refinement were worried that the colonies were lacking in respectable high society as well as in the material comforts to which they were accustomed in Britain.<sup>70</sup> On the other hand, emigration advocates argued, class distinctions were less pronounced in the colonies, and women taking jobs as governesses or domestic servants were likely to find themselves less socially alienated than they would have been in the same roles at home.<sup>71</sup> Wages were also often far better than they would be in the overcrowded labor market in Britain, and there were reports that servants and governesses were treated better by their employers than was common at home. Emigration provided single women with the chance to work and be useful, and often to lead a more independent life than they would have in Britain. Whether it was more respectable to emigrate or to work at home was thus a complicated question. The negative stigma attached to emigration was often counteracted by the possibility for maintaining middle-class status in the colonies.

In practical terms, lower-class women with less to lose were far more likely to emigrate than middle-class women. But as we have already seen, it was the middle-class single woman who was seen as the real problem in Britain, far more, for example, than the unmarried domestic servant. William Greg pointed out that female servants

are in no sense redundant . . . they do not follow an obligatorily independent and therefore for their sex an unnatural career; on the contrary, they are attached to others, and are connected with other existences which

they embellish, facilitate, and serve...they fulfil both essentials of woman's being; *they are supported by, and they minister to, men.*<sup>72</sup>

The issue of who was actually needed in the colonies also pervaded the debate about emigration. Most people assumed that domestic servants were more in demand in the colonies than educated governesses who were unwilling to do manual labor. Many people emphasized the need for emigrants' adaptability and willingness to work in unexpected ways.<sup>73</sup> James Hammerton points out that "the shift in selection criteria [from lower-class to middle-class women] illustrated how quickly social pressures in Britain, at the point of origin, came to overshadow the labour demands of the colonists."<sup>74</sup>

One of the most widely-read contributions to the debate over emigration was William Greg's article "Why are Women Redundant?" Greg argued that attempts to help single women lead happy and comfortable lives at home had been misdirected and were ultimately harmful. For Greg, a woman's appropriate role was that of wife and mother, and to make it possible for women to be happy outside of marriage was only to perpetuate the problem. Greg insisted that "we are disordered, we are suffering, we are astray, because we have *gone wrong*; and our philanthropists are laboring, not to make us go backward and go right, but to make it easier and smoother to persist in wrong."<sup>75</sup>

Greg proposed several partial solutions, suggesting that women should lower their expectations about the wealth and status of the men they married and that men should also be more willing to marry on a modest income. Greg also agreed that women should be permitted and willing to work in certain appropriate jobs, such as nursing, teaching, charity work, and novel-writing. Like Farr, Greg made a distinction between "natural" and "unnatural" celibates. He admitted that on occasion one came across a woman who was better off remaining single, and who could use her unusual talents to benefit society. In all countries, Greg explained, there was a small excess of women over men, and "Nature" must have thus designed this exact percentage of women to remain single. Any greater excess of unmarried women, however, was unnatural and harmful. He explained that "the residue—the large excess over this proportion—who remain unmarried, *constitute the problem to be solved, the evil and anomaly to be cured.*"<sup>76</sup> According to Greg, "nature makes no mistakes and creates no redundancies."<sup>77</sup>

Even for the sake of the natural celibates, however, Greg was unwilling to contemplate opening professional or business positions to women; he believed that such a move would depress men's wages and harm the national economy. For him, emigration was the only solution. He displayed statistical tables and referred to supply and demand, and he insisted that by decreasing the population of women in Britain, the value of those still at home would rise. For Greg, the beneficial results of an emigration scheme were well worth the practical difficulties of executing it. He claimed that the disproportion of the sexes caused "mischief," which manifested itself in the colonies as "unmatched men," and at home as "unprotected women" who

were "condemned to celibacy, struggle and privation."<sup>78</sup> Greg spoke sympathetically about the women who were forced to "earn their own living, instead of spending and husbanding the earnings of men," and those who had to "carve out artificial and painfully-sought occupations for themselves; who, in place of completing, sweetening, and embellishing the existence of others, are compelled to lead an independent and incomplete existence of their own."<sup>79</sup> Greg, however, was at least as interested in the threat that such work posed for society as in the threat to the individual woman's happiness. Women, he argued, were completed by caring for others, and those who ceased performing the "natural duties and labours of wives and mothers" were contributing not only to their own problems but also to those of their country.<sup>80</sup>

Moral commentators such as Sarah Ellis had insisted a generation earlier that it was the *duty* of women to marry, and Greg agreed. Greg believed that the first step was to get as many women as possible to fulfill their role at home. If there were not enough men at home, then there was nothing for the excess of women to do but go abroad in order to fulfill their duty. It was for the society as a whole as well as for the woman herself that this natural order of things was important. Greg's emphasis on healthy proportions, the nation as a whole, and that which was "unnatural" or "abnormal" relied heavily on the census, for it was the census that allowed people to think about the social body in terms of numbers and depicted single women as one among many problematic populations.

Although Greg was explicitly opposed to the women's rights movement, many of those men and women who were working to open certain professions to women were likely to agree that emigration was at least a partial solution to the problem.<sup>81</sup> Maria Rye, for example, who ran a law-copying office for women clerks and found herself swamped with applications, began to think about emigration. She felt strongly that women should be allowed to work at home, but she also admitted that there were not enough jobs available and that those women who could not find work in Britain would benefit by going to find it in the colonies.<sup>82</sup> In 1862, Rye founded the Female Middle Class Emigration Society to facilitate such a plan.

The debate about single women and emigration was extended in the pages of *The English Woman's Journal*, founded by Bessie Parkes in 1858. The journal regularly published letters from female emigrants, as well as articles about the advantages and disadvantages of emigration.<sup>83</sup> Most of the writers for *The Journal* encouraged emigration, believing that sending single women to where there were more jobs available was one of many possible ways to improve women's condition. These feminist emigration advocates even used language that was similar to Greg's: as one wrote in 1862, the question was "how to transfer [women] from the place where they are not wanted, and where they may even become injurious, to the place where they will be valued as they deserve, and benefit instead of injuring those around them."<sup>84</sup> It is also clear that many of the middle-class emigrants did understand themselves as

members of a problematic and too populous group. As one satisfied emigrant wrote, "I love [England] as ever, but I can earn more money here and I expect always find something to do, there are enough of us at home."<sup>85</sup> For these writers, as for Greg, single women were harming both themselves and their country.

Most people involved in the women's movement, however, saw emigration as only a short-term solution, and they believed that social reform at home was ultimately more important. And during the 1860s, a split between feminism and emigration occurred, because emigration came to be seen as a popular antifeminist solution.<sup>86</sup> Feminists began to believe that emigration, by returning women to their traditional roles of wives and moral guardians in the colonies, only discouraged activism for women's rights.<sup>87</sup> They also began to realize that the unclear distinction between emigrating to find husbands and emigrating to find work was embarrassing.

The embarrassment was caused in part by *The Saturday Review's* 1862 article "The Export Wife Trade." The satirical article made an explicit connection between female emigrants and other problematic members of society such as "paupers, penitents, or convicts."<sup>88</sup> The writer referred to the governesses seeking work in Australia as "unmarketable womanhood," and insisted that those whom Britain was exporting were "those whom we are most eager to be rid of here."<sup>89</sup> The plan was faulty because the colonies "do not like being the outfall sewer of any community of the Old World," and because "the colonists are tired of becoming customers for the goods which can find no sale in England—chipped statuettes, spoiled engravings, and old maids."<sup>90</sup> The reviewer also spoke about spinsters' lack of productivity: "When we find the garrison too numerous for the provisions, we naturally turn out the non-effectives first."<sup>91</sup>

Some people did believe that the problem of the surplus woman could be handled within existing economic and social life. Most of these thinkers agreed that having a whole body of unproductive women was negative both for the women themselves and for the society as a whole. They believed, however, that the women could be made productive within the context of Victorian society, and they were thus willing to rethink cultural and social values in a way that their opponents were not. Judith Worsnop rightly points out that activists in the women's movement attempted to redefine the problem of surplus women; rather than a problem of numbers, the problem was a lack of women's opportunities.<sup>92</sup> I believe that, in addition, both feminists and antifeminists defined the problem in part as one of national inefficiency. Drawing on the language and the theoretical frameworks of already existing debates about other problematic populations, feminists, instead of refusing to talk about productivity, argued that the society was not providing women with enough opportunities to be productive.

Many writers who wished for changes within the existing economy quoted the census figures and insisted that the problem could not be solved until society was willing to face the facts. Harriet Martineau, in her influential

1859 article about women's work, described "how much good may be done, and how much misery may be saved, by a timely recognition of this simple truth [that women are working]." <sup>93</sup> Martineau explained that

the need and the supply of female industry have gone on increasing, . . . while our ideas, our language, and our arrangements have not altered in any corresponding degree. We go on talking as if it were still true that every woman is, or ought to be, supported by father, brother, or husband. . . . a social organization framed for a community of which half stayed at home, while the other half went out to work, cannot answer the purposes of a society, of which a quarter remains at home while three-quarters go out to work. <sup>94</sup>

"With this new condition of affairs," Martineau explained, "new duties and new views must be accepted." <sup>95</sup>

The power of Martineau's contribution came partly from her insistence, and proof using the census, that half the women in Great Britain were "industrial in their mode of life." <sup>96</sup> The idealized middle-class housewife simply did not exist in the numbers that ignorant readers might assume she did, and Martineau's goal was to determine "how . . . we meet the conditions which stare us in the face." <sup>97</sup> Her emphasis on the practical considerations of wages, specific types of work, and the effects of that work on women's physical and mental well-being gave her credibility with the social scientific and statistical community, and coming as it did at the exciting feminist moment of the late 1850s, Martineau's article helped to spark the intensive interest in women's work that continued through the following decades. <sup>98</sup> But as innovative as she was, Martineau was also drawing on a well-established idiom of liberal political economy that allowed her to see women's work in the context of free trade and national productivity. She believed that if "natural" competition was permitted to operate without interference, and if women were educated as men were for practical kinds of work, then "we would render the powers and the industry of women available to the welfare of society." <sup>99</sup>

Other women's rights advocates similarly saw the census results as a call to action. Frances Power Cobbe, in her article "What Shall We Do with Our Old Maids?" described the increase in single women and asserted that

it is obvious enough that these facts call for a revision of many of our social arrangements. The old assumption that marriage was the sole destiny of woman, and that it was the business of her husband to afford her support, is brought up short by the statement that one woman in four is certain not to marry, and that three millions of women earn their own living at this moment in England. <sup>100</sup>

Cobbe challenged the idea that single women were a problem population that must be eliminated. She spoke sarcastically of women's "offense," compared

the way they were spoken of to the way criminals were discussed, and lamented the way "old maids are lectured on the very improper position."<sup>101</sup> In Cobbe's opinion, the blame was especially misplaced because the problem actually stemmed from men's unwillingness to marry. Large-scale emigration schemes paralleled the transportation of criminals, and by refusing to open remunerative and respectable professions to women, Cobbe said, society was condemning old maids to "transportation or starvation."<sup>102</sup>

Finally, in a powerful reinterpretation of the surplus woman problem, Jessie Boucherett, in her essay "How to Provide for Superfluous Women," argued that the real issue was the supply and demand of certain groups of people, not their numbers. Boucherett argued that the problem of the unsupported woman arose from male jealousy in the labor market, not from the numerical surplus of women itself, and she declared that "the national plan at present adopted in England for providing for superfluous females, is that of shutting them up in workhouses."<sup>103</sup> As long as they were forced to be useless, she said, single women would continue to be redundant. Boucherett's goal was to make single women more useful, not to simply transport them from one place where they were not wanted to another: "Let us, then, proceed to consider by what means we can provide for the superfluous women in England, since it is evident we cannot hope to get rid of them."<sup>104</sup> In her mind, improving education and opening up more careers to women "would put an end to superfluous women altogether, by converting them into useful members of society."<sup>105</sup> She also suggested that more men should emigrate in order to do the jobs involving hard labor in the rural colonies, and leave the professional jobs in Britain open to women. Distinguishing between the terms "excess" and "superfluous," Boucherett argued that if her solution were enacted, then Britain "would at last contain a vast excess of women and a prodigious number of single women, but there would not be one superfluous woman, as every one would be valuable in the labour-market."<sup>106</sup> Prohibiting women from supporting themselves, she said, was to impose unnatural restrictions instead of allowing competition to proceed: "The plan then which I advocate for providing for superfluous women is that of allowing them to engage freely in all occupations suited to their strength."<sup>107</sup> Boucherett turned the emigration scheme on its head, challenged the entire notion that gender ratios had to be relatively even, and suggested that a large female majority in Britain was a perfectly acceptable solution to the problem of unemployment.<sup>108</sup>

Although those in favor of expanding women's spheres were increasingly visible, the solutions they advocated were not easy to enact. The reformers assigned themselves the difficult task of trying to make traditionally degrading positions respectable for middle-class women, and their attempts were frustrated by the fact that options other than marriage were sometimes seen as last resorts even by some of the feminists themselves. Many of the women's rights advocates argued publicly that women's most natural place was in the home and that work should only be for single women.<sup>109</sup> Whether out of genuine belief or rhetorical flourish, they tended to assume that women who



were lucky enough to be supported by their husbands would have no reason to choose to work, and that women were inherently most useful within domestic situations or in public positions that required domestic qualities, such as philanthropy, nursing, and teaching. Harriet Martineau, for example, asserted that "every girl has an innate longing...for the household arts, if nature had but her way."<sup>110</sup> Women who had been brought up to think that working was both degrading and unpleasant could not be expected to jump at the opportunity to work, and it would take a serious readjustment of both opportunities and values to make singleness a truly desirable option.

In 1869, the women's rights advocate Josephine Butler published her edited collection, *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture*. In the introduction to the book, Butler made explicit the connection between the plight of the single woman and her feminist agenda. She pointed out that "a much greater number of women must support themselves now than has been the case at any other time," and she asked both for an opportunity for these women to avoid poverty and disgrace, and for them to be able to feel as though their existences were worthwhile.<sup>111</sup> She admitted that custom was strong and that for society to accept that women could act in new ways would be difficult, but she insisted that current social conditions made the changes necessary. The "constantly reiterated assertion that 'Woman's sphere is the home,'" Butler explained, was uttered "in the face of the great facts of society as they lie confessed before us, is to a great extent wholly inapplicable, and assumes the character of a most ungentle irony."<sup>112</sup> Butler insisted that everyone ought to be permitted to contribute in some way to the national interest, but that in the current state of things, single women were denied this right. Single women's "unapplied existences" and their "demand for a place in God's order of society" could not be addressed without fundamental changes.<sup>113</sup> "I cannot believe," Butler wrote, "that it is every woman's duty to marry...our unmarried women will be the greatest blessing to the community."<sup>114</sup> Butler's explicit demand for an expansion of the acceptable roles for women was inseparable from her belief that everyone ought to be a contributing member of society.

Although usually defined in statistical terms, the surplus woman problem was not primarily a numerical one. Commentators were not only interested in the fact that there were more women than men, they were also making a judgment about which women were redundant, and they were trying to find ways to either make these women productive or to exclude them from the population. In a society where women were expected to marry, it was not just any 500,000 women who were superfluous, but specifically the single women. Old maids thus became a problematic group that was to be carefully examined by commentators and statisticians. Cobbe pointed out in 1862 that bachelors simply were not spoken about in the way that single women were: "*Their* moral condition seems to excite no alarm, their lonely old age no foreboding compassion, their action on the community no reprobation."<sup>115</sup> Having a surplus of women was a problem only because women were defined in regard to their ability to marry and they were seen as unproductive when

they did not marry. This was because it was not only cultural values that were at stake but also reproduction.

### **Women and the Strength of the Nation**

In 1859, *The Saturday Review* published its own take on the single woman question, titled "Queen Bees or Working Bees?" The writer refused to acknowledge a change in female roles as a possibility, fearing that "all our social habits should be changed."<sup>116</sup> The author also insisted that for a government to provide women with alternatives to marriage was to encourage a flawed social state for "women labourers are a proof of a barbarous and imperfect civilization."<sup>117</sup> By allowing single women to support themselves, the state would perpetuate a situation that should not have been occurring in the first place, and alleviating the symptoms without addressing the root of the problem ultimately would do more harm than good. Like Greg, this writer believed that providing alternatives to marriage was simply to create more redundant women: "It is not the interest of States, and it is not therefore true social policy, to encourage the existence, as a rule, of women who are other than entirely dependent on man as well for subsistence as for protection and love."<sup>118</sup> The writer rejected female independence because it discouraged marriage, and not only was "married life . . . woman's profession," but a woman who failed to marry "has failed in business."<sup>119</sup> "The greatest of social and political duties," claimed this writer, "is to encourage marriage. The interest of a state is to get as many of its citizens married as possible."<sup>120</sup>

As a large population came to be seen as crucial to maintaining Britain's military, economic, and imperial power, marriage was viewed as ever more central to the strength of the nation. During the 1850s and 1860s, British people discussing the census began to use language surrounding the reproduction of the race that was very similar to the language later used by eugenicists, and women were deeply implicated in the new understanding of national strength. Women had to be mothers, so that the British race could be exported around the world, and their work as mothers would therefore be a vital contribution to the national and imperial economies. It was only through marriage that population growth could be sustained.

As we have already seen, the interrelated questions of population, procreation, and class were thorny ones in nineteenth-century Britain. Fears of overpopulation, even at their height, were always class-specific; people in the middle and upper classes were not expected to limit their reproduction. Malthus's call for "moral restraint" was aimed at the poor who had no means to support large families of children. Among the urban poor, one observer commented in 1850,

Their passions being early roused, all the circumstances which restrain the abandonment to their gratification being wanting, there being neither

moral restraint, prudential consideration, nor self-government, females are early surrounded by families of children.<sup>121</sup>

Contradictory ideas about working-class women's duties were evident: women were supposed to use moral restraint, despite the constant assertion by middle-class observers that domesticity was the most virtuous state for women, and despite the fears that circulated about the immorality of unmarried and working women.

Unlike working-class women, however, middle-class women were clearly informed of their duties. We have seen that productivity was of central concern to those who wrote about single women, and the census, by defining women's work, was crucial in framing the terms of the debate. Edward Higgs, in his study of the categories with which nineteenth-century census takers labeled women's work, has found that "in broad terms, women tended to be defined as dependents, whatever their productive functions, whilst men were classified according to the nature of their labour."<sup>122</sup> In 1851, however, motherhood was explicitly categorized as work for the first time. The new method of classifying the occupations upheld the ideology of marriage that so firmly underpinned the census and its analysis.

The listing of occupations in the first census caused confusion, in part because of the different ways in which enumerators described women's work. While some wives were classed with their husbands as involved in either agriculture or manufacture, most were classed in the third occupational category, which included those who were not involved in either trade. The census takers were at this point interested in communities more than in individuals, and the fact that men and women may have done different things with their days seemed irrelevant. Thus, in 1811, 1821, and 1831, the census takers asked about the occupations of families rather than the occupations of individuals. What was important, they believed, was the mode by which the family and the community sustained itself. By the 1830s, however, the notion that the family supported itself as a whole, with a single occupation, was becoming obsolete. By the beginning of the Victorian era, many men and women were leaving the home to work in factories or as other sorts of wage laborers, and in cases where this was not necessary, the woman usually stayed at home while the man worked.

When the census of 1841 asked about the occupations of individuals for the first time, women and men were asked to separately state what they did, the assumption being that their occupations might well have been different. The instructions on the 1841 forms, however, advised householders that the "profession &c of Wives, or of sons or daughters living with and assisting their parents but not apprenticed or receiving wages, need not be inserted."<sup>123</sup> When the results were tabulated, wives and mothers, as well as children, did not constitute their own occupational "class," but were simply described as unclassified. This meant that the 1841 census report on occupations listed 7,846,569 "persons classified" and 10,997,865 as the "residue of Population

not classified."<sup>124</sup> It is evident that many women who in fact were working outside their homes for wages were counted here simply as wives. In 1841, the only substantial group of female workers that was categorized as belonging to the wage economy was domestic servants, whose unique role as essential female workers I have already addressed.<sup>125</sup>

Creating a clear and accurate categorization of occupations was one of the largest challenges for the census takers, and Farr was always especially interested in improving and simplifying his system. In 1851, he divided the population into 17 different occupational classes, and for the first time, one of them comprised "persons engaged in the Domestic Offices, or Duties of Wives, Mothers, Mistresses of Families, Children, Relatives."<sup>126</sup> This did not solve the problem of accounting for all the wage labor that women did; in fact, it probably tended to discourage such labor from being listed. If women were irregularly or seasonally employed, or even if they or the "heads" of their families simply considered their work in the domestic realm more important than the wage work they did, such work may not have wound up on the census forms at all.<sup>127</sup> But for the first time, the census explicitly described the job of wife and mother as productive labor.

In the 1851 report, Farr took the occupation question primarily as another opportunity to dwell on domesticity. As he explained, the fifth class of the new classification system comprised "a large number of the population that have hitherto been held to have no occupation; but it requires no argument to prove that the *wife*, the *mother*, the *mistress* of an *English Family*—fills offices and discharges duties of no ordinary importance."<sup>128</sup> This was because "the most important production of a country is its population."<sup>129</sup> Producing a strong population that could compete on the world stage, however, called for more than simple procreation. Middle-class women were required to be wives and mothers both so that the population could grow and so the nation could maintain its moral strength and its moral superiority.

Census Commissioner Horace Mann, who wrote the report to accompany the 1851 census of education, called for improvements in female education:

Considering how vast an influence is exercised by the female character upon the general disposition of society, it cannot but appear of very great importance that the future wives and mothers of the people should be qualified by sound and healthy education, continued for the longest practicable period, to exert a softening and an elevating influence upon their partners and their offspring.<sup>130</sup>

The fact that many female paupers become prostitutes was especially alarming because of "the preponderating influence which female example and female morals exercise over the social progress of a nation."<sup>131</sup> And the fact that women worked at all outside the home caused great anxiety during the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>132</sup> Farr explained that "in districts where women are much employed from home, the children and parents

perish in great numbers.”<sup>133</sup> Women from more humble backgrounds had always worked, but as the preindustrial household economy was replaced by an industrialized economy, women were leaving home in ever greater numbers. Anna Davin’s work on motherhood at the turn of the twentieth century has demonstrated how children’s moral and physical health, and therefore the health of the nation, was considered the responsibility of mothers.<sup>134</sup> We in fact can see the signs of such anxiety about national health, as well as the implications for mothers, as early as the 1850s.

To the wife, mother, and English family were thus attributed both a large population and a virtuous one, and as Farr explained, “The occupation of wife and mother and housewife is the most important in the country.”<sup>135</sup> As always, he praised the English institution of marriage in comparison to others: “Under the institution of marriage...this country has a population of much higher character than countries where polygamy prevails, where the wife is confined at home, and where the management of the household in all its details...belong to the husband.”<sup>136</sup> Farr claimed that when St. Paul said “I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house,” he “lays down for the women...their substantial business; which cannot be neglected without imminent peril to their children,—to the nation of the next generation.”<sup>137</sup> Farr thereby confirmed the sanctity of the mother who cared for her children, and he also noted that races that neglected their children tended to disappear: “Under such circumstances monogamic nations inevitably fall in arrear, like the races who practice polygamy.”<sup>138</sup> So while Farr and other census takers always moved fluidly between statistical analysis and moral commentary, in an age so concerned with racial competition, the clearest evidence that they found for the superiority of English marriage were comparative rates of population growth.

By 1861, marriage seemed even more obvious as a focus of investigation. The 1861 census report explained that

marriage is of so much importance in every civil community that no Census is complete in which the conjugal condition is left undistinguished. Yet it was strangely omitted in the Census, and was only discussed by speculative writers unacquainted with the facts, until 1851 when the conjugal condition of the people was first inquired into, and the results were published.<sup>139</sup>

The 1861 results showed an increase in marriage rates since 1851, and Farr expressed great satisfaction over the advance.

This rapid rate of increase in the married part of the English population at home will dissipate the fears of those who entertain any apprehensions that Englishmen of the present day are less disposed to contract marriage, and to take upon themselves the duty of heads of families, than their ancestors. The increase of families living in the healthy condition of

matrimony is chiefly the cause and partly the result of the prosperity of the country.<sup>140</sup>

There were still more spinsters than bachelors in Britain, a problem Farr attributed to the fact that "the arrangements to enable men to take wives out as emigrants are defective."<sup>141</sup> Rather than simply useless, however, unmarried people could more optimistically be viewed as "reserves": "Those who dread the depopulation of England will observe with satisfaction the resources which the country commands in this reserve both of spinsters and bachelors."<sup>142</sup> It may have been unfortunate that more people were not already married, but it was also true that the great "reserve" served as a guarantee: "The perpetuity of the British race is thus secured against all contingencies."<sup>143</sup>

As we have seen, British liberals after 1851 felt justified in their urbanization, industrialization, and increasing population because they had avoided the perils of revolution. The far lower rates of growth in the more agricultural countries of France and Ireland, combined with what many British people viewed as the political and economic disasters that those nations experienced in 1848, served as a vindication of the British way of life. In 1851, Farr suggested that France's low birth rate came from faulty marriage laws and customs—particularly the fact that the age of majority was 25, so people were marrying late in life.<sup>144</sup> This meant that the government had the ability to influence even something as personal as marriage. "By raising or depressing the age of majority," Farr explained, "the legislature then has the power to exercise considerable control over the population."<sup>145</sup>

If the census takers were to be believed, the ideal of the family united all classes of society. "The importance of the duties of a wife are seen in the Anglo-Saxon labourer's cottage," Farr wrote, "and are still more strikingly displayed in higher classes."<sup>146</sup> Values such as health, morality, order, and religion were all, according to the census takers, dependent on the state of marriage in the nation. Marriage was "the state of complete social development," for individuals as well as for countries.<sup>147</sup>

The surplus woman problem must be tied back to the more general fear of surplus that was most prevalent during the 1820s and 1830s. When surplus ceased to be a problem and population came to be seen as one of the most important productions of the country, women who were not reproducing became the ones who were producing nothing of value, and were themselves therefore labeled as surplus. The census allows us to understand the surplus woman problem in the context of discussions surrounding the economic, moral, and political health of the nation. Almost all the participants in the surplus woman debate claimed that unproductive women were a national problem, and that solving the problem would benefit the nation. The difference lay in where the solution to the question of women's work was to be chiefly found: within metropolitan society, or in the larger empire.

## 6

### “Sprung from Ourselves”: Counting Race at Home and in the Colonies

Nor is the interest in the information herein furnished confined alone to ourselves as Colonists. Such information becomes national property, as a contribution—to the general fund—...In these figures, our Island adds *its* quota to swell the vast and accumulating mass of Statistics now in-gathering, under Imperial auspices, from the remotest regions—Statistics which will be viewed as a monumental record—valuable, because authentic—of the might and resources of that extended Empire, in whose unity and prosperity we all feel a deep and an abiding interest.

—Census of Prince Edward’s Island, 1861<sup>1</sup>

The census, I have argued, played a major role in allowing British people to visualize their nation in new ways. The precise borders of the nation, however, were fluid and shifting, and as global communication and migration increased over the course of the nineteenth century, new ways of understanding those borders emerged. Britain’s large, diverse, and scattered Empire was also counted by census takers, and the census data helped British people to visualize their Empire, like their nation, as a vast and shifting aggregate in which different kinds of people moved and interacted with one another. In this chapter, I will discuss the administration of the census in Ireland and the colonies as well as British understandings of racial demographics during the nineteenth century. By examining British interpretations of colonial statistics we can gain insight into the tensions within British national and imperial identity, particularly as they related to racial proportions in both metropole and colonies.

The ways in which British people understood their Empire were varied and complicated.<sup>2</sup> The Empire might at times have been seen as an extension of Britain and at times as quite separate. In some contexts, British people distinguished the different colonies from one another with great subtlety and complexity, while in others they viewed the Empire as a whole without much variegation. But as transportation and communication improved, the census served as yet another technology that brought the Empire together. The census helped British people make sense of a world in which large-scale migration was the norm, and census questions about birthplace and race in

both Britain and abroad were indicative of the confusion and interest that such migration caused.

Victorian census analysts did not, in general, believe themselves to have the same internal “national” divisions as many other European countries. The debates at the International Statistical Congresses of the mid-nineteenth century suggest that while the German and Austrian governments were deeply concerned with linguistic and cultural difference within their borders, the British government was, with one important exception, largely uninterested in such questions. What was understood as racial difference mattered within Britain as it related to Irish immigration to England and Scotland. But in the context of the expanding Empire, racial proportions “at home” became inextricably linked to racial proportions across the Empire. As the fear of overpopulation gradually gave way to eugenic language surrounding the reproduction of the race, census analysts came to believe that strength on the world stage would depend not only on a large and productive population at home but also on racially “healthy” colonies. By the 1850s, many British people viewed the world as one in which different races competed with one another for dominance. The census, therefore, helped to define racial identities as well as national, religious, occupational, and local identities.

The question of how large a role race played in British people’s understandings of their Empire has received renewed attention since the publication of David Cannadine’s *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*.<sup>3</sup> Cannadine argues that race took second place to class divisions in the minds of British administrators, and that in most colonial contexts, the Empire was both ruled and imagined as if it were an extension of Britain’s individualized social hierarchy. Examining the census categories that British rulers created in and for the colonies provides a lens into this debate, because it indicates precisely what types of distinctions administrators considered important. A summary of these distinctions suggests that understandings of colonial hierarchies varied greatly from place to place, and class, race, religion, and other categories of analysis were all considered important in certain contexts.<sup>4</sup> While Cannadine is right to insist on close examination of local hierarchies rather than broad generalizations about race, race did play an important role in nineteenth-century understandings of national and imperial populations. The details of social hierarchy were different everywhere, but one way for British people to imagine their Empire as a whole was in terms of racial proportions of people.

Colonial census-taking, in addition to providing British administrators and the British public with information about the colonies, also affected the lives and the identities of colonial subjects. In recent years, colonial census-taking has received attention from historians and anthropologists, who have often emphasized the effects that the censuses had on those being counted. In his study of the census in India, Bernard Cohn argues that the objectification of Indian culture that the censuses taken by the British represented affected



the ways in which Indians understood their own history and society, and it helped make Indian society objective to Indians.<sup>5</sup> Scholars have also noted that colonial censuses helped to create national identities that contributed to colonial nationalist movements.<sup>6</sup> But while some of the sources that I examine were originally produced in the colonies, I am primarily concerned with British governmental and public understandings of racial demographics. This is not a study of the census's effects on colonial subjects, nor is it a comprehensive survey of the census in each of the colonies. Rather, I am interested in what the colonial censuses can tell us about British understandings of demographics within their Empire, and in the relationship between these understandings of the Empire and understandings of the nation.

### The Irish and Colonial Censuses

Once census-taking began in Britain it was not long before administrators saw its potential usefulness both in ruling the colonies and in determining ground for future colonial expansion. But until 1861, when the process was at least partially standardized, the population of Britain's many colonies was counted sporadically and haphazardly. Colonial censuses were usually done on the initiative and authority of the colonial governor or some other local administrator, or occasionally at the request of a government minister in London. They were often simply manuscripts sent to London for only a few people to read. The questions asked and the distinctions made were largely at the discretion of whoever was taking the census, and were dependent on local issues and the specific concerns of local administrators.<sup>7</sup>

The British government and its servants in the colonies often began with an assumption that non-European countries did not take censuses themselves, and because of their supposedly uncivilized nature, were most likely opposed to census-taking. Whether for that reason or on more simple administrative grounds, census takers in the colonies usually did not ask questions directly of the population the way enumerators did in Britain. As C. A. Bayly has demonstrated in his book about information gathering in British India, the processes by which colonial administrators and rulers obtained data relied greatly on local cooperation and local methods.<sup>8</sup> Any sense that the colonial censuses ought to follow a British or European model (asking certain set questions) was not voiced until the 1850s, and so the early colonial censuses all look very different from one another. Often, censuses were accompanied by maps or descriptions, including judgments about different groups within the society, and the returns addressed not only people but also land, livestock, manufactures, and commerce. And just as the statistical movement in Britain helped make the collection of data a public project, statistics in the colonies were sometimes collected by people who did not work for the government. During the first decades of the nineteenth century, studies of specific colonies such as Walter Hamilton's 1820 *A Geographical*,

*Statistical, and Historical Description of Hindostan and the Adjacent Countries* began to include statistics along with topography, economics, and history.<sup>9</sup> We can thus see the gathering of statistics in the colonies as part of a much broader project of information gathering, which happened in specific ways in colonial settings.

Despite the local variety, I would like to make a few broad claims about nineteenth-century census-taking in the colonies. Firstly, despite fears of opposition from native subjects, government officials had the power to take far more extended and potentially unpopular censuses in the colonies than at home. While colonial subjects may at times have successfully resisted census-taking or contributed in their own ways to information-gathering projects, these largely subordinate populations, usually without political representation or a central organ such as the press to make their concerns heard, had little ability to influence the specifics of the census. David Kertzer and Dominique Arel argue that “what distinguished colonial from non-colonial censuses... was that the formulation of categories in the colonies was unilaterally done by the ruling officials, while European categories... were already being negotiated, to some extent, with social groups.”<sup>10</sup> Secondly, the notion that a healthy society was one made up of healthy proportions of people living together in harmony extended from Britain to the Empire as a whole. As the century progressed and the nature of Britain’s Empire changed, the colonial censuses became more concerned, in many cases, with the proportions of different groups of people that were increasingly understood as races, although “race” continued to mean radically different things in different contexts.

The fluidity of the conceptual borders of the nation is exemplified by Ireland, which was always understood and governed as somewhere between metropole and colony. The Irish census was taken separately from the English, Welsh, and Scottish censuses, and it required a separate bill to be passed in Parliament. Unlike the censuses in the more far-flung British colonies, however, the Irish census was regularized during the first few decades of the nineteenth century, and was usually taken in conjunction with the British census. E. Margaret Crawford has summarized the development of the Irish census in her book *Counting the People: A Survey of the Irish Censuses 1813–1911*, and I will not examine it in detail here.<sup>11</sup> But a few points are worth mentioning, especially concerning the discussions of the Irish census within Britain. As always, Ireland’s position as a subordinate colony yet one that was partially represented in the British parliament made for a unique administrative apparatus. The Irish census was planned and taken in Dublin, with only minimal oversight from the government in London, and Ireland had its own census commissioners who corresponded with the British commissioners but maintained their own control and published their own results. The British census reports and the British press often discussed Irish census results, but while they sometimes described the population of Ireland as central to the British nation, at other times they spoke of the Irish census as though it were the

census of a foreign country—albeit a country closely connected to and implicated in British affairs.

No census of Ireland was taken when the first British census was taken in 1801, but during the following years various politicians lamented the omission and pushed to remedy it. In 1806, one MP “expressed his wish to assimilate the laws and regulations of Ireland to those of this country, as far as it was just and expedient,” and insisted that all countries needed a census.<sup>12</sup> The English machinery that had been used in 1801 was not available in Ireland, however, for no registration of births and deaths existed there, and there were no overseers to act as enumerators. It was clear that the census in Ireland would be a more technically difficult task than the census in Britain had been. During the first decade of the British census there was never enough momentum for an Irish one to be taken.

In 1812, the possibility of taking a census in Ireland was again raised in Parliament. John Newport

expressed his surprise that a measure should have been so long deferred which would enable parliament to ascertain the number of persons for whom it was to legislate. Twice since the Union had the population of Great Britain been calculated, but in this respect, as well as in others, the natives of Ireland had been totally neglected.<sup>13</sup>

Newport claimed that the government was afraid of knowing how many Irish there actually were, and he urged that a census be taken immediately.<sup>14</sup> But when an Irish census was finally taken in 1813, it was considered a failure. Robert Peel, the Secretary for Ireland at the time, told the House of Commons that he had no results to place before it, for some counties had not sent returns at all and the returns that had been compiled were full of errors.<sup>15</sup> The first census that was actually completed was taken in 1821, and from that point on the Irish censuses coincided with the decennial British censuses. Significantly, the 1821 census of Ireland asked for substantially more information about the population than its counterpart in Britain did, including the name, age, and occupation of every Irish resident, relationships within families, the quantity of land held by each family, and the numbers of schools and pupils. As in Britain in 1821, the information was collected verbally by enumerators who traveled door to door.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the greater success of the 1821 census, Henry Hardinge claimed in 1830 that no accurate results had yet been returned for Ireland, and Daniel O’Connell, a leading parliamentary advocate for repeal of the Union, argued that the most recent attempt had greatly underestimated the Irish population. Politicians attributed the continuing problems with the Irish census to a lack of local organization and administrative centralization, and in 1831 the government simplified the census somewhat by requiring the names of household heads only rather than those of every inhabitant. As in Britain, the 1841 census in Ireland marked an important turning point and set the

basic format for many years to come. At this point, commissioners in Dublin were appointed to undertake the work, and the enumeration itself was done by officers from the recently established Dublin Metropolitan Police Force and the Royal Irish Constabulary. As in Britain, forms were distributed to every householder for the first time, and the enumerators gathered information verbally only from those who were unable to read or write. The census was taken on one day, as it was in Britain, and it asked for the name, sex, age, marital status, occupation, birthplace, and level of literacy of every person. In addition, the Irish census gathered information about the numbers of days of agricultural employment, wages, property, quality of housing, farm size, and numbers of livestock. Again, the census in Ireland asked many more questions than did the simultaneous census in Britain, and some of those questions, especially those related to property and wages, would have been considered intrusive and utterly outside government jurisdiction in Britain. In 1844, a General Registrar's Office for Ireland was established, and the 1851 census was the first to be taken under its control. The census was taken on the same day as the British census, but was again far more extensive in regard to the information gathered. The census asked about education, emigration, quality of housing, and sickness, in addition to the questions asked in Britain.<sup>17</sup> It also asked about language, and sought to determine the numbers of people who spoke only Irish and those who spoke both Irish and English.

One of the most controversial issues for the British government was whether to gather information about religion on the Irish census. When the census of 1813 was proposed, some hoped that the "number of persons attached to each religious sect [would be] specified."<sup>18</sup> O'Connell, who consistently fought for more power and privileges for Irish Catholics, suggested before the 1831 census

that this census should be made to discriminate, which the former did not, the religion of the inhabitants.... As far as he understood the relative numbers of the different persuasions, it was impossible he thought that the temporalities of the Irish Church should remain as at present.<sup>19</sup>

Others, especially those who supported the Union, argued that asking about religion in Ireland would result in unnecessary competition and ill feeling between Catholics and Protestants. It would also, as O'Connell suggested, indicate the extent of the Catholic majority, a highly politicized question in a country where a largely Catholic population was subject to a state-sanctioned Protestant church. In the end, the government did gather information about religion in Ireland at various moments, although the only time that it was systematically gathered as part of the census was in 1861, at the very moment when the religious census in Britain was rejected. Various politicians, both those who were opposed to taking a religious census in Britain and those who supported it, expressed satisfaction that one would be taken in Ireland. One MP commented that "in Ireland no difficulty whatever would exist in

obtaining a religious census. Every one had a religion of some kind, and no one was ashamed to avow it."<sup>20</sup> Another suggested that if information about religion was to be gathered in Ireland then it ought to be gathered in Britain too: "He objected most strongly to the principle of legislating for a common Empire upon different principles."<sup>21</sup>

Census administrators in London, including George Graham and William Farr, also favored centralization and standardization.<sup>22</sup> Graham believed that the census would be most informative and most efficient if it was taken using the "same system on all essential points throughout the United Kingdom," although he agreed that it might be beneficial to ask for additional information in Ireland as well. In 1861, he quoted the president of the recent International Statistical Congress (Prince Albert himself), who had said that a lack of uniformity "diminishes [the census's] value for general purposes."<sup>23</sup> Census Commissioner James Hammack, prior to the 1861 census, also hoped that "Ireland would no longer be treated rather as an independent state than as an integral part of the United Kingdom."<sup>24</sup> An Irish census taker wrote more cautiously that Ireland and England should be as close as possible "until the laws habits and customs of the two countries shall become sufficiently assimilated to allow full uniformity to be attained in the Census Returns."<sup>25</sup>

Even a brief survey of the administration of the Irish census indicates that the British government did not develop census-taking in London and extend it outwards. Even though it took several decades for the census in Ireland to be established, once it was in place it clearly served as a site for the government to experiment with possibilities that would not have been considered acceptable within Britain.<sup>26</sup> Viewed this way, the Irish census could serve as an example:

some of those [improvements] which had been effected in the Irish census returns should be imported into those made for this country; especially that columns describing the size of the dwelling houses and the relative amount of acreage under crops of different kinds should be included.<sup>27</sup>

The sense that the more extensive Irish census ought to function as a model for census-taking makes it evident that despite Ireland's position as a part of the United Kingdom, and despite the control that Irish administrators had over their own census, the Irish census must be understood largely in the context of colonial census-taking. In Ireland, where the population was poorer and less educated than the population in Britain, administrators had the power to design the census in whatever way they deemed fit. In the more geographically remote colonies, the censuses were even more removed from the metropolitan model and even more contingent on local conditions and concerns.

British administrators viewed the colonies in which large numbers of British people were settling as very different from those in which a small number of British people ruled over a large native population. As the settler colonies

gained more independence from the government in London, they also gained more control over their own census-taking, and they used their censuses to assess their own growth and progress in comparison to other colonies and in the context of the larger Empire. Settler colonies could not succeed unless they were desirable destinations and unless the settlers themselves could gain a demographic advantage. It was in this context that European and non-European, or 'white' and 'black' or 'colored' gained potency as categories for understanding the Empire.

In Australia the transition from convict settlement to thriving colony is evident in the censuses. In 1822, a census of New South Wales distinguished between convicts, free settlers, and those who were born in the colony, with various more detailed subdivisions.<sup>28</sup> The population statistics were combined with statistics of revenue, shipping, livestock, and land, as well as the names, expenses, and salaries of British civil and military administrators and "free persons victualled," "prisoners victualled," and "persons not victualled."<sup>29</sup> The document also described "returns made by the Magistrates of New South Wales of persons living upon their own estates and property married and unmarried and their characters," as well as a "return of the number of marriages, births and deaths" and a "return of the number of illegitimate children born in N.S. Wales from the 1 January 1815 to the 31 December 1820."<sup>30</sup> It listed those transported since the founding of the colony, along with their convict status, marital status, land ownership, and "character." Those who were "intelligent," "honest," "industrious," "sober," "decent," and "respectable" were contrasted with those who were "poor," "drunken," "of bad family," "doubtful," "immoral," or "living in a state of concubinage."<sup>31</sup>

The census provides an image of a remote outpost, and those who tabulated the results understood it, in their own words, as "a land of crime."<sup>32</sup> They considered most of the colony's inhabitants to be poor, immoral, and lacking in religion.<sup>33</sup> The emphasis on morality in this early census is understandable given the colony's foundation as a convict settlement. If the colony was to succeed and become more than a prison, then in the minds of colonial administrators morality and respectability were central. By the 1850s, the Australian colonies had a large and diverse population and a new reputation as a thriving destination for emigrants, and questions of racial demographics had overcome questions of criminal proportions. Mid-century censuses counted the various European and Chinese immigrants in comparison with aboriginals. Discussions of these groups in the British press revealed anxiety about interracial sex and the ultimate racial character of the colony, and devoted attention to the question of whether aboriginals were on the verge of extinction.<sup>34</sup>

In Canada, the censuses also changed as the colonies grew, acquired more mixed populations, and eventually gained more independence from the government in London.<sup>35</sup> Early census takers were interested primarily in the proportions of French, English, and indigenous people; these ratios had been important for centuries. An extended census of 1833 counted males

and females, their ages, whether they were single or married, and whether they were deaf, dumb, blind, or insane. The census included statistics of revenue, land, livestock, and immigrants, gathered information about occupation and religion, and noted whether the immigrants were Irish, Scottish, or English.<sup>36</sup> As representative bodies within the Canadian provinces gained more independence, the censuses were taken over by local authorities, published by those authorities, and sent to Britain only as printed documents.<sup>37</sup> An 1857 census of Newfoundland, for example, was published in the form of an anecdotal history of census administration in the colony.<sup>38</sup> The census was largely concerned with fishing regulations, again indicating the emphasis on local concerns. As Bruce Curtis points out, however, British officials exerted pressure on Canadian administrators to take their census in particular ways and to do it "in concert with the imperial government and other colonial administrations."<sup>39</sup>

In 1861, the British government attempted to take the census in a somewhat more standardized form throughout the Empire, but the individual Canadian provinces maintained control over their own censuses. The Canadian census reports suggest that administrators in the colonies often understood their censuses to serve a similar nation-building role as the census in Britain served; they usually believed that the census would bring satisfaction and a sense of unity to settlers. The 1861 census of New Brunswick was published by order of the provincial government and laid before the provincial parliament, and the census commissioners claimed that "the evidence thus furnished of material progress in our own Province will, we believe, be extremely gratifying to all classes of our people."<sup>40</sup> The census gathered information about the sick and infirm, the blind, deaf, and dumb, idiots and lunatics, immigration, and school and religious attendance. It also provided statistics of crops, livestock, minerals, various industries, and fisheries, as well as information about the proportions of Blacks and Indians in the colonies. The report declared pride in the province's progress in comparison to its neighbors, both among the Canadian colonies and in the United States. Similarly, a census of Prince Edward's Island taken in 1861 listed the total population along with the "excess" of males and the number who were of an age capable of bearing arms. It provided information about the deaf, dumb, blind, insane, and unvaccinated, along with numbers of churches and schoolhouses and information on the religion and birthplace of the inhabitants. It also listed the numbers of people holding land of various qualities, and their acreage, crops, livestock, and manufactures. Enumerators inserted comments about each district, and the census divided the island into counties and electoral districts.<sup>41</sup>

It was precisely because the Canadian colonies were inhabited by white settler majorities that the government in London was willing to give up control of local census-taking, just as it gave up control of other aspects of administration and governance. When the dominion of Canada was formed in 1867, uniting New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Quebec, and Ontario, census-taking was centralized and taken over by the new government.<sup>42</sup> By the 1860s,

administrators in the Canadian colonies believed themselves to be counting not others, but themselves, and as the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter suggests, the census could serve to express both the particularity of the colony and the unity of the Empire. But these censuses were almost always more extensive in the types of information that they gathered than their counterparts in Britain were. In their wide range of questions and categories, they were similar to the censuses taken in places where Europeans were a minority.

In 1831, the lieutenant governor of "Sierra Leone and African Forts" took a "census of population and liberated Africans" either on his own authority or in response to a request from the secretary of state for the colonies.<sup>43</sup> The census listed liberated Africans who were receiving government support, the names of landholders, and the numbers of their livestock. A separate set of tables described the population of Freetown, and distinguished between Europeans, Mulattoes, colonial residents, disbanded soldiers, liberated Africans, and "native strangers."<sup>44</sup> The example is typical in its variety and in the combination of information about the distribution of agricultural resources and the proportions of people. It is also typical in its wide range of categories. While some people were identified by their nationality or race, others were described by their occupation or economic status.

In other places, however, such as the West Indian colonies, racial proportions were understood to be crucial in the earliest censuses. Returns from Trinidad in 1823 included statistics of population, agriculture, manufactures, and the military. The census divided the white, colored, and Indian populations into men, women, boys, and girls, counted the Chinese population, and listed both male and female slaves as either personal or plantation slaves. It then subdivided white people into various European nationalities.<sup>45</sup> The divisions became more specific over the years, and the emphasis on race intensified. A census of British Honduras taken in 1861 listed ages, birthplaces, and races, as well as shipping and other economic statistics. In this case, the racial distinctions were detailed, and the census distinguished between people from different European countries as well as mixed races. The census also asked questions about marital status, disabilities, religion, and occupation. The census report analyzed the incidence of deafness and blindness among different races. The writers of the report said that races and occupations exerted "the greatest influence on the manners and habits of the people," and they believed that "the Census returns are very interesting as they give an insight into the materials...of which colonies are founded, the various places of the human race, and the laws which govern their movements," and that they provided data for the "philosophic statistician."<sup>46</sup>

India was an aberration in British colonial census-taking. No full census was taken there until 1881, because the government administration simply could not cope with the size and diversity of the population. Census machinery used in Britain and the other colonies was not suitable or feasible. But as Bayly demonstrates, information gathering in India had a long and rich



history. Local censuses were taken, sporadically and with mixed success, and they reveal a great deal about the colonial government's concerns in its largest and most treasured colony. At the same time, the absence of a complete census reflects British understandings of India as too large, diverse, and crowded to count, just as it sometimes was thought to be too large and crowded to rule.<sup>47</sup>

During the early nineteenth century, various attempts to estimate the population of India were made; these estimates were often couched in histories and geographic or economic surveys.<sup>48</sup> At the same time, local rulers took occasional censuses on the level of state, city, or town; an example is the "Return of the Population of the Island of Ceylon Compiled from the Separate Returns made by the Collectors of Districts to the Commissioner of Revenue, in pursuance of an order of Government bearing date 27<sup>th</sup> January 1824."<sup>49</sup> This document divided the people of Ceylon into those above the age of puberty and those below it. It also included a "description of Casts of the Population," and distinguished between Europeans, European descendants, and people of various occupations, castes, nationalities, and religions.<sup>50</sup>

In 1846, the East India Company's board of directors called for a census, and one was published in 1847. The population, however, was taken by sampling and estimates instead of by an actual count, and few had faith in the accuracy of the returns. The 1847 census attempted to break down the population into those who were involved in agriculture and those who were not, but it asked for little additional information. In 1857, in the midst of the Sepoy Rebellion, the government again attempted to summarize population data from India. A report printed in Britain listed the area and population of various states, including the estimated population of the "native" states and of French and Portuguese-ruled areas. It divided the population of the British-ruled states into male and female, agricultural and nonagricultural, Hindu, Muslim, and other. Each district, however, had its own divisions. While no religious divisions were listed in Bengal, for example, Bombay was divided into "Hindoos, wild tribes, low castes, shrawniks/Jains, Lingayets, Mussulmans, Parsees, Jews, and Christians."<sup>51</sup> Superimposed on these subdivisions was the more simple division into Hindu, Muslim, and other.

The British hoped to take a full census of India in 1861, but they abandoned the plan because of technical difficulties and because after the crisis of 1857 they were treading carefully and were worried that a census would be understood as an intrusive act.<sup>52</sup> "The Government of India," the writers of the 1861 census report in Britain admitted, "has always been too weak to procure an accurate enumeration of the population, notwithstanding the remarkable and partial success in taking the Census of certain provinces under able administrators."<sup>53</sup> In 1871, more obstacles arose, both from opposition and a lack of personnel, and it was not until 1881 that a full census of India was taken. The local censuses indicate, however, that British rulers in India were especially concerned with the proportions of Muslims to Hindus. Bernard

Cohn argues that “it was felt by many British officials in the middle of the nineteenth century that caste and religion were sociological keys to understanding the Indian people,” and that census takers emphasized caste to such an extent that it may have heightened caste feelings among Indians.<sup>54</sup>

In addition to colonial censuses, the British government and the British public showed interest in foreign population statistics. The government may have been interested in these statistics for various reasons. In some areas, it may have had explicit imperial ambitions, while in other places questions of international diplomacy or commercial interests were at stake.<sup>55</sup> As the British consul in Greece wrote to Palmerston in an 1849 letter accompanying population returns,

The perpetual expansiveness of the British population creates a never-ceasing inquiry after new fields for the exercise of our national industry; and while our merchants and manufacturers require a correct knowledge of the habits and customs of nations, to guide them in their speculations, there are also frequently others who, averse to permanent emigration to our distant colonies, are seeking employment in foreign countries.<sup>56</sup>

This particular set of returns was couched in a “report on the Population of Greece, and on the education, religion, and domestic Customs of the Greeks,” and was in fact a general survey of the commerce, agriculture, laws, and everyday habits of Greece.<sup>57</sup> The census of Greece had not been very accurate in the past, the Consul explained, and “a question of considerable importance, as relates to the future prospects of Greece, is the amount of Greek population not included within the boundary of the new kingdom.”<sup>58</sup> In this case, perceived national or racial divisions had obvious implications for international diplomacy and geopolitics.<sup>59</sup>

Statistics of the Empire and of foreign nations were often repeated in the British press, but rarely with the extensive commentary that accompanied press coverage of the British census. Usually newspapers simply provided the population of a colony as a whole, sometimes divided into different races, and perhaps combined with statistics about revenue, shipping, or agricultural production. And for most of the first half of the nineteenth century, the censuses in the colonies tended to be less totalizing than the British census. While they were often concerned with proportions of people, the practical concerns were, due to the exigencies of rule, local rather than “national.” But by mid-century, the Empire as a whole, which was in some ways understood as a macrocosm of the nation, was coming to be seen as an aggregate that could be studied as one.

As the Empire became more whole in the minds of many British administrators, calls for a more consistent and standardized census were heard. This was a mammoth task however; the technical difficulties of taking a census under such radically different circumstances as the British Empire represented were immense. In 1842, the government gathered a summary of the population

and trade of all the “foreign possessions of the British Crown,” with information about when each colony was acquired, its population, government, exports, imports, and shipping. The Empire was divided broadly into the West Indian colonies, the North American colonies, and “others.” The population was counted afresh only in a few colonies, however; elsewhere it was simply taken from the most recent census. The results, then, were far from standard or comparable.<sup>60</sup> William Farr was always convinced that colonial statistics needed to be gathered more consistently. He believed that statistics had important implications for war and international relations as well as colonial governance, and in 1861 he explained that “it is desirable on many grounds that the population of the Queen’s dominions should be enumerated simultaneously.”<sup>61</sup> Census Commissioner James Hammack agreed that “by uniformity of plan, not only at home but in our colonial possessions, we might obtain results capable of being summed up for the entire British Empire.”<sup>62</sup> According to this view, the colonies could be absorbed into the increasingly centralized and standardized metropolitan government, making the Empire understandable as a single unit (figure 6.1).

Yet the difficulties remained. As a British consul in the Middle East explained in 1861, “from the peculiarly oriental repugnance of the natives to registration or the counting of their numbers, there is a great difficulty

TABLE XXVI.—POPULATION of the BRITISH EMPIRE, 1861.

	AREA.		POPULATION.
	Square Miles.	Square Kilometers.	
ENGLAND, HER COLONIES AND POSSESSIONS -	4,420,600	11,418,886	174,389,308
UNITED KINGDOM (including Army, Navy, and Merchant Seamen at Home and Abroad) -	121,115	313,675	29,321,288
BRITISH COLONIES AND POSSESSIONS (exclusive of Military) -	3,365,763	8,716,970	9,496,669
BRITISH INDIA (exclusive of the British Army, 62,893, stationed in India) -	933,722	2,418,241	135,571,351
European Possessions -	1,163	3,012	397,743
North American Colonies -	512,193	1,326,526	3,333,507
West Indian Possessions -	106,449	275,692	1,114,508
African Possessions -	130,756	338,644	1,004,595
Islands in the South Atlantic Ocean -	7,647	19,805	7,426
Possessions in the Indian Ocean, and Hong Kong -	25,485	66,003	2,363,767
Australia and New Zealand -	2,582,070	6,687,288	1,322,937
Total -	—	—	9,544,483*
Deduct Military stationed in the Colonies -	—	—	47,814
Population of British Colonies and Possessions (exclusive of Military) -	—	—	9,496,669

\* In most instances the Native Population, the Military, and persons on board vessels in the Navy and Merchant Service, are included in the Colonial Censuses.

**Figure 6.1** Summary of the Population of the British Empire, 1861, from *Census of England and Wales for the Year 1861: General Report*, Vol. III (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1863), 72.

in obtaining any correct statistics."<sup>63</sup> In addition to local resistance, the census in the colonies was hindered by supposedly demanding terrain, lack of personnel, and other technical obstacles. In 1851, the *Manchester Guardian* explained in an article about the preparations for the census that "while this is going on in England, the same course will be pursued as far as is practicable in the colonies, where there will not be the same facilities for obtaining information as at home."<sup>64</sup>

Yet at the same time, and perhaps in contradiction to these perceived difficulties, a great many questions were asked in the colonies that were not permissible in Britain. Census results were also more explicitly used for purposes of efficient rule. The fact that questions could be asked in the colonies that could not be asked in Britain was for advocates of census expansion simply another reason that more should be asked at home. Farr pointed out, for example, that the question about religion on the Australian census of 1861 was taken "without any of those deplorable consequences which were anticipated from the same kind of inquiry in England."<sup>65</sup> But whether an expanded census at home was desirable or not, it is evident that the British public had a much more powerful voice in matters of census-taking than their colonial counterparts.

Nineteenth-century British administrators, both in Britain and in the colonies, often described the census as central to technological progress and scientific modernity. In fact, some British census takers saw themselves at the vanguard of a European project to spread science throughout the wider world. Farr pointed out that "among uncivilized tribes the enumerations are more generally confined to the 'fighting men.'"<sup>66</sup> Yet, he declared grandly, "the English occupy, fortunately for science, a large portion of the finest parts of the world; and up to a certain point, ... they are, like every governing race, statistical."<sup>67</sup> The statistics gathered by colonial administrators were then to be sent home to the metropole, which, as the epigraph to the chapter indicates, was both the source and the ultimate destination for imperial statistics. Yet the colonial censuses of the nineteenth century reflect not only the dilemmas that the British faced in governing their Empire but also more abstract concerns about worldwide racial demographics.

### "Peopling the World" and the English Race

In 1853, the *Manchester Guardian* wrote that Britain's enormous population increase since 1801 "indicat[ed] the transition from a kingdom to an Empire."<sup>68</sup> British census analysts often expressed pride in the fact that the colonies were growing and that British people were settling all over the world. At first, emigration to the colonies was considered helpful as a means of ridding Britain of its surplus population, but as Malthusian fears gradually gave way to eugenic language surrounding the reproduction of the race, emigration also came to demonstrate Britain's material power and worldwide influence. "As a race," explained the *Times* in 1861, "we assign a high place to the command to increase and multiply and replenish the earth. We consider it our vocation to people the wilderness."<sup>69</sup>

The size of the Empire, not only in terms of land and resources but also in terms of population, was increasingly understood to mean strength in a competitive world. Pride in the size of the Empire was related to pride in the fact that members of the British, or in many cases the English, "race" were everywhere, and discussions of the demographic strength of the Empire in the middle of the nineteenth century often revolved around race.<sup>70</sup> Many British people believed that they were "exporting" the Anglo-Saxon race all over the world. As race became an increasingly important element in discussions of national strength throughout Europe, and social scientists theorized about the development and possible extinction of different races, many British people accepted the notion that their Empire would be strong only if certain racial proportions existed.<sup>71</sup>

Census analysts were not always clear or consistent about what kinds of demographics made the Empire strong. As statistical data from the colonies began arriving in Britain more regularly during the 1830s, the most immediate response was usually simple satisfaction in the Empire's size. In 1841 the *Times* wrote proudly,

It will be found that the subjects of the British Crown are more numerous than that of any other civilized monarchy or republic on the face of the globe....we may safely say, that Her Majesty Queen Victoria is the sovereign of a hundred millions of subjects—a larger portion of the human race than has ever obeyed any one European sovereign since the downfall of the Roman Empire.<sup>72</sup>

Size alone, however, was not enough to ensure the health of the Empire. Just as society in Britain could not be healthy if the proportions of people were not appropriate, the Empire was also thought to need appropriate proportions of people. One way for British people to visualize their Empire was as a large body, with a metropolis and extremities that all had to be in good health. This was simply the domestic social body writ large, extending over the entire world. What were considered healthy demographic ratios, however, differed greatly depending on the nature of the colony or region in question.

During the early nineteenth century, proportions of people were thought to be especially important in the settler colonies. In 1809, the *Quarterly Review* described "settlements,...[that] resemble garrisons rather than colonies; their white inhabitants forming scarcely a tenth of their total population."<sup>73</sup> Particularly problematic were the West Indian colonies, which had been founded by large numbers of white settlers, but as a result of the slave trade had acquired a substantial non-European majority. In Barbados, the *Quarterly Review* author wrote, security itself was threatened by the disproportion, because plantation owners were sometimes forced to delegate authority to their slaves:

Whenever a society consists solely of free men vested with authority, and of mere slaves, a great numerical disparity between these two classes is the

worst evil that can befall the community. It has an obvious tendency to produce insurrection on one side, and harshness on the other.<sup>74</sup>

What were understood as healthy racial proportions, however, were also important for the same reason that gender ratios were important: because of the need for the reproduction of the race. The emphasis on reproduction becomes evident when we examine analysis of the mid-century census results in the Australian colonies. While in some contexts, as we have seen, census takers made detailed distinctions between people from different European countries, in the Australian colonies Europeans were described as making up a single race in terms of their ability or likelihood to breed with one another. In a discussion of the ratio of the sexes, the many Chinese male immigrants were simply discounted; the assumption was that they would not marry white women.<sup>75</sup>

But in a world where many people were traveling long distances, the racial proportions were constantly shifting. If the Empire was a macrocosm of the nation, and both needed healthy distributions of people, then migration was central to both national and imperial stability. In the Victorian era, migration was a fact of life, and the 1851 census report noted that

the Irish have entered the British population in large numbers, and great numbers of all the British races have annually left the United Kingdom; settled and multiplied into millions in the United States, in the colonies of North America, of Australia, and of South Africa.<sup>76</sup>

In 1861, the census commissioners wrote that “the people of these islands are more moveable than other nations,” and in reference to the British citizens who were living abroad at the time of the census, British people were found “in the strangest places.”<sup>77</sup>

Migration was considered necessary because it distributed labor where it was needed. Discussions of surplus, primarily during the 1820s and 1830s, often relied upon the assumption that unemployment could be remedied by simply relocating people to where there was work. This was true on an Empire-wide level as well as within Britain, and the importation of East Indians to the Caribbean, for example, indicates that the British government was well aware of the potential for increased productivity that such redistribution of labor could bring. But at the same time, migration caused anxiety to people who, perhaps remembering a more sedentary and local society, believed that people “belonged” in certain places. The question about birthplace, first added to the census in 1841, reflected this anxiety, and can be understood in part as an attempt to pin down an overly mobile population. Hundreds of thousands might live in Manchester and Liverpool, but where, the census asked, were they *really* from?

Discussions of both the metropolitan and the colonial censuses constantly reflected this anxiety. Census takers believed that migratory or seasonal

workers, for example, would skew the results. Rather than simply accepting these workers as moving, many people maintained an understanding of localities as stable places, and they believed that “at home” was something that could be determined. In reality, people of many social classes traveled a great deal in Victorian Britain; the wealthy were as likely to be away from home on extended social visits as laborers were to be searching for work. But because of pervasive fears about vagrancy, crime, and a lack of social control, concern tended to focus on the working poor.

Technical debates about when the census was to be taken also were indicative of anxiety about migration and strength. Before the 1841 census one MP worried that if the census were taken on July 1 people would be away at the quarter sessions.<sup>78</sup> Seasonal migration for harvest time, particularly among the Irish, was also thought to be misleading, and in 1850, Baron Monteagle worried that the Irish census would not be comparable with earlier ones because more Irish would be at home in March than in July, when many of them were away harvesting in England.<sup>79</sup> In 1861, the *Manchester Guardian* noted that people who were leaving for the countryside at the time of the census were “lost to the town in the numbering of the population.”<sup>80</sup> People protested against these “distortions” for different reasons, often because they were worried about the numerical strength of various groups. But such discussions betray the assumption that constant moving was not entirely natural, and that one of the goals of the census was to determine where people actually belonged.

Large towns, with people constantly coming and going, were especially confusing to those who found sedentary populations easier to understand. London, said Farr, “contains natives of every county of England and Wales, of every part of the United Kingdom, and of all the principal countries of the world,” and the *Manchester Guardian* wrote “only 645,000 men and women would be left in London, if the 750,000 recruits marched back to their homes.”<sup>81</sup> Although such a statement clearly served as an expression of pride in London’s greatness, the very fact that the writer was considering the possibility of people going back “home” is significant. While London might not have been what it was without its immigrants, those immigrants were also thought to have more genuine homes elsewhere.

The anxiety became even more acute when the migrants were of different “races.” British understandings of race were complex and shifting, and it is evident that the word could be used in many ways. But while Victorians’ use of the word “race” was famously fluid, their understanding of an individual’s race tended to be rigid; one’s race certainly did not change simply by moving from one place to another. And if race was permanent, then the census could be, according to some, misleading. From the very beginning of the British census, the government was interested not only in the numbers of people living on British soil but also in their origins.<sup>82</sup> “The mere population of the natives was not the only thing to be considered,” one MP pointed out in 1800.<sup>83</sup> “It was well known that, for some years past, there had been a

great number of foreigners in the country, who consumed their proportion of its annual produce.”<sup>84</sup> Fifty years later, the notion that the census ought to distinguish natives from foreigners remained common: before the 1851 census one MP said that “as a very great number of foreigners would probably be in London at that time, care must be taken not to include them in the census.”<sup>85</sup>

Within Britain, the concern about migration centered primarily on poor Irish laborers, who were often thought to threaten the social and political stability of British cities. Irish immigration to Britain had begun centuries earlier, but it grew exponentially during the 1820s, 1830s, and 1840s. Most Irish arrived first in Liverpool, from where they migrated to Glasgow, Manchester, and London. Irish immigrants were active in the Chartist movement and in the trade unions, and although tension and sometimes outright hostility between British and Irish workers certainly existed, the fear for many middle-class observers was that the Irish, as the most desperate segment of the working class, would be the ones to ignite a class-wide revolt.<sup>86</sup> The census question about birthplace may have originated partly in response to anxieties about Irish immigration, but its results provoked further unease and debate.

Many observers focused on the Irish as both symptom and cause of the urban problems that they encountered, and they almost invariably emphasized numbers. James Kay and Friedrich Engels both recognized the important link between Irish immigration and industrialization itself, for as Kay argued, “The rapid growth of the cotton manufacture has attracted hither operatives from every part of the kingdom, and Ireland has poured forth the most destitute of her hordes to supply the constantly increasing demand for labour.”<sup>87</sup> Engels agreed that “the rapid extension of English industry could not have taken place if England had not possessed in the numerous and impoverished population of Ireland a reserve at command,” and William Farr wrote that “wherever employment is active the Irish flock, and they abound in the large towns.”<sup>88</sup> In times of economic recession, however, the demand for labor decreased, and the result was thousands of unemployed. Many British observers believed that in times like these, the Irish were taking jobs needed by the British working class, and were thus contributing to the problems of surplus population, unemployment, and social unrest.

Furthermore, many observers believed that the Irish brought the morals and the standard of living of the British working class to an even lower and more miserable level. The Irish, wrote Engels,

bring all their brutal habits with them among a class of the English population which has...little inducement to cultivate education and morality...The Irish have...discovered the minimum of the necessities of life, and are now making the English workers acquainted with it.<sup>89</sup>

One result of this phenomenon was economic: the Irish brought wages down. “The condition of the lower multitude of English labourers approximates



more and more to that of the Irish, competing with them in all the markets," Thomas Carlyle explained.<sup>90</sup> While English workingmen's wages were still higher than wages in Ireland, "with the arrival of every new steamboat," they sank closer to Irish levels.<sup>91</sup> The Irish were especially active in unskilled jobs requiring manual labor, and certain jobs "count hordes of Irishmen among their number, and the pressure of this race has done much to depress wages and lower the working class."<sup>92</sup> Engels, however, saw a positive light to all this. He believed that if the Irish had lowered the condition of the English working class, they had also furthered the development of the labor movement.

Kay, on the other hand, saw no benefit to Irish immigration. Perhaps feeling obliged to explain the exception that he was making to the tenets of capitalism, he argued that the "introduction of an uncivilized race" did not increase the overall wealth of the society, even though the labor was cheap and liberal economic theory presupposed that labor should circulate freely and that competition was advantageous. Irish labor was cheap only, Kay insisted, because of the savage habits of the people, and "when they assist the production of wealth, therefore, their barbarous habits and consequent moral depression must form a part of the equation."<sup>93</sup> After a few years, the Irish "become burdens to a community whose morals and physical power they have depressed."<sup>94</sup> Both in economic and moral terms, the Irish would cease to be worth it: instead of contributing, they would decrease the productivity of the social body as a whole.

Many of the "brutal habits" that Engels noticed among the Irish related to domestic life. Statisticians conducting urban studies often pointed out that the Irish lived in more crowded and filthy conditions than the English did, and that the majority of people living in cellars were Irish. The Irish would eat, sleep, and live in a single room, observers noted, and many insisted upon keeping a pig in that room as well. What the Irish were most noticeably lacking, it appeared, was the supposedly innate English love for a peaceful and pleasant home.<sup>95</sup> Comfortless homes resulted in poverty and disease, and Engels pointed out that "whenever a district is distinguished for especial filth and especial ruinousness, the explorer may safely count upon meeting chiefly those Celtic faces which one recognizes at the first glance as different from the Saxon physiognomy of the native."<sup>96</sup> A lack of cleanliness was "the Irishman's second nature," and while it would not be so "injurious in the country, where population is scattered," it "becomes terrifying and gravely dangerous through its concentration here in the great cities."<sup>97</sup> Carlyle similarly wrote that "crowds of miserable Irish darken our towns."<sup>98</sup>

Until 1841, information about the large proportions of Irish in British cities was anecdotal. However, the statistics on birthplace that were acquired beginning in 1841 only confirmed the numerical language that people had already been using. One of the most recurrent points that commentators made about the Irish throughout the 1830s and 1840s had to do with their overwhelming numbers and their overcrowding. The Irish were repeatedly described

in terms such as “armies,” “swarms,” and “droves.” “Every year has brought armies of the Irish hither,” wrote Engels.<sup>99</sup> They arrived “on the deck of a steamship on which they are often packed like cattle,” and when they landed they “insinuate themselves everywhere.”<sup>100</sup> They then allegedly spread their habits of overcrowding among the English working classes. Engels argued that “the custom of crowding many persons into a single room, now so universal, has been chiefly implanted by the Irish immigration.”<sup>101</sup> Perhaps most important, the Irish supposedly procreated faster than the English, and were now spreading this “imprudent” habit to the English.

Such language, evoking “swarming” animals rather than people, dehumanized the Irish population and made their contagious threat to British society especially vivid. But the census did do more than provide statistics to back up the subjective evidence: it was crucial in its ability to describe the Irish as a certain proportion of the national population. The census indicated that Irish immigrants made up large fractions of certain cities, and it was only when this fraction was high that “the whole character of the working-class assimilates a great part of the Irish characteristics.”<sup>102</sup> In small numbers, the Irish could do no harm, but in “armies” or “droves,” they could threaten the very character of the English people. The Irish were threatening not only because of who they were but also because there were too many of them.

The census question about birthplace, however, could do only so much in describing Irish immigration. Children born in England of Irish parents were registered as English in the census, because the census asked only about birthplace, not ancestry. Analysts often described this as misleading, and suggested that there was no way to determine the “real” number of Irish people in Britain. Furthermore, the supposed Irish propensity to wander—to arrive in one city but then travel to where there was work—made them seem temporary or impermanent, and at times they were spoken of as a naturally “migratory” people.<sup>103</sup> The other “races” of Britain (Welsh, Scottish, Anglo-Saxon) were equally unidentifiable with the current census machinery. As Farr wrote in the 1851 report, “No attempt has been made to ascertain the number of the people of different races that can still be distinguished by their speech or by their characters.”<sup>104</sup>

Ireland’s ambiguous position on the outskirts of the nation continued to place it at the center of debates about national strength throughout the nineteenth century, and the question of racial difference remained a shifting and confused one. Observers such as James Kay, Friedrich Engels, and Thomas Carlyle believed that the Irish were racially different from and inferior to the English, but they also expressed anxiety about the possibility of these two races becoming amalgamated; the English workers, polluted by the contagion of Irish immigration, would become as bad as the Irish, and individuals would no longer be recognizable as either Irish or English. As Thomas Carlyle pointed out, “having a white skin and European features, [the Irish] cannot be prevented from circulating among us at discretion.”<sup>105</sup> Census categories

were one strategy used to keep the Irish recognizable and separate from the English, but these categories did not quite succeed in alleviating anxiety.

Yet even if migration was problematic, it was also necessary.<sup>106</sup> Farr wrote that “a free circulation of the people is now necessary in Great Britain, to meet the varying requirements of the Public Industry.”<sup>107</sup> Furthermore, an increased knowledge of one’s own country and potentially one’s Empire was coming to be understood as a positive, because of the role that such knowledge played in creating and maintaining national unity. Farr wrote in the 1851 report that as a result of migration “the whole of the inhabitants will gradually grow acquainted with the different parts of their native land, to which, as well as to the town or village of their birth, it is desirable that the people of the United Kingdom should be attached.”<sup>108</sup> Finally, if race was permanent, then migration could indicate the expansion of the race and could therefore bring great pride. When the 1851 census indicated that there were more British people abroad than there were foreigners in Britain, commentators expressed satisfaction in this further proof of the size of the British population.<sup>109</sup> If British people remained British wherever they went, then Britain was constantly growing and expanding. This fairly rigid understanding of race and nationality is made especially clear by British discussions of the United States.

Since the United States took its census only one year before the British did, comparisons between the two were obvious. As the *Illustrated London News* wrote in 1851, “[We can] compare their material and moral progress with our own, and to take warning, should we on any great point find them wiser or more fortunate than ourselves.”<sup>110</sup> The United States held a unique place in the British imagination: no longer colony, yet not quite foreign, this new country had “sprung from ourselves,” and the two nations were viewed as inextricably linked by language, culture, race, and economic ties.<sup>111</sup> The United States had been founded by British settlers—settled in the same way that the British were now continuing to settle Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Southern Africa. Thus, British discussions of their Empire during the Victorian period often blurred the distinction between their own colonies and the English-speaking world more generally, and British people tended to view not only white settlers in their own colonies but also white Americans as extensions of themselves. The British press spoke of “emigration which has spread our race and language over half the world,” and while independent for many years, the United States was included in this conception.<sup>112</sup>

All things American were therefore of interest to Britain’s educated public, but the census was especially so. British people were especially impressed by the evidence that the U.S. census provided of astounding growth in the population and economy, growth that outstripped even that of Britain itself. British people were proud of U.S. growth: if Britain was to be surpassed as the nation with the fastest growing population, it was best that the country surpassing it was the one most closely tied to Britain. “The survivors and descendants of the races” made the British population even larger, even if those descendants

were by now in the United States, and a large American population was therefore a source of satisfaction.<sup>113</sup> As the *Manchester Guardian* remarked in 1854, "Extraordinary as was the increase of the population of the United Kingdom in the past half century, its magnitude appears less remarkable when the American is placed beside it."<sup>114</sup> The American census indicated an "increase that may fairly be ranked as one of the most remarkable phenomena in the modern history of the inner life of nations."<sup>115</sup> The *Westminster Review* also showed its pleasure in American growth and progress:

In surveying the progress of our state and nation, we cannot throw aside our brethren's interests and honours, as a bad government threw off their allegiance and duty; and when we have to tell of advance and improvement at home, we have hearty pleasure in showing the far more striking progress of those who are placed in a newer position, and under fresher influences, than ourselves.<sup>116</sup>

If British emigrants were still British, whether they settled in the colonies or the United States, then the vast numbers of people leaving the British Isles during the period from 1820 through 1860 could be considered not a loss, but a success of "colonization." The 1851 census report asserted that emigration "cannot exhaust the vast resources of these islands, but will rather extend, as they have done hitherto, the commerce, manufactures, and numbers of the nation from which they sprang, and from which they can never be divided in interest, language, or affection," and "armies of peaceful emigrants from the United Kingdom every year crossed the Atlantic in increasing numbers to swell the States' Census."<sup>117</sup> The 1861 report explained that "to determine the increase of the English race the emigrants must be taken into account."<sup>118</sup> And in 1853, a *Manchester Guardian* report on the census expanded on the same theme:

Contemporaneously with the increase of the population at home, emigration has preceded since 1750 to such an extent, as to people large states in America, and to give permanent possessors and cultivators to the land of large colonies in all the temperate regions of the world, where, by a common language, commercial relations, and the multiplied reciprocities of industry, the people of the new nations maintain an indissoluble union with the parent country.<sup>119</sup>

When British writers emphasized their connection with the United States, they rhetorically enhanced the strength of their Empire. In 1851, a journalist for the *Times* wrote, "With North America and many other portions of the earth's surface occupied by our own flesh and blood, speaking our language and inheriting our laws, if not our allegiance, we must ever occupy an honourable and useful position."<sup>120</sup> The deliberate blurring between the political entity of the United States and Britain's own colonies in North America and

elsewhere made the Empire seem larger and more important. And the image of Britain as the mother country was taken very seriously and was frequently repeated. The article went on to explain that

the results of the British and of the American census, appearing as they do together at this moment, bring this relation of the parent State and her numerous progeny into unusual prominence. . . . We can never forget that it is an Anglo-Saxon population which is thus expanding itself, and that the laws and language of the new Empire have descended from our own.<sup>121</sup>

While British commentators were sometimes vague when praising American population growth, they clearly viewed only white Americans as descendants of the British. In a discussion of the U.S. census of 1850, the *Times* explained that if the black population was subtracted from the total,

this would leave the American citizens of British or other European extraction about 20,000,000. It thus appears that there are about 52,000,000 persons of British extraction, or of some other European race amalgamated with them, occupying the best geographical positions in the world, possessing the largest maritime trade and the most profitable manufactures, enjoying the freest institutions, commanding the vastest extents of fertile territory and the finest climates, and receiving the services of many millions of useful auxiliaries, of various races and hues, living either in comfortable slavery, or willing subjection, or dignified alliance.<sup>122</sup>

Such hyperbole regarding the Empire is familiar to historians of Victorian Britain. But this particular interpretation of the numbers augmented the British Empire by many millions, bringing satisfaction to imperialists and indicating that certain kinds of racial categories were at least in this context trumping political or geographical categories. Yet while the British constantly pointed out that race was one of the things that they shared with the United States, this emphasis belied the radically different racial situations in the two countries. The United States, although settled by British people and sharing language as well as other perceived cultural characteristics with the mother country, had its political independence and in some people's minds its own political and social disgrace in the form of slavery. Thus, statistics of race were another aspect of the U.S. census that was of great interest to British people. The British recognized that rates of regional population growth and racial proportions in the United States would have profound implications as tensions over slavery grew.<sup>123</sup>

Both the British government and the wider public participated in discussions of American racial statistics. The Foreign Office collected maps of North America that indicated the racial demographics, connected to political representation and wealth, of various states.<sup>124</sup> A map that was produced as the

American Civil War began showed the states that had seceded, and listed the proportions of whites, free blacks, and slaves in free states, slave states, and territories.<sup>125</sup> When British newspapers displayed U.S. statistics to their readers, they followed the U.S. census itself in making a division between whites, free blacks, and slaves. British journalists were interested in the proportional strength of these groups and the rates at which they were increasing.<sup>126</sup>

Some people in Britain were opposed to slavery not only because of its immorality but also because they believed that a large proportion of black people was a threat to order. Blacks, wrote an author for the *Quarterly Review* in 1845, are "elements of discrepancy in the composition of a state. The coloured race pervades the whole Union, and being more equally spread, the virus may be considered as diluted by diffusion."<sup>127</sup> The only cause for relief seemed to be that whites were increasing faster than blacks were (because of immigration). Current ideas about racial survival and extinction suggested that if blacks were not as demographically significant as whites they would not survive as a major element in the population. We can see how the British concern with social harmony and their anxiety about maintaining correct proportions, issues central to their own census, influenced their understandings of the demographic situation in the United States. It is also clear that as tensions grew and the American Civil War began, much of the British public saw itself as deeply implicated in and affected by events across the Atlantic. As the *Leicester Guardian* wrote in September of 1861, "every tide of events [in the United States] have been anxiously watched, and that not on account of the great commercial interests involved but a feeling that those taking part in the contest are bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh."<sup>128</sup>

As I pointed out earlier, however, the emphasis on shared race ignored the glaring differences in the racial situations of the two countries, blurring the lines between mother country and colonies, nation-state and Empire. The U.S. racial situation was, at least on the surface, more comparable to the situation in the British Empire as a whole than it was to Britain itself. Yet here too, things were different, because the abolition of slavery in the British colonies had occurred in 1833. And if Britons were always ready to express pride and complacency in their Empire, they also had anxieties about it, particularly in regard to the economic plight of their West Indian colonies. Fears that productivity had decreased there since abolition helped to gradually change British ideas about race, as a liberal concept of the equality of all races largely gave way after 1850 to an idea of the inherent inferiority of nonwhites.<sup>129</sup> Economic competition with the United States was therefore inevitably tied up with the issue of slavery. While many British people saw their own nation as the morally superior one, the question of black productivity was thought to be very much unresolved.

Furthermore, by the 1850s, cries for political representation were being heard both at home and in the colonies, and numbers again played an obvious role. The large black majority in Jamaica and other West Indian colonies seemed to many British people to forecast political and economic chaos. After

the Jamaica rebellion of 1865, the shift in attitudes toward race seemed to be complete, and British colonial policy shifted in tandem.<sup>130</sup> The centrality of representation and power in the history of the U.S. census, therefore, spoke to growing British concerns about their political system at home and in the colonies. The United States, with its peculiar circumstances arising from slavery as well as its historical and economic ties to Britain, could serve as a mirror—albeit a distorted one—for anxieties about race and labor within Britain’s postabolition Empire.

It was clear to British imperialists that the Empire provided great opportunities for racial expansion in addition to military, political, and commercial expansion. The 1851 census, wrote the *Illustrated London News*, would reveal statistics of emigration, colonization, and the manufactures “which carry our name, and fame, and usefulness to the remotest regions of the globe.”<sup>131</sup> And in these remote regions, “there is so much waste and unoccupied land yet, that it is rather to be described as an untenanted wilderness than overcrowded with human beings.”<sup>132</sup> Thus, by the time that a large population had come to be considered positive, the immense population increases at home and abroad were thought to complement one another and together to contribute to Britain’s greatness. This was an image of an Empire (and a former Empire, in the case of the United States) that was united by free trade capitalism as well as a shared culture and race. In 1854 Farr remarked proudly that

the United Kingdom is now covered by *twenty-eight millions of people*; and has thrown out towards the west a long line of colonies, and independent states, that speak her language, that preserve the purity of the English family, that have lost none of the courage or industry of their race.<sup>133</sup>

It was a goal “that the British race, growing better and greater, may increase in numbers at home, and continue to send out every year thousands of new families to the colonies.”<sup>134</sup> Population growth at home and abroad was one and the same. The domestic discourse of proportions was thus reproduced both on the level of individual colonies and on the level of the Empire and even the world as a whole.

The discussion of racial proportions in the colonies happened in the context of broader debates about the nature of the Empire and about whether colonies ought to be sustaining themselves economically and militarily. If, as many Britons argued, the colonies should be self-sufficient, then they would need a large population to defend themselves and to cultivate the land. After the Indian rebellion of 1857 it became evident that the existing policy of ruling hundreds of millions of potentially hostile subjects with only tens of thousands of British men was no longer safe for the government. So just as the renewed international tension of the early 1850s brought a large domestic population back into favor, problems of governance in the colonies helped transform emigration and settlement from a mode of disposing of surplus to a signpost of national strength.

Yet despite the general shift toward the embrace of a large population in the metropole, the British did not completely give up their faith in emigration either as a means of redistributing surplus labor or of disposing of those who were considered incurably unproductive. Even when overpopulation was ostensibly no longer a problem, the British were still thankful to have somewhere to put their undesirables. In 1861, the *Times* wrote that “vast cities have risen up in the Antipodes, peopled by men and women who would otherwise have pressed on the common resources of home.”<sup>135</sup> And as is evident in discussions surrounding the census, some elements of the English race were thought to be of higher quality than others.

### **The Strength of Races and the Improvement of the English Race**

Many British observers took their expanding Empire to mean not only military strength but also racial strength, and by the 1850s discussions of the relative strength of different races were common in the British press. While the easiest way to maintain the strength of the race, however defined, was through targeted migration and manipulation of racial proportions, statisticians were also very interested in the possibilities that selective breeding held. As early as the 1840s, statisticians began to use language that was very similar to later eugenic language about the manipulation and improvement of the race. Census questions about health and disabilities as well as numbers more generally addressed both the quality and the quantity of different races, and census takers, who combined knowledge of population with a concern about the strength of the nation, often found the shift to eugenic thinking an easy one.

Francis Galton invented the word “eugenics” in the 1880s, and so it is perhaps anachronistic to describe earlier thinkers as “eugenicists.” When I refer to “eugenic” thinking, I simply mean an interest in selective breeding and in the possibility of racial improvement and racial decline. As various scholars have pointed out, ideas of degeneracy and selective breeding were around long before Galton articulated his theories, and in fact, long before Charles Darwin’s idea about the survival of the fittest. Yet most of the literature on eugenics still focuses on the last third of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, which is indeed when eugenics had its largest following and its most cohesive platform.<sup>136</sup> Eugenics has usually been associated with late nineteenth-century pessimism about industrial and social decline, as well as an increase in international military and imperial competition. But the roots of this pessimism can be found in earlier decades. Looking at discussions about racial strength through the lens of the census allows us to look closely at some of the ideas that anticipated eugenics, and also ties eugenic thinking to general discussions of overpopulation and depopulation.<sup>137</sup> Census takers during the 1850s and 1860s often took the census results as an opportunity to dwell on questions of racial decline and racial improvement.

From the very beginning of the nineteenth century, the press reported foreign census results with the assumption that censuses demonstrated the



relative strength of different nations. The first British census was taken in large part to determine such strength, both military and agricultural. At the same time, it was evident that some people were better for the nation than other people, and a large population could be viewed as positive only if the majority of the population was both productive and peaceful. The concept of surplus arose simultaneously with the census, and a nation's strength was thought to depend on both quantity and quality. National strength could be determined not only through numbers but also through physical and moral characteristics, and as the census expanded it gathered information about more than population, even as population remained central to ideas of national strength.

The relationship between quality and quantity was complicated and often contradictory. In many contexts, national and racial strength continued to be defined in terms of population. As Malthusian fears of surplus ebbed in the 1840s, it became common to compare the population "progress" of Britain with its two greatest rivals, France and the United States. "We have been struck," the *Manchester Guardian* wrote, "with the different ratios of progress in the population of the three most civilized and most powerful nations in the world."<sup>138</sup> According to the censuses, the American population was increasing the fastest, the French population the slowest. Since American growth was considered positive in Britain because of the perceived racial connection between the two nations, the comparison sparked unqualified feelings of superiority: the Anglo-Saxons were gaining strength while their age-old rivals on the continent were weakening. The *English* press, however, often made such favorable comparisons specifically between England and France, and chose to ignore Scotland and Ireland, both of which had lost population in recent years. Commentators dismissed especially Ireland as a special case that did not reflect the greatness of the nation as a whole. In this context, it was not the political entity of the United Kingdom that was important, but the English race.<sup>139</sup>

William Farr was especially fond of comparing British industrial and urban growth with French stagnation. In addition to the standard moral objections to birth control that were common in Britain, Farr condemned it on the grounds of national and racial strength. As John Eyler argues, Farr saw a high birthrate as "a sign of national vigor. . . . The birthrate reflected the manpower needs of nations."<sup>140</sup> In other words, population growth met needs that arose from colonialism, international competition, and industrial growth. But Farr also recognized the possibility of improving the vigor of the nation through means other than that of population growth.

People who worked with the census had the potential to turn into social engineers because of the very nature of their work. Information was being gathered not simply for the sake of knowledge, but so the society could be improved. This improvement was to be primarily social, economic, and moral, not racial. But if different groups of people were understood to have inherent traits and capabilities, it was easy to make the shift. Farr's tendency to use

census data as a basis for meditating about change was obvious throughout his career. After studying the 1851 census results on occupation, he mused that people who worked with animals were “a peculiar race of men; silent, circumspective, prompt, agile, dexterous, enduring, danger-defying men... By their habits many of the class must be well adapted to the purposes of war; they are sometimes idle, and in a militia they could be turned to account.”<sup>141</sup> The example suggests that Farr saw the possibility of rendering unproductive people productive, primarily through an understanding and employment of their supposedly natural capacities.

The census was also linked to conceptions of physical fitness, in part because of the public health movement and the prominence of physicians in the statistical movement. By the 1830s, the suggestion had been raised that the working classes, because of their poor living conditions, were becoming a weak and unhealthy “race.” The fear was not only for their own welfare but also for the future strength of the country, which depended on the labor of healthy people. Friedrich Engels wrote in 1844 that bad food was causing the “enfeeblement of the whole race of workers.”<sup>142</sup> When Hector Gavin published his survey of workers’ housing in 1850, he suggested that urban men were feebler than countrymen, and were thus less fit to fight in wars.<sup>143</sup> In the 1851 census report, which was widely quoted in the press, Farr wrote that “extensive sanatory arrangements, and all the appliances of physical as well as of social science, are necessary to preserve the natural vigour of the population, and to develop the inexhaustible resources of the English race.”<sup>144</sup>

For Farr, disease was not a providential obstacle to overpopulation, but a precursor to racial decline and ultimately, perhaps, racial extinction.<sup>145</sup> Disease would drain the national energy and destroy the aggregate strength of the population. If deaths were reduced, on the other hand—eminently possible to Farr’s thinking—then the society could “increase the vigour (may I not add the industry and wealth?) of the population in an equal proportion.”<sup>146</sup> Farr urged public health on the grounds that it would “strengthen, and in every respect...improve the English race.”<sup>147</sup> The census gathered statistics on health and strength through its questions about disabilities, and although Farr wanted a far more complete survey of health and sickness in the country, he made use of what information he did have in order to examine national strength on an international level. He commonly made comparisons of blindness and deaf-mute statistics between different regions in the United Kingdom and between different countries in Europe, and analyzed the various proportions in order to conclude that some countries were both healthier and more productive than others.

Questions of strength also took on more explicitly racial aspects. As early as the first decade of its existence, the Statistical Society of London was interested in the relative height, weight, and physical strength of the English, Scots, and Irish. The 1851 census showed that the “Celtic” race was declining in Scotland and Ireland, and one observer took this as “an illustration of

the general fact, of which the slow increase of the liberated African in the United States is another illustration, that an inferior race of men can only be sustained in conjunction with a superior race, by being taken under its especial care."<sup>148</sup> As Patrick Brantlinger has argued, the notion of extinction was central to Victorian understandings of race, and the conception of the superiority of certain races relied on both quantity and quality. Farr wrote in the 1851 report that "the character of every race of men is the real limit to its numbers in the world."<sup>149</sup>

The capacity of the census to gather detailed information about both the physical and moral traits of the population was certainly recognized, although it was not put into practice to the extent that some would have liked. In 1860, the Home Secretary spoke teasingly of "one enthusiastic ethnographer [who] was anxious to have returns of the number of people with different coloured hair, that some idea might be formed of the relative proportion of the Saxon and Danish races."<sup>150</sup> The possibility of selective breeding, and its connection to census taking, was also recognized. In an 1836 letter about the poor law to Cornwall Lewis, James Kay wrote that

in the absence of the workhouse system, and under the encouragement of out allowance, marriages would occur among epileptics, cripples, the victims of scrofula, and depravity—the aged and helpless would continue to marry young women, and propagate a miserable offspring.<sup>151</sup>

In the midst of medical debates about the nature of hereditary disease, Farr wrote that improvements in the science of animal breeding were related to the science of population, and that those studying human heredity could draw inspiration from those who were involved in the breeding of livestock.<sup>152</sup> Farr wanted a register of sickness and strength within Britain, as well as information about the physical characteristics of different races and classes within the Empire.<sup>153</sup> He also wanted to produce a list, using census data, of the insane people in Britain. And it was not only that the unhealthy ought not to reproduce; interracial mixing could also, potentially, harm the future of the English race. In 1851, Farr reassured his readers that "Scotchmen, leaving their fair countrywomen behind them, marry English wives, under the English marriage law; to which no exception can be taken in England, as neither race thereby suffers any deterioration."<sup>154</sup>

Racial degeneration, however, according to Farr's understanding, could occur through circumstances as well as biology. Farr believed that even strong and healthy races could degenerate in tropical climates and in other unhealthy places, presumably including unsanitary cities in Britain.<sup>155</sup> Like many nineteenth-century social scientists, Farr also believed that people's morality and level of civilization were affected by climate. Thus, a detrimental environment joined interracial sex and the reproduction of unfit people as possible dangers to the future of the race. The premise behind all of this discussion was that manipulating racial quality was possible, whether by

controlling migration or by controlling reproduction.<sup>156</sup> What Farr ultimately wanted would encompass both things:

The strength, the rate of increase, and the colonization now proceeding can be sustained by the marriages of only a part of the population; hence... If by any judicious means the increase of the incurably criminal, idle, insane, idiotic, or unhappily organized parts of the population can be, without cruelty, repressed,... the character and good qualities of the race will be immeasurably improved, without checking the tide of population or the increase of numbers. Hitherto the flower of the British youth has been in ignorance sent to the alluvial lands of the tropics, where our race cannot live, or where it is inevitably degenerated, while, in defiance of the principles of physiology, and of the doctrines that are inculcated on the breeders of the inferior animals by the Royal Agricultural Society,— convicts have been thrown broadcast over some of the healthiest colonies in the world, and may now, without due precaution, multiply at home, like the forçats in France, and prove a leaven of social disorder and disorganization.<sup>157</sup>

Since Farr specifically mentioned the possibility of cruelty, he clearly understood the more sinister implications of what would come to be called eugenics. But Farr believed that reproduction could and ought to be controlled for social ends.<sup>158</sup> Farr believed that “to a nation of good and noble men Death is a less evil than Degradation of Race.”<sup>159</sup> And a wise legislature “deems the physical perfection of the people the sole basis of their moral and intellectual greatness.”<sup>160</sup>

For the most part, Farr saw the information that he gathered as a cause for pride rather than alarm; the 1850s and 1860s were generally a time of optimism in Britain. But Farr also believed that there was always room for improvement, and in Eyler’s words, he “essentially welcomed the competition between races as leading towards the overall elevation of humanity.”<sup>161</sup> Selective breeding could be mobilized in the service of optimism as well as pessimism, and the census takers were well placed to act as agents in this process. In his article “How Should We Do the History of Statistics?” Ian Hacking suggests that the role that statistics has always played in distinguishing the “normal” from the “nonnormal” meant that statistical reasoning was greatly implicated in the rise of eugenics.<sup>162</sup> According to Hacking, “Statistics of populations and of deviancy form an integral part of the industrial state.”<sup>163</sup> The statistical training and interests of early eugenicists, including Galton, provide evidence for this link. The census was also implicated in eugenics because of its longstanding association with surplus, productivity, and national strength. The census not only distinguished the positive from the negative, it also defined these categories as proportions of the national and imperial populations.

\* \* \*

There were many reasons why eugenics, and related notions of racial improvement and selective breeding, became popular in the middle and late

nineteenth century. But I would like to at least tentatively suggest that as the Empire became less peripheral to British society, it also became harder to deal with problem populations by simply sending them to the Empire. Australians of European descent no longer wanted to be associated with a remote convict settlement; they preferred to see themselves as inhabitants of a prosperous and respectable colony that was mainly white and was central to the Empire. Some way other than sending "surplus" populations abroad thus had to be found to improve the British population and to deal with the undesirables. The discourse about healthy proportions in the metropole was gradually applied to the very places that had traditionally been part of the "solution" to domestic problem populations, opening up the need for a new kind of solution in Britain.

While the census did different kinds of work in Britain, Ireland, and the colonies, the various sites do need to be understood in a single framework. The censuses in Ireland and the colonies raised questions about racial proportions that were directly related to concerns about proportions of people "at home." Irish migrants in Britain, for example, came to be understood as a racialized underclass, who suggested that the borders of Britain were becoming dangerously fuzzy. Inside the ambiguous relationship between Britain and Ireland, therefore, was the fear that the colony might colonize the metropole. At the same time, British people were leaving the metropole to settle elsewhere, sometimes in the colonies and sometimes in other places, particularly the United States. In the colonies, the metropolitan concern about the threat to racial purity was translated into concerns about racial proportions. The racial distinctions that mattered were different everywhere; the differences between English, Scottish, and Irish, for example, became far less important in a context where whites were trying to gain a demographic advantage over blacks.<sup>164</sup> At the same time, there were practical issues that drove the concern to manufacture demographic proportions that ensured the future of colonial rule. The future of the "race," whether defined in terms of its Englishness, Britishness, or Europeaness, seemed ensured by colonial settlement and reproduction both in the colonies and in the United States.

As ideas of racial competition and survival became more central, both the administration and interpretation of the census reflected the ideological shift. While earlier census takers had had a wide range of categories available to them, and were as likely to describe people by occupation or religion as by race or nationality, the censuses of the 1860s brought race to the forefront.<sup>165</sup> In as diverse a configuration as the British Empire, race could play a unifying role, making the whole thing complete and recognizable, and allowing observers to focus on simple questions, such as how many British people there were in comparison to non-British people. The idea of Britishness, of course, could be defined in cultural, political, or linguistic terms as well as in racial terms. But the image of the mother country and its "progeny" most often relied on a notion of blood ties that survived changes of place and were extended through biological reproduction. Migration was threatening and helpful for the same reason: because people could move but they

could not change their innate origin. It was not only the colonies, then, that were “sprung from ourselves,” but the anxieties about healthy proportions as well.

If the census was a tool of governmental and extragovernmental power, it in some ways reached its most extreme form in the colonies. The colonies could be used as a site for the government to experiment with technologies and methods that would not have been accepted in Britain. The alleged colonial opposition to the census can also be understood partly in the context of opposition to the census within Britain. There was an implicit alliance between the colonial populations and the British people who viewed governmental activities such as the census with suspicion. People who opposed the census during the nineteenth century did not necessarily foresee the census leading to a form of population control such as eugenics, but they did believe that the census contributed to problems of alienation and surveillance that they associated with the modern economy and the modern state. And in hindsight, eugenics can be seen as one possible end of the road that census opponents described: they worried about the census’s focus on the health of the collectivity, and about its inability to devote attention to individuals. In the final chapter, I will discuss these anticensus criticisms.

# 7

## Challenges and Alternatives to the Census

What did Mr Fox lecture on about the census; I mean what could he find to say. I can't imagine.

—Elizabeth Gaskell, 1853<sup>1</sup>

As the above quotation makes clear, not everyone shared the British public's fascination with the census. Novelist Elizabeth Gaskell simply could not fathom what might be interesting about the census, and she was not alone. Yet this lack of interest is surprising given both Gaskell's own public concerns and the importance of the census in British public life during the nineteenth century. As I have already argued, many of Gaskell's middle-class, reform-minded contemporaries understood the census as a crucial foundation for the nation's improvement. They believed that by creating understanding and sympathy, the census could create social harmony in a society where it was sadly lacking. Social harmony was Gaskell's aim as well, and at least one of the reasons that she both did the charitable work she did and wrote stories. As is evident from Gaskell's letters and fiction, she found social and political conflict to be among the most heartbreaking aspects of the modern nation. Gaskell, however, like many other writers of her day, called for a solution based in literature rather than statistics. She believed that it was through telling stories not about groups but about individuals that social tension could be described and overcome.

In this chapter, I will examine the opposition to the census that existed during the nineteenth century, as well as some of the alternative methods of describing and improving the social body that people such as Gaskell proposed. Even as the census gained the support of more and more people, others remained skeptical or suspicious of both the motives behind it and its usefulness. The story of the nineteenth-century census is ultimately a success story, in that it came to be embraced and appropriated by a large part of the public and to be understood as a central aspect of modern government. But challenges to the census are worth examining seriously for several reasons. First, among the people who at least indirectly questioned the utility of the census were some of the most influential intellectuals of the Victorian era, including not only Gaskell but also Charles Dickens, Thomas Carlyle, and George Eliot. Furthermore, opposition to the census often reflected unhappiness with

larger forces: the centralization of government, the relationship between the state and private life, the changes in economic and social life that arose from industrialization, and the national hegemony of a capitalist elite. Challenges to the census were therefore not simply part of the ongoing public debate over the expansion and the uses of the census, but a more fundamental critique of nineteenth-century society's rapid transformation.

## Opponents of the Census

In the century between 1753 and 1851, the census was transformed from a symbol of despotism to a source of national pride. But opposition to census-taking did not disappear overnight. The opposition to the proposed census of 1753 came from both rural landowners and the uneducated poor.<sup>2</sup> While the wealthy believed that the census was a sign of government tyranny and that it had dangerous democratizing tendencies, the poor cited examples from the Bible suggesting that census-taking was against the will of God. The descendents of both these anticensus groups continued to make their voices heard during the nineteenth century. Resistance to the census among the poor certainly continued to exist; such opposition seems to have been based on fears of taxation and military recruitment, and it sometimes encompassed traditional religious beliefs about the dangers of census-taking. Opposition also came from those who saw themselves as conservative, who were averse to the increasing interventionism of the government, and who believed the census to be overly intrusive.

By the middle of the nineteenth century those who opposed the census did not receive much of a hearing in the halls of Parliament. In fact, they were often dismissed as ignorant or accused of obstructionism. But they continued to express their opposition, much of which had to do with a distrust of the government and the new industrial and urban elite. As much as the census had been appropriated and embraced by the public, it was still a government project and it represented government power. It had also become associated with political economy, utilitarianism, and the middle class. It tended to be people who felt alienated from that government and from what it seemed to represent who used anticensus rhetoric.

Since the census involved every household filling out a form, it also relied on the cooperation of the entire public. But this process could be hampered by either woeful ignorance or willful subversion. Stories of uneducated people who were ignorant about and frightened of the census abounded in the weeks following census day. These stories came from the mouths of enumerators, police, and educated witnesses, and they leave us with little grasp of the real reasons for opposition or even of the reality of this opposition. Poking fun of the anticensus poor served its own purpose for the census's supporters; it reinforced the notion of the census as a symbol of civilization and modernity. Those who were opposed to it were almost always marked as uncivilized in some way, and often they were also marked as foreign. The 1851 census



report described "a tribe of gypsies [who] struck their tents, and passed into another parish in order to escape enumeration."<sup>3</sup> Others were described as avoiding enumeration because they worried that the census would be used to determine the militia quotas in different areas, which, in fact, it sometimes was.<sup>4</sup> In 1812, Henry Brougham explained to the House of Commons that

when the measure was first proposed, it had to struggle with the prejudices of the people.... Many persons had imbibed superstitious ideas on the subject. They conceived there was an ominous fatality, something extremely unlucky, in numbering the people; and they quoted certain passages from the Old Testament, in support of their opinion.<sup>5</sup>

Opposition to the census was thought to be especially common in Ireland and the colonies. After the 1841 census was taken, the *Times* reported that

the census inspired such feelings of alarm...that the whole country [of Ireland] was illuminated, hill and valley, with lighted firebrands. In the county of Westmeath there was scarcely a head of poultry left alive, an opinion having gone abroad that a tax or rate was to be levied upon them!<sup>6</sup>

The newspaper also described a more serious incident:

An unfortunate constable of police, employed in collecting the census papers, nearly met his death on Sunday morning, whilst engaged on this service in the village of Cabinteely, about four miles from Dublin. The Irish peasantry, at all times unwilling to give a direct answer, have expressed the greatest and most superstitious horror at this "numbering of the people," and to such a pitch did they carry it in the present instance, that the ill-fated policeman, after having collected a number of the papers, was followed by a crowd of persons, who knocked him down, beat him in a most dreadful manner, and totally destroyed the papers. He was brought to the hospital, where he lies in a very precarious condition, having, it is said, received a stab from some sharp weapon.<sup>7</sup>

The opposition of the Irish peasantry could easily, and conveniently, be attributed to their lack of civilization: any more overt political motive for opposition that may have existed was ignored by the British press.

As the century progressed, lower-class opposition to the census within Britain began to be understood less as traditional superstition and more as class hostility. It was in urban areas that enumerators expected to meet the most antagonism. In 1841, the census commissioners requested police to protect enumerators in Manchester and other towns, "in a few low neighborhoods where the object of the Enumerator might be misunderstood and subject him to interruption and annoyance."<sup>8</sup> One enumerator, complaining to the *Times* in 1841 about the failure of the government to pay him his wages

promptly, described his “duties in some parts of the districts of Whitechapel, Spitalfields, Bethnal-green, St. Giles, Westminster, etc.,...[as] anything but enviable, from a variety of painful circumstances.”<sup>9</sup>

Ignorance and opposition to census-taking also could be humorous. Instructions were often printed in the press ahead of census day, and census-taking technologies were widely publicized. But not everyone understood or followed the instructions. After the census had been taken, newspapers printed amusing anecdotes about the event, such as the letter from a “perplexed householder” whose family was so large that there were not enough slots on the census form (see cover image).<sup>10</sup> In 1843, *Punch* explained that “the last census made several omissions; amongst whom was our boy, who did not go to bed at all on the night of the fifth of June, 1841, and consequently slept nowhere.”<sup>11</sup>

Some people also expressed suspicion of the census or actively resisted its intrusions into their lives. One anecdote involved a servant who thought that the form was a “censure” paper and became very distressed.<sup>12</sup> A man wrote a letter to the *Morning Chronicle* complaining that his servants were unwilling to answer: “I shall have a mutiny below stairs if I try to enforce answers on these tender points.”<sup>13</sup> Crucial in these instances was the question of privacy, and those who were suspicious of government motives were less likely to willingly provide the information requested of them. The woman who did not wish to betray her age to the census enumerator was a particularly recurrent humorous figure. In an article about the census of 1851, Charles Dickens mentioned a man who sent his schedule directly to the office in London instead of giving it to his local enumerator, because he did not want his wife’s age to be gossiped about in the town.<sup>14</sup> In 1851, the *Morning Chronicle* told of suspicious people who “in not a few instances...committed the papers to the flames or tore them up before the eyes of the enumerators, vowing that they would not state their ages to please any government whatever.”<sup>15</sup> Women who inserted themselves as “head of the household” even when their husbands were present also provoked amusement (figure 7.1). Finally, journalists laughed at those who had not understood the questions on the form. In 1841, the *Hull Advertiser* joked that “some of the papers, of course, required a little correcting. In the column headed, ‘profession, etc.’ one good man had placed opposite to the name of his better half—Methodist.”<sup>16</sup> The results, or the data, could also be funny. Newspapers related strange or extreme census results, such as the parish that had had one inhabitant at the time of the last census, and had now doubled its population because of the marriage of the sole man.

These examples suggest that there were several ways in which gathering and interpreting data could be amusing. The technicalities of census-taking, which insisted on certain norms such as identifying the head of a household or counting all the people sleeping in a particular house on a given night, could be viewed as absurd because they did not apply to every situation.



**FILLING UP THE CENSUS PAPER.**

*Wife of his Bosom.* "UTON MY WORD, MR. PREWITT! IS THIS THE WAY YOU FILL UP YOUR CENSUS? SO YOU CALL YOURSELF THE 'HEAD OF THE FAMILY'—DO YOU—AND ME A 'FEMALE!'"

Figure 7.1 "Filling up the Census Paper," from *Punch* xx, 1851.

People who did not understand the technical jargon or the true intentions of the statisticians could be mocked for their ignorance. Meanwhile, those who more deliberately subverted the intentions of the authorities, or asserted their right to privacy and therefore rejected the ability of the authorities to gather data about their lives, could also be taunted by those who had embraced such government intervention.

An even more extensive humorous treatment of the census can be found in a play called *The Census: A Farce, in One Act* that opened at the Adelphi Theater in London on April 15, 1861 (a week after census day), ran for 65 performances as an afterpiece, and was well received by a reviewer for the *Observer*.<sup>17</sup> The play focused on the household of Mr. Peter Familias, who takes his "most important duty...as the head of this family...[and as] a citizen of a free and constitutional country" very seriously (figure 7.2).<sup>18</sup> As Peter says,

This is the sacred duty of every man who loves his country. Let foreign nations, groaning under despotisms, dread conscriptions; let bygone ages tremble at the thought of a poll-tax...but *our* consolation in happy England, in the latter half of the nineteenth century,...is, that a paternal government only wants to know how many there are on us.<sup>19</sup>

*First performed at the New Adelphi Theatre, under the management of Mr. BENJAMIN WEBSTER,  
on Monday, April 15th, 1861.*

**T H E C E N S U S.**

Name and Surname.	Relation to Head of Family.	Age last Birthday.	Rank, Profession, or Occupation.	Alias.
MR. PETER FAMILIAS	Head of Family	51	Funholder	Mr. J. L. TOOLE.
MISS ROSE MAGENTA	Niece	19	Heiress	Miss E. THORNE.
MR. ALBERT PUMPS	Intruder	24	Lover	Mr. W. H. EDWINE.
TATURS	Servant	40	Gardener	Mr. R. ROMER.
JENNY MORCAP	Servant	20	Coufante	Miss KATE KELLY.
MRS. PERKYSITES	Housekeeper	Age unknown	Spinster	Mrs. CHATTERBLEY.
G. WOA ( <i>Baileys 2007</i> )	No Relation	Age doesn't matter	Cubman	Mr. C. J. SMITH.
CRITCHER (21 Z)	Servants' Follower	Age no consequence	Policeman	Mr. ALDRIDGE.

**COSTUMES—MODERN.                      TIME—PRESENT DAY.**

Figure 7.2 Cover page and cast list for the play *The Census: A Farce, in One Act*, written out in the form of a census form.

Peter’s intention to fill out the census form in an accurate and timely manner, however, is hindered by the various events of census morning. He encounters not only servants who refuse to state their ages but also an intruder who complicates the number of people who slept in his house on census night.

The use of humor as a response to statistics demonstrates one of the ways in which people adjusted to an age that was replete with new technologies. Humor could make something that was not entirely user-friendly more familiar and accessible, and could also challenge the assumption that statistics worked as a complete descriptive mode. Statistics was a novel and exciting technology. But while it could describe the society in fascinating ways, it also fragmented the society, dividing it up into categories and abstract figures. Statistics could therefore be funny for the same reasons that it could be frightening or offensive: it was abstract, vast, and anonymous at the same time that it asked for specific and intimate details about individual people. The statistics-gathering process and its results could also be amusing because of its limitations: the answers it provided almost never displayed a full view of the subject, and some topics could not be adequately described by statistics at all. Thus, even those who accepted statistics used humor to acknowledge its confines.

The government and its advocates tended to downplay the opposition to the census that existed, even as they simultaneously viewed that opposition as a source of amusement and a marker of ignorance. The *Times* wrote in 1841 that while the census for the most part had been taken successfully, “a few individuals, influenced by the most strangely ridiculous motives, obstinately refused to fill up the ‘return paper,’ but the number who so insanely acted was

so insignificant as to be undeserving of a moment's consideration."<sup>20</sup> Anxiety about the state of national support for the census is evident here despite the dismissive claim; in fact, the newspaper's emphasis on precisely that which it claimed deserved no emphasis betrays a more complicated state of affairs.

Although we know little about the real motivations for working-class opposition to the census, it can certainly be understood as a form of political protest, and the *Times'* anxiety is explainable in that context. Nineteenth-century Britain, we know well, saw large-scale social antagonism, and if the census was associated with the government, political economy, and the middle class, then we should not be surprised to find that members of the working classes were suspicious of it. The census also represented government intervention and control, and was linked to other forms of surveillance. The fact that clergy and others with local influence often served as enumerators, and then distributed the information that they had acquired on a local and informal basis, suggests that the census can be understood as part of a multi-layered, cooperative, and at times coercive project of gathering information, primarily in cities, about the poor. As such, it may well have been understood as an intrusive and even a hostile act.

It is impossible to determine how many people accepted the census and how many rejected it. While we should not necessarily trust the census commissioners' claim that opposition was so negligible as to be almost nonexistent, we also have no reason to assume that the majority, or even a sizable minority, was opposed to the census. We do know that elements of the working class used the census when it suited them. Chartist newspapers, for example, cited census results in order to educate their readers about the conditions facing the laboring classes and to call for a more equal distribution of representation. However, we can infer that the frequent public calls for cooperation assumed a potential lack thereof. When William Farr sent a memorandum to the newspapers before the 1861 census, he emphasized the fact that the census was democratic, that it counted all people equally, and that it would not be used for purposes such as taxation. Such a focus suggests that the working classes, already suspicious enough of government and ruling-class intentions, may in fact have seen the census as anything but democratic.

Opposition to the census, however, also came from those who found its democratizing tendencies all too evident; these were the more direct descendants of the 1753 landowners who had refused to be counted. Just as pro-census people associated the census with material progress and modernity, conservatives who harkened back to a hierarchical and rural society often thought that the census was a threat to traditional ways of life. They believed that it neglected the emotional and the interpersonal aspects of life, and that it did little toward improving either the lives of the poor or the relations between classes. By transforming people into numbers, it also threatened the traditional political system that had been based on interests. This sort of anticensus sentiment can be thought of as part of a much broader movement

that questioned the materialism of modern life and celebrated the past, a movement that encompassed such diverse groups as Young England and the Pre-Raphaelites, and such diverse individuals as Carlyle, Disraeli, Dickens, and Ruskin. But it was more specifically political conservatives who found the lack of poetry in modern life to be closely linked to democratization, industrialization, and government centralization. The census, because of its implications for government bureaucracy as well as issues of political equality, served as a useful site for the articulation of broader societal ills.

Those who were opposed to the census were often those who failed to gain any political or social power from it. The nineteenth-century census consistently demonstrated that the rural and agricultural portion of the population was decreasing while the urban and industrial segment was growing at an astounding rate. The census served to triumphantly justify, both emotionally and practically, those who identified themselves with the modern economy and the modern state. Those who associated themselves with a way of life that was disappearing most likely gained no such satisfaction from the perusal of the census reports. Furthermore, when the census shifted in 1841 from counting local communities to counting people as first and foremost members of the nation, it contributed to what many elites considered a dangerous trend of centralization and standardization that threatened to destroy local power structures. Yet even if there were practical and self-interested reasons for conservatives to be opposed to the census, the arguments that they used to make their case are significant. Their emphasis on government bureaucracy and the intrusiveness of the census combined rhetoric and theoretical assumptions inherited from an earlier century with complaints based firmly in the modern age.

Politicians who opposed or dismissed the census were, by the 1850s, seen as almost quaintly old-fashioned. When James Caird said in 1860 that "no single improvement had been adopted in the mode of taking the census in England since 1801," his fellow MPs ignored him.<sup>21</sup> Lord Ellenborough similarly argued that all the details that had been added to the census since 1831 could be discarded: names and personal details were expensive and irrelevant. "If they got a statement of the number, sexes, and ages of the people," he insisted, "they had all that, as a Legislature, it was possible for them to require."<sup>22</sup> He then betrayed his ignorance of how the census was actually administered, and again, MPs paid no attention. At a time when the Home Office and the Census Office were being bombarded daily with requests for a yet more extended census, Earl Granville could comment wryly, "It was refreshing... for the Government to find themselves asked to omit details for which hitherto the pressure had been all the other way."<sup>23</sup>

More articulate opposition to the census on the grounds of conservatism certainly did exist, mainly in the pages of periodicals. In 1854 and 1855, after the 1851 census report had been published, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* published a series of articles titled "Civilisation—the Census." The first article was an extended satire of the notion that the census could depict the society

scientifically. The author poked fun of political economy and what administrators and liberals lauded as modernization and progress. He or she raised old arguments about government control and intrusion, as well as the leveling effects of the census. Far too much information was required, the writer insisted, and individuals were turned into nothing but names and numbers:

There is something frightful in the idea that no class of men, no individuals, can henceforth escape the eye of this Great Inquisitor-General—a Census commission. There is no conceivable thing belonging to man, woman, or child that may not come under this inspection, and be in the books, of this great Gargantuan Busybody... With a thirst for domestic knowledge, he insisted upon knowing who were married and who not. He would burst in upon a family at their prayers, and note what religion they were of.<sup>24</sup>

The emphasis upon the domestic circle is significant. The writer portrayed the census as a threat to the private life of the family and the home: "It is not pleasant to know that the pure, chaste secrecy of your house has been invaded, taken possession of, and is no longer exclusively yours."<sup>25</sup> By evoking ideas of both privacy and domestic virtue, the writer appealed specifically to middle-class sensibilities: "It is something monstrous that every one should be obliged to give an account of every inmate in his house, their ages, conditions, and their relationship."<sup>26</sup> The writer also suggested that the census would not always be flattering, and people ought to have the right to keep their darker secrets private: "Must foibles, frailties, and follies all be registered in damnatory schedules?"<sup>27</sup>

The alleged fear was about what the government might do with this private information. "How do you or I know," asked the writer, "what use will be made of all these registered particulars about us? It would be far pleasanter to be let alone. I have an antipathy to curious questioning people."<sup>28</sup> The writer found the question about religion to be particularly offensive, despite the fact that the 1851 census had counted church attendance rather than asking about individuals' religious identity. Finally, "Census is perpetually knocking at every man's door, to ask impertinent questions."<sup>29</sup> This personification of the census (or its representation in the body of the enumerator) brings an added level of fear. The image of the census taker as an intruder and as a threat to the sanctity of religious life and domestic tranquility also turns the census-takers' argument about the regulation of health and morality on its head.<sup>30</sup> While those involved with the census tended to argue for regulation of private and civic life in order to avoid regulating economic life, the writer in *Blackwood's* suggested that private life should remain especially free of government regulation. And while it was members of the new, urban, middle class who served as the census's greatest supporters, the writer suggested that it was middle-class values of privacy and domesticity that were at stake.

The other argument that anticensus conservatives used was that the census was simply useless. It cost a great deal of public money, and "it is a very curious and pretty plaything; but of what imaginable use?"<sup>31</sup> In other words, the census gathered a great deal of information but was not going to solve anything. One had not only to count criminals, after all, but also to do something to stop crime. As the author wrote

[The census] is the Great Humbug and Deceiver, cajoling silly ones into a belief in the marvel of his arithmetic; that all the commonest things of life must be done by his mystical numbers, or will be done ill; that they must count and think of how many joints, bones, muscles and sinews they have in their toes, before venturing their feet a single step.... When I see such glib statistical calculators boasting of their practical knowledge, I bethink me of the learned dog in the show, who with perseverance has acquired the trick of putting his paw upon letters and numbers, and of arithmetising required ages.<sup>32</sup>

And, "will the world be better... for all these statistics; will civilisation be one jot advanced?"<sup>33</sup>

This is an old British argument, one about the superiority of experience over theory, an argument that had found its clearest articulation in the writing of Edmund Burke. And as for Burke, it was the whole concept of civilization that was at stake, hence the title of the article. Did civilization mean material progress, organized and efficient government, state regulations about health, education, and municipal planning, and a complete statistical understanding of the population? Or did it mean religion, social cohesion, ties between people and the land they lived on, arts and culture? If the census takers claimed the authority to depict and to improve the society, some of those opposed to the census advocated a return to a civilization based on romance, art, and virtue rather than materialism.

The notion that the society needed more than numbers was also developed explicitly in a humorous *Monthly Magazine* article of 1841 titled "The Census and the Non-Sensus for 1841." The writer began by proclaiming that "this periodical taking of stock—that is, of the live-stock of the nation—is a laudable and useful practice."<sup>34</sup> But the article went on to become increasingly ironic, suggesting that the census could be used by Malthusians as a way to control the lower classes. Finally, the writer arrived at the title point, which was

our regret, that when parliament in its wisdom provided for this enumeration of the people, it did not extend its parental care to erecting a similar machinery for collecting and displaying the non-sensus of the nation... There is nothing more influential on the happiness of a nation, than the flourishing condition and wide diffusion of its popular nonsense.<sup>35</sup>



After poking fun at the famous statistician Adolphe Quetelet, the writer ended with the assertion that society was under an obligation not only to educate people but also to make them happier.

The census, as we have already seen, provoked humor, and there was a fine line between the rejection of the census and a harmless making fun. It did seem to many that that the great faith some had in the census could be deprecated and laughed at, for ultimately, it was only a mound of numbers. Even such a procensus newspaper as the *Manchester Guardian* found the census a useful target of humor and satire. An ironic article of 1854 pointed out the potential that the census had for giving the government a clear view of how to tax the public as much as possible. Before the census had begun, the article explained, the government had no idea how to tax its population efficiently, but now the British have the

proud and expensive honour of being the best-paying nation in the world.... Increased statistical knowledge is the secret of their success in the art of screwing. The tax gatherer visits us unerringly, because we are every one of us numbered, ticketed, and pigeon-holed in the office of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. There is, therefore, a melancholy appropriateness in the circumstance that just while the second income-tax assessments for the year are circulating in all directions, we are furnished with by far the most complete classification of the people of Great Britain that has ever yet been published. If it be thought desirable to tax a man for his age, his sex, his birthplace, his religion, his occupation, for being married, or unmarried, blind, deaf, dumb, a criminal, a lunatic, or a pauper, Registrar-General Graham has furnished the means of fixing his liability on any of these grounds.<sup>36</sup>

Finally, the paper admitted that

to guide and assist the designs of the Chancellor of the Exchequer against the pockets of her Majesty's lieges is not, however, the sole use of these curious official returns. They have an appreciable utility to the legislator, the social reformer, the historian, and the divine,

and they were full of general interest too.<sup>37</sup> The article then moved on to analyze census results and praise the skills of the census takers. The potential for humorous jabs at the census along with more serious anticensus remarks indicates that inherited skepticism and suspicion about the census remained strong. Even those who had accepted it as an important aspect of modern life and the modern state saw the potential for misuse, and they recognized that information gathering was inherently intrusive. Many also recognized that ultimately, the census did not find out the real truth about human nature or social relations, but simply gathered data. This data might be enlightening or useful, but it was only data, and it

assumed that people could be understood as members of groups rather than as individuals.

### The Limitations of Statistics

Thomas Carlyle, one of the era's most influential social critics, believed that knowledge was essential for the society to be at peace: "All battle is misunderstanding; did the parties know one another, the battle would cease."<sup>38</sup> But Carlyle found statistics relatively useless. He mused that "tables are like cobwebs, . . . beautifully reticulated, orderly to look upon, but which will hold no conclusion."<sup>39</sup> He accused statisticians of attempting to fool the public into believing that "perfect clearness on [a problem] were equivalent to remedy of it."<sup>40</sup> People who, like Carlyle, had other means at their disposal for describing society and making their voices heard were often willing to dismiss statistics as a mode of description with no active power. Although such critics may not have been explicitly opposed to the census, they did believe that statistics was a limited method of describing society.

Carlyle argued that even when numbers were gathered carefully and efficiently they should not be trusted without question. This was particularly the case when statisticians declared economic or social victories, thus excusing further action. Statistical data might indicate that mortality was decreasing, for example, but walking through the streets of one of Britain's industrial cities revealed that the numbers did not tell the full story. And even those most faithful to statistics agreed that it was easy to manipulate numerical data for party purposes. As Thomas Macaulay once said, "Figures are like mercenaries: they may be enlisted on both sides."<sup>41</sup> A writer for the *North British Review* agreed that "statistical Tables afford invaluable materials to the statesman and the economist, and occasionally offer hints of great significance to the moral philosopher; but few materials are more misleading when dealt with by inexperienced or unskillful hands."<sup>42</sup> At stake here is the notion of statistical expertise. On the one hand, statistical societies suggested that even amateurs could do statistics, but at the same time, if unqualified people tried to interpret the data gathered then serious mistakes could be made. It is also evident that even those who trusted statistics as a discipline and method did not necessarily trust the government. The *North British Review* reminded its readers in 1855 that "now even official statistics are not always to be relied upon, and seldom comprise *all* the information which directly or indirectly bears upon the subject."<sup>43</sup> Clearly some of the high enthusiasm about statistics that had been voiced in the 1830s had been lost. It was no longer enough to simply gather data: statistics required interpretation, and political conflict had not ended with the acquisition of accurate, supposedly unbiased statistics about the nation.

But even when statistics were accurate and complete, they were not necessarily enough. Even the greatest enthusiasts of statistics tended to combine their numbers with personal observation, theory, and visual

descriptions in order to support their arguments. It was probably only a small minority, in fact, who would have agreed with the following statement in the *Times*:

It would not be easy to exaggerate the value of a mass of figures which, although they may not at first sight interest the general reader, present a more faithful representation of the social position and prospects of this country in its various departments than could be presented by the pen of the most graphic writer.<sup>44</sup>

To suggest that statistics was in fact more interesting than literature or philosophy was probably further than most were willing to go, and the notion that numbers could not express everything always held current, even by statisticians themselves and those whose arguments were based largely on statistics. In 1816, the *Quarterly Review* described poverty

as far as it can be expressed by numerical figures; the sum of existing wretchedness is not to be numbered... The solid, substantial, permanent welfare of a nation is not to be estimated by extent of dominion, or greatness of population, or amount of revenue, or of national wealth.<sup>45</sup>

What mattered, in other words, was the state of people underneath the statistics. The *Journal of the Statistical Society of London* admitted that the quality of education "can be conveyed by no census," and James Kay believed that the sexual habits that he encountered among the poor could not be captured by statistics.<sup>46</sup> He instead described in his most flowery language

a licentiousness capable of corrupting the whole body of society, like an insidious disease, which eludes observation, yet is equally fatal in its effects. Criminal acts may be statistically classed—the victims of the law may be enumerated—but the number of those affected with the moral leprosy of vice cannot be exhibited with mathematical precision. Sensuality has no record.<sup>47</sup>

Hector Gavin, in his statistically oriented survey of housing in London, insisted that not only numbers but also "words, written or spoken, cannot convey to the mind the whole state of things; there must be sight and smell to aid and inform the imagination. The pen of the novelist never yet depicted such a depth of utter wretchedness."<sup>48</sup> Census Commissioner Horace Mann, in his report on the education census, wrote that his knowledge of the deficiency of education in the kingdom came not from statistics but "from certain prominent facts in every day experience, illustrating the actual condition of large classes of society."<sup>49</sup> Most people would perhaps have agreed with the *North British Review* that "some facts which cannot be arithmetically expressed are more eloquent by far."<sup>50</sup>

Furthermore, despite the role that the census played in describing the population, numbers could be misleading or insufficient. Scottish “natives in England are not so conspicuous in numbers as they are in other respects,” Farr wrote in the 1861 census report.<sup>51</sup> On the learned professions, Farr stressed that “their importance cannot be overrated; yet in point of mere numbers they would be outvoted by the tailors of the kingdom.”<sup>52</sup> And the rapidly growing population itself was difficult to conceptualize merely with numbers. An author for the *Quarterly Review* described London, as it might be viewed by a spectator, as “the congregated habitations of two millions and a half of his species—but how vain are figures to convey an idea of so immense a multitude.”<sup>53</sup> It was therefore common for journalists as well as the census commissioners themselves to make the huge population more understandable to their readers through visual descriptions. After the 1851 census, for example, the report explained that since 100,000 people could fit into the Crystal Palace exhibition hall at a time, the entire population of Britain could pass through the building in 211 days.<sup>54</sup> The use of such images reminds us that statistics as a new way of knowing and envisioning was emerging simultaneously with a larger and more mobile population than people had ever imagined. Paradoxically, the very modernity of Britain’s towns and cities was too difficult to understand using modern ways of knowing. In order to conceive the quickly growing millions of the country, prestatistical modes of knowledge were needed.

### **Alternatives to the Census: Nonstatistical Examinations of the Social Body**

Statisticians and census takers often claimed that it was only through gathering and disseminating information about the nation as a whole that the different elements in the society could come to understand one another, sympathize with one another, and help one another. According to this view, social harmony would arrive with the help of impartial, unbiased statistics and “self-knowledge.” While many novelists of the mid-nineteenth century shared with the statisticians a deep concern about the challenges of modern industrial society and agreed about the need for a resolution of class conflict, they also may have believed that the census was not as successful as it ought to be in representing the nation. In different ways, these novelists argued that in order for those from different walks of life to sympathize with one another, people had to be represented and understood not as members of an aggregate, but as individuals. The census needed to be supplemented by other types of social examination.

Novelists’ responses to statistics therefore underline a tension regarding the census and society during the nineteenth century. This tension was not simply a stylistic dispute between writers and statisticians. Rather, the bifurcation between literary and statistical attempts to address pressing social problems reflected a larger ambivalence among many elite intellectuals regarding the

increasing anonymity of society. While the census offered a much-needed method for understanding a large and mobile population, it also arose from and possibly even contributed to one of the major problems facing modern society: the gradual effacement of the individual and the small-scale community. The census, by making the anonymous society visible through the language of numbers, was an attractive tool, but it was one that had to be wielded with caution lest it exacerbate the very problems that it was meant to solve.

Fiction writers and other social commentators maintained a powerful voice during the nineteenth century. While anticensus writers in Tory periodicals had an air of desperation to them, widely read novelists mounted a successful challenge to the notion that census-taking was the best or the only way to depict the nation. They suggested, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly, that the process by which individuals were abstracted into numbers was ultimately detrimental to the cause of social cohesion. The census turned people who had problems into a problem for the society as a whole, and took away their identities as individuals. Paradoxically, the need to print census results without names and particulars for the sake of people's privacy hindered the mutual understanding and sympathy that the census takers claimed to create.

The literary disagreement with the census was in part based in a more general antiutilitarian critique that influenced many nineteenth-century writers. Even some of those with great faith in numbers, such as James Kay, believed that

the social body cannot be constructed like a machine, on abstract principles which merely include physical motions, and their numerical results in the production of wealth. The mutual relation of men is not merely dynamical, nor can the composition of their forces be subjected to a purely mathematical calculation.<sup>55</sup>

Dickens, in his famous antiutilitarian satire *Hard Times* as well as in his other writings, made the same point. The notion that literature was needed both because "facts" could not explain everything and because fiction could serve as a healing force was thus far wider than statistics. Novelists themselves, while not necessarily opposed to statistical commentary per se, did often see utilitarian modes of thinking as operating in competition with fiction.

But while the "Facts... nothing but Facts" of Dickens's Mr. Gradgrind were often condemned as detrimental to human society and as neglectful of the poetry and romance of human interactions, nineteenth-century fiction writing does not have to be understood in opposition to statistics.<sup>56</sup> This was the era of the realist novel, and the conception of truth as an authority was applied to both statistics and literature. Furthermore, many Victorian novelists emphasized their commitment to social change and the improvement in people's lives. Like the statisticians, then, fiction writers tended to focus on truth and knowledge as impetuses to an improved society. As Anne Brontë

wrote in the Preface to the second edition of her novel *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*,

My object in writing the following pages was not simply to amuse the Reader; neither was it to gratify my own taste, nor yet to ingratiate myself with the Press and the Public: I wished to tell the truth, for truth always conveys its own moral to those who are able to receive it . . . Let it not be imagined, however, that I consider myself competent to reform the errors and abuses of society, but only that I would fain contribute my humble quota towards so good an aim; and if I can gain the public ear at all, I would rather whisper a few wholesome truths therein than much soft nonsense.<sup>57</sup>

Here, the commitment both to realistic description and a moral and social aim is concisely summed up. Morality would be taught simply by telling the truth, or through the spread of information about the society and the human condition.

The social novelists of the mid-nineteenth century understood themselves to be active participants in many of the political and social debates of their day.<sup>58</sup> Gaskell admitted after the 1848 publication of her novel *Mary Barton*, "A good deal of its success I believed was owing to the time of its publication,—the great revolutions in Europe had directed people's attention to the social evils."<sup>59</sup> And in the Preface to the book, she pointed out that her own analysis had received "confirmation from the events which have so recently occurred among a similar class on the Continent."<sup>60</sup> About her novel *Ruth*, which details the plight of a young, unprotected woman who is seduced by a wealthy man, Gaskell wrote that it "has made them talk and think a little on a subject which is so painful that it requires all one's bravery not to hide one's head like an ostrich and try by doing so to forget that the evil exists."<sup>61</sup> Like statistics, Gaskell suggested, novels could reveal the problems of the society, and force people to think about possible solutions. The tendency among many Victorian novelists to insert their own narrative voices in their fiction to make political and social judgments confirms their own understanding of the public nature of their work.

Realism was not the only tool available to novelists, however, and other contemporary literary forms indicate the limitations of realism. The sensationalist novel, as well as the tendency toward melodrama and other nonrealistic forms even within realist novels, suggest that bringing people together sometimes required unrealistic modes. Unlikely chance meetings, long-lost relatives, and sudden inheritances were as significant in a society torn apart as the realism. Charlotte Brontë wrote

I hold that a work of fiction ought to be a work of creation: that the *real* should be sparingly introduced in pages dedicated to the *ideal*. Plain household bread is a far more wholesome and necessary thing than cake; yet who would like to see the brown loaf placed on the table for dessert?<sup>62</sup>

It was this potential tension, between the useful and the emotional, the real and the ideal, that influenced many mid-nineteenth-century novelists to question the absolute authority of statistics.

The most well known of the social novelists, including Disraeli, Gaskell, and Dickens, emerged from different backgrounds and proposed different solutions to the nation's problems. But they all emphasized the need for better communication between people and social classes, and they tended to describe the evident hostility between employers and laborers as failures of communication rather than as a result of fundamentally opposing interests. As Raymond Williams argues, the mid-century "industrial novelists" tended to find solutions to industrial problems outside British society itself, often by sending their characters to the colonies.<sup>63</sup> Their focus on individual human relations deliberately ignored emerging group identities based on class, and suggested that any kind of group-based solution (often some form of worker "combination") was dangerous. But the fictional focus on individuals was not only a defense of a certain kind of capitalism but also a critique of statistical method.

Like statisticians, novelists often argued explicitly that more knowledge would bring more sympathy, but they tended to emphasize the isolating nature of modern society rather than its role in bringing people together. According to their way of thinking, modern technologies, including statistics, were more likely to separate people than to unite them. The census may have helped people understand their nation as an aggregate, but it also differentiated people, dividing them up into numerous overlapping groups and encouraging them to identify more with some groups than others. It also encouraged definition based on social, economic, or other easy-to-count characteristics. Fictional forms of commentary often sought to show these differentiated groups interacting with one another. Dickens and Eliot, for example, in their attempts to portray entire diverse communities, from the very poor to the very rich, suggested that society had to be understood as a single unit, not simply a conglomerate of distinct groups. All of the fiction writers I will discuss emphasized the disunity that tormented their society, and in many cases, they blamed that disunity in part on statistical modes of reasoning.

In the advertisement to his novel *Sybil, or the Two Nations*, Disraeli explained that his inspiration came from the sad fact that British people knew "so little...of the state of our own country."<sup>64</sup> Disraeli, who wanted a moral revival and an end to what he saw as an obsession with money and materialism, believed that only through better knowledge could the society improve. The novel is explicitly about class conflict and the lack of unity in Britain, a lack that to Disraeli seemed so extreme that it could be described only as "two nations." Disraeli's language, significantly, was that of statistics, and he was explicit about the dual process by which modern technologies resulted in both aggregation and differentiation. Early in the novel, the sympathetic Chartist leader Walter Gerard, who of all the characters most closely represents Disraeli's own views, explains to the aristocratic Egremont, "There is no community in England; there is aggregation, but aggregation under

circumstances which make it rather a dissociating than a uniting principle."<sup>65</sup> In the modern nation, and primarily in the modern city, Gerard suggests, people live in close physical proximity to one another without sharing any genuine sense of community or mutual sympathy. Like statistics, which abstractly aggregated people yet did not produce unity, industrial society left individuals isolated and unhappy in the midst of great numbers. It was not enough, Disraeli implied, to describe the society as an aggregate. Real association would come not from statistics but from individual interactions.

Like Carlyle, Disraeli was skeptical about the authority that statistics had gained in the public sphere, and he tried to challenge what he saw as unthinking use of numerical evidence. As Egremont innocently says, "I was reading a work the other day that statistically proved that the general condition of the people was much better at this moment than it had been at any known period of history."<sup>66</sup> He is corrected by the wiser Gerard: "Ah! yes, I know that style of speculation," who goes on to aver that "the people were better clothed, better lodged, and better fed just before the War of the Roses than they are at this moment."<sup>67</sup> Yet Disraeli, despite his skepticism about statistics, used them as well. The characters in his novels ask one another to compare mortality rates and other statistics of working conditions, and many of Disraeli's descriptions of working-class life came directly from widely read government bluebooks.<sup>68</sup> But if numbers could serve as evidence of the problems that the society faced, they seemed to Disraeli to be an utterly unhelpful solution. To provide confirmation of the all too visible disunity that existed, statistics could be useful. But it was not what could change that disunity into harmony, and it should not, according to Disraeli, be used to encourage complacency.

Elizabeth Gaskell, although she came from a very different political milieu than Disraeli, also used her novels to emphasize the society's need for knowledge, sympathy, and harmony. Gaskell, the wife of a prominent Unitarian minister in Manchester, was firmly based in the liberal dissenting life of the town. She was also closely involved in charitable work, and had far more first-hand knowledge of the lives of the urban working poor than Disraeli did. When Gaskell was accused of choosing unpleasant topics for her fiction, she, like Anne Brontë, claimed truth as her defense and emphasized her desire to alert readers to societal evils. Her novel *Mary Barton*, which is about class conflict in Manchester, was condemned by some factory owners as provoking further hostility and even encouraging the poor to revolt. "Some say the masters are very sore," Gaskell wrote to a friend after the book was published, "but I'm sure I *believe* I wrote truth."<sup>69</sup> And again,

My poor Mary Barton is stirring up all sorts of angry feelings against me in Manchester; but those best acquainted with the way of thinking and feeling among the poor acknowledge its *truth*; which is the acknowledgement I most of all desire, because evils being once recognized are half way on towards their remedy.<sup>70</sup>



In her Preface to the novel, Gaskell described the process by which she had chosen its subject. After beginning a story based in the countryside, "I bethought me how deep might be the romance in the lives of some of those who elbowed me daily in the busy streets of the town in which I resided."<sup>71</sup> The novel was therefore an attempt to take what was closest yet most difficult to understand—urban working-class life—and describe not the statistics of urban poverty, with which any bluebook or newspaper reader would already be familiar, but the "romance" of people's lives. At least one of Gaskell's stated goals was to demonstrate to both masters and workers that they were "bound to each other by common interests, as the employers and the employed must ever be."<sup>72</sup> She explained that she had been struck by the hostility between social classes that was visible in Manchester, and in the midst of the novel, she inserts her own narrative voice to note that "the most deplorable and enduring evil that arose out of the period of commercial depression to which I refer, was this feeling of alienation between the different classes of society."<sup>73</sup> So, while Gaskell had deep sympathy for the poor because of the physical conditions in which they lived, she here implied that bad feelings between people—misunderstandings or ignorance about each other's problems—and the resulting lack of social cohesion were worse than the conditions themselves.

In order for these mutual interests to be realized, Gaskell's novel suggests, people had to stop seeing one another as members of groups and start seeing them as individuals. At the climax of the novel, when the murderer John Barton is confronted by the father of his victim, such understanding is finally reached. John Barton suddenly realizes that "the mourner before him was no longer the employer; a being of another race, eternally placed in antagonistic attitude. . . no longer the enemy, the oppressor, but a very poor and desolate old man."<sup>74</sup> The moment of reconciliation represents the goal of the novel. While statistics might capture mortality rates, average wages, and living conditions, Gaskell intimated, it could not describe the alienation that people were feeling, and it could only arouse the most abstract kind of sympathy. *Mary Barton*, while criticized at the time for its attack on factory owners, did not condone trade unions or other forms of worker "combination." The novel suggests that combination is less useful than the sympathy that the characters eventually come to feel for one another.

Gaskell, at times, called liberal political economy into question, and agreed with Carlyle and Disraeli that the less quantifiable aspects of life had to be examined in addition to statistics of death rates. "Though it may take much suffering to kill the able-bodied and effective members of society," she wrote, "it does *not* take much to reduce them to worn, listless, diseased creatures, who thenceforward crawl through life with moody hearts and pain-stricken bodies."<sup>75</sup> Yet Gaskell was also based firmly in a milieu in which political economy was accepted and dominant. Her oft-quoted claim in the Preface to *Mary Barton* is therefore significant. Again evoking "truth" as her only authority, she wrote "I know nothing of Political Economy, or the theories of trade. I have tried to write truthfully; and if my accounts agree or clash with any system,

the agreement or disagreement is unintentional."<sup>76</sup> Yet as Gaskell scholars have repeatedly pointed out, Gaskell was in fact well-read in political economy as in other social and scientific theories, and the narrator's statement later in the novel, "distrust each other as they may, the employers and the employed must rise or fall together," is clearly capitalist theory.<sup>77</sup> So, why the claim of ignorance? This was a conscious marketing decision on Gaskell's part, a reflection of the way in which she chose to present herself to the public. By insisting that she was entering the battle between workers and employers from a neutral, unknowing perspective, and that her information was based purely on observation, she claimed the power to speak to and for both sides equally. She would stand over and above the warring factions that she represented in her fiction, she suggested, and would identify not with the groups in question but the individuals. Gaskell, who often chose to present herself as a wife and mother who wrote fiction only on the side, explicitly renounced "politics" and turned to the domestic as the road to social reconciliation.<sup>78</sup> So while statistics also claimed the authority of neutrality, Gaskell claimed a lack of not only bias but also theory. She was interested not in positions, but in people.

While Gaskell at times inserted her own voice to describe economic or political developments, she always returned eventually to the characters at the heart of the novel: "So much for generalities," the narrator says after describing the effects of a strike in Manchester, "let us now return to individuals."<sup>79</sup> The emphasis on individuals did not mean that Gaskell was completely disregarding group identities or issues. Gaskell once wrote to Florence Nightingale, "One can't be strongly interested in individuals without learning to care for the class to which they belong."<sup>80</sup> Yet it was exactly the fear that people would care *only* for the "class" that inspired Gaskell's literature. In response to one of many attacks on *Mary Barton*, Gaskell promised that people would have every right to condemn the book "if I had misrepresented, or so represented, a part as the whole, as that people at a distance should be misled and prejudiced against the masters, and that class should be estranged from class."<sup>81</sup> But, she wrote to another correspondent,

I believe what I have said in *Mary Barton* to be perfectly true, but by no means the whole truth; and I have always felt deeply annoyed at anyone... who chose to consider that I had manifested the whole truth; I do not think it is possible to do this in any *one* work of fiction.... the utmost I hoped from *Mary Barton* has been that it would give a spur to inactive thought, and languid conscience in this direction."<sup>82</sup>

Gaskell again, here, made her understanding of fiction's role explicit: by focusing on individual stories, fiction worked to create sympathy on the interpersonal level, not to represent group identities or propose group-based solutions to problems.

Perhaps the most consistently realist of the Victorian novelists was George Eliot. Eliot, like Gaskell and others, was interested in finding a peaceful

solution to class conflict, and she believed that society needed to be represented accurately and realistically for understanding to be reached. Her interest in positivism and other forms of scientific thinking gave her great faith in personal observation and rational thought as means of coming to conclusions, and she was not opposed to statistics. But Eliot argued that through novels, "More is done towards linking the higher classes with the lower, towards obliterating the vulgarity of exclusiveness, than by hundreds of sermons and philosophical dissertations. Art is the nearest thing to life."<sup>83</sup> The specific advantage of novels, in Eliot's opinion, was that they allowed the reader to understand the individual, and thus to show the exceptions to types. In speaking of the clergyman Mr. Irwine in her novel *Adam Bede*, Eliot asks the reader to

see the difference between the impression a man makes on you when you walk by his side in familiar talk, or look at him in his home, and the figure he makes when seen from a lofty historical level, or even in the eyes of a critical neighbour who thinks of him as an embodied system or opinion rather than as a man.<sup>84</sup>

The problem that novels could overcome was that of stereotyping. History, sociology, and statistics, Eliot thought, divided people into groups: the gentry, the clergy, the urban bourgeoisie, the rural poor. In her novels, Eliot demonstrated that within each of these groups there were individuals who had both virtues and flaws, and she argued that people ought to be examined and evaluated as individuals, not simply as members of groups. When people came to know others on an individual and personal level, she believed, they also came to love them better and could thus judge them more fairly, more indulgently, and with more sympathy. Eliot claimed that art "is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot."<sup>85</sup> Selfishness and narrowness, then, which contributed so much toward the social problems of the contemporary world, could be obliterated or lessened by art.

Dickens, in his novels, often made the same point: that individuals ought to be judged by their merits rather than by the labels attached to them.<sup>86</sup> The novel form could make this point because readers came to know the individual character with all of his or her positive and negative qualities, and came to their own conclusions about what sort of treatment he or she deserved. Dickens's novels, like Gaskell's, are often divided between those who can judge others accurately and those who are too rigid in their categorizing. But Dickens demonstrated the novelist's skepticism about statistics most dramatically in an article devoted directly to the census. When the 1851 census report appeared, much of the public was fascinated by it. Cheap, condensed versions sold tens of thousands of copies, and newspapers and journals devoted pages and pages to analysis and results. People were especially proud of the great technical feat taking the census had been.

But Dickens did not express the same enthusiasm. In an article in *Household Words* titled "Numbers of People," he expressed the same distrust of government machinery and bureaucracy that comes through in many of his novels. He dwelt on the huge public expense of "vast official blue-books."<sup>87</sup> Tongue in cheek, Dickens pointed out that it used to be only members of the government who were interested in such returns, "recently, however, public attention has been called to the vast amount of useful and interesting information that has lain perdu in these prodigious pamphlets, which have for so long a period been wasting their sweetness on the dusty shelves of public libraries."<sup>88</sup> Bluebooks were now available to everyone but "still a blue-book is but a blue-book—a dreadful unreadable folio for a' that."<sup>89</sup> These bluebooks contained such "armies of figures," "interminable tables," "the grim marginal references, the endless repetitions" that "so can I imagine many a nervous reader preferring, in the long run, a month on the treadmill to the thorough perusal of a blue-book."<sup>90</sup> Dickens also emphasized the grim bureaucracy of the census-taking process itself. An "army of enumerators" went to every house in the kingdom, he explained, and "it rained schedules, hailed schedules, snowed schedules."<sup>91</sup> The technology of census-taking, Dickens had to admit, was impressive, but was it useful? What was the point of all this?

Finally, Dickens arrived at his central point: the census did not succeed in counting everyone. On the one hand, the census takers were presumptuous to think that they could convince everyone to share their secrets with the government. "If the Truth could in all cases have been told and made manifest, what awful secrets those thirty-eight thousand enumeration books would have been able to disclose!"<sup>92</sup> But "it is not reasonable to suppose that people would tell the enumerator all."<sup>93</sup> Dickens also emphasized the aspects of the census machinery that did not work very well. People were bound to make mistakes, fill in the wrong columns, or provide erroneous information, "which descriptions, being obviously absurd, had to be amended."<sup>94</sup>

Most important, the census failed at representing those who most needed to be represented, those who most needed recognition, assistance, and understanding: the outcasts of the cities. "What destitute wretches were manifest, were counted," Dickens explained, "but how many hundreds—may I without exaggeration say thousands—must have remained unrecorded in the enumerators' schedules."<sup>95</sup> He then provided a vivid description of "houseless poverty" in London; of those who

must have been cowering in the black tenebrae of dark entries, crouching behind ambuscades of lath and plaster on the bare joists of unfinished houses; in the dank shadows of railway arches, and under the dry arches of bridges; under the lee of tilted carts and timber stacks; rolled up like hedgehogs before the deadly warmth of brick and lime kilns...huddled up stealthily in or under baskets in the London markets, with potatoes for a pillow and a tarpaulin for a counterpane; snatching a surreptitious quaking, waking, shivering sleep—a sleep disturbed by nightmares of

stern policemen with strident voices and loudly creaking boots, of violent market-gardeners with pails of water, of the testy market-beadle with his cane. Were these enumerated?

There is a sad contradiction here, for those who needed to hide from one agent of government (the police) were the ones who also most needed to be represented by another agent of government (the census). If the census brought people privileges, representation, and perhaps even identity, the outcasts' necessity for hiding had left them unrepresented, unidentified, non-members of the society. Dickens continued in this vein, describing

the poverty-stricken rogues forlorn, who clambered into haystacks and coal-barges and empty waggons; the masses of wretched rags that should have been children, lying huddled together, round, a-top of each other, gathering a scanty warmth by close contiguity; the miserable heaps of utter worn-out poverty cast upon remote doorsteps, motionless as sleeping dogs, and which, but for the larger size and the bartered bonnets, might have been dogs for any human kindred that acknowledged them. Who counted the phantoms in the street, that should have been young and beautiful, and women?<sup>96</sup>

The prostitutes and "masses of rags," who as Dickens said *should* have been women and children, had fallen so low that they were unrecognizable as the beings that they were; they had lost their identity. Uncounted and undescribed, they were "nameless, sexless, friendless, foodless, penniless, despairing, drunk and dying."<sup>97</sup> These were "phantoms," and part of "that phantom world which we see gibbering in the gaslight; fluttering in the shadows of Westminster Abbey and among the trees of the Queen's Park; cowering in the bays of the bridges...."

Dickens's critique was in part a practical one: the Census Office had to find a better mechanism for counting the homeless. It was true that no satisfactory solution to this problem had been found, and in dense urban areas the census takers simply estimated homeless people. Counting the homeless remains a problem for census takers in many countries today.<sup>98</sup> But more significant was Dickens's assumption that the poor homeless waif and the prostitute wanted and needed to be counted. If they were not counted, their interests could not be looked to and they could not be represented as members of the society or as an interest group in the society. The census, Dickens had accepted, was a means to represent people, both politically and in the other sense of the word: to describe. But the census, he believed, was not doing a good job of representing everyone.

So, was it simply a technical problem? Or were there better means for representing all members of society than the census? As a novelist and journalist, Dickens had other means at his disposal, means that he was making use of in his very critique of the census. Through vivid descriptions of real people,

he suggested, far more could be learned about the elements making up the society than from the census. Dickens was not entirely anticensus; his article, in fact, turning more generally to census results, began to follow much the same form as other press analyses of the census.<sup>99</sup> But for him, as for Gaskell and Eliot, the overarching goal of social reconciliation had to be addressed by something more personal and ultimately more descriptive than statistics. People's lives could not be captured by numbers, and the census could not capture the truth about the nation.

In modern, industrial society, novelists suggested, the population was too large, diverse, and shifting for easy understanding or knowledge. On the one hand, only statistics could describe such overwhelming numbers and types of people. But statistics could also result in stereotyping, and stereotyping was already all too easy in the context of modern life. In their novels and stories, writers such as Gaskell and Eliot often suggested that one of the greatest challenges of life was overcoming one's own prejudices, and by telling stories about individuals, they hoped to help their readers overcome theirs.

Opposition to the census was complex and multifaceted. Taken together, however, opponents of the census and those who found its utility limited raise questions about privacy and individuality that go beyond the census itself. Many who questioned the census saw it as a threat to private life, but by abstracting individuals into numbers, the census also made people, in some sense, too private. The census taker entered the home and asked questions about domestic and personal life that were often understood as intrusive. But the census, through its insistence on group rather than personal characteristics, also failed to alert the society to the problems that *individuals* faced. In other words, by the time the results were abstracted and tabulated, there was nothing personal about the census anymore. The dilemma is indicative of a larger paradox. Opposition to the census as it was expressed during the nineteenth century drew on centuries-old notions of liberty, but it also responded directly to modern state-building and modern capitalism, both of which could be oppressive and alienating. For those who had wholeheartedly embraced the modern, the census was an exciting technology with the capacity to describe the nation as a single unit and to create social harmony within that nation. But if the nation was disunited as a result of modern values and practices, then so modern a technology as statistics was not the tool that could bring it together.

# Conclusion

By the 1860s, the census had been transformed from a purely government project to a public and national one. Its transformation happened in dialogue and in parallel with the rapid changes arising from industrialization and other forces, and it was therefore both the society and the census itself that looked very different by the middle of the century. It may seem paradoxical that the anticensus writers whom I discussed in the last chapter were worried about the census's inability to describe individuals, while, as I have suggested, the census after 1841 focused primarily on individuals. But the process of interpreting and abstracting the census results made it clear that individuals were important not as individuals but as members of aggregates, both national and subnational. The shift whereby the individual replaced the local community, yet was then made anonymous and abstract as a member of various other groups, is symbolic of the great changes that British society underwent during the first half of the nineteenth century. In 1801, many people envisioned their country as one of geographically defined local communities, even if they were also aware of hierarchical estates or groups that crossed physical boundaries. By the 1850s, in a society that was more urban, more mobile, more politically represented, and more global in its outlook, individuals could see themselves and others as members of groups that were not geographically defined, even if they also continued to hold strong local or regional identities. The process whereby individuals were abstracted into groups could be alienating and intrusive, but people also embraced the census precisely because it could help them find others like themselves. The paradox was true not only of the census but also of industrial society more broadly. It could be alienating and impersonal, but it could also create new solidarities.<sup>1</sup>

The most important solidarity that the census emphasized was the national one. From the moment of its origin, the census had been associated with national strength and national pride. John Rickman, in his 1796 article proposing a census, had equated the study of political economy and the acquisition of statistics with "patriotic speculations."<sup>2</sup> But the nation in question looked very different in the 1860s. Urbanization and the extension of the railroad had made large, condensed populations and geographic mobility the norm, and had altered the ways in which people imagined the national

population and the relationships between people. Furthermore, the political system of the eighteenth century, which had been understood to revolve around property and interests, had been replaced by a system that, while not democratic, appealed to public opinion as a final arbiter and focused on numbers as the primary basis for representation. By the 1860s, therefore, a new, dominant vision of Britain had emerged. It was an optimistic vision of a nation in which a large population brought military, industrial, and imperial strength, and the institution of the family brought moral strength. The census returns of the mid-century period brought pride to readers and stimulated satisfaction about the purportedly stable and productive nature of British society. The census showed evidence "of improved communication, and consequent intelligence and mutual understanding among the town and country people, the Irish and the English, and the various ranks in each class."<sup>3</sup>

Mid-nineteenth-century discussions of strength emphasized British difference from its neighbors and rivals, just as eighteenth-century discussions had. The categories of superiority, however, had changed. The reason that Britain was stronger than other nations, the census takers wrote in 1863, was that the British "have followed an entirely different policy; they have married, worked with increasing industry, skillfully struck out into new fields of employment, and peopled cities and colonies with millions of their descendants."<sup>4</sup> The emphasis on the combined strength of marriage, industry, and empire relied heavily on statistics. But observers also believed Britain's economic and imperial greatness to be firmly based in its less quantifiable tradition of moral family life, just as eighteenth-century British identity, according to Linda Colley, had relied upon a notion of Protestant morality.<sup>5</sup>

According to census administrators and others, ensuring Britain's greatness also relied on the ability of the state to intervene in the society in order to improve and control people's lives. The census helped people visualize the national economy as well as the social body, and served to justify those who were contributing to the economy and who could therefore be understood as necessary to the society. Census analysts often labeled those whom they considered economically unproductive as "surplus" or "redundant." Over the years, the government added questions to the census that while not necessarily designed to help determine productivity were immediately understood by analysts to have the capacity to do so. Debates about controversial issues such as urban growth, race and migration, and the health of the empire all tended to revolve around notions of productivity and surplus. Was the ideal nation predominantly industrial or agricultural? Urban or rural? Were Irish immigrants becoming too large a proportion of the British population? Was the white landowning population of Jamaica large enough to maintain order after the emancipation of the slaves? Such questions of demographics relied on the notion that certain elements of the population were more productive members of the social body than others were. A healthier nation (or empire) could be created, however, if those who were "redundant" were eliminated,



or, alternatively, helped to become useful. In 1832, the statistician and physician James Kay wrote that in a society and economy that worked as one, every "order" was made "immediately conscious of the evils affecting any portion of the general mass, . . . thus rendering their removal equally necessary for the immediate ease, as it is for the ultimate welfare, of the whole social system."<sup>6</sup> Because the society was a national one, Kay suggested, everyone would be affected by the unproductive, and those who had problems were also a problem for the society as a whole.

In regard to theories of economy and population, the nineteenth century was an aberration. In the eighteenth century, most people believed that a large population was crucial to national strength and that government control of the economy was obvious. The early nineteenth century saw the rise of laissez-faire economic theories, as well as the notion of surplus population. By the twentieth century, although free trade remained an ideal for many, overpopulation was no longer considered a problem, and a new emphasis on the collective had emerged. Even when surplus was considered a problem, however, analyses of the census always relied on the notion that population was the most important resource of the nation and the empire. If imperialism was at least partly about finding markets for British products, and particularly for those products that could find no market in Britain itself, then population was simply another such product. Malthusians believed that the British were overproducing people, or overreproducing. Those superfluous people could be sent to the colonies where there was a market for them, or a need for their labor. Nation and empire cannot be separated then, even though the census counted the national and imperial populations separately and in different ways. Furthermore, reproduction, and therefore the family, was always closely linked to nation, empire, and surplus. And despite the self-congratulatory words of census takers and journalists, the censuses of the 1850s and 1860s were not all about success. The census could be mobilized in the service of eugenics, and the mid-century censuses hinted at the pessimistic fears of the late nineteenth century about the decline of the race.

Sending people to the colonies, however, was not the only way to solve the problems of industrial society. The census was also, administrators consistently argued, capable of improving social harmony in Britain itself. This conception relied on the assumption that the census would be public: that it would disseminate information about the nation to a wide swath of the population. One journalist wrote that because of the census, "we are sensible of our faults—of a good many at least; and we are, as a nation, resolved to amend them."<sup>7</sup> The census thus awakened pride in response not only to what it revealed about the nation but also to the process of census-taking itself. The notion that the census would not only help the government legislate for the population but also would be a model of rational, scientific inquiry was also, therefore, a product of the nineteenth century. By mid-century, numbers had become so widely accepted a mode of description that public arguments

about the economy or the society that did not employ statistics were rare. Even many of those who criticized the census used it as well, for they realized that if they refused to do so, they would be entirely excluded from the political and social debates in which they wished to intervene.

As the census developed over the years, its proponents and administrators began to understand its role to be one of far more than simple counting. The expansion of the census, therefore, involved not only additions to the questions asked but also a dramatically expanded understanding of its purposes. The census had not only to count but also to divide, classify, and interpret, and the result would be a description of the entire society within which people could identify and locate both themselves and others. The process would be a public and a national one. The census, as both a tool of surveillance and an exciting new technology that allowed people to assert their own identity and power, was central in the development of British understandings of their nation.

# Notes

## Introduction: Envisioning the Multitude

1. *Quarterly Review* 53 (1835): 56.
2. "Results of the Census of 1851," *Westminster Review* 61 (1854): 323. Nineteenth-century observers often believed that the census would help them understand the past, present, and future state of the nation. See *Manchester Guardian*, October 26, 1853, 5.
3. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 1991), and Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
4. Enlightenment thinkers' interest in both taxonomy and probability is relevant here. See Lorraine Daston, *Classical Probability in the Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988). For the American census, see Margo Anderson, *The American Census: A Social History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988). For French statistics, see Marie-Noëlle Bourguet, *Déchiffrer la France: la Statistique Départementale à l'Epoque Napoléonienne* (Paris: Editions des Archives Contemporaines, 1989); Jean-Claude Perrot and Stuart J. Woolf, *State and Statistics in France, 1789–1815* (London: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1984); Carol Blum, *Strength in Numbers: Population, Reproduction, and Power in Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); and Joshua Cole, *The Power of Large Numbers: Population, Politics, and Gender in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).
5. See, for example, Edward Higgs, *A Clearer Sense of the Census: The Victorian Censuses and Historical Research* (London: HMSO, 1996), and *Making Sense of the Census Revisited: Census Records for England and Wales 1801–1901: A Handbook for Historical Researchers* (London: Institute of Historical Research, 2005); Richard Lawton, ed., *The Census and Social Structure: An Interpretive Guide to Nineteenth-Century Censuses for England and Wales* (London: Frank Cass and Company Ltd., 1978); Muriel Nissel, *People Count: A History of the General Register Office* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1987); and E. A. Wrigley, ed. *Nineteenth-Century Society: Essays in the Use of Quantitative Methods for the Study of Social Data* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).
6. See D. V. Glass, *The Eighteenth-Century Population Controversy and the Development of Census and Vital Statistics in Britain* (Westmead: D.C. Heath, Ltd., 1973), and Andrea Rusnock, *Vital Accounts: Quantifying Health and population in Eighteenth-Century England and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
7. See Gabriel Wolfenstein, *Public Numbers and the Victorian State: The General Register Office, the Census, and Statistics in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Ph.D. diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2004); Edward Higgs, *The Information State in England: The Central Collection of Information on Citizens since 1500* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) and *Life, Death and Statistics: Civil Registration, Censuses and the Work of the General Register Office, 1836–1952* (Hatfield: Local Population Studies, 2004); and Libby Schweber, *Disciplining Statistics: Demography and Vital Statistics in France and England, 1830–1885* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).
8. Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); M. J. Cullen, *The*

- Statistical Movement in Early Victorian Britain: The Foundations of Empirical Social Research* (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1975); and T. M. Porter, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking, 1820–1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).
9. Ian Hacking, "How Should We Do the History of Statistics?" in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, edited by Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 182.
  10. Ibid.
  11. Peter Buck, "Seventeenth-Century Political Arithmetic: Civil Strife and Vital Statistics," *Isis* 68 (1977): 67–84.
  12. See John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money, and the English State, 1688–1783* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).
  13. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, translated by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 140.
  14. See Higgs for a summary of this argument: *The Information State in England*, Chapter 2. Higgs is skeptical of such a simple division between the premodern and the modern, as well as between local and central power. He sees nineteenth-century information gathering not so much as a new, but rather as "an old activity displaced from local to central government." Furthermore, he believes that many of the supposedly centralizing reforms of the Victorian era actually gave more power to localities rather than less, but in a new national context of supervision and oversight, and that the state was not truly centralized until the late nineteenth century. Census results, and the implications of these results, were also both national and local, since central information gathering could often lead to local action. Ibid, 25–26, 66–67.
  15. Hacking, "How Should We Do the History of Statistics?," 194.
  16. Mary Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830–1864* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); and Linda Colley, "Whose Nation? Class and National Consciousness in Britain 1750–1830," *Past and Present* no. 113 (November 1986): 103.
  17. Bruce Curtis, *The Politics of Population: State Formation, Statistics, and the Census of Canada, 1840–1875* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 4.
  18. Oz Frankel, *States of Inquiry: Social Investigations and Print Culture in Nineteenth-Century Britain and the United States* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).
  19. Giovanna Procacci, "Social Economy and the Government of Poverty," in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, edited by Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 164.
  20. See Higgs, *The Information State in England*, 21–23. He is skeptical of the simple division between preindustrial and industrial kinds of communities. Ibid, 67.
  21. Ibid, 89.
  22. Ibid, 98.
  23. See Peter Buck, "People who Counted: Political Arithmetic in the Eighteenth Century," *Isis* 73 (1982): 28–45.
  24. Foucault suggests that modern society involves surveillance, but that the surveillance is not always conscious. He would not necessarily disagree with the idea that people were interested in the census as a technology for self-counting, or self-surveying.
  25. See, for example, Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, Chapter 10, and Bernard Cohn, "The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia," in *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). An exception is Silvana Patriarca, *Numbers and Nationhood: Writing Statistics in Nineteenth-Century Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), who does focus on the census and identity in a European context.

- Also see Perrot and Woolf for the notion that a unified French nation during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period required statistics to limit the importance of local divisions.
26. David I. Kertzer and Dominique Arel, eds., *Census and Identity: The Politics of Race, Ethnicity, and Language in National Censuses* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 2. "The requirement that each individual be pigeon-holed in a culturally defined category had major implications for how people came to think of themselves." Ibid, 31.
  27. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 166.
  28. See Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900–1948* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), for challenges to this nationalist exclusivity.
  29. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 1st Series, 21 (1812): 400.
  30. Kertzer and Arel, *Census and Identity*, 29.
  31. The notion that numbers equaled power was not obvious, and in fact notions of the elite in the medieval and early modern world usually were based on the premise that power belonged to a select few.
  32. Kertzer and Arel, *Census and Identity*, 33, 35.
  33. Ibid, 27.
  34. *Illustrated London News*, April 5, 1851, 263.
  35. Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992). Also see Gerald Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History, 1740–1830* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987).
  36. Linda Colley, "Whose Nation? Class and National Consciousness in Britain 1750–1830," 97. See Benjamin Disraeli, *Sybil, or the Two Nations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
  37. These hostile groups were at the time understood as "classes," but some historians have called into question the idea that class is a product of clearly defined social and economic conditions, and have suggested that class identities can be understood as political as much as social identities and that class may be more a product of discourse than economic conditions. See Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832–1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); and Dror Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class: The Political Representation of Class in Britain, c. 1780–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). For a survey of this debate, see Jan Goldstein, "Of Marx and Marksmanship: Reflections on the Linguistic Construction of Class in Some Recent Historical Scholarship," *Modern Intellectual History* 2 (2005): 87–107.
  38. The major qualification is that the British were involved in colonial wars throughout the nineteenth century, and were thus extremely tied up with the wider world.
  39. Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830–1864*, 2.
  40. Ibid, 4.
  41. Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland, and Jane Rendall, *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender and the Reform Act of 1837* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 40.
  42. Friedrich Engels, "The Condition of the Working Class in England," in *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels on Britain* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953), 107.
  43. *Census of Great Britain, 1851: Religious Worship in England and Wales: abridged from the official report made by Horace Mann to...Registrar-General* (London: G. Routledge, 1854), 63.
  44. *Census of England and Wales for the Year 1861: General Report*, Vol. III (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1863), 233.

45. Curtis, *The Politics of Population*, 4.
46. *Quarterly Review* 76 (1845): 24.
47. "Results of the Census of 1851," 342.
48. See, for example, United Kingdom National Archives (UKNA), RG 27/1, 59.
49. The government compared census results with statistics about income tax, for example. See April 2, 1860, April 18, 1860, and April 26, 1860, UKNA, IR 40/895. Part of the reason that the census became so public and at times so hotly disputed was because it had serious policy implications.
50. Schweber, *Disciplining Statistics*, 13.

## 1 "A National Undertaking": Taking the Census

1. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 1st Series, 6 (1806): 113.
2. *Manchester Guardian*, November 23, 1853, 4.
3. *Parliamentary History* 35, (1800–1801): 601.
4. *Ibid*, 598.
5. *Ibid*.
6. *Ibid*, 598, 601.
7. *Ibid*, 600. For a brief survey of eighteenth-century European censuses, see D. V. Glass, *Numbering the People: The Eighteenth-Century Population Controversy and the Development of Census and Vital Statistics in Britain* (Farnborough: D. C. Heath Ltd., 1973), 12–13.
8. *Parliamentary History* 35, (1800–1801): 600.
9. The only exception to this was 1941, when wartime conditions made conducting a census too difficult.
10. See Peter Buck, "People Who Counted: Political Arithmetic in the Eighteenth Century," *Isis* 73 (1982): 28–45. For the history of early modern political arithmetic and attempts to estimate the population of Britain, see Peter Buck, "Seventeenth-Century Political Arithmetic: Civil Strife and Vital Statistics," *Isis* 68 (1977): 67–84, and M. J. Cullen, *The Statistical Movement in Early Victorian Britain: The Foundations of Empirical Social Research* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, Inc., 1975), 1–8. Also see Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), Chapter 3.
11. Quoted in Buck, "People Who Counted: Political Arithmetic in the Eighteenth Century," 33.
12. Glass, *Numbering the People: The Eighteenth-Century Population Controversy and the Development of Census and Vital Statistics in Britain*, 90. Glass argues that the census would not have failed had it been proposed in the 1780s, when many people saw the question of population as essential to national security.
13. See Buck, "People Who Counted: Political Arithmetic in the Eighteenth Century."
14. For an account of how numbers gained their reputation for neutrality, see Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems in the Sciences of Wealth and Society*. Buck's argument does not explain why William Pitt's government, which saw people such as Price who had supported the French Revolution when it began as its enemies, would be willing to do something with such radical political implications.
15. See Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 289, and Cullen, *The Statistical Movement in Early Victorian Britain*, 12.
16. The memorandum was shown to Abbot by George Rose, MP. It was revised and printed in *The Commercial and Agricultural Magazine* in 1800. It is reprinted in full in Glass, *Numbering the People: The Eighteenth-Century Population Controversy and*

*the Development of Census and Vital Statistics in Britain*, 106–113. It is this version that I will cite.

17. Glass, *Numbering the People*, 106.
18. *Ibid.*, 106, 108.
19. *Ibid.*, 108.
20. *Ibid.*, 106.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*, 107.
23. *Ibid.*, 109.
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*, 110.
27. *Ibid.*, 112. Rickman's contemporary Frederick Eden agreed about the patriotic uses of the census: "it is singular that the countries, now at war with Great Britain, have all preceded us in enumerations of the people," and Britain's population and strength "has been proved by our exertions in the present awful contest." Frederick Morton Eden, *An Estimate of the Number of Inhabitants in Great Britain and Ireland* (London: J. Wright, 1800), 88, 93. Reprinted in D. V. Glass, ed., *The Population Controversy: A Collective Reprint of Material Concerning the Eighteenth-Century Controversy on the Trend of Population in England and Wales* (Farnborough: Gregg International Publishers Ltd., 1973).
28. See Michel Foucault, "Governmentality," in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, edited by Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 100.
29. For a discussion of the "social" and its historiography, see James Vernon, "The Ethics of Hunger and the Assembly of Society: The Techno-Politics of the School Meal in Modern Britain," *The American Historical Review* 110, no. 3 (2005).
30. Lord Grenville believed that the clergy should not be the ones to provide returns, for "nothing... ought to be more sacredly observed than the principle of keeping the civil duties of the State from being blended with those of the ecclesiastical." *Parliamentary Register* XIII (1800): 495–496.
31. See Glass, *Numbering the People: The Eighteenth-Century Population Controversy and the Development of Census and Vital Statistics in Britain*, 91.
32. The government often had army statistics anyway. See Edward Higgs, *The Information State in England: The Central Collection of Information on Citizens since 1500* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 50–53.
33. The possibility of estimating population from parish registers was Rickman's idea. See *Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol. 46 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 897.
34. "Abstract of the Answers and Returns" printed December 21, 1801, United Kingdom National Archives (UKNA) ZHC 1/105, 497.
35. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 1st Series, 18 (1811): 1241.
36. See *Abstract of the Answers and Returns* (London: printed for the House of Lords, 1822), vii.
37. See *Abstract of the Answers and Returns* (London: printed for the House of Lords, 1812), x.
38. See John Eyler, *Victorian Social Medicine: The Ideas and Methods of William Farr* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), Chapter 4, for a discussion of vital statistics and insurance.
39. *Abstract of the Answers and Returns* (1822): vi.
40. See "Minutes of evidence taken before the committee on the bill for taking an account of the population of Great Britain, and of the increase and diminution thereof," *Parliamentary Papers* 4 (1830): 3–5.
41. Henderson to Sidmouth, July 19, 1821, UKNA HO 44/8, 212–213.
42. *Ibid.*

43. Ibid.
44. *Edinburgh Review* articles, like those in most periodicals at the time, were written anonymously. See Frank Whitson Fetter, "The Authorship of Economic Articles in the *Edinburgh Review*, 1802–1847," *Journal of Political Economy* lxi, no. 3 (June 1953): 232–259, for a list of probable authors. For an analysis of McCulloch's contribution to the fields of political economy and statistics, see Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society*, 295–306.
45. "Proposals for an Improved Census of the Population," *Edinburgh Review* 49 (1829): 10.
46. "State and Defects of British Statistics," *Edinburgh Review* 61 (1835): 161.
47. Ibid, 156.
48. Ibid, 177.
49. For the census as a technology, see Mary Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830–1864* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 4.
50. "Proposals for an Improved Census of the Population," 21.
51. "Minutes of evidence taken before the committee on the re-committed bill for taking an account of the population of Great Britain, and of the increase and diminution thereof," 13.
52. "State and Defects of British Statistics," 156.
53. On the founding of the statistical societies, see Eyler, *Victorian Social Medicine*, 13, and Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society*, Chapter 7. On the Statistical Society of London, see Lawrence Goldman, "The Origins of British 'Social Science': Political Economy, Natural Science and Statistics, 1830–1835," *The Historical Journal* 26, no. 3 (1983): 587–616, and Cullen, *The Statistical Movement in Early Victorian Britain*, Chapters 6–7. On the Manchester Statistical Society, see T. S. Ashton, *Economic and Social Investigations in Manchester, 1833–1933: A Centenary History of the Manchester Statistical Society* (London: P. S. King & Son, Ltd., 1934), and Cullen, *The Statistical Movement in Early Victorian Britain*, Chapters 8–9.
54. *Journal of the Statistical Society of London* 1, no. 1 (May 1838): 1. Many of the articles in the Society's Journal were not attributed to any author.
55. Ibid, 2, 8.
56. *Journal of the Statistical Society of London* 3, no. 2 (July 1840): 204.
57. "The Late Census," *Edinburgh Review* 80 (1844): 68.
58. G. R. Porter, *The Progress of the Nation, in its Various Social and Economical Relations, From the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century to the Present Time* (London: Charles Knight and Co., 1836); J. R. McCulloch, *A Statistical Account of the British Empire: Exhibiting its Extent, Physical Capacities, Population, Industry, and Civil and Religious Institutions* (London: Charles Knight and Co., 1837).
59. "State and Defects of British Statistics," 158.
60. Ibid, 177.
61. The earlier belief had been that population was a state secret because a small population would provide encouragement to enemies. Eyler, *Victorian Social Medicine*, 39.
62. *Journal of the Statistical Society of London* 1, no. 1 (1838): 1.
63. *Proceedings of the Statistical Society of London, 1834–1839*, 77.
64. "Proposals for an Improved Census of the Population," 10.
65. "The Late Census," 68.
66. Ibid, 100.
67. *Journal of the Statistical Society of London* 4, no. 1 (April 1841): 69.
68. *Journal of the Statistical Society of London* 2, no. 4 (July 1839): 274.
69. Eyler, *Victorian Social Medicine*, 22.
70. Ibid, 23.
71. Poovey makes a similar point in *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society*, 305–306.



72. Eyler, *Victorian Social Medicine*, 37.
73. For example, baptism registers were deficient because “irreligious Persons, especially in large towns, neglect the Rite of Baptism altogether.” July 28, 1812, UKNA ZHL 1/76 xxiii.
74. Eyler, *Victorian Social Medicine*, 37. At least in theory, Dissenters and Roman Catholics could not prove the legitimacy of children or inheritance rights, since marriages conducted anywhere other than the Established Church were not officially recognized by the state. See Muriel Nissel, *People Count: A History of the General Register Office* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1987) 9–10. Also see Higgs, *The Information State in England*, 78.
75. See Ibid, 87. Also see Simon Szreter, “The GRO and the public health movement in Britain, 1837–1914,” *Social History of Medicine* 4 (1991): 435–464.
76. Eyler, *Victorian Social Medicine*, 37. On the growth of bureaucratic government during this period, see Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830–1864*, 98–114.
77. “Report on the General Register Office,” July 20, 1855, UKNA RG 29/5, between 385 and 386.
78. To my knowledge, the only full-length study of William Farr is John M. Eyler’s *Victorian Social Medicine: The Ideas and Methods of William Farr*.
79. “Knowledgeable contemporaries claimed Farr exercised a decisive influence on these censuses and wrote a large part of the final reports.” Ibid, 41.
80. Ibid, ix.
81. Ibid.
82. Quoted in *ibid*, 4.
83. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851...Reprinted in a Condensed Form* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1854), 38. See Eyler, *Victorian Social Medicine*, 32.
84. Quoted in Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society*, 300. Using statistics to describe the aggregate was also helpful for social reformers because it could put into action the Benthamite maxim of the greatest happiness of the greatest number. See Eyler, *Victorian Social Medicine*, 21, 33. Bentham himself had wanted a national census to be taken before 1801.
85. Quoted in Eyler, *Victorian Social Medicine*, 15.
86. Quoted in *ibid*, 20.
87. Ibid, 27.
88. *Journal of the Statistical Society of London* 3, no. 1 (April 1840): 97.
89. *History of the Census of 1841*, UKNA RG 27/1. Women were not eligible to be enumerators until 1891. This history was written by clerk Thomas Mann. Mann did much of the administrative work for this census, including a trial enumeration in certain areas to determine how many people one enumerator could count in a day. See *ibid*, 11. Mann’s son Horace Mann also worked for the Census Office beginning in the late 1840s, and was involved in the 1851 censuses of education and religion.
90. “Results of the Census of 1851,” *Westminster Review* 61 (1854): 345.
91. *Journal of the Statistical Society of London* 3, no. 1 (April 1840): 97.
92. Higgs, *The Information State in England*, 21.
93. Ibid, 87.
94. Ibid, 62.
95. This may have been partly because he did not trust the ability of the overseers. Michael Drake, “The Census, 1801–1891,” in *Nineteenth-Century Society: Essays in the Use of Quantitative Methods for the Study of Social Data*, edited by E. A. Wrigley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 11. Also see Richard Lawton, ed., “Introduction,” in *The Census and Social Structure: An Interpretive Guide to Nineteenth-Century Censuses for England and Wales* (London: Frank Cass and Company Ltd., 1978), 13.

96. "Minutes of evidence taken before the committee on the bill for taking an account of the population of Great Britain, and of the increase and diminution thereof," 4–5.
97. Letter from Thomas Lister to Drinkwater Bethune, reprinted in Glass, *Numbering the People: The Eighteenth-Century Population Controversy and the Development of Census and Vital Statistics in Britain*, 116. Lister was the brother-in-law of the Whig politician Lord John Russell, who had been the push behind the establishment of the office and had power over its early appointments.
98. See *History of the Census of 1841*, UKNA RG 27/1, 5.
99. *Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol. 1, 11.
100. *Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol. 46, 898.
101. He also managed to regularly increase Farr's salary, until Farr was making more than most civil servants. See Eyler, *Victorian Social Medicine*, 48.
102. Phipps and Vardon to Phillipps, January 10, 1845, UKNA HO 45/146.
103. Ibid.
104. See Graham to Treasury, November 24, 1847, UKNA RG 29/1, 285–287.
105. Phipps and Vardon to Phillipps, January 10, 1845, UKNA HO 45/146, and Phipps and Vardon to Home Office, January 27, 1844, UKNA HO 45/146.
106. Graham was even obliged to ask permission to hire a charwoman to clean the census offices. Graham to Bouverie, September 20, 1850, UKNA HO 45/3251, 11.
107. *History of the Census of 1841*, ruinousness UKNA, RG 27/1, 33. Recurring complaints from enumerators who were not paid in a timely fashion suggest that the management of this aspect of census procedure was not entirely successful. See *Times*, September 24, 1841, 3; and October 22, 1841, 6.
108. See Treasury to Graham, September 1, 1860, UKNA HO 45/7098, 21.
109. While the system that was used to collect census data was certainly bureaucratic in some sense, Higgs points out that this period actually saw government expenditure and the Civil Service decline relative to gross national product and the population of the country. Higgs, *The Information State in England*, 65.
110. John Brewer makes a similar argument about the eighteenth century. John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money, and the English State, 1688–1783* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).
111. Lawton, *The Census and Social Structure*, 11.
112. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, 112 (1850): 1420. Another skeptical MP "protested against proceeding with this Bill at a quarter past 12 o'clock at night.... Such a course on the part of the Government was... a piece of low dirty cunning, full of trickery and humbug." Ibid, 1419–1420.
113. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, 114 (1851): 1306.
114. Ibid.
115. Graham to Bouverie, October 2, 1850, UKNA HO 45/3251, 20.
116. Ibid.
117. Ibid.
118. See correspondence in UKNA HO 45/7098. Also see ADM 7/617, WORK 22/2/11, and CUST 33/374.
119. *Compte Rendu des Travaux du Congrès Général de Statistique* (Brussels: 1853), 3.
120. Farr to Graham, July 21, 1853, UKNA RG 29/1, 410.
121. *Report of the Proceedings of the Fourth Session of the International Statistical Congress* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1861), 345.
122. See Wilson to Graham, July 7, 1855, UKNA RG 29/5, 386.
123. *Report of the Proceedings of the Fourth Session of the International Statistical Congress*, 346.
124. Some people believed that Britain ought to hold a more "inquisitorial census" on the model of certain continental countries. See Lawton, *The Census and Social Structure*, 7. For a discussion of the different issues that the different

- European countries had in taking their censuses, see Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 97–98.
125. See Lawrence Goldman, *Science, Reform, and Politics in Victorian Britain: the Social Science Association, 1857–1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
  126. *Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science* 1 (1857): xxii.
  127. Horace Mann, “What Information, as to the Social Condition of England and Wales, would it be most Desirable to Collect at the Census of 1861?” *Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science* 3 (1859).
  128. *Ibid.*, 628.
  129. *Ibid.*, 629.
  130. *Ibid.*, 633.
  131. *Ibid.*, 632. In fact, none of these questions made it onto the 1861 census form.
  132. James Hammack, “On the Direction in which the Census Inquiry may be extended in 1861,” *Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science* 3 (1859): 709.
  133. *Ibid.*, 710.
  134. *Ibid.*, 712.
  135. Mann, “What Information, as to the Social Condition of England and Wales, would it be most Desirable to Collect at the Census of 1861?” 632.
  136. Memorial of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland to Palmerston, June 4, 1860, UKNA HO 45/7098, 6.
  137. Graham to Undersecretary of State, June 12, 1860, UKNA HO 45/7098, 12.
  138. Graham to Undersecretary of State, July 2, 1860, UKNA HO 45/7098, 18.
  139. As a result of these extra questions, as well as the more dispersed population, the census of Scotland was more expensive per head. *Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, 164 (1861): 1418–1419.
  140. Dundas to Waddington, March 20, 1862, UKNA HO 45/7098, 90.
  141. Stark to Dundas, March 18, 1862, UKNA HO 45/7098, 90.
  142. Stark to Dundas, April 3, 1862, UKNA HO 45/7098, 93.
  143. *Times*, October 18, 1850, 4.
  144. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, translated by Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 66.
  145. See *Durham County Advertiser*, June 23, 1821, November 16, 1821, November 23, 1821, December 7, 1821.
  146. October 18, 1821, November 7, 1821, UKNA, HO 44/10, 246–247, 360–363. Also see Rickman to Lamb, October 31, 1833, UKNA HO 44/26, 175.
  147. *Quarterly Review* 53 (1835): 56.
  148. *Quarterly Review* 76 (1845): 36.
  149. *Manchester Guardian*, August 30, 1854, 9.
  150. *Illustrated London News*, April 5, 1851, 263.
  151. *Illustrated London News*, June 28, 1851, 624.
  152. *Illustrated London News*, April 5, 1851, 263.
  153. *Ibid.*
  154. *Ibid.*
  155. “Results of the Census of 1851,” 344.
  156. *Manchester Guardian*, August 16, 1854, 7.
  157. See letter from the superintendent registrar to the *Manchester Guardian*, May 18, 1861, 5.
  158. See *Census of England and Wales for the Year 1861: General Report*, Vol. III (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1863), 28.

159. The question of who should pay for copies of the returns sometimes became a source of conflict. One request from the Manchester Free Library pointed out that it was a free and open institution where “special attention has been paid to the literature of politics and of social economy.” Manchester Free Library to Palmerston, January 29, 1853, UKNA HO 45/4993. Graham, however, was worried about setting a precedent of distributing copies for free. See Graham to Fitzroy, February 4, 1853, UKNA HO 45/4993.
160. Hammond to Lewis, April 18, 1861, UKNA HO 45/7098, 70.
161. Graham to Undersecretary of State, April 15, 1861, UKNA HO 45/7098, 68.
162. See *Census of England... 1861*, 16.
163. Graham to Undersecretary of State, April 29, 1862, UKNA HO 45/7098, 95. In 1861, John Harvey, who had “no personal but purely a patriotic interest,” suggested that the government publish books with names and particulars from the census, which would be kept by each district for reference so that people could find one another; a directory which “might be useful to the state in a thousand ways.” This, besides threatening the privacy policy that the census office had promised, was far too expensive for the government to consider. See Harvey to Palmerston, April 2, 1861, UKNA HO 45/7098, 64.
164. *Manchester Guardian*, August 9, 1854, 6.
165. See Oz Frankel, *States of Inquiry: Social Investigation and Print Culture in Nineteenth-Century Britain and the United States* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006) for an analysis of state-sponsored publications and the role they played in print culture.
166. See Graham to Fitzroy, February 2, 1854, UKNA HO 45/5543. The Census Office did retain ultimate control over the information, with the power to refuse publication rights. See Greenwood to Palmerston, January 24, 1854, UKNA HO 45/5543 and Cole to Lewis, May 8, 1861, UKNA HO 45/7098, 44.
167. Graham to Undersecretary of State, May 19, 1862, UKNA HO 45/7098, 91. Benedict Anderson suggests that print, and particularly a mass culture of newspapers, plays a big role in creating imagined national communities. The widely publicized census is a perfect example of such mass consumption of information, and in this case, the information was about the society itself. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso: London, 1991), 35–36.
168. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851... Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, iii.
169. *Ibid.*, iii–iv.
170. *Manchester Guardian*, October 26, 1853, 5.
171. *Ibid.*
172. *Census of England... 1861*, 57.
173. Gladstone to Palmerston, January 31, 1854, UKNA HO 45/5779.
174. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, 159 (1860): 1707.
175. *Education Census of 1851* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1854), xiv.
176. *History of the Census of 1841*, UKNA RG 27/1, 118.
177. Graham to Undersecretary of State, April 11, 1861, UKNA HO 45/7098, 65. One such case of “insanity” drew public attention: the Bavarian minister in London refused to be counted on the grounds that he was a foreigner. Eventually he gave in to government pressure.
178. Lister to Bethune, quoted in Glass, *Numbering the People: The Eighteenth-Century Population Controversy and the Development of Census and Vital Statistics in Britain*, 116.
179. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851... Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 12, and *Census of England... 1861*, 7.
180. *History of the Census of 1841*, UKNA, RG 27/1, 75.
181. *Ibid.*

182. Ibid.
183. *Manchester Guardian*, April 9, 1851, 8.
184. *History of the Census of 1841*, UKNA, RG 27/1, 107.
185. *Times*, March 29, 1851, 4.
186. "Results of the Census of 1851," 345.
187. *Illustrated London News*, April 5, 1851, 263.
188. *Manchester Guardian*, November 23, 1853, 4.
189. *Illustrated London News*, June 28, 1851, 624.
190. *Census of England... 1861*, 3.
191. *Times*, April 11, 1861, 8.
192. *Census of England... 1861*, 3.
193. *Hull Advertiser*, June 4, 1841, 3.
194. *Hull Advertiser*, June 11, 1841, 6.
195. *Manchester Guardian*, March 29, 1851, 6.
196. Ibid.
197. *Morning Chronicle*, March 29, 1851, 4.
198. Graham to Undersecretary of State, March 28, 1861, UKNA HO 45/7098, 59.
199. "Memorandum on some of the Objects and Uses of the Census of 1861," March 25, 1861, UKNA HO 45/7098, 59.
200. Ibid.
201. "Results of the Census of 1851," 347.
202. September 7, 1854, on the back of a letter from Graham to the Home Office, UKNA HO 45/5786.
203. Drake, "The Census, 1801–1891," 30.
204. Ibid, 10.
205. *Illustrated London News*, April 5, 1851, 263.
206. Ibid.

## 2 The Census and Surplus

1. *Times*, December 18, 1841, 3.
2. D. V. Glass, *Numbering the People: The Eighteenth-Century Population Controversy and the Development of Census and Vital Statistics in Britain* (Farnborough: D. C. Heath Ltd., 1973), 90.
3. See T. R. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
4. Mary Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830–1864* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 7–8.
5. *Parliamentary History* 35 (1800–1801): 601. Several MPs insisted that the first census ought to be combined with an agricultural survey, as "it would be unavailing to know the number of mouths, if they did not also inquire into the quantity of corn there was to feed them." *Parliamentary Register* XIII (1800): 195.
6. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 1st Series, 21 (1812): 181.
7. Ibid, 400.
8. Ibid, 181.
9. *Quarterly Review* 8 (1812): 319.
10. Ibid, 354.
11. *Quarterly Review* 15 (1816): 235.
12. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 1st Series, 21 (1812): 178.
13. Ibid, 177.
14. Ibid, 178.
15. For a history of unemployment see John Burnett, *Idle Hands: The Experience of Unemployment, 1790–1990* (London: Routledge, 1994).

16. See United Kingdom National Archives (UKNA) PRO 30/22/2F.
17. See Donald Winch, "Introduction," in Malthus, xiii.
18. Reproduced in Glass, *Numbering the People*, 108.
19. James Kay, *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester: ...Containing an Introductory Letter to the Rev. Thomas Chalmers*, 2nd ed. (London: James Ridgeway, 1832), 15–16.
20. "A Letter to Wilmot Horton, Esq. M. P. on Emigration from Ireland by the Rev. M. I. Keating, Rector of Ventry," September 18, 1827, UKNA HO 44/17, 72 B, 7.
21. For a survey of the poor laws during this period, see Anthony Brundage, *The English Poor Laws, 1700–1930* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), and J. R. Poynter, *Society and Pauperism: English Ideas on Poor Relief, 1795–1834* (London: Routledge, 1969). Also see K. D. M. Snell, *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity, and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), and Patricia Fumerton, *Unsettled: The Culture of Mobility and the Working Poor in Early Modern England* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006). For "idleness" as an early modern category, see Paul Slack, *Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England* (London: Longman, 1988). For an example of a pre-Malthusian discussion of idleness among the poor, see Joseph Townsend, *A Dissertation on the Poor Laws* (London: C. Dilly, 1786). Ultimately, the New Poor Law of 1834 showed Malthus's influence.
22. According to a capitalist way of thinking, the society ought to be investing its extra capital into further economic growth, not charity. Too large a population meant that not everyone could be employed, meaning that the economy as a whole would have to expend resources caring for the "surplus."
23. For a discussion of this shift, see Sandra Sherman, *Imagining Poverty: Quantification and the Decline of Paternalism* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2001). Sherman describes the process by which the poor came to be understood as a group rather than as individuals.
24. Romantic conservatives such as Robert Southey were opposed to Malthus, as were socialists from Robert Owen to Karl Marx. Conservatives believed that by discouraging charity to the poor, Malthus threatened the traditional society of hierarchy and deference and also contributed to the possibility of revolution. Socialists also believed that Malthusian ideas led to a disregard for the problems of the poor, but they argued that the poor needed economic and political rights rather than charity. Malthus remains susceptible today to attacks from various parts of the political spectrum. See Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1984) for a conservative analysis of Malthus.
25. An example is the census taker William Farr, who criticized Malthus, yet was also very influenced by Malthusianism. John Eyler argues that "to a certain degree all nineteenth-century liberals were Malthusian, although they might modify Malthus' original doctrine somewhat." John Eyler, *Victorian Social Medicine: The Ideas and Methods of William Farr* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 150. Malthus himself, according to Donald Winch, "remained a moderate Whig." Winch, "Introduction," xxi.
26. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 2nd Series, 21 (1829): 1729.
27. *Ibid.*, 1723, and *Quarterly Review* 8 (1812): 352.
28. *Ibid.*
29. Wilson to Peel, October 2, 1822, UKNA HO 44/12, 272–273.
30. *Quarterly Review* 8 (1812): 327.
31. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 2nd Series, 21 (1829): 1728.
32. The understanding of redundancy as local or regional was current for many years. Before the 1861 census one statistician expressed an interest in "what districts were the best able to give employment to the natural increase of the population; what districts had the largest overplus population, which they must send to other parts." James Hammack, "On the Direction in which the Census Inquiry may be Extended in 1861," *Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science* 3 (1859): 709.

33. *Quarterly Review* 15 (1816): 235.
34. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 2nd Series, 21 (1829): 1723.
35. Wilson to Peel, October 2, 1822, UKNA HO 44/12, 273.
36. A petition from an emigration advocate in the Hebrides claimed that the district needed "assistance in the attempt to provide for our superfluous population, and make the Hebrides a source of wealth, instead of burthen on the kingdom." Hugh Maclean to Earl Bathurst, October 5, 1823, UKNA HO 44/13, 51A. Works on emigration include Richard Garret, *The Search for Prosperity: Emigration from Britain, 1815–1930* (London: Wayland Publishers, 1973); Colin G. Pooley and Ian D. Whyte, eds., *Migrants, Emigrants and Immigrants: A Social History of Migration* (London: Routledge, 1991); Charlotte Erickson, *Leaving England: Essays on British Emigration in the Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Robin F. Haines, *Emigration and the Labouring Poor: Australian Recruitment in Britain and Ireland, 1831–60* (London: Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1997). On British policy, see H. J. M. Johnston, *British Emigration Policy, 1815–1830: 'Shovelling out Paupers'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972). For a demographically oriented study of emigration, see D. V. Glass and P. A. M. Taylor, *Population and Emigration* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, Ltd., 1976).
37. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 2nd Series, 21 (1829): 1721. As an example, Wilmot-Horton called "attention to what had occurred in the village of Shipley. From that immediate vicinity, two hundred and fifty persons had been removed to Canada; and, of course, the rest of the population had been greatly relieved from the pressure of a heavy burthen." *Ibid*, 1724.
38. *Ibid*, 1740.
39. *Ibid*, 1723.
40. "A Letter to Wilmot Horton...", September 18, 1827, UKNA HO 44/17, 14 and Wilson to Peel, October 2, 1822 UKNA HO 44/12, 273.
41. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 2nd Series, 21 (1829): 1725.
42. *Ibid*, 1725–1726. William Huskisson responded, "Nobody could suppose, that men who were placed in a new country, and obliged to adopt new habits, would not have some difficulties to surmount; but, would anybody compare them with the miserable peasantry of Ireland, having a scanty supply of bad food, and being liable to all the misery arising from the gradual suffering, which was the only positive check to the increase of population in old countries?" *Ibid*, 1730.
43. *Ibid*, 1732.
44. March 28, 1803, UKNA PC 1/3577, 2. This report on emigration by the Highland Society of Scotland explained that people were needed both for the army and because only people raised in the Highlands knew how to farm the terrain there.
45. Parker to Peel, February 21, 1827, UKNA HO 44/17, 16.
46. William Coleman to Peel, February 2, 1830, UKNA HO 44/19, 116.
47. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 2nd series, 21 (1829): 1728.
48. *Ibid*, 1729. Observers believed that when skilled artisans or farmers left the country, Britain's economy would decline. See, for example, Hamilton to Fox, June 13, 1806, UKNA PC 1/3727. Supporters of emigration made the same distinction between those who should and should not emigrate: "[regulated emigration] does not, necessarily, imply a permanent diminution of actual numbers, but, on the contrary, may leave resources for a larger increase of a different sort of inhabitants." "A Letter to Wilmot Horton...", September 18, 1827, UKNA HO 44/17, 6. Finally, emigration was controversial because of the question of whether emigration would bring benefits to the colonies as well as to Britain. Many people thought that it was more useful to put the surplus population in the colonies, where it would increase the prosperity of the empire, than in a foreign state. One proemigration MP said that "by persons going abroad and employing their skill and their capital in matters in which they could not be so well employed at home, they created a commerce which, but for them, would never have existed, and

- which, in the end, afforded employment to the industry and capital of the people at home." *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 2nd Series, 21 (1829): 1730.
49. Much has been written on Irish immigrants in Britain, but one study that focuses on the migration itself is Ruth-Ann M. Harris, *The Nearest Place that Wasn't Ireland: Early Nineteenth-Century Irish Labor Migration* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1994).
  50. Printed Letter to Henry Goulburn, September 10, 1824, UKNA HO 44/17, 72D, 8, and "Letter to Wilmot Horton . . .," September 18, 1827, UKNA HO 44/17, 11.
  51. James Kay, *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester* (London: James Ridgeway, 1832), 54.
  52. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 2nd Series, 21 (1829): 1727.
  53. *Ibid.*
  54. "The Census and Non-Sensus of 1841," *Monthly Magazine* (1841): 302–303.
  55. *Ibid.*, 305.
  56. *Ibid.*, 304.
  57. *Quarterly Review* 76 (1845): 11.
  58. "Proposals for an Improved Census of the Population," *Edinburgh Review* 49 (1829): 10.
  59. Farr's classifications influenced the taxonomy still used by the World Health Organization today.
  60. It was not self-definition for everyone. The head of the family was asked to identify everyone else in the household, including children and servants. We have no way of knowing how many of them would have self-identified differently, or how families actually completed the task of filling out the census forms. In cases where those being counted were illiterate and the information was being relayed verbally, the enumerators may have bypassed the stage of self-definition and inserted their own interpretations. See Edward Higgs' extensive work on the occupation census: "The Tabulation of Occupations in the Nineteenth-Century Census with Special Reference to Domestic Servants," in *Women's Work in Industrial England: Regional and Local Perspectives*, edited by Nigel Goose (Hatfield: Local Population Studies, 2007), 250–259; "Household and Work in the Nineteenth-Century Censuses of England and Wales," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 11 (1990), 73–77; "The Struggle for the Occupational Census, 1841–1911," in *Government and Expertise: Specialists, Administrators and Professionals, 1860–1919*, edited by R. M. Macleod (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 73–86.
  61. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851...Reprinted in a Condensed Form* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1854), 61.
  62. "Minutes of evidence taken before the committee on the bill for taking an account of the population of Great Britain, and of the increase and diminution thereof," *Parliamentary Papers* 4 (1830): 3.
  63. *Abstracts of the Answers and Returns . . . Occupation Abstract* (London: H.M. Stationary Office, 1844), 20.
  64. *Ibid.*, 21.
  65. *Ibid.* William Frend, on the other hand, told a Parliamentary Committee on the 1831 census that "I am not of the opinion of those who have divided mankind into strange fanciful classes which they call productive and unproductive classes." "Minutes of evidence taken before the committee on the bill for taking an account of the population of Great Britain, and of the increase and diminution thereof," 5.
  66. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851...Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 58. Higgs believes that one reason that Farr categorized occupations based on the materials that people worked with was because he believed that those materials affected health. Edward Higgs, *The Information State in England: The Central Collection of Information on Citizens since 1500* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 89.
  67. *Census of England and Wales for the Year 1861: General Report*, Vol. III (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1863), 225.



68. Ibid, 225.
69. Ibid, 228.
70. Ibid, 35.
71. Ibid, 39.
72. Ibid, 228.
73. Ibid.
74. Ibid, 225.
75. Ibid.
76. Ibid, 32.
77. Ibid, 225–226.
78. Ibid, 225. Many specific occupations could also be viewed as signs of progress. On soap and candle makers—"the progress of civilization has been greatly promoted by these trades; for cleanliness and artificial light distinguish the English and other civilized nations from barbarians, immersed in dirt and darkness." There was also, of course, the "not very agreeable but...important group of scavengers and nightmen." Ibid, 37–38.
79. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851...Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 61.
80. *Census of England...1861*, 225.
81. Ibid.
82. Ibid.
83. "Results of the Census of 1851," *Westminster Review* 61 (1854): 352.
84. In 1861: "It is everywhere acknowledged that an important service has been rendered by statistics to the Blind and to the Deaf-and-Dumb. Not only have the authentic numbers of these unfortunate members of the community been ascertained..., but a fresh impulse has been given to the effects of philanthropy on their behalf." *Census of England...1861*, 42.
85. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851...Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 77.
86. *Census of England...1861*, 7.
87. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851...Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 82–83. Farr and others also argued, however, that the large numbers of elderly paupers indicated that the country did not have enough provision for the elderly. See *Manchester Guardian*, August 16, 1854, 10. The workhouse, a public institution that was meant not to help people but to motivate people to work, complicates the notion that institutions meant benevolence and civilization.
88. *Census of England...1861*, 50.
89. Ibid, 59.
90. Ibid, 50.
91. Ibid, 47.
92. Ibid, 62.
93. *Illustrated London News*, April 5, 1851, 263.
94. *Census of England...1861*, 70. Farr also said about the idle: it is "much easier to displace than to regenerate such a population." Quoted in Eyler, *Victorian Social Medicine*, 149.
95. While this was true in a family-based agrarian economy as well, it was true more on the level of the household than on the level of the national economy.
96. *Proceedings of the Statistical Society of London*, 1834–1839, 114.
97. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851...Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 28.
98. "Curiosities of the Census," *North British Review* (1855): 405.
99. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851...Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 28.
100. *Manchester Guardian*, August 9, 1854, 6. The writer also noted that Britain's population was most likely the youngest in Europe, and therefore had the greatest potential for future productivity. Ibid, 7.
101. Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor* (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 451. Incidentally, Mayhew found that "for all purposes of a scientific or

- definite character the Occupation Abstract of the Census of this country is comparatively useless." Ibid, 456. This judgment was based on the 1841 census.
102. Ibid, 451.
103. Ibid.
104. Ibid.
105. Ibid.
106. *Carpenter's Monthly Political Magazine* (1831): 8.
107. Ibid, 12.
108. Quoted in William Farr, 1807–1883. *The Report of the Centenary Symposium Held at the Royal Society on 29 April 1983* (London: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, 1983), 7.
109. "The Late Census," *Edinburgh Review* 80 (1844): 94.
110. *Illustrated London News*, April 5, 1851, 624, and quoted in Eyler, *Victorian Social Medicine*, 152.
111. *Illustrated London News*, April 5, 1851, 624.
112. "Results of the Census of 1851," 351.
113. *Manchester Guardian*, September 17, 1851, 3.
114. *Times*, December 18, 1841, 3, and *Manchester Guardian*, September 17, 1851, 3.
115. Ibid.
116. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851... Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 55.
117. *Times*, July 4, 1851.
118. Ibid.
119. "The Census and Free Trade," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 70 (1851): 134.
120. "A Few Words on the Census of Ireland," *Fraser's Magazine* 64 (1861): 303.
121. Ibid, 302.
122. Ibid, 301.
123. Ibid.
124. Ibid, 302.
125. Ibid.
126. Ibid, 300.
127. Ibid, 303–304.
128. Ibid, 307, 301. The author argued that the only negative result of the famine was that the British military had lost a certain number of its recruits. Ibid, 306. But according to this author, far more important to national strength was the fact that Ireland was finally pacified and the military would no longer have to waste its strength controlling it. The *Times*, while admitting that the Irish famine was "so humbling to our national pride," also blamed Ireland itself for its problems and excused the British government from any blame. *Times*, September 10, 1851, 4.
129. "Curiosities of the Census," 404.
130. *Manchester Guardian*, November 6, 1852, 6.
131. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, 160 (1860): 79. A decreasing budget for the Emigration Board was the practical result of this shift in attitudes.
132. "The Census and Free Trade," 126.
133. James Kay wrote in the 1830s that "a debilitated, emasculated race would be rapidly multiplied.... A dense mass, impotent alike of great moral or physical efforts, would accumulate." Kay, *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester*, 51. I will examine eugenic thinking in Chapter 6.
134. *Times*, August 22, 1851, 8.
135. *Manchester Guardian*, July 24, 1861, 4.
136. *Times*, July 23, 1861, 5.
137. *Times*, March 12, 1867, 12.
138. *Census of England... 1861*, 19.
139. Ibid, 25.
140. Ibid, 229.

141. Ibid, 25.
142. "Results of the Census of 1851," 348.
143. *Manchester Guardian*, November 6, 1852, 6.
144. Ibid.
145. Ibid.
146. This assumes that imperial wars and struggles in Ireland were seen as domestic issues, which at least in the case of Ireland was largely true.
147. For Malthusianism and eugenics, see Pauline Mazumdar, *Eugenics, Human Genetics and Human Failings: The Eugenics Society, its Sources and its Critics in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1992), 1–2.

### 3 The Census and Representation

1. Percy Shelley, "The Mask of Anarchy," in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, edited by Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1977), 310, lines 368–372.
2. For a description of this conflict see Peter Buck, "People Who Counted: Political Arithmetic in the Eighteenth Century," *Isis* 73 (1982): 28–45.
3. This is connected to the question of whether categorization eliminates or leads to discrimination. The French model of an indivisible national identity, in which subcategories are understood as problematic, has received criticism in recent years. See David I. Kertzer and Dominique Arel, eds., *Census and Identity: The Politics of Race, Ethnicity, and Language in National Censuses* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 24.
4. Ibid, 21.
5. Ibid, 25.
6. Much of the work on the ability of the census to create collective identities has been done in the context of the colonial state. See Bernard Cohn, "The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia," in *An Anthropologist among the Historians and other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), Chapter 10.
7. Sidmouth to Murray, March 9, 1821, United Kingdom National Archives (UKNA) HO 44/7, 188–189.
8. See UKNA PRO 30/22/1A 129–156.
9. See Wood to Russell, January 11, 1830, UKNA PRO 30/22/1A 240–242.
10. See for example, December 31, 1830, UKNA HO 44/24, 3.
11. Ibid.
12. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 2nd Series, 8 (1823): 126.
13. Ibid, 126–127.
14. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, 2 (1831): 1264.
15. Ibid, 1269.
16. Ibid, 1270.
17. Ibid.
18. 1831, UKNA PRO 30/22/1B.
19. Ibid.
20. See *Northern Star*, July 24, 1841, and October 23, 1841. Also see *Bronterre's National Reformer*, February 11, 1837.
21. Those who opposed the Reform Bill sometimes also used the census. In a discussion of the 1841 census, a writer for the *Quarterly Review*, after describing the high rates of criminality in cities, complained, "Yet it is this very [criminal] class of persons on whom . . . the Reform Act of 1832 has transferred such ominous influence." *Quarterly Review* 76 (1845): 20.
22. *Manchester Guardian*, September 14, 1853, 3.

23. James Graham to John Russell, September 11, 1857, UKNA PRO 30/22/13D, 132.
24. James Graham to John Russell, September 22, 1857, UKNA PRO 30/22/13D, 144.
25. By the 1860s, political representation on a local level was clearly based on the census. See *Census of England and Wales for the Year 1861: General Report*, Vol. III (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1863), 14.
26. See Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland, and Jane Rendall, *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender and the Reform Act of 1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 71–118.
27. *Manchester Guardian*, November 23, 1853, 4.
28. *Manchester Guardian*, June 7, 1851, 8.
29. For example, a correspondent wrote to the *Manchester Guardian* in 1847 asking the paper to print the populations of Manchester, Glasgow, and Liverpool, in order to settle a public dispute. Different figures had been printed in the *Liverpool Mercury* and the *Scotch Reformers Gazette*, each giving a larger population for its own city. The figures were disputed because municipal and parliamentary boundaries were different. *Manchester Guardian*, January 23, 1847, 9.
30. *Census of England... 1861*, 18.
31. *Times*, December 22, 1866, 6, and December 25, 1866, 6.
32. Mayor Burbidge to Secretary of the Treasury, January 13, 1862, UKNA HO 45/7362.
33. See UKNA MPAA 1/7/12. A clergyman, however, wrote to the government about his fear that laborers in his parish were using census statistics to get money that they were then using for drink. Frederick Smithy to Cornwall Lewis, April 1, 1861, UKNA HO 45/7098, 60.
34. 1855, UKNA RAIL 1059/1.
35. 1836, UKNA RAIL 1075/415. Also see 1846, UKNA RAIL 134/18 and 1847, UKNA RAIL 1031/46.
36. *Abstracts of the Answers and Returns... Occupation Abstract* (London: H.M. Stationary Office, 1844), 72.
37. See Michael Drake, "The Census, 1801–1891," in *Nineteenth-Century Society: Essays in the Use of Quantitative Methods for the Study of Social Data*, edited by E. A. Wrigley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 30.
38. *Manchester Guardian*, January 4, 1845.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*
41. *Ibid.*
42. *Ibid.*
43. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, 113 (1850): 138.
44. *Ibid.*
45. *Ibid.*
46. M. G. Wiebe, ed., *Benjamin Disraeli Letters, Vol. 5, 1848–1851* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 484.
47. For positive interpretations of urban population growth, see *Manchester Guardian*, January 15, 1845, *Manchester Guardian*, April 29, 1861, 3, and *Manchester Guardian*, July 4, 1861, 3.
48. British Temperance League to Cornwall Lewis, January 19, 1861, UKNA HO 45/7098, 29.
49. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, 114 (1851): 1307.
50. *Ibid.*
51. *Ibid.*, 1308.
52. *Ibid.* Opponents focused on specific technicalities of the census. Anglicans were to be asked about the number of seats, for example, while Dissenters were asked about standing room as well. Some critics also claimed that more accurate infor-

- mation would be obtained by taking the average over an extended period than by counting one day's attendance.
53. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, 114 (1851): 1308.
  54. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, 115 (1851): 631. Opponents of the measure also praised "information," demonstrating the extent to which statistics had come to be seen as an authority. One MP said, "He had no doubt the Secretary of State was actuated by a laudable desire to obtain the greatest possible mass of information." *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, 114 (1851): 1308.
  55. See Thomas Mann to Solicitor General, December 18, 1850, UKNA TS 25/524.
  56. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, 115 (1851): 631.
  57. *Ibid.*, 632.
  58. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, 114 (1851): 1309.
  59. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, 115 (1851): 630, 633.
  60. See K. D. M. Snell and Paul S. Ell, *Rival Jerusalems: The Geography of Victorian Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); W. S. F. Pickering, "The 1851 Religious Census - A Useless Experiment?", *The British Journal of Sociology* 18 (1967): 382–407.
  61. *Census of Great Britain, 1851: Religious Worship in England and Wales: Abridged from the Official Report Made by Horace Mann to...Registrar-General* (London: George Routledge, 1854), 57.
  62. A precursor to this looming conflict was visible in 1830, when census taker John Rickman expressed his concern about the dishonest population returns of Dissenters. John Rickman to Thomas Venables, April 8, 1830, UKNA HO 44/19, 320–323.
  63. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, 135 (1854): 25. Another MP said that he was not surprised at the errors, because "many [Dissenting] ministers were not often in the same rank of life as the clergy of the Established Church." *Ibid.*
  64. *Ibid.*
  65. *Ibid.*, 29. If there were indeed any truth to these accusations it would show a very high level of awareness in the power of the census. It would raise further questions, however, about whether a few Dissenting leaders encouraged the rank and file of their congregations to show Dissenting strength, or if the awareness existed throughout the Dissenting community.
  66. *Ibid.*, 27.
  67. *Ibid.*, 30.
  68. *Ibid.*, 27.
  69. *Ibid.*, 31.
  70. July 10, 1854, UKNA PRO 30/29/23/15, 267–270.
  71. July 19, 1854, UKNA HO 45/5786.
  72. July 10, 1854, UKNA PRO 30/29/23/15, 267–270.
  73. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, 135 (1854): 24.
  74. *Ibid.*, 28.
  75. *Ibid.*, 28.
  76. *Census of Great Britain, 1851: Religious Worship in England and Wales: Abridged from the Official Report Made by Horace Mann to...Registrar-General*, v.
  77. *Ibid.*
  78. *Education Census of 1851* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1854), xi.
  79. R. Ashton, Secretary of the Congregational Union of England and Wales to Cornewall Lewis, April 28, 1860, UKNA HO 45/7098, 5.
  80. Memorial of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland to Palmerston, June 4, 1860, UKNA HO 45/7098, 6.
  81. Protestant Dissenting Ministers of Warwickshire and Neighboring Counties to Cornewall Lewis, June 5, 1860, UKNA HO 45/7098, 7.
  82. *Ibid.*
  83. *Ibid.*
  84. *Ibid.*

85. Moderator of the Bristol Association of Baptist Churches to Cornwall Lewis, June 11, 1860, UKNA HO 45/7098, 8; and Memorial of the Congregation of Unitarian Dissenters Assembling for Public Worship, Cole Hill Tamworth to Cornwall Lewis, June 13, 1860, UKNA HO 45/7098, 13.
86. Western Association of Baptist Churches to Cornwall Lewis, June 14, 1860, UKNA HO 45/7098, 15; and Congregational Chapel at Staplehurst to Cornwall Lewis, July 11, 1860, UKNA HO 45/7098, 19.
87. Memorial of Committee of Kilmarnick Presbytery of the United Presbyterian Church to Cornwall Lewis, June 22, 1860, UKNA HO 45/7098, 17. A petition from Birmingham with a list of the names and professions of Dissenters suggests that many of the signatories were involved in artisan, merchant, and manufacturing pursuits. Birmingham Protestant Dissenters to Cornwall Lewis, June 14, 1860, UKNA HO 45/7098, 14.
88. "I have further considered the subject," he wrote, "and I have paid attention to every thing that has been publicly said or written respecting it." Graham to Undersecretary of State, July 2, 1860, UKNA HO 45/7098, 18.
89. Ibid.
90. Ibid.
91. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, 159 (1860): 1696. Both sides agreed that the bill "has excited great attention and interest in a large part of the community." Ibid, 1702.
92. Ibid 1696, 1737–1738. Douglas agreed that it was not only Dissenters but also Catholics who were opposed to the religious question.
93. Ibid, 1701.
94. Ibid.
95. Ibid.
96. Ibid, 1702.
97. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, 158 (1860): 92.
98. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, 159 (1860): 1697–1698.
99. Ibid, 1698.
100. Ibid, 1700.
101. Ibid, 1707.
102. Ibid, 1732. Lewis also suggested that a census which "would throw together into one body all the Protestant Dissenters of the country... would place those denominations in a position, ... which would not prove disadvantageous to them in a numerical point of view." Ibid, 1709.
103. Ibid, 1696.
104. Ibid, 1721.
105. Modern opinion surveys, which assume that statistical evaluation of the ways in which people self-identify is useful, did not originate until after this period. Kertzer and Arel argue that now censuses try to find out about people's subjective identities, but that during the nineteenth century most governments were not interested in identity. Kertzer and Arel, *Census and Identity*, 20.
106. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, 159 (1860): 1716. In 1851, someone on the other side of the debate had said something similar. Goulburn "had always understood that the object of the census was to procure... information with reference to a particular class of facts; and... the information sought by the paper to which he had referred was uncertain." *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, 114 (1851): 1316. William Gladstone, who took a more neutral view of the whole affair, wrote in his diary "I regret that a Religious Census has been proposed on the part of the Government. But I believe 1) That a religious census is not in itself mischievous. 2) That combined with a return of attendance it would be as nearly as possible fair. 3) That the opposition now offered will not materially alter the value of the return as it respects the main point, that between Church and Dissent." M. R. D. Foot, ed., *The Gladstone Diaries*, Vol. 4 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 503.

107. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, 159 (1860): 1713. Monsell more bluntly said, "The real meaning of the opposition... lay in the idea that the floating masses of the people, of no particular religious persuasion, would... be all put down to the Established Church." *Ibid*, 1729.
108. *Ibid*, 1722.
109. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, 160 (1860): 80.
110. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, 159 (1860): 1703.
111. *Ibid*, 1703–1704. Many nineteenth-century Europeans looked to Prussia as a model for statistical progress and government regulation, especially in the realm of public education. For those who supported a more "inquisitorial" census, Prussia showed that it could be done. For those opposed to it, however, Prussia was a perfect example of an autocratic country where individual liberties were subordinated to the needs of the state.
112. *Ibid*, 1703. A religion question, Lewis said, had also been adopted in various British colonies and in Ireland. *Ibid*, 1705. Marsh pointed out that certain colonies needed a religious census because money was to be divided among religions there. "In England no such reason existed, and therefore an inquiry as to the religious professions of the people was mere idle curiosity, and its results would prove of no practical value." *Ibid*, 1721.
113. *Ibid*, 1698. Interestingly there was a difference of opinion over the exact legislative relation between the government and Dissenting congregations. While one MP asked, "Why should Dissenters be compelled to make a religious confession to a Government from which they derived no assistance in religious matters?" another pointed out that "when the whole of the grants for education which were annually voted by Parliament depended upon... there being large Dissenting bodies who proclaimed themselves as such, and... received government aid, it could not be said that an accurate account of the numerical strength of each denomination would be an entirely worthless document." *Ibid*, 1726, 1728.
114. *Ibid*, 1696.
115. *Ibid*.
116. *Ibid*, 1727.
117. *Ibid*, 1714.
118. *Ibid*, 1715. Dissenting MPs found the comparison extremely insulting.
119. The debate over the religious census had been extensively covered in the press, and when the census itself was about to be taken, the *Manchester Guardian* added, "We need scarcely remind our readers that no person will be required to state his 'religious profession.'" *Manchester Guardian*, March 30, 1861, 5.
120. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, 159 (1860): 1702.
121. *Ibid*.
122. *Ibid*, 1719.
123. *Ibid*, 1726–1727. Marsh agreed that "instead of trying to expose religious differences, they ought to endeavour to conceal them." *Ibid*, 1721.
124. *Census of England... 1861*, 30.
125. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, 135 (1854): 28.
126. Kertzer and Arel, *Census and Identity*, 29.
127. *Ibid*, 30.

#### 4 Urban Growth, Urban Problems, and the Census

1. *Manchester Guardian*, September 17, 1851, 3.
2. Friedrich Engels, "The Condition of the Working Class in England," in *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels on Britain* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953), 56.
3. *Ibid*.

4. *Quarterly Review* 95 (1854): 271.
5. Engels, "The Condition of the Working Class in England," 56.
6. *Ibid.*, 57.
7. "Minutes of evidence taken before the committee on the re-committed bill for taking an account of the population of Great Britain, and of the increase and diminution thereof," *Parliamentary Papers* 4 (1830), 13.
8. Thomas Carlyle, "Chartism," in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, Vol. 4 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900–1901), 121.
9. Engels, "The Condition of the Working Class in England," 155.
10. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851...Reprinted in a Condensed Form* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1854), 26.
11. Mary Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830–1864* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 7–8, Chapters 3–4.
12. Edward Higgs disagrees with the notion that Victorians were constantly trying to control the poor. He says that the mid-Victorian state "sought to change the behavior of individuals via the provision of information and the creation of rights and obligations." Edward Higgs, *The Information State in England: The Central Collection of Information on Citizens since 1500* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 91. Also see A. P. Donajgradzki, ed., *Social Control in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Croom Helm, Ltd., 1977).
13. The fact that urban workers were a "majority" tended to be assumed rather than specifically proven using statistics. The census did not ask about income, so there was no direct way to identify the poor. Rather, social commentators used statistics of population density and urban growth to indicate the prevalence of urban poverty. In fact, it was not until 1851 that the census determined that at least half the population lived in urban rather than rural areas, but that did not stop earlier analysts from describing the urban poor as "the bulk" or "great body" of the people.
14. See Susan Thorne, "'The Conversion of Englishmen and the Conversion of the World Inseparable': Missionary Imperialism and the Language of Class in Early Industrial Britain," in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, edited by Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 238–262.
15. John Eyler argues that "it was primarily this interest in the state of the poor that seems to have united the members of the statistical societies and to explain the rapid spread of the statistical movement in the 1830s." John Eyler, *Victorian Social Medicine: The Ideas and Methods of William Farr* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 17.
16. See Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (London: Penguin Books, 1990) for Manchester as a "shock city."
17. For analysis of Kay, see Poovey, *Making a Social Body*, Chapters 3–4.
18. James Kay, *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester* (London: James Ridgeway, 1832), 1–3.
19. *Ibid.*, 4.
20. James Kay, *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester...Containing an Introductory Letter to the Rev. Thomas Chalmers*, 2nd ed. (London: James Ridgeway, 1832), 4.
21. *Ibid.*, 14.
22. *Ibid.*, 9.
23. *Ibid.*, 11.
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*, 8.
26. Kay, *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester*, 72.
27. *Ibid.*, 29.



28. Kay, *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester*, 2nd ed., 12.
29. Kay, *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester*, 21.
30. See Kay, *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester*, 2nd ed., 5.
31. Kay, *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester*, 47.
32. Kay, *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester*, 2nd ed., 11.
33. Asa Briggs points out that “mass” referred both to large numbers and to the process of “massing,” or bringing people together in towns and factories. Viewing the urban poor as “masses” was something that was done from the outside: most people do not understand themselves as members of masses. Asa Briggs, “The Language of ‘Mass’ and ‘Masses’ in Nineteenth-Century England,” in *Ideology and the Labour Movement: Essays Presented to John Saville*, edited by David E. Martin and David Rubinstein (London: Croom Helm Ltd, 1979), 62–83. As Raymond Williams famously wrote, “There are in fact no masses; there are only ways of seeing people as masses.” Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780–1850* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 300.
34. See Steven Marcus, *Engels, Manchester, and the Working Class* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1985), Chapter 3.
35. Engels, “The Condition of the Working Class in England,” 85.
36. *Ibid.*, 133.
37. *Ibid.*, 70.
38. *Ibid.*, 81.
39. *Ibid.*, 70.
40. *Ibid.*, 130.
41. *Ibid.*, 85, 94.
42. *Ibid.*, 97.
43. *Ibid.*, 155.
44. *Ibid.*
45. *Manchester Guardian*, March 29, 1851, 9.
46. Higgs, *The Information State in England*, 88–91. Among the many studies of the public health movement, see Anthony S. Wohl, *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983) and Pamela K. Gilbert, *The Citizen’s Body: Desire, Health, and the Social in Victorian England* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2007).
47. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851...Reprinted in a Condensed Form* 1851, 57. After the first national statistics of blindness appeared in 1851, Farr explained that “crowded dwellings and other circumstances attendant upon dense populations, by inducing diseases of the organs of sight, have caused a greater amount of blindness in towns than in rural localities.” *Ibid.*, 79. It was not actually the case that incidence of blindness was higher in the cities, but Farr argued that it was higher in rural areas only because of the higher proportion of elderly people there, and because blind people were less likely to migrate to the cities. See *Census of England and Wales for the Year 1861: General Report*, Vol. III (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1863), 44.
48. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851...Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 32.
49. Eyler, *Victorian Social Medicine*, 141.
50. *Ibid.*, 152.
51. Quoted in *ibid.*, 123.
52. *Ibid.*, 125.
53. *Ibid.* A. Adelstein argues that Farr’s “genius lay in the clear conceptualisation of public health as a population problem.” William Farr, 1807–1883. *The Report of the*

- Centenary Symposium Held at the Royal Society on 29 April 1983* (London: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, 1983), 29.
54. The health of the working classes in manufacturing areas was of interest to working-class activists as well as middle-class reformers. See, for example, *McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal* 21 (1841): 163.
  55. Engels, "The Condition of the Working Class in England," 129.
  56. *Examiner*, November 27, 1841, 754.
  57. Kay, *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester*, 2nd ed., 7, and Engels, "The Condition of the Working Class in England," 133.
  58. James Hammack, "On the Direction in Which the Census Inquiry may be Extended in 1861," *Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science* 3 (1859): 707.
  59. *Illustrated London News*, April 5, 1851, 263.
  60. Hammack, "On the Direction in Which the Census Inquiry may be Extended in 1861," 707.
  61. Information on housing quality was gathered informally. After census day, newspapers provided shocking anecdotes from individual enumerators' experiences; in 1841, for example, the *Hull Advertiser* said that "in one house of two rooms, twenty-eight persons of both sexes slept the night before taking the census." *Hull Advertiser*, July 16, 1841, 5.
  62. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, 159 (1860): 1740. In 1840, the Statistical Society of London had advised the government to count rooms, but the government did not follow the recommendation. The census did gather information about housing quality in Ireland, and in 1861, the census in Scotland recorded the number of windows per house.
  63. *Quarterly Review* 76 (1845): 12.
  64. Hector Gavin, *The Habitations of the Industrial Classes: Their Influence on the Physical and on the Social and Moral Conditions of these Classes ... Being an Address Delivered at Crosby Hall, November 27th, 1850* (London: Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes, 1851), 11.
  65. *Ibid.*, 12.
  66. *Ibid.*, 15.
  67. *Ibid.*, 69.
  68. *Ibid.*, 81.
  69. *Ibid.*, 13.
  70. *Ibid.*, 16.
  71. *Ibid.*, 87.
  72. *Ibid.*, 66.
  73. *Ibid.*, 87. By the 1850s, some believed that housing for the poor had improved. See "Results of the Census of 1851," *Westminster Review* 61 (1854): 352.
  74. Howlett to Grey, December 28, 1850, United Kingdom National Archives (UKNA) HO 44/39, 287–289.
  75. See Nadja Durbach, *Bodily Matters: The Anti-Vaccination Movement in England, 1853–1907* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).
  76. Eyler, *Victorian Social Medicine*, 149. The exigencies of public health even called for an exception to the government's policy of sharing only the general census results. Graham wrote to the Home Office asking for permission to publish personal details: "For purposes connected with the improvement of the sanitary state of the metropolis I have been asked by the medical officers of Health of London to furnish them with a Return respecting each house and apartment in every street etc. of the metropolis." Graham to Undersecretary of State, April 4, 1861, UKNA HO 45/7098, 62. Also see *Census of England... 1861*, 65.
  77. Eyler, *Victorian Social Medicine*, 128.

78. *Illustrated London News*, April 5, 1851, 263.
79. *Proceedings of the Statistical Society of London* (1834–1839), 234.
80. Engels, "The Condition of the Working Class in England," 61.
81. *Ibid*, 163.
82. See *Manchester Guardian*, April 3, 1847, 8.
83. *Quarterly Review* 8 (1812): 338
84. Quoted in Engels, "The Condition of the Working Class in England," 154.
85. *Ibid*, 61.
86. Gavin, *The Habitations of the Industrial Classes*, vii.
87. *Ibid*, 80.
88. Engels, "The Condition of the Working Class in England," 162.
89. *Census of England... 1861*, 10.
90. Engels, "The Condition of the Working Class in England," 71.
91. *Ibid*, 73.
92. Kay, *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester*, 2nd ed., 12.
93. Kay, *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester*, 51.
94. Engels, "The Condition of the Working Class in England," 97.
95. Gavin, *The Habitations of the Industrial Classes*, 66.
96. Women were frequently blamed for continuing to work after marriage, and thereby failing to keep their homes comfortable.
97. Kay, *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester*, 20.
98. Gavin, *The Habitations of the Industrial Classes*, 52.
99. See Miles Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism, 1847–1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).
100. "Educational Census of Great Britain," *Edinburgh Review* 102 (1855): 384.
101. *Ibid*, 391.
102. *Education Census of 1851* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1854), xxiv.
103. "Educational Census of Great Britain," 386.
104. *Education Census of 1851*, xxx.
105. *Ibid*, lxxv.
106. *Ibid*, xv.
107. *Ibid*, lxxv–lxxvi. Mann was also well aware that the main obstacle to establishing a national education system in the nineteenth century was religious rivalry. However, Mann believed that rivalry had actually worked paradoxically to increase education, as the different sects tried to outdo one another.
108. *Ibid*, lxxiv.
109. *Ibid*. The way to achieve this result, Mann admitted, was most likely not the model of "'common schools' in which the children of the different classes of society are educated all together." This model "is not likely to succeed in England, where the tone of social feeling is decisively opposed to such a democratic intermixture." *Ibid*, xlv.
110. "Educational Census of Great Britain," 389.
111. *Education Census of 1851*, lxxxiii. At the same time, Mann acknowledged that compulsory education would be interpreted as an infringement on parental rights and the sanctity of the home, so incentives were needed instead of force. *Ibid*, lxxx.
112. Lord John Russell was particularly interested in this question, and wanted more information acquired on a yearly basis. Graham to Russell, October 7, 1855, UKNA PRO 30/22/12F, 186–188.
113. Mann to Graham, October 5, 1855, UKNA PRO 30/22/12F, 190–193.

114. *Census of Great Britain, 1851: Religious worship in England and Wales: Abridged from the Official Report made by Horace Mann to...Registrar-General* (London: George Routledge, 1854), 93.
115. Ibid.
116. Ibid.
117. Ibid.
118. Ibid, 84.
119. Ibid, 65.
120. Ibid, 57.
121. Ibid.
122. Ibid, 73.
123. Ibid, 93.
124. Ibid, 102.
125. Ibid.
126. Ibid, 103.
127. Ibid.
128. Ibid, 63.
129. Ibid.
130. Ibid, 84.
131. Ibid, 95.
132. Ibid, 96.
133. Organizations had already been founded for this purpose. For example, the Society for Promoting the Employment of Additional Curates in Populous Places had existed since 1836.
134. *Census of Great Britain, 1851: Religious Worship in England and Wales: Abridged from the Official Report Made by Horace Mann to...Registrar-General*, 100.
135. *Quarterly Review* 8 (1812): 341.
136. *Quarterly Review* 76 (1845): 17.
137. Ibid.
138. Ibid, 18.
139. *Manchester Guardian*, September 14, 1853, 6.
140. "Curiosities of the Census," *North British Review* 22 (1855): 405.
141. *Manchester Guardian*, July 31, 1844.
142. See *The Census of Great Britain in 1851...Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 13.
143. *Manchester Guardian*, June 28, 1854, 10.
144. Ibid.
145. Ibid.
146. *Manchester Guardian*, September 17, 1851, 3.
147. *Manchester Guardian*, June 28, 1854, 10.
148. *Abstracts of the Answers and Returns...Occupation Abstract* (London: H.M. Stationary Office, 1844), 12–13.
149. "The Late Census," *Edinburgh Review* 80 (1844): 93.
150. Ibid, 91.
151. *Manchester Guardian*, November 23, 1853, 4.
152. See *Manchester Guardian*, March 29, 1851, 9.
153. *Manchester Guardian*, September 17, 1851, 3.
154. Ibid.
155. Ibid.
156. *Illustrated London News*, 1851, 624.
157. *Census of England...1861*, 229.
158. "The Late Census," 79.
159. Ibid, 101.
160. Elizabeth Gaskell, *Ruth* (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 32.

## 5 Marriage, the Family, and the Nation

1. *Manchester Guardian*, August 16, 1854, 7
2. William Greg, *Literary and Social Judgments* (Boston: J. R. Osgood, 1873), 276.
3. *Ibid.*, 285.
4. *Ibid.*, 286.
5. For work on single women's responses to their situation, see Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850–1920* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1985); and James Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen: Genteel Poverty and Female Emigration, 1830–1914* (London, Croom Helm Ltd., 1979). For work on the feminist movement in general, see Barbara Caine, *Victorian Feminists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) and Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States* (London: Macmillan Publishers, Ltd., 1985). For an examination of the census and the surplus woman problem, see Judith Worsnop, "A Reevaluation of 'the Problem of Surplus Women' in Nineteenth-Century England: The Case of the 1851 Census," *Women's Studies International Forum* 13, no. 1/2 (1990): 21–31. Worsnop makes several interesting points about feminists' success in redefining the "surplus woman" problem. She refers generally to the census as a "public document," however, and does not analyze it in depth. I suggest that the census report, which was written by William Farr, should be viewed as an intervention in the debate over women's roles that needs to be taken seriously in its own right.
6. November 21, 1801, United Kingdom National Archives (UKNA) PRO 30/9/126, 36.
7. For an analysis of fertility and its relationship to marriage, see Hera Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution: English Women, Sex, and Contraception, 1800–1975* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
8. Quoted in D. V. Glass, *Numbering the People: The Eighteenth-Century Population Controversy and the Development of Census and Vital Statistics in Britain* (Farnborough: D. C. Heath Ltd., 1973), 108.
9. *Abstract of the Answers and Returns* (London: printed for the House of Commons, 1822), vii.
10. "Proposals for an Improved Census of the Population," *Edinburgh Review* 49 (1829): 28.
11. *Ibid.*
12. See Patricia Hollis, ed., *Women in Public, 1850–1900: Documents of the Victorian Women's Movement* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1979), 33.
13. Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979), 378.
14. See Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987).
15. See moral etiquette books by Sarah Ellis, especially *The Mothers of England: Their Influence and Responsibility* (London: Peter Jackson, Late Fisher, Son, & Co., 1845).
16. Jane Austen, *Emma* (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), 79. Austen marries her proud single heroine off at the end of the novel, thus complicating the assertion of pleasant old maid-hood.
17. Joanna Trollope, *Britannia's Daughters: Women of the British Empire* (Oxford: Hutchinson, 1983), 71.
18. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851...Reprinted in a Condensed Form* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1854), 36.
19. *Ibid.*, 38.
20. *Ibid.* Farr himself had three unmarried daughters, for whom he was anxious to make financial provision.

21. See Davidoff and Hall. In this case, Englishness was explicitly separated from Britishness.
22. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851...Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 6.
23. Ibid, 35.
24. Ibid, 7.
25. Ibid, 8.
26. Ibid, 9.
27. Ibid, 26.
28. Ibid, 35.
29. "Results of the Census of 1851," *Westminster Review* 61 (1854): 351. These middle-class commentators ignored the fact that the servants were not living with their families. Single and widowed people, or people whose children had left home or were away at school, did often have servants but did not fit into the "ideal" category regarding the family living situation. Furthermore, the common practice of extended social visits among the upper classes in nineteenth-century Britain meant that the census, which counted the people staying in a given house on a single night, did not always reflect family situations accurately.
30. Wives were usually younger than husbands, but there were only a few cases of very great age disparity in a marriage; as the *Manchester Guardian* described it, there was a "rarity of these freaks of conjugal taste." See *Manchester Guardian*, August 16, 1854, 7. Farr believed that "the reciprocal attractiveness of the sexes diminishes in the distance of age at rates which may ultimately be expressed by some simple mathematical formula." *The Census of Great Britain in 1851...Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 38. *The Manchester Guardian*, however, disagreed that marriage was governed by laws, and berated the writer of the report as a "cold-blooded official." "We have benefited by their abilities and research, but we must leave them to defend such perilous propositions as the foregoing on their own hook." *Manchester Guardian*, August 16, 1854, 7.
31. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851...Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 7.
32. Ibid, 35.
33. Ibid, 74, 35.
34. *Manchester Guardian*, August 16, 1854, 10.
35. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851...Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 47.
36. Ibid, 47, 48.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid, 49.
39. Ibid, 50. Farr here returned to an old symbolic parallel between the father as the head of a family and the king as the head of a country. His reference to the French Revolution is significant because he was describing George III not only in contrast to his predecessors in Britain but also in contrast to Louis XVI of France, who was punished for his inability to fulfill his obligations as father of his country. See Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1993).
40. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851...Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 50.
41. Ibid, 51.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid, 46.
44. Ibid, 47.
45. Ibid, 51.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid, 52. In an article on the 1851 census, Charles Dickens also focused on the improvement of marriage. See Charles Dickens, "Numbers of People," *Household Words* 10 (October 1854): 227.
48. *Manchester Guardian*, August 16, 1854, 7.

49. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851... Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 42.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid.
52. *Manchester Guardian*, November 23, 1853, 4.
53. *Manchester Guardian*, August 16, 1854, 7.
54. "Curiosities of the Census," *North British Review* 22 (1855): 408.
55. Ibid, 409.
56. Ibid, 410.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid, 411.
60. Ibid, 409. Also see Dickens, "Numbers of People," 227.
61. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851... Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 39.
62. Isa Craig, "Emigration as a Preventive Agency," *The English Woman's Journal* II, no. 11 (January 1859): 289.
63. Ibid, 290.
64. "The Export Wife-Trade," *The Saturday Review*, September 6, 1862, 276.
65. Trollope, *Britannia's Daughters*, 74.
66. See Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen*, chapter 4, and Rita Kranidis, *The Victorian Spinster and Colonial Emigration: Contested Subjects* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).
67. *Punch*, January 5, 1850, quoted in Constance Rover, *The Punch Book of Women's Rights* (New York: A. S. Barnes and Company, 1970), 19–20.
68. Kranidis, *The Victorian Spinster and Colonial Emigration*, 3.
69. Hollis, *Women in Public, 1850–1900*, 35. Also see Pamphlet of the Colonial Land and Emigration Office, January 1850, UKNA CO 885/2/1.
70. Trollope, *Britannia's Daughters*, 76.
71. Ibid, 77.
72. Greg, *Literary and Social Judgments*, 296.
73. A pamphlet of 1850 produced by the Colonial Land and Emigration Office argued that farm and domestic servants were needed in Australia, and so women who emigrated ought to be familiar with agricultural work and should be of good character. Pamphlet of the Colonial Land and Emigration Office, January 1850, UKNA CO 885/2/1.
74. Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen*, 60.
75. Greg, *Literary and Social Judgments*, 308.
76. Ibid, 281.
77. Ibid, 306.
78. Ibid, 288.
79. Ibid, 276.
80. Ibid.
81. See "Emigration for Educated Women," *The English Woman's Journal* VII, no. 37 (March 1861): 1–9, and "Middle-Class Female Emigration Impartially Considered," *The English Woman's Journal*, X, no. 56 (October 1862): 73–85.
82. Trollope, *Britannia's Daughters*, 74.
83. The experiences of women who emigrated were mixed. One emigrant wrote that "in Sydney I can assure you the difficulty of obtaining an engagement appeared to me the same as in England." Letter from Mary Phillips, June 16, 1862, Women's Library, Female Middle Class Emigration Society Papers. Some particularly harsh condemnation of Rye's project arrived from an emigrant in Capetown: "So much ridicule is thrown on the way in which you are sending women abroad that I am ashamed to own that I came out under the protection of your society... Do not again send single unprotected women wandering away from friends over the strange world again without knowing what you are doing." Letter from Catherine Brough, March 20, 1863, Women's Library, Female Middle Class Emigration Society Papers.

84. "Middle-Class Female Emigration Impartially Considered," 73.
85. Letter from Gertrude Gooch, February 17, 1862, Women's Library, Female Middle Class Emigration Society Papers.
86. See Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen*, chapter 5, and A. James Hammerton, "Feminism and Female Emigration, 1861–1886," in *A Widening Sphere*, edited by Martha Vicinus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977).
87. See Carmen Faymonville, "'Waste Not, Want Not': Even Redundant Women Have Their Uses," in *Imperial Objects: Essays on Victorian Women's Emigration and the Unauthorized Imperial Experience*, edited by Rita Kranidis (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998), 67. This does not mean that female emigration societies ceased to operate or that all feminists disavowed emigration. See J. Bush, "'The Right Sort of Woman': Female Emigrators and Emigration to the British Empire, 1890–1910," *Women's History Review* 3, no. 3 (1994): 388–389. Bush argues that the mid-Victorian connection between feminism and emigration remained present in the Edwardian period, albeit in a different form.
88. "The Export Wife Trade," 276.
89. *Ibid.*
90. *Ibid.*
91. *Ibid.* Although emigration was the most widely accepted policy advocated by people such as Greg, other solutions that involved eliminating single women from mainstream society were also proposed. In 1869, J. B. Mayor published an article called "The Cry of the Women." Mayor concentrated upon the plight of middle-class single women, genteel yet poor, who "find a great difficulty in feeding their useless mouths." J. B. Mayor, "The Cry of the Women," *The Contemporary Review* 11 (1869): 198. He went on to explain that our present system... goes upon the supposition that every woman is to marry and be supported by her husband; whereas the fact is that there are in the British Isles some half million more females than males, while there is moreover, a growing indisposition to marry among the men of the upper classes." *Ibid.*, 197. Mayor admitted that "society at large is the loser to an unknown extent by refusing a sphere to all that portion of its energy and force which happens to be centred in unmarried female bodies." *Ibid.*, 199. This belief drove him to his idea of providing a home for single women, in which they could be both protected and useful. Mayor's "main object is to find a career for unmarried ladies, to provide for them, if possible, a life as full of interest and usefulness as that which the matron finds in the cares of a family." *Ibid.*, 212. In Mayor's home for single women, the women (who would be looked after by a married clergyman) would be able to engage in "educational, charitable, and artistic work." *Ibid.* 212. The women would be isolated from the national economy and society even as they contributed to it. Single women, like paupers, seemed to have problems that the state was obligated to remedy, but they were also a threat to the rest of the society. In both cases, the threat was addressed by placing the problematic elements outside of the society. For actual communities of single women, see Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850–1920*.
92. See Worsnop, "A Reevaluation of 'the Problem of Surplus Women'" 23.
93. Harriet Martineau, "Female Industry," *The Edinburgh Review* 109 (1859): 294.
94. *Ibid.*, 298.
95. *Ibid.*, 336.
96. *Ibid.*, 335.
97. *Ibid.*
98. Although people who had read the 1851 census report or excerpts from it when it appeared in 1854 would already have been aware of the "surplus woman problem," Martineau's article was credited with dramatically raising public awareness of the issue. See Valerie Sanders, *Reason over Passion: Harriet Martineau and the Victorian Novel* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 179.
99. Martineau, "Female Industry," 333.



100. Frances Power Cobbe, "What Shall We Do With Our Old Maids?" *Fraser's Magazine* 66 (1862): 594.
101. *Ibid.*, 599.
102. *Ibid.* Cobbe even more explicitly challenged the notion that women were superfluous in "Criminals, Idiots, Women, and Minors," *Fraser's Magazine* 78 (1868): 777–794.
103. Jessie Boucherett, "How to Provide for Superfluous Women," in *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture: A Series of Essays* edited by Josephine Butler (London: Macmillan and Co., 1869), 42. Also see Jessie Boucherett, "On the Obstacles to the Employment of Women," *The English Woman's Journal* IV, no. 24 (February 1860): 361–375.
104. Boucherett, "How to Provide for Superfluous Women," 31.
105. *Ibid.*, 45.
106. *Ibid.*, 33.
107. *Ibid.*, 45.
108. John Boyd-Kinnear, in his essay "The Social Position of Women in the Present Age," used an argument that was similarly based on the tenets of liberal political economy. He advocated emigration for both men and women who could not find work, suggesting that single women were not less redeemable than other groups of people. He also focused on usefulness: a woman's life was "but half useful if she does marry, and an utter blank if she does not." John Boyd-Kinnear, "The Social Position of Women in the Present Age," in *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture: A Series of Essays* edited by Josephine Butler (London: Macmillan and Co., 1869), 366, 352. The most famous liberal analysis of women's rights is John Stuart Mill, "The Subjection of Women," in *On Liberty and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), especially Chapter 4.
109. See Boyd-Kinnear, "The Social Position of Women in the Present Age," and Martineau, "Female Industry."
110. Martineau, "Female Industry," 316.
111. Josephine Butler, ed., *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture: A Series of Essays* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1869), xv.
112. *Ibid.*, xxviii.
113. *Ibid.*, xxvi.
114. *Ibid.*, xxxv.
115. Cobbe, "What Shall We Do With Our Old Maids?," 598.
116. "Queen Bees or Working Bees?" *The Saturday Review*, November 12, 1859, 576.
117. *Ibid.*
118. *Ibid.*
119. *Ibid.*
120. *Ibid.*
121. Hector Gavin, "The Habitations of the Industrial Classes: Their Influence on the Physical and on the Social and Moral Condition of these Classes: Showing the Necessity for Legislative Enactments," (London: Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes, 1850), 74.
122. Edward Higgs, "Women, Occupations and Work in the Nineteenth-century Censuses," *History Workshop Journal*, 23, Spring (1987): 60.
123. *Ibid.*, 63.
124. See *The Census of Great Britain in 1851... Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 57.
125. In 1841, Farr wrote that "it must be a matter for congratulation that so large a number of females as 908,825 should be comprehended in a class in which habits of steady industry, of economy, and of attention to the maintenance of good character are so necessary as that of domestic service." *Abstracts of the Answers and Returns... Occupation Abstract* (London: H.M. Stationary Office, 1844), 15.

126. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851... Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 122.
127. Elizabeth Gaskell, for example, who by 1861 was a famous writer and was earning a large proportion of the family income, is listed in the 1861 census as simply a wife. Higgs also points out that enumerators often standardized the results, and so by the time they arrived at the RG the householders' original preferences were impossible to retrieve. Higgs, "Women, Occupations and Work in the Nineteenth-century Censuses," 64.
128. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851... Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 64.
129. Ibid.
130. *Education Census of 1851* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1854), xxxvii.
131. Gavin, "The Habitations of the Industrial Classes: Their Influence on the Physical and on the Social and Moral Condition of these Classes: Showing the Necessity for Legislative Enactments," 76.
132. William Farr, 1807–1883. *The Report of the Centenary Symposium held at the Royal Society on 29 April 1983* (London: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, 1983), 3. In 1851 and 1861, Farr made a number of observations on particular female occupations, betraying his own mixed feelings about working women. On midwives: "These women, if properly instructed, are most useful, and otherwise they are dangerous. Midwifery is a branch of medicine which women are quite competent to study, but there are cases requiring the utmost skill and judgment of the physician." See *Census of England and Wales for the Year 1861: General Report*, Vol. III (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1863), 36. For an analysis of women's work and reproduction that places the shift from fears of overpopulation earlier in the century, see Marjorie Levine-Clark, *Beyond the Reproductive Body: The Politics of Women's Health and Work in Early Victorian England* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004).
133. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851... Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 64. Farr here ignored the fact that areas where women worked were poorer, and that mortality rates varied by class.
134. Anna Davin, "Imperialism and Motherhood," in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, edited by Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 87–151.
135. *Census of England... 1861*, 33.
136. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851... Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 64.
137. Ibid.
138. Ibid.
139. *Census of England... 1861*, 19.
140. Ibid, 20.
141. Ibid.
142. Ibid, 21. Farr also wrote after the 1851 census that "the British population contains a great reserve of more than a million unmarried men, and of more than a million unmarried women, in the prime of life." *The Census of Great Britain in 1851... Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 42.
143. Ibid.
144. Ibid, 43. The *Manchester Guardian* said that the lower rate of marriages in France was a result of protectionist economic policies that caused high food prices. See *Manchester Guardian*, June 28, 1854, 10. Also see "Results of the Census of 1851."
145. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851... Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 43.
146. Ibid, 64.
147. *Manchester Guardian*, August 16, 1854, 7.

## 6 “Sprung from Ourselves”: Counting Race at Home and in the Colonies

1. 1861, United Kingdom National Archives (UKNA) CO 229/34.
2. For the debate between those who believe the Empire was distant to most of the British public, and those who believe it was central to understandings of class and nationhood at home, see Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: What the British Really Thought about Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); and Antoinette Burton's review of the book in *Victorian Studies* 47/4 (Summer 2005): 626–628.
3. David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
4. A notable absence in Cannadine's book is analysis of the West Indian colonies. Racial proportions in the West Indies were more important than racial proportions in most other parts of the Empire.
5. Bernard Cohn, “The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia,” in *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 229. Also see, Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 1991), Chapter 10; and Arjun Appadurai, “Number in the Colonial Imagination,” in *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*, edited by Carol Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 314–339.
6. See David I. Kertzer and Dominique Arel, eds., *Census and Identity: The Politics of Race, Ethnicity, and Language in National Censuses* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 32.
7. Our knowledge of these censuses is incomplete, for there may have been many that did not survive.
8. C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
9. See Walter Hamilton, *A Geographical, Statistical, and Historical Description of Hindostan and the Adjacent Countries* (London: Murray, 1820).
10. Kertzer and Arel, *Census and Identity*, 10.
11. E. Margaret Crawford, *Counting the People: A Survey of the Irish Censuses, 1813–1911* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003).
12. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 1st Series, 6 (1806): 113.
13. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 1st Series, 21 (1812): 399.
14. *Ibid*, 400.
15. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 1st Series, 27 (1814): 430. Crawford suggests that the failure of the census resulted from both poor administration and hostility of the largely Catholic population to Protestant administrators. Crawford, *Counting the People*, 13.
16. *Ibid*, 14.
17. William Wilde, one of the census commissioners in Ireland, was a physician whose interest in medical statistics and the classification of diseases was similar to that of Farr. *Ibid*, 17.
18. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 1st Series, 21 (1812): 181.
19. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, 1 (1830): 492–493.
20. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, 159 (1860): 1729.
21. *Ibid*, 1736.
22. As various conflicts between the Scottish and English census takers make clear, the office in London was not always willing to take local concerns into account.
23. Graham to Undersecretary of State, August 7, 1861, UKNA HO 45/709, 84.

24. James Hammack, "On the Direction in which the Census Inquiry may be extended in 1861," *Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science* 3 (1859): 708.
25. Thomas Larcom to Waddington, March 1, 1862, UKNA HO 45/7098, 89.
26. Edward Higgs makes a similar argument: that Ireland was "a test-bed for means of surveillance later used on the 'mainland.'" Edward Higgs, *The Information State in England: The Central Collection of Information on Citizens since 1500* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), ix.
27. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, 158 (1860): 92.
28. 1822, UKNA CO 201/130.
29. *Ibid.*, 4. The census even listed the pieces of furniture owned by various people in the colony.
30. *Ibid.*, 2.
31. One was described as "industrious, but of doubtful integrity." *Ibid.*, 4.
32. *Ibid.*, 46.
33. *Ibid.*, 19–21.
34. Other examples from Australia and New Zealand include an 1861 map of New Zealand that listed tribes, native and European populations, and the area of land in the hands of each group. 1861, UKNA MPH 1/134. Also see an 1849 map of Van Diemen's Land, which listed the population of each district with numbers of houses, numbers of children, and the numbers of government and private schools. 1849, UKNA FO 925/4451; and an 1857 census of New South Wales, as reported in the *Manchester Guardian*, which indicated the proportion of the population born in the colony as compared with those born in Britain and Germany, *Manchester Guardian*, October 21, 1857.
35. For the Canadian census, See Bruce Curtis, *The Politics of Population: State Formation, Statistics, and the Census of Canada, 1840–1875* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).
36. 1833, UKNA CO 880/1/17, 216. Although this again suggests that more controversial questions could be asked in the colonies than in Britain, the census takers did note that some people were suspicious of the census, and had understated the numbers of people in their families as a result.
37. Curtis says that "control over the production of knowledge shifted away from imperial officials... and by 1867 the official documentary system was overwhelmingly in Canadian hands." Curtis, *The Politics of Population*, 11.
38. The census of Newfoundland, it was assumed, would help to enforce fishing conventions between the British and the French. Copy of a dispatch from governor A. Bannerman to H. Labouchere, January 5, 1858, and copy of report by James Prendergast, UKNA CO 880/3/3, 10. Also see a map of North America from 1857 that showed the population of different "Aboriginal tribes," indicating the ones that had been removed west. 1857, UKNA FO 925/1248.
39. Curtis, *The Politics of Population*, 11.
40. 1862, UKNA CO 191/62, 3.
41. 1861, UKNA CO 229/34. The Canadian censuses had important implications for political representation, and were topics of debate both in colony and in metropole. In 1861, the *Manchester Guardian*, in response to a request from Upper Canada for more representatives in the assembly, cited census figures to argue that such representation was unjustified. *Manchester Guardian*, May 10, 1861, 3.
42. Curtis, *The Politics of Population*, 10.
43. "I have caused a complete census to be taken," he wrote to London. Lieutenant Governor Findlay to Goderich, July 30, 1831, UKNA CO 267/111, 3.
44. *Ibid.* Censuses listing owners and their slaves, for purposes of determining compensation, were taken in Mauritius and the Seychelles in 1830. See August 8, 1833, UKNA T 71/643. Other examples from Africa include an 1845 census of the Cape

- of Good Hope that listed the population of various towns along with statistics of produce, stock, and land; and a map of West Africa that listed population. See 1845, UKNA MPG 1/966 and MPG 1/766/J. In St. Helena a census of 1822 divided the population into Whites, Free Blacks, Slaves, Chinese, and Lascars. "Returns from St. Helena, 1816–1822," UKNA J 76/2/3, 1–26.
45. 1823, UKNA EXT 1/254/2.
  46. "Report on British Honduras," 1861, UKNA WO 334/27, 19. The census was also used to settle international disputes, as when a disagreement between Britain and Mexico over the border of British Honduras was addressed with the use of census figures. See 1865–1866, UKNA FO 204/557.
  47. For a history of nineteenth-century attempts to take a census in India, see Cohn, "The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia."
  48. *Ibid.*, 233. In 1814, the governor-general of India asked for an account of the population, and estimates were compiled. *Ibid.*, 232.
  49. 1827, UKNA CO 59/29.
  50. *Ibid.*, 29.
  51. Colonel Sykes, "A Return of the Area and Population of each Division of each Presidency of India from the latest Inquiries; comprising, also, the Area and estimated Population of Native States," printed by House of Commons, July 28, 1857, UKNA PRO 30/2/7/33.
  52. Cohn, "The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia," 238.
  53. *Census of England and Wales for the Year 1861: General Report*, Vol. III (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1863), 72.
  54. Cohn, "The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia," 241–242. Like people in Britain, therefore, colonial subjects recognized and legitimized themselves through the census. This had practical consequences as different castes were eligible for different benefits. *Ibid.*, 230. According to Cohn, British people's attitudes about Indians were also indicated in the ways that they administered and discussed the census. Europeans usually envisioned Indian cities as immense and overcrowded, even more overwhelming and disorderly than cities at home. Cohn suggests that because of the perceived density of population in Indian cities, census takers often believed population overestimates.
  55. For examples, see 1861 population statistics from Lebanon and Syria, acquired by the Austrian and the British consul generals. The report discussed the relative proportions of Christians and non-Christians in the region. E. T. Rogers, January 12, 1861, UKNA FO 226/158. Also see the 1866 map of the Dutch East Indies with population density, UKNA FO 925/2579.
  56. Consul Green to Palmerston, March 6, 1849, UKNA FO 881/133, 1.
  57. The report also included an estimate of the ancient population of Greece.
  58. *Ibid.*, 2.
  59. Returns were also made, in answer to a circular from Lord Aberdeen in 1844, of the subjects under British protection in the Regency of Tunis. The population was divided into Maltese, Greeks, and British. December 31, 1847, UKNA FO 335/96.
  60. 1842, UKNA PRO 30/2/3/14.
  61. *Census of England... 1861*, 72.
  62. Hammack, "On the Direction in which the Census Inquiry may be extended in 1861," 708.
  63. E. T. Rogers, January 12, 1861, UKNA FO 226/158. Also see *Census of England... 1861*, 223, for the assumption that uncivilized populations were opposed to census-taking.
  64. *Manchester Guardian*, March 8, 1851, 7.
  65. *Census of England... 1861*, 72.
  66. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851... Reprinted in a Condensed Form* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1854), 27.

67. Quoted in John Eyler, *Victorian Social Medicine: The Ideas and Methods of William Farr* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 35.
68. *Manchester Guardian*, November 23, 1853, 4.
69. *Times*, June 14, 1861, 8.
70. While it was usually specifically the “English” or the “Anglo-Saxon” race that English writers were interested in, they often replaced these words with “British.”
71. For the idea that some races were doomed to extinction, see Patrick Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings: Discourse on the Extinction of Primitive Races, 1800–1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).
72. *Times*, October 29, 1841, 7.
73. *Quarterly Review* 1 (1809): 263.
74. *Ibid*, 266.
75. See *Times*, August 31, 1857, 9.
76. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851...Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 5.
77. *Census of England...1861*, 4.
78. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, 57 (1841): 395.
79. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, 113 (1850): 138.
80. *Manchester Guardian*, May 6, 1861, 4.
81. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851...Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 76, and *Manchester Guardian*, August 16, 1854, 10.
82. The first census takers were concerned about foreigners partly because Britain was at war with France, and they were worried about Jacobins and spies entering the country.
83. *Parliamentary Register* XIII (1800): 196.
84. *Ibid*.
85. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, 111 (1850): 871.
86. Works on Irish immigration to Britain during the nineteenth century include Mary J. Hickman, *Religion, Class and Identity: The State, the Catholic Church and the Education of the Irish in Britain* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1995); Roger Swift and Sheridan Gilley, eds., *The Irish in the Victorian City* (London: Croom Helm, 1985); and John A. Jackson, *The Irish in Britain* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963). Also see Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland, and Jane Rendall, *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender and the Reform Act of 1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Chapter 4.
87. James Kay, *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester* (London: James Ridgeway, 1832), 6. For an analysis of Kay's approach to the Irish, see Mary Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830–1864* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), Chapter 3.
88. Friedrich Engels, “The Condition of the Working Class in England,” in *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels on Britain* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953), 124, and *Census of England...1861*, 40.
89. Engels, “The Condition of the Working Class in England,” 124–125.
90. Quoted in *ibid*, 125.
91. Quoted in *ibid*.
92. *Ibid*, 127.
93. Kay, *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester*, 52.
94. *Ibid*.
95. See Engels, “The Condition of the Working Class in England,” 126.
96. *Ibid*, 125.
97. *Ibid*.
98. Quoted in Hall, McClelland, and Rendall, *Defining the Victorian Nation*, 212.

99. Engels, "The Condition of the Working Class in England," 124.
100. *Ibid.*, 125.
101. *Ibid.*, 126.
102. *Ibid.*, 127.
103. *Quarterly Review* 76 (1845): 16.
104. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851...Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 73.
105. Quoted in Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1823–1938* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 282.
106. *Manchester Guardian*, November 23, 1853, 4.
107. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851...Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 77.
108. *Ibid.*
109. *Manchester Guardian*, August 16, 1854, 10.
110. *Illustrated London News*, April 5, 1851, 263.
111. *Ibid.*
112. "Results of the Census of 1851," *Westminster Review* 61 (1854): 347.
113. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851...Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 6.
114. *Manchester Guardian*, December 9, 1854, 7.
115. *Ibid.*
116. "Results of the Census of 1851," 344.
117. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851...Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 42, 52.
118. *Census of England... 1861*, 5.
119. *Manchester Guardian*, September 14, 1853, 6.
120. *Times*, June 18, 1851, 5.
121. *Ibid.*
122. *Ibid.*
123. Unlike the early censuses in Europe, the American census was from its origin explicitly linked to the system of political representation, for the states acquired representatives based on their population. Furthermore, slavery was written into this system via a law whereby slaves counted as 3/5 the population of white people. What the American census showed during the 1840s and 1850s was a rapidly increasing population in the North and in the new Western states, and a relatively stagnant South. The South was clearly losing its proportion of population and would continue to lose representatives and power as well. In the new states of the West, the proportion of slaveholders would determine whether the state became a free or a slave state. Within the United States, the census was therefore increasingly associated with disunity and sectional crisis, and it was often seen as an enemy of the South. At the same time, the census was seen as a potential aid in reuniting the country. U.S. census administrator Charles Kennedy said in 1862 that "the truth as presented by the census, will teach us the importance of union and harmony, and stimulate a proper pride in the country and people as one and indivisible." Quoted in Margo Anderson, *The American Census: A Social History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 68. The importance of population to both American and British understandings of the struggle between North and South can be demonstrated by a verse of Yankee Doodle, printed in 1865 in a *Times* article about popular Southern songs: "Yankee Doodle said he found/ By all the census figures,/ That he could starve the rebels out,/ If he could steal their niggers./ Yankee Doodle, doodle-do,/ Yankee Doodle dandy,/ And then he took another drink/ Of Gunpowder and brandy." *Times*, May 30, 1865, 6.
124. See 1857, UKNA FO 925/1582; and 1860, UKNA FO 925/1820.
125. 1861, UKNA FO 925/1839.
126. See *Manchester Guardian*, February 22, 1851, 5.
127. *Quarterly Review* 76 (1845), 23.

128. *Leicester Guardian*, September 9, 1861.
129. See Hall, McClelland, and Rendall, *Defining the Victorian Nation*, 191–192. Also see Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830–1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002) for a detailed account of this process in the Jamaican context.
130. See Hall, McClelland, and Rendall, *Defining the Victorian Nation*, 192–204.
131. *Illustrated London News*, April 5, 1851, 263.
132. *Illustrated London News*, June 28, 1851, 624.
133. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851...Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 56.
134. *Ibid.*
135. *Times*, June 14, 1861, 8.
136. The literature on British eugenics and related concepts such as degeneracy is large, but for a few examples, see Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c.1848–c.1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), especially Chapters 6 and 7; Mathew Thomson, *The Problem of Mental Deficiency: Eugenics, Democracy, and Social Policy in Britain c.1870–1959* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); Elof Axel Carlson, *The Unfit: A History of a Bad Idea* (Cold Spring Harbor: Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press, 2001); Pauline Mazumdar, *Eugenics, Human Genetics and Human Failings: The Eugenics Society, Its Sources and Its Critics in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1992), and Marouf Arif Hasian, Jr., *The Rhetoric of Eugenics in Anglo-American Thought* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1996). For eugenics in the Empire, see Chloe Campbell, *Race and Empire: Eugenics in Colonial Kenya* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007). While all these books focus on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Carlson also provides a prehistory of eugenic theories in Part I.
137. See Mazumdar, *Eugenics, Human Genetics and Human Failings*, 1–2, for the links between Malthusianism and eugenics.
138. *Manchester Guardian*, April 16, 1845.
139. *Manchester Guardian*, June 28, 1854, 10.
140. Eyler, *Victorian Social Medicine*, 154.
141. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851...Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 67.
142. Engels, “The Condition of the Working Class in England,” 135.
143. Hector Gavin, *The Habitations of the Industrial Classes: Their Influence on the Physical and on the Social and Moral Conditions of These Classes...Being an Address Delivered at Crosby Hall, November 27th, 1850* (London: Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes, 1851), 64.
144. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851...Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 26.
145. Eyler, *Victorian Social Medicine*, 156.
146. Quoted in *ibid.*, 124.
147. Quoted in *ibid.*, 153.
148. *Illustrated London News*, June 28, 1851, 624.
149. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851...Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 55. See Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings*.
150. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, 160 (1860): 83.
151. James Kay to Lewis, “On the Cause of the Efficacy of Workhouses, and on the Out-door Relief of the Impotent Poor,” July 19, 1836, UKNA PRO 30/22/2F, 282.
152. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851...Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 52, and *Census of England...1861*, 56.
153. Eyler, *Victorian Social Medicine*, 155.
154. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851...Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 74.
155. Eyler, *Victorian Social Medicine*, 156.
156. *Census of England...1861*, 7.
157. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851...Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 42.
158. Eyler, *Victorian Social Medicine*, 156.



159. Quoted in *ibid*.
160. Quoted in *ibid*, 157. Eugene Grebenik argues that Farr “did not concern himself with decline in the quality or quantity of the nation. Such speculations only became increasingly frequent in the decade after Farr’s death.” *William Farr, 1807–1883. The Report of the Centenary Symposium Held at the Royal Society on 29 April 1983* (London: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, 1983), 7. While it is true that these issues took center stage later, Farr was explicitly concerned with them as early as the 1840s.
161. Eyler, *Victorian Social Medicine*, 157.
162. Ian Hacking, “How Should We Do the History of Statistics?” in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, edited by Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 183.
163. *Ibid*.
164. As Cannadine argues, some colonies saw an entirely different situation evolve, where metropolitan class hierarchies were replicated to create complex alliances between colonial officials and indigenous elites.
165. Charles Hirschman makes a similar argument about the increasing importance of race in the census of colonial Malaysia, although he focuses on a later period. Charles Hirschman, “The Meaning and Measurement of Ethnicity in Malaysia: An Analysis of Census Classifications,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 46, no. 3 (August 1987): 552–582.

## 7 Challenges and Alternatives to the Census

1. J. A. V. Chapple and A. Pollard, eds., *The Letters of Mrs Gaskell* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966), 254.
2. See Peter Buck, “People who Counted: Political Arithmetic in the Eighteenth Century,” *Isis* 73 (1982): 28–45.
3. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851...Reprinted in a Condensed Form* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1854), 12. People with no fixed place of residence were especially worrisome to census takers.
4. *Census of England and Wales for the Year 1861: General Report*, Vol. III (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1863), 17.
5. *Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates*, 1st Series, 21 (1812): 180.
6. *Times*, June 16, 1841, 3.
7. *Times*, June 17, 1841, 5.
8. *History of the Census of 1841*, United Kingdom National Archives (UKNA), RG 27/1, 74.
9. *Times*, October 22, 1841, 6.
10. *Morning Chronicle*, March 28, 1851, 4.
11. *Punch* 4 (1843): 11.
12. *Morning Chronicle*, March 29, 1851, 4.
13. *Ibid*.
14. Charles Dickens, “Numbers of People,” *Household Words* (October 1854): 222.
15. *Morning Chronicle*, April 1, 1851.
16. *Hull Advertiser*, June 11, 1841, 6.
17. *Observer*, April 21, 1860.
18. William Brough and Andrew Halliday, *The Census: A Farce, in One Act* (London: Samuel French, 1861), 6.
19. *Ibid*.
20. *Times*, November 22, 1841, 5.
21. *Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, 158 (1860): 91.
22. *Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, 160 (1860): 83.
23. *Ibid*.

24. "Civilisation—the Census," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 76 (1854): 442.
25. *Ibid.*, 444.
26. *Ibid.*, 449.
27. *Ibid.*, 450.
28. *Ibid.*, 444.
29. *Ibid.*, 450.
30. In 1841, the *Times* cited an account in a French newspaper describing a thief who managed to enter homes in Paris pretending to be a census-taker. *Times*, September 10, 1841, 5.
31. "Civilisation—the Census," 443.
32. *Ibid.*, 451.
33. *Ibid.*, 449.
34. "The Census and Non-Sensus of 1841," *Monthly Magazine* (1841): 302.
35. *Ibid.*, 305.
36. *Manchester Guardian*, August 16, 1854, 7.
37. *Ibid.*
38. Thomas Carlyle, "Chartism," in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, Vol. 4 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900–1901), 122–123.
39. *Ibid.*, 124.
40. *Ibid.*, 122.
41. Quoted in "Curiosities of the Census," *North British Review* 22 (1855): 403.
42. *Ibid.*, 401.
43. *Ibid.*
44. *Times*, August 12, 1851, 8.
45. *Quarterly Review* 15 (1816): 187. The article, however, turned then to a different set of statistics, the poor rates, and suggested that they were better indicators of the state of the country.
46. *Journal of the Statistical Society of London* 3, no. 1 (April 1840): 98.
47. James Kay, *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester* (London: James Ridgeway, 1832), 38.
48. Hector Gavin, *The Habitations of the Industrial Classes: Their Influence on the Physical and on the Social and Moral Conditions of these Classes... Being an Address Delivered at Crosby Hall, November 27th, 1850* (London: Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes, 1851), 19.
49. *Education Census of 1851* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1854), lxxxiii.
50. "Curiosities of the Census," 411.
51. *Census of England... 1861*, 41.
52. *The Census of Great Britain in 1851... Reprinted in a Condensed Form*, 62.
53. *Quarterly Review* (1854): 271.
54. Quoted in *Times*, June 18, 1853, 5.
55. Kay, *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester*, 39.
56. Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 47.
57. Anne Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, Ltd., 2001), 3.
58. See Catherine Gallagher, *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form, 1832–67* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), and Sheila Smith, *The Other Nation: The Poor in English Novels of the 1840s and 1850s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).
59. Chapple and Pollard, *The Letters of Mrs Gaskell*, 115.
60. Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), xxxvi.
61. Chapple and Pollard, *The Letters of Mrs Gaskell*, 227.
62. Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (London: Downey and Co., Ltd., 1901), 477.
63. See Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780–1850* (New York: Columbia University Press), 91.

64. Benjamin Disraeli, *Sybil, or the Two Nations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), xxii.
65. *Ibid.*, 64–65.
66. *Ibid.*, 172.
67. *Ibid.*
68. *Ibid.*, 152, 173.
69. Chapple and Pollard, *The Letters of Mrs Gaskell*, 66.
70. *Ibid.*, 827.
71. Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, xxxv.
72. *Ibid.*, xxxv.
73. *Ibid.*, 96.
74. *Ibid.*, 431.
75. *Ibid.*, 130.
76. *Ibid.*, xxxvi.
77. *Ibid.*, 200. See explanatory note by Edgar Wright, 475.
78. Mary Poovey's analysis of Gaskell and Disraeli raises similar points. Poovey also argues that the literary form was specifically feminine while political economy was understood as masculine. Mary Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830–1864* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 133.
79. Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, 203.
80. John Chapple and Alan Shelston, eds., *Further Letters of Mrs Gaskell* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 192.
81. Chapple and Pollard, *The Letters of Mrs Gaskell*, 73.
82. *Ibid.*, 119.
83. George Eliot, "The Natural History of German Life," in *Essays of George Eliot*, edited by Thomas Pinney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 270–271.
84. George Eliot, *Adam Bede* (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 69.
85. Eliot, "The Natural History of German Life," 271.
86. An example is *A Tale of Two Cities*, in which the reader is asked to move beyond the stereotypes of the French Revolution and see aristocrats and others as individuals rather than representatives of their social groups. Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (New York: Penguin Books, 1980).
87. Charles Dickens, "Numbers of People," *Household Words* (October 1854): 221.
88. *Ibid.*
89. *Ibid.*
90. *Ibid.*
91. *Ibid.*, 222.
92. *Ibid.*, 224.
93. *Ibid.*, 227.
94. *Ibid.*, 222.
95. *Ibid.*, 223.
96. *Ibid.*, 224.
97. *Ibid.*
98. For attempts to count the homeless in the modern world, see Irene Glasser, *Homelessness in Global Perspective* (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1994), Chapter 6.
99. Dickens was interested in the humorous aspects of the census too. He expressed dismay at the number of lawyers listed in the occupation abstract, and noted "We are glad to hear that the apparitors were in numbers such a feeble folk." Dickens, "Numbers of People," 227.

## Conclusion

1. Marx and Engels noticed this in the 1840s. See Friedrich Engels, "The Condition of the Working Class in England," in *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels on Britain* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953).

2. John Rickman, "Thoughts on the Utility and Facility of a General Enumeration of the People of the British Empire," reprinted in D. V. Glass, *Numbering the People: The Eighteenth-Century Population Controversy and the Development of Census and Vital Statistics in Britain* (Farnborough: D. C. Heath Ltd., 1973), 109.
3. "Results of the Census of 1851," *Westminster Review* 61 (1854): 352.
4. *Census of England and Wales for the Year 1861: General Report*, Vol. III (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1863), 20.
5. See Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).
6. James Kay, *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester* (London: James Ridgeway, 1832), 3.
7. "Results of the Census of 1851," 356.

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