

The skill set option for multicultural American genealogy

By Darcie M. Hind Posz

A curious anachronism exists in American ethnology. The first history textbooks encountered by every school child introduce him to the cliché that the United States is the great melting pot of people. A stroll down the streets of almost any city confirms that genetic "melting"; citizens pass in every conceivable hue. Yet, even though legal segregation along ethnic lines has long since ended, North American society still clings to ethnic labels and imposes sharp and arbitrary dividing lines—especially between black and white. In the pursuit of genealogy such a posture is counter-productive.¹

In 2006, artist Kip Fulbeck introduced the world to *Hapa* culture with his publication *Part Asian 100% Hapa*. The definition of *hapa* is a person "of mixed racial heritage with partial roots in Asian and/or Pacific Islander ancestry."² Fulbeck's introduction discussed America's habit of racial compartmentalization: "Our country and its individuals continually seek out absolutes and simplicity, when absolutes don't exist."³

America has a long history of compartmentalizing race. Census enumerators were instructed to do it and laws of various periods have required it. But the more time that passes, the more there is cultural blending. American boundaries blur, disrupt, engulf, colonize, overthrow, and combine; it makes sense for us to be a multicultural nation.

Consider the US census classification system that, until 1997, only allowed six ways of classifying race: White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, or Latino.⁴ The 2010 census was the first census to allow recipients to identify if they were more than one race, but a majority only reported one.⁵ From 2000 to 2010 there was a 36.9 percent increase of reported mixed race in the white population and a 133.3 percent increase in the Black and African American population of mixed race.⁶ Overall, there was a 32 percent increase of people choosing to state that they are more than one race in the 2010 census. This will impact how we, our descendants, and our clients request and perform genealogical research.



Because we are the clichéd melting pot and we have research to be done on both sides of the pond, American genealogy is unique. We are a nation of immigrants, by choice or by force; our ancestors yearned for their homeland yet wanted something better for the future. We are the product of their decisions.

My unique research problem is not that unique

I have multiple ancestries: I am Hawaiian, Japanese, Norwegian, English, Chinese, Swedish, German, and Shoshone. My mitochondrial DNA is haplogroup J; my father's Y chromosome DNA is haplogroup O. I also have a handful of Boones and a Pony Express rider in my pedigree chart. My ancestry, like many, forces me to learn about many regions, counties, repositories, languages, laws, time periods, and cultures.

I realized early on that simply possessing knowledge of Hawaiian records would not necessarily help resolve complex genealogical problems. By stating that my specialty was Hawaiian/Polynesian, I was boxing myself in and sidestepping seven other cultures, not to mention the other regions I would need to research. Since I was born and raised in southeast Iowa, my access to records and

repositories was limited by geographical location. And being a Hawaiian in the Midwest meant that what I learned about these cultures came exclusively from books rather than personal experience, so I was always just a bit detached.

Then, while attending the Salt Lake Institute of Genealogy and the Association of Professional Genealogists' Professional Management Conference, I noted an emerging topical trend: the idea that the theory "knowledge of 'x' records is essential to solving 'x' problems" is fallible, whereas methodology and skill sets are transferable.⁷ As a *hapa* with numerous regions, cultures, and records to study, this appealed to me; by assessing, educating, and practicing I have focused on developing a skill set that is transferable and will make me a more flexible genealogist in the future.

Skill set

An overly specialized knowledge base can tie you down, but family history should be a journey. In my case, I started with Hawaiian genealogy and found it bled into other areas: I have been Hawaiian since birth, Japanese since 2000. The more genealogical research I have performed, the more cultures and ethnicities I have had to adjust to. After learning about my own ancestral cultures and records by trial and a lot of error, I realized I was redeveloping many of the same skills for each one, so I created a table for reassessing transferable skills that I could apply to new areas, ethnicities, and regions as they came up.

The table I use includes categories listed in the order confronted when approaching a new area. The first area I pursue is records, quickly followed by region and languages. Methodology items should be read next as they will keep research skills on alert. Analysis/correlation, followed by the Genealogical Proof Standard help me to be aware of conflicts as they arise, then resolve them and eventually write it out. Education helps keep me informed by honing skills that can be reused while repeating genealogical research steps.

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- Finding Aids such as Preliminary Inventories, descriptive pamphlets, microfilm publication descriptions available at the Archives.gov.

REGIONS AND LANGUAGES

- FamilySearch.org research wiki and videos
- Online gazetteers available at Google Books, Internet Archive (Archive.org)
- Google Translate
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- Laws online via Google or state archives websites.

METHODOLOGY

- Journals: *NGS Quarterly*, *The Genealogist*, *The American Genealogist*, *New England Genealogical and Historical Register*, etc.
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ANALYSIS/CORRELATION

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GENEALOGICAL PROOF STANDARD (GPS)

- Board for Certification of Genealogists. *The BCG Genealogical Standards Manual*. Orem, Utah: Ancestry, 2000, 8-13.
- Jones, Thomas W. *Mastering Genealogical Proof*. Arlington, Va.: National Genealogical Society, 2013.
- Rose, Christine. *Genealogical Proof Standard*. San Jose, Calif.: CR Publications, 2005 and 2009.

EDUCATION

- Institute of Genealogy and Historical Research: Advanced Methodology and Evidence Analysis
- National Institute on Genealogical Research
- ProGen Study Group: This study group will hold you accountable and by the end of the class, you will have read the entire publication, *Professional Genealogy*.
- Salt Lake Institute of Genealogy: Advanced Evidence Analysis Practicum

Note: These are not ranked in any particular order and this is not a complete list.

The table is compatible with new areas, regions, and record groups, and the resources can be applied throughout the research process. Self educating focuses on reading, studying, and listening. Using *QuickSheets* reminds us of standards and practices, including categories to improve recall until they become second nature. These categories should lead the researcher organically to a research plan that can eventually be executed in writing to show that the Genealogical Proof Standard has been applied. Organized research plans provide a chance to state what you have and what more you want to know.

The quote at the opening of this article is even truer today than when Elizabeth Shown Mills first wrote it in 1985. As recent censuses have demonstrated, more people are recognizing and self-identifying as a mix of races and cultures. Honing skill sets will give genealogists transferable tools that can be applied to all genealogical thinking, analysis, and reasoning, regardless of cultural context. America is a multicultural nation and genealogical standards and skills can be applied universally. 🌳

Notes

1. Elizabeth Shown Mills, "(De) Mézières-Trichel-Grappe: A Study of a Tri-Caste Lineage in the Old South," *The Genealogist* 6 (Spring 1985): 4. This paragraph reprinted with the permission of the author.

2. Kip Fulbeck, *part asian*100% hapa* (Vancouver, British Columbia: Raincoast Books, 2006), definition before preface.

3. *Ibid.*, 12–13.

4. United States Census Bureau, "About Race" (<http://www.census.gov/population/race/about/>).

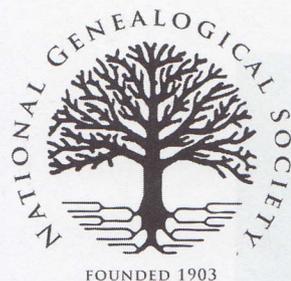
5. Karen R. Humes, Nicholas A. Jones, and Robert R. Ramirez, "Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin: 2010," (Washington, DC: US Census Bureau, March 2011), 4.

6. Lindsay Hixson, Bradford B. Hepler, and Myoung Ouk Kim, "The White Populations: 2010," (Washington, DC: US Census Bureau, September 2011), 3; Sonya Rastogi, Tallese D.

Johnson, Elizabeth M. Hoeffel, and Malcolm P. Drewery Jr., "The Black Population: 2010," (Washington, DC: US Census Bureau, September 2011), 3.

7. Thomas W. Jones, "Variables in Professional Genealogists' Approaches to Complex Research," APG Professional Management Conference, 2013 Syllabus (Westminster, Col.: APG, 2013), 11–14; Sidney Sachs, *Skill Set and Knowledge Base*, episode 155, "Tracing Your Family Roots," 2010; YouTube channel upload (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tnwaJvPskZg>; accessed 11 May 2013); Michael Hait, "Professional genealogists and genealogy professionals," *Planting the Seeds: Genealogy as a Profession*, 10 July 2012 (<http://www.michaelhait.wordpress.com/2012/07/10/pro-gens-gen-pros/>; accessed 11 May 2013).

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ON THE COVER

Photograph, ca. 1862–65, of the house of Chief John Ross, principal chief of the Cherokee in Georgia. Ross supervised much of the Indian removal process, losing his wife, Quati, on the Trail of Tears. See John P. Deeben's article, "Native Americans on the Trail of Tears: Part I—Census rolls relating to Indian removals, 1817–57," on page 38. Photo courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration, Special Media Archives Services Division.

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