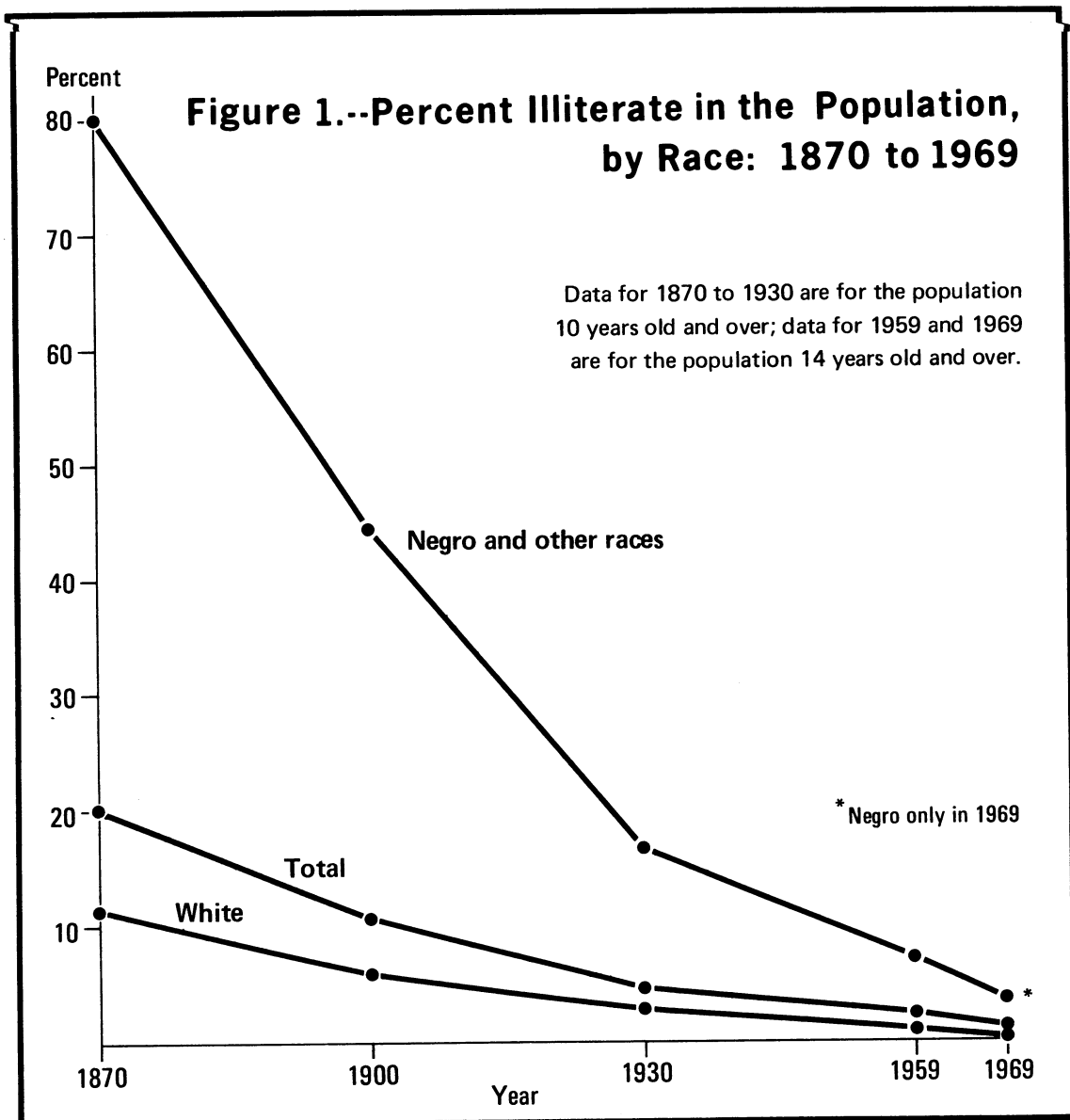


Population Characteristics

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ILLITERACY IN THE UNITED STATES: NOVEMBER 1969



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Illiteracy in the United States: November 1969

The rate of illiteracy in the United States has declined to the point where it is only one-twentieth of the level that prevailed one hundred years ago. In 1870, 1 out of every 5 persons 10 years old and over was illiterate, that is, unable to read and write. In 1969, 1 out of every 100 persons 14 years old and over was so handicapped (table A). The illiteracy rate was cut in half in just the past decade. In 1959, about 1 in 45 persons was illiterate as compared with 1 in 100 in 1969. Between March 1959 and November 1969, the number of persons unable to read and write decreased from 2.6 million persons to 1.4 million persons, although during this period the total number of persons 14 years old and over increased by 21.8 million, or 18 percent. The 1969 findings in this report are based on results from the Current Population Survey conducted by the Bureau of the Census in November 1969, in which respondents were asked about the literacy of each household member who was 14 years old or over.

Table A. PERCENT ILLITERATE IN THE POPULATION, BY RACE: 1870 TO 1969

(Data for 1870 to 1940 are for the population 10 years old and over; data for 1947, 1952, 1959, and 1969 are for the population 14 years old and over)

Year	Total	White	Negro and other races
1969.....	1.0	0.7	¹ 3.6
1959.....	2.2	1.6	7.5
1952.....	2.5	1.8	10.2
1947.....	2.7	1.8	11.0
1940.....	² 2.9	² 2.0	² 11.5
1930.....	4.3	3.0	16.4
1920.....	6.0	4.0	23.0
1910.....	7.7	5.0	30.5
1900.....	10.7	6.2	44.5
1890.....	13.3	7.7	56.8
1880.....	17.0	9.4	70.0
1870.....	20.0	11.5	79.9

¹Negro only in 1969.

²Estimated.

Illiteracy rates are related to educational attainment. With each increase in educational attainment, as measured by number of years of school completed, there is a decrease in the illiteracy rate (table B). The illiteracy rates in 1969 were 57 percent for persons who had completed no years of school, 47 percent for those who had completed 1 year, 22 percent for those who had completed 2 years, 11 percent for those who had completed 3 years, 4 percent for those who had completed 4 years, and 2 percent for those who had completed 5 years. For this report, it was assumed that everyone who had completed 6 or more years of school was literate.

Table B. PERCENT ILLITERATE OF PERSONS 14 YEARS OLD AND OVER, BY YEARS OF SCHOOL COMPLETED AND SEX: NOVEMBER 1969

(Civilian noninstitutional population)

Years of school completed	Both sexes	Male	Female
Total.....	1.0	1.1	1.0
No school years.....	57.4	57.0	58.3
1 year.....	46.6	48.4	45.8
2 years.....	21.8	21.3	21.6
3 years.....	10.9	12.5	9.0
4 years.....	4.5	3.6	5.4
5 years.....	2.3	3.1	1.4

Some of the reduction in illiteracy in the past decade is attributable to the decrease in the number of persons with very little schooling. Over the past decade, the number of persons 14 years old and over who had completed less than 6 years of school dropped by 3.0 million persons, or by 28 percent.

Illiteracy rates are related to age. In 1969, persons 65 years old and over were more likely to be illiterate, 3 percent, than were those under 65 years old, 1 percent (table C). Thus, a significant factor in the decline in the proportion of persons with little or no schooling was the replacement of older cohorts, who generally had

Table C. PERCENT ILLITERATE OF PERSONS 14 YEARS OLD AND OVER, BY AGE, RACE, AND SEX: NOVEMBER 1969

(Civilian noninstitutional population)

Age and race	Both sexes	Male	Female
ALL RACES			
Total, 14 years and over.	1.0	1.1	1.0
14 and 15 years.....	0.3	0.3	0.2
16 to 24 years.....	0.3	0.3	0.2
25 to 44 years.....	0.5	0.5	0.5
45 to 64 years.....	1.1	1.3	0.9
65 years and over.....	3.5	3.4	3.5
WHITE			
Total, 14 years and over.	0.7	0.7	0.7
14 and 15 years.....	0.3	0.4	0.2
16 to 24 years.....	0.2	0.3	0.2
25 to 44 years.....	0.4	0.4	0.5
45 to 64 years.....	0.7	0.8	0.6
65 years and over.....	2.3	2.1	2.4
NEGRO			
Total, 14 years and over.	3.6	4.3	2.9
14 and 15 years.....	-	-	-
16 to 24 years.....	0.6	0.8	0.4
25 to 44 years.....	1.3	2.1	0.6
45 to 64 years.....	5.5	7.4	4.0
65 years and over.....	16.7	17.2	16.2

- Represents zero.

lower levels of education, by younger cohorts, who generally had higher levels of education. Thus, a larger proportion of all illiterates is now concentrated in the oldest age group (65 years old and over) than was the case 10 years earlier. In 1969, about 45 percent of all illiterates were 65 years old and over, whereas, in 1959, only about 37 percent were this old (table D).

Table D. PERCENT DISTRIBUTION OF ILLITERATE PERSONS 14 YEARS OLD AND OVER, BY AGE AND SEX: 1969 AND 1959

(Civilian noninstitutional population)

Age and sex	1969	1959
BOTH SEXES		
Total, illiterate.....	100.0	100.0
14 to 24 years.....	6.8	5.5
25 to 44 years.....	16.5	22.0
45 to 64 years.....	31.3	35.5
65 years and over.....	45.4	37.1
MALE		
Total, illiterate.....	100.0	100.0
14 to 24 years.....	8.6	6.8
25 to 44 years.....	16.7	24.5
45 to 64 years.....	36.3	37.0
65 years and over.....	38.4	31.7
FEMALE		
Total, illiterate.....	100.0	100.0
14 to 24 years.....	5.1	3.9
25 to 44 years.....	16.6	18.6
45 to 64 years.....	26.3	33.5
65 years and over.....	52.0	44.1

Illiteracy rates are related to sex. In 1969, the number of illiterate men in the population, 708,000, was approximately the same as the number of illiterate women, 727,000. These numbers contrast with those in 1959 when illiterate men outnumbered illiterate women by 1.5 million to 1.1 million, or by 30 percent. The illiteracy rate, which had been higher for men than women in 1959, was about the same for both sexes in 1969 (table E). Some of this decline in the sex ratio among illiterates arose from a change in the proportion of men and women

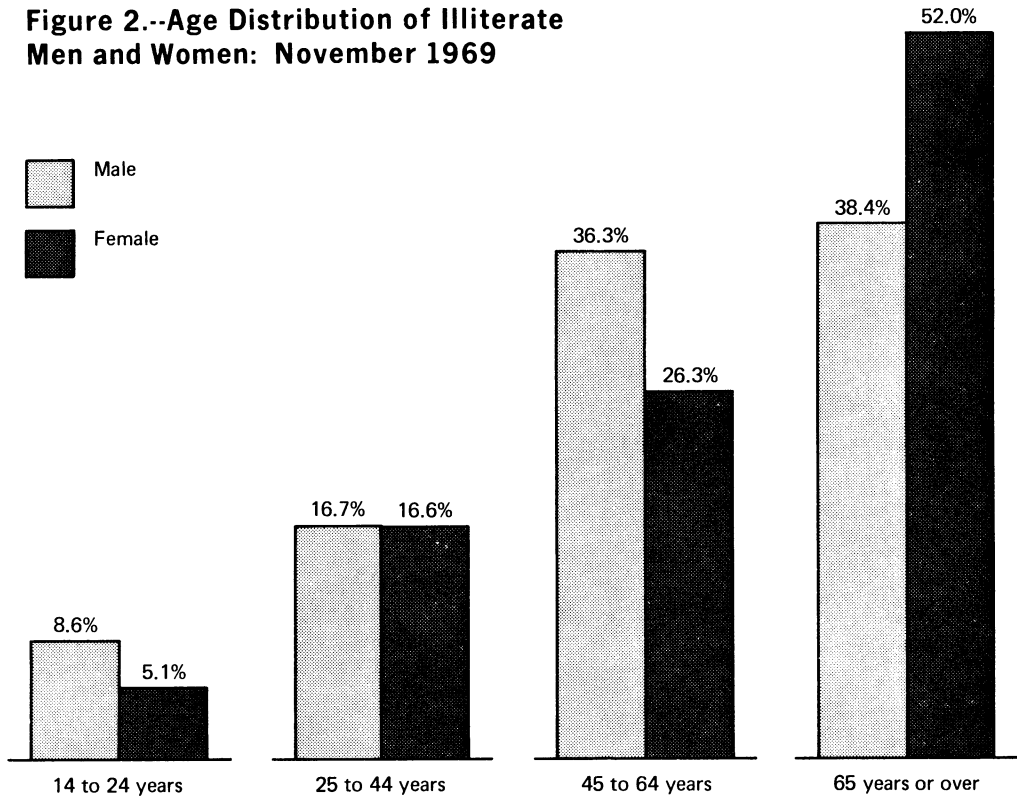
Table E. PERCENT ILLITERATE OF PERSONS 14 YEARS OLD AND OVER, BY RACE AND SEX: 1969 AND 1959

(Civilian noninstitutional population)

Sex	1969			1959		
	All races	White	Negro	All races	White	Negro
Total.....	1.0	0.7	3.6	2.2	1.6	17.5
Male.....	1.1	0.7	4.3	2.5	1.7	19.8
Female.....	1.0	0.7	2.9	1.8	1.4	15.4

¹Negro and other races.

Figure 2.--Age Distribution of Illiterate Men and Women: November 1969



who had completed no years of school. In 1959, around half of the persons without any formal schooling were men and half were women. In 1969, however, the corresponding figures were 44 percent and 56 percent, respectively. Older men with no years of school completed were replaced by younger men with some schooling at a faster rate than the older women with no formal schooling were replaced. That is, differential mortality favored the older women with the result that a larger proportion of these older women survived to 1969. Consequently, there were as many illiterate women as men in the population in 1969 but not in 1959.

Illiteracy rates are related to race. A comparison of illiteracy rates by race shows that among white persons 14 years old and over in 1969, about 891,000, or 1 percent, were unable to read and

write. The illiteracy rate was approximately the same for both white men and white women. In 1959, about 2 percent of the whites were unable to read and write. Among Negroes of this age in 1969, about 4 percent of the men and about 3 percent of the women were illiterate. In 1959, the illiteracy rate for men of Negro and other races was 10 percent as compared with 5 percent for the women of Negro and other races.

Illiterate white men and women were more likely not to have completed any years of school than were illiterate Negro men and women (table F). In 1969, among illiterate white men, 60 percent had completed no years of school as compared with 39 percent of the illiterate Negro men. Among illiterate white women, 70 percent had completed no years of school as compared with 53 percent of the illiterate Negro women.

Table F. PERCENT DISTRIBUTION OF ILLITERATE PERSONS 14 YEARS OLD AND OVER, BY YEARS OF SCHOOL COMPLETED, RACE, AND SEX: 1969 AND 1959

(Civilian noninstitutional population)

Years of school completed and race	1969		1959	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
WHITE				
Total, illiterate..	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
No school years.....	60.2	70.4	53.2	68.6
1 year.....	8.0	5.2	11.4	7.8
2 years.....	10.2	10.9	13.8	8.3
3 years.....	13.7	7.1	12.1	9.9
4 years.....	4.1	5.0	6.9	2.9
5 years.....	3.7	1.3	2.6	2.4
NEGRO¹				
Total, illiterate..	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
No school years.....	39.0	52.6	44.3	53.7
1 year.....	18.4	18.4	20.5	17.0
2 years.....	17.0	8.3	17.3	10.9
3 years.....	13.5	9.6	11.4	14.1
4 years.....	5.3	7.5	5.0	3.2
5 years.....	6.7	3.5	1.6	1.1

¹Negro and other races in 1959.

RELATED REPORTS

Survey data on illiteracy in the United States for 1947, 1952, and 1959 were published in Current Population Reports, Series P-20, Nos. 20, 45, and 99, respectively. Series P-20, No. 45, also contains estimates of illiteracy for the United States for 1950, and No. 20 shows estimates for 1940. Series P-23, No. 6 and No. 8 contain estimates of illiteracy by States for 1950 and 1960, respectively.

Data on educational attainment for persons 14 years old and over in March 1959, 1962, 1964, 1965 and 1966, 1967, 1968, and 1969 were published in Current Population Reports, Series P-20, Nos. 99, 121, 138, 158, 169, 182, and 194, respectively. Further information on educational attainment is presented in "Educational Change in a Generation: March 1962," Series P-20, No. 132. In addition, educational attainment as determined in the Current Population Survey is related to labor force characteristics in publications of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, as in "Educational Attainment of Workers, March 1969 and 1970," Special Labor Force Report No. 125, and "Education of Adult Workers: Projections to 1985," published in the August 1970 issue of Monthly Labor Review.

Statistics on educational attainment are also available in several reports of the 1960 Census of Population, the most relevant of which is PC(2)-5B, Educational Attainment, Volume I, Characteristics of the Population, chapter C, "General Social and Economic Characteristics," also includes statistics on educational attainment. Report PC(2)-1C, Non-white Population by Race, includes educational data for selected races. Statistics on fall school enrollment, as of October of each year, are published in Series P-20 reports and were last shown in Series P-20, No. 206, for October 1969.

Comparability. The data presented in this report for different years are not strictly comparable for several reasons. In the first place, the small group of Current Population Survey enumerators were more experienced and had more intensive training and supervision than the large number of temporary decennial census enumerators and may have more often obtained more accurate answers from respondents. Second, the survey data exclude members of the Armed Forces, whereas these persons are included in the census data and estimates based on census data. Survey figures on illiteracy, shown in the tables of this report, also exclude inmates of institutions, but census figures include inmates. Third, data on illiteracy for 1870 to 1940 relate to the population 10 years old and over, whereas illiteracy data for 1947 to 1969 relate to the population 14 years old and over.

Despite these several types of differences, however, the conclusions that are drawn from comparisons of the data for different years should not be seriously affected.

DEFINITIONS AND EXPLANATIONS

Population coverage. All figures for decennial census years (years ending in zero) relate to the total population of the United States, that is, to all persons (including Armed Forces and inmates) residing within the United States (excluding Alaska and Hawaii).

The figures in this report for November 1969 and other survey years (1959, 1957, 1952, 1947) are sample survey data and relate to the civilian noninstitutional population. The 1969 data include Alaska and Hawaii.

Age. The age classification is based on the age of the person at his last birthday.

Race. The population is divided into three groups on the basis of race: white, Negro, and "other races." The last category includes Indians, Japanese, Chinese, and any other race except white and Negro.

Illiteracy. In 1969, as in past censuses and surveys, persons who were reported as not able both to read and to write a simple message either in English or any other language were classified as illiterate. Thus, illiterates include persons who are able to read but not write. Persons who formerly knew how to read and write but who were unable to do so at the time of the survey because of mental or physical impairment, such as blindness, are classified as literate. In the 1969 literacy survey, respondents were asked (1) if the person could read and write the language now usually spoken in his home; (2) if the person could read and write English, if some language other than English was now usually spoken in his home; and (3) if the person could read and write the language spoken in his home when he was a child, if some language other than English had been spoken.

Information on illiteracy of the population was obtained from direct questions in the censuses of 1870 through 1930. The data for 1947, 1952, 1959, and 1969 were obtained from sample surveys; and the statistics for the census year 1940 were derived by estimating procedures. Figures for 1870 through 1940 refer to the total population 10 years old and over, whereas figures for 1947, 1952, 1959, and 1969 refer to the civilian noninstitutional population 14 years old and over. In 1947, the literacy question was asked only of persons who had completed less than 5 years of school; in 1952, 1959, and 1969 the same general procedure was used but the question was asked of those who had completed less than 6 years of school.

Nonresponses on ability to read and write from this survey were prorated proportionately between those who reported that they could read and write and those who reported that they could not read and write within each age, race, and sex group. About 2.4 percent of persons in this survey did not report on their ability to read and write.

Years of school completed. Data on years of school completed in this report were derived from the combination of answers to two questions: (a) "What is the highest grade of school he has ever attended?" and (b) "Did he finish this grade?"

The questions on educational attainment apply only to progress in "regular" schools. Such schools include graded public, private, and parochial elementary and high schools (both junior and senior high), colleges, universities, and professional schools, whether day schools or night schools. Thus, regular schooling is that which may advance a person toward an elementary school certificate or high school diploma, or a college,

university, or professional school degree. Schooling in other than regular schools was counted only if the credits obtained were regarded as transferable to a school in the regular school system.

Assignment of educational attainment for those not reporting. When information on either the highest grade attended or completion of the grade was not reported in the 1969 survey, entries for the items were assigned using an edit in the computer. The general procedure was to assign an entry for a person that was consistent with entries for other persons with similar characteristics. The specific technique used in the 1969 survey was as follows:

1. The computer stored reported data on highest grade attended by color and age, and on completion of the grade by age and highest grade attended, for persons 14 years old and over in the population.

2. Each stored value was retained in the computer only until a succeeding person having the same characteristics (e.g., same color and age, in the case of assignments for highest grade attended) and having the item reported, was processed through the computer. Then the reported data for the succeeding person were stored in place of the one previously stored.

3. When one or both of the education items for a person 14 years old and over was not reported, the entry assigned to this person was that stored for the last person who had the same characteristics.

SOURCE AND RELIABILITY OF THE ESTIMATES

Source of data. The estimates for the years 1870 through 1930 presented in this report are based on data obtained from the decennial censuses taken in those years. The estimates for the years 1947, 1952, 1959, and 1969 are based on data obtained from the monthly Current Population Survey (CPS) of the Bureau of the Census. During this period several changes were made in the design of the CPS.

Data for 1969 were obtained by using the current CPS sample design. This sample was instituted in January 1967 and is spread over 449 areas comprising 863 counties and independent cities with coverage in each of the 50 States and the District of Columbia. Approximately 50,000 occupied housing units are eligible for visits each month. Of this number 2,250 occupied units, on the average, are visited but interviews are not obtained because the occupants are not found at home after repeated calls or are unavailable for some other reason. In addition to the 50,000, there are also about 8,500

sample units in an average month which are visited but are found to be vacant or otherwise not to be interviewed.

In 1959 the sample was spread over 330 areas comprising 638 counties and independent cities with coverage in the then 48 States and the District of Columbia. Approximately 35,000 households were eligible for interview each month. In 1947 and 1952 the sample was spread over 68 areas comprising 125 counties and independent cities with coverage in 42 States and the District of Columbia. Approximately 21,000 households were eligible for interview each month.

The estimating procedure used in this survey involves the inflation of the weighted sample results to independent estimates of the civilian noninstitutional population of the United States by age, race, and sex. These independent estimates are based on statistics from the previous decennial census of population; statistics of births, deaths, immigration and emigration; and statistics on the strength of the Armed Forces.

Reliability of the estimates. Since the estimates are based on a sample, they may differ somewhat from figures obtained if a complete census had been taken using the same schedules, instructions, and enumerators. As in any survey work, the results are subject to errors of response and of reporting as well as being subject to sampling variability

The standard error is primarily a measure of sampling variability, that is, of the variations that occur by chance because a sample rather than the whole of the population is surveyed. As calculated for this report, the standard error also partially measures the effect of response and enumeration errors but does not measure any systematic biases in the data. The chances are about 68 out of 100 that an estimate from the sample would differ from a complete census figure by less than the standard error. The chances are about 95 out of 100 that the difference would be less than twice the standard error.

The figures presented in tables G, H, I, and J are approximations to the standard errors of various estimates shown in this report. In order to derive standard errors that would be applicable to a wide variety of items and could be prepared at a moderate cost, a number of approximations were required. As a result, the tables of standard errors provide an indication of the order of magnitude of the standard errors rather than the precise standard error for any specific item.

Tables G and H contain the standard errors of estimated numbers for data obtained in 1969.

Table G. STANDARD ERRORS OF ESTIMATED NUMBERS, TOTAL QR WHITE POPULATION: 1969

(68 chances out of 100)

Size of estimate	Standard error	Size of estimate	Standard error
25,000.....	7,200	2,500,000....	71,000
50,000.....	10,200	5,000,000....	100,000
100,000.....	14,400	10,000,000....	140,000
250,000.....	23,000	25,000,000....	214,000
500,000.....	32,000	50,000,000....	283,000
1,000,000....	45,000		

NOTE.--To estimate standard errors for 1959, multiply these standard errors by 1.2, and for 1947 and 1952, multiply by 1.5.

Table H. STANDARD ERRORS OF ESTIMATED NUMBERS, NEGRO AND OTHER RACES: 1969

(68 chances out of 100)

Size of estimate	Standard error	Size of estimate	Standard error
10,000.....	5,300	250,000.....	26,000
25,000.....	8,300	500,000.....	37,000
35,000.....	9,900	1,000,000....	51,000
50,000.....	11,800	2,500,000....	75,000
75,000.....	14,400	5,000,000....	92,000
100,000.....	16,600	10,000,000....	77,000

NOTE.--To estimate standard errors for 1959, multiply these standard errors by 1.2, and for 1947 and 1952, multiply by 1.5.

The reliability of an estimated percentage, computed by using sample data for both numerator and denominator, depends upon both the size of the percentage and the size of the total upon which the percentage is based. Estimated percentages are relatively more reliable than the corresponding estimates of the numerators of the percentages, particularly if the percentages are 50 percent or more. Tables I and J contain the standard errors of estimated percentages.

Standard errors for data obtained in 1959 can be approximated by multiplying the appropriate 1969 table entry by 1.2. Standard errors for data obtained in 1947 and 1952 can be approximated by multiplying the appropriate 1969 table entry by 1.5.¹

¹Since the data for the years 1870 through 1930 are based on data obtained from complete decennial censuses, there is no sampling variability for these estimates.

Table I. STANDARD ERRORS OF ESTIMATED PERCENTAGES, TOTAL OR WHITE POPULATION: 1969

(68 chances out of 100)

Estimated percentage	Base of percentage (thousands)									
	100	250	500	1,000	2,500	5,000	10,000	25,000	50,000	100,000
2 or 98.....	2.0	1.3	0.9	0.6	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1
5 or 95.....	3.1	2.0	1.4	1.0	0.6	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.1
10 or 90.....	4.3	2.7	1.9	1.4	0.9	0.6	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.1
25 or 75.....	6.2	3.9	2.8	2.0	1.2	0.9	0.6	0.4	0.3	0.2
50.....	7.2	4.5	3.2	2.3	1.4	1.0	0.7	0.5	0.3	0.2

NOTE.--To estimate standard errors for 1959, multiply these standard errors by 1.2, and for 1947 and 1952 multiply by 1.5.

Table J. STANDARD ERRORS OF ESTIMATED PERCENTAGES, NEGRO AND OTHER RACES: 1969

(68 chances out of 100)

Estimated percentage	Base of percentage (thousands)							
	50	100	250	500	1,000	2,500	5,000	10,000
2 or 98.....	3.3	2.3	1.5	1.0	0.7	0.5	0.3	0.2
5 or 95.....	5.1	3.6	2.3	1.6	1.2	0.7	0.5	0.4
10 or 90.....	7.1	5.0	3.2	2.2	1.6	1.0	0.7	0.5
25 or 75.....	10.2	7.2	4.6	3.2	2.3	1.4	1.0	0.7
50.....	11.8	8.4	5.3	3.7	2.6	1.7	1.2	0.8

NOTE.--To estimate standard errors for 1959, multiply these standard errors by 1.2, and for 1947 and 1952 multiply by 1.5.

Illustration of the use of table of standard errors. Table I of this report shows that in 1969 there were 1,433,000 illiterate persons 14 years old and over. Table G shows the standard error on an estimate of this size to be approximately 53,000. The chances are 68 out of 100 that the estimate would have been a figure differing from a complete census by less than 53,000. The chances are 95 out of 100 that the estimate would have been a figure differing from a complete census by less than 106,000 (twice the standard error).

Of these 1,433,000 persons, 727,000 or 50.7 percent are females. Table I shows the standard error of 50.7 percent on a base of 1,433,000 to be approximately 2.0 percent. Consequently, chances are 68 out of 100 that the estimated 50.7 percent could be within 2.0 percentage points of a complete census figure, and chances are 95 out of 100 that the estimate would be within 4.0 percentage points of a census figure; i.e., this 95 percent confidence interval would be from 46.7 to 54.7 percent.