

Challenging Embedded Privilege in Archive Searching

The case study of Census Search

ARMA / AABC special presentation

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DISCOVER. UNDERSTAND. CONNECT.



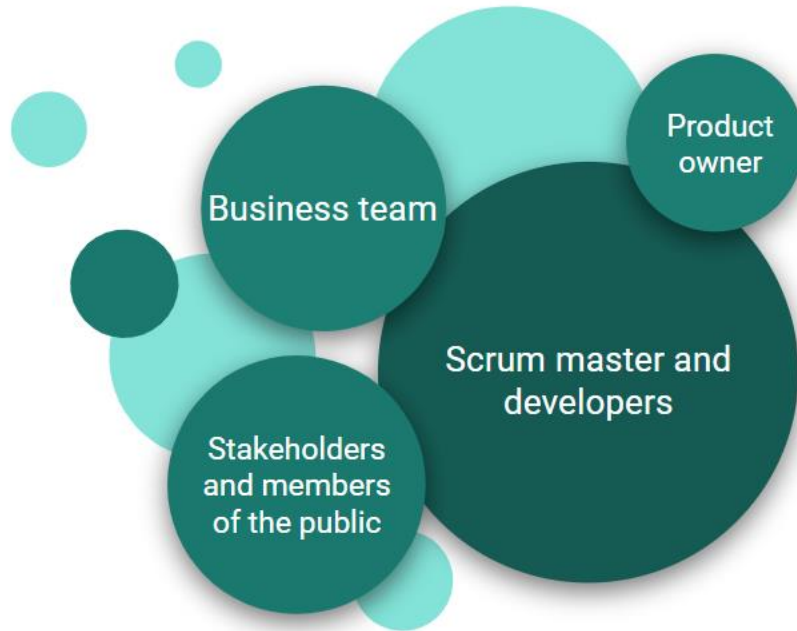
Library and Archives
Canada

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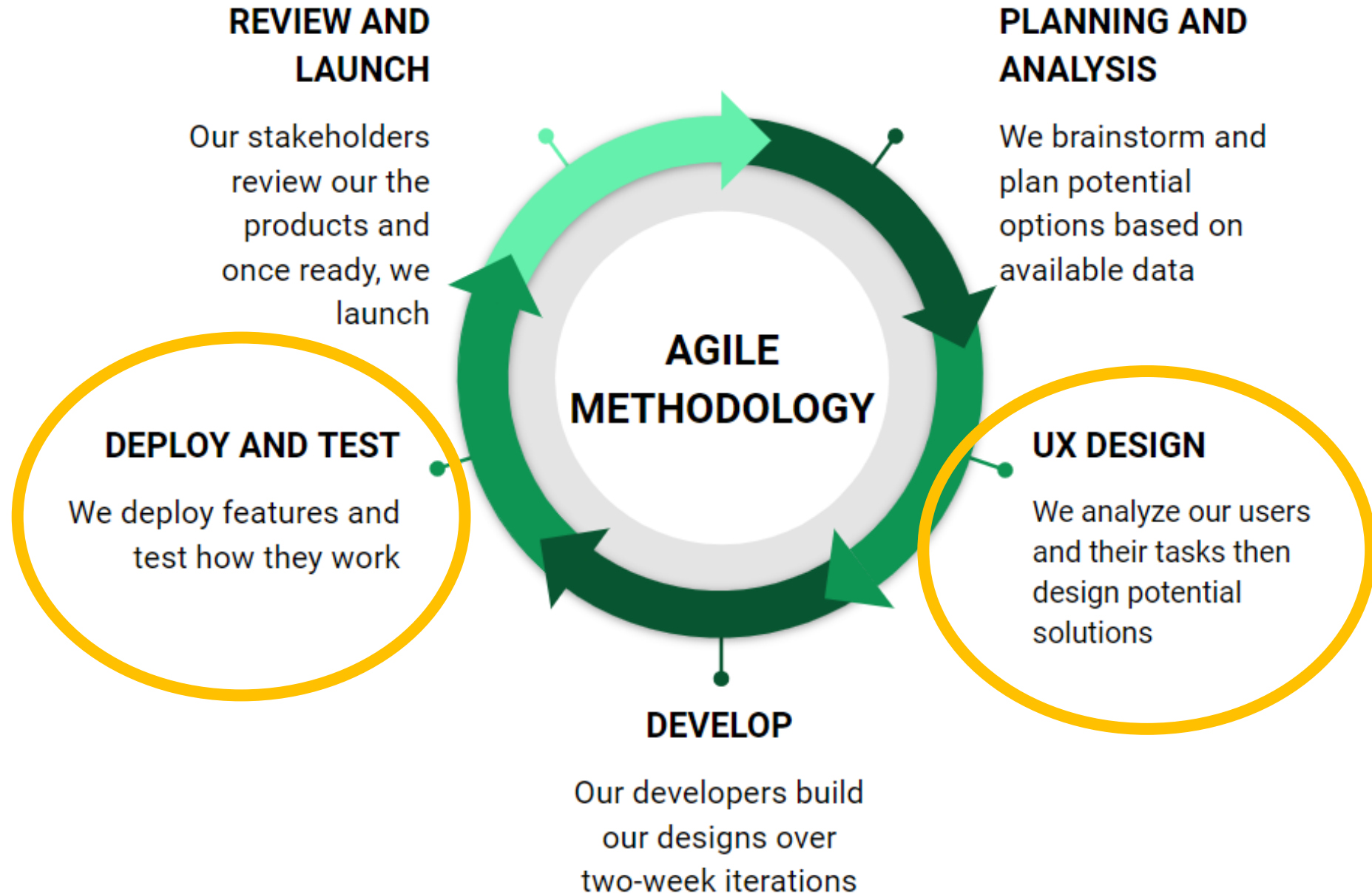
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Digital Access Team

- We design and build digital products and solutions to enhance LAC's digital presence



How we work



Our newest product

Census Search^{BETA}



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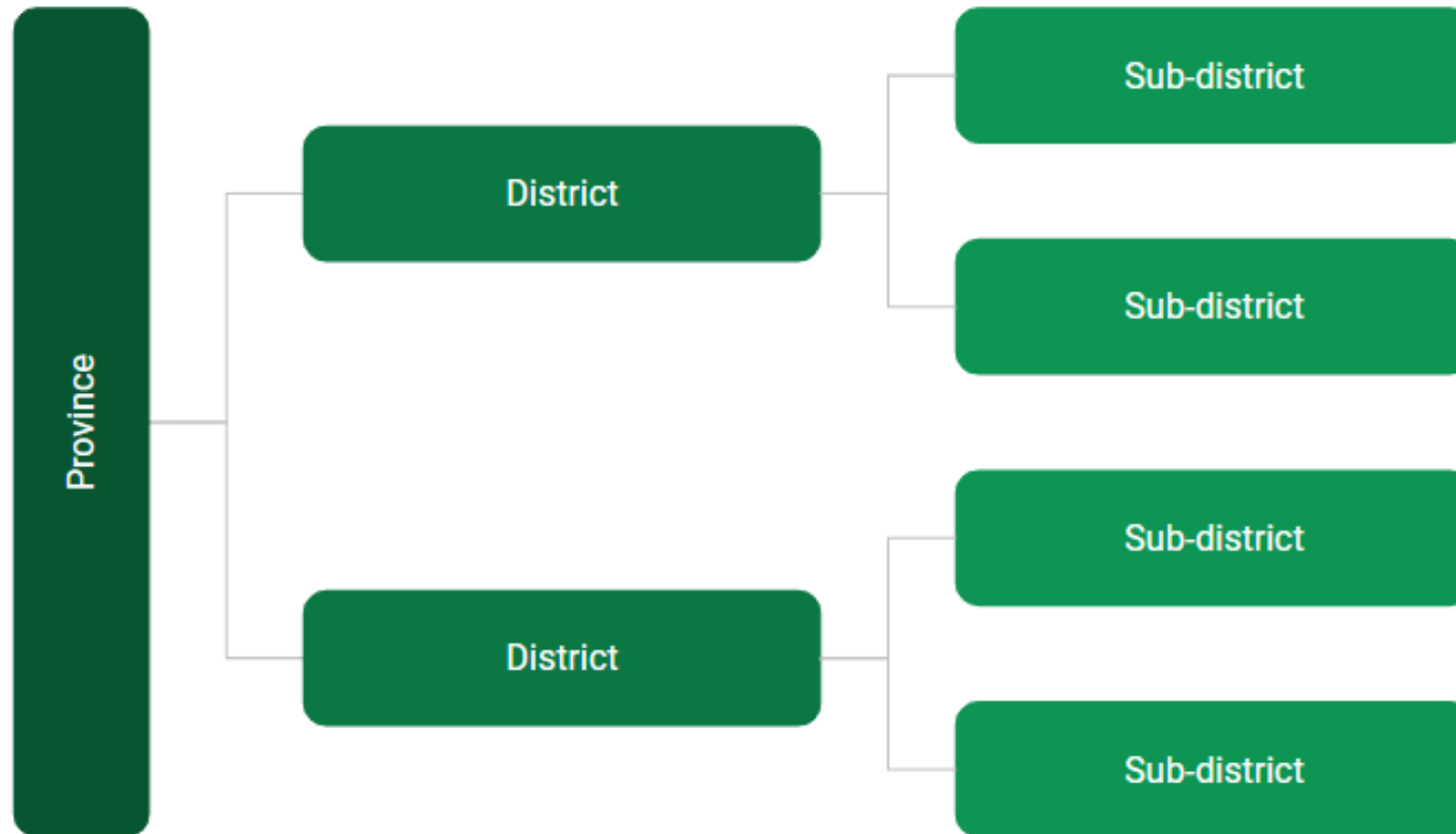
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What is the Census?

Censuses provide “a detailed statistical portrait of Canada and its people by their demographic, social and economic characteristics.” [StatsCan](#) (2022)

How is the Census organized?



What information is captured in the Census?

- Name (First and Last Name)
- Age
- Gender
- Marital status
- Relationship (to head of household)
- Ethnic Origin
- Birth country
- Occupation
- Religion
- Year of birth
- Year of immigration
- Language
- Education level
- Literacy
- Income

What LAC has for Censuses

- Census returns (on paper or microform) from 1825-1931
- Partial records for municipal, regional or provincial Censuses dating from 1640-1825 including New France, Acadia and early colonial regions
- Records for Newfoundland from 1671 to 1945
- Census 1931 launched a few days ago!



Censuses

1851 Census

Search: 1851 Census

Search Help: 1851 Census

Districts and Sub-districts:
1851 Census

Search: Census of 1851

This census includes Canada East (Quebec), Canada West (Ontario), New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.

Enter one or more search terms. You don't need to fill in all the boxes.

Wildcard character: * (e.g. John* for Johns, Johnsen, Johnson, Johnston, etc.)

Keywords:

Surname:

Given Name(s):

Age:

Province:

▼ Hide/Show Advanced Search Options

District Name:

District Number:

Sub-District Name:

Sub-District Number:

Page Number:

Search

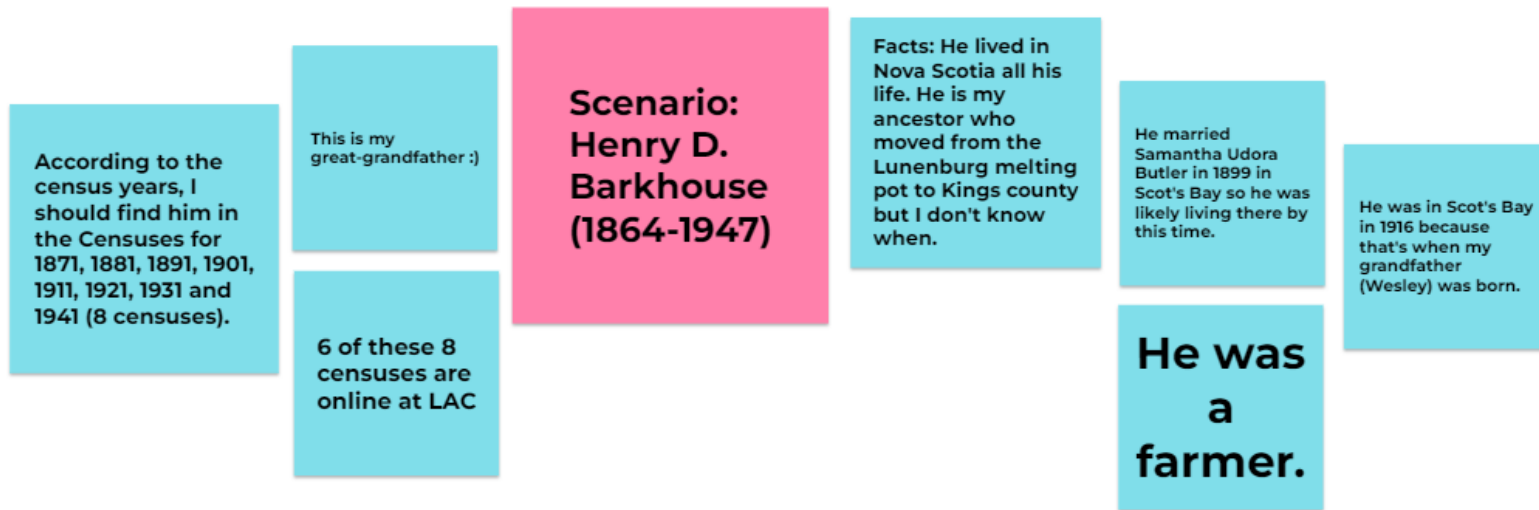
Clear

UX Design process

An example of an older census database

- What does this design show?
- What does it leave out?
- Why does it leave out so much information?

Census Search: is it possible to consolidate?



Search: Census of Canada, 1921

Enter one or more search terms. You don't need to fill in all the boxes.

Wildcard character: * (e.g. John* for Johns, Johnsen, Johnson, Johnston, etc.)

Keywords:

Surname:

Given Name(s):

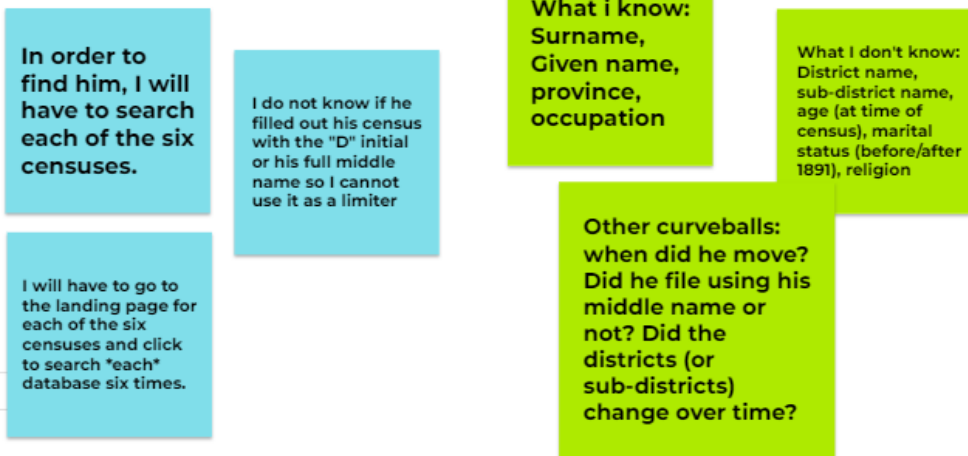
Age:

Province:

▶ Hide/Show Advanced Search Options

Search

Clear





Censuses

1825 Census, Lower Canada

1831 Census, Lower Canada

1842 Census, Canada East

1842 Census, Canada West

1851 Census

1861 Census

1870 Census, Manitoba

1871 Census, Canada

1871 Census, Canada:
Ontario, heads of household

1881 Census, Canada

1891 Census, Canada

1901 Census, Canada

1906 Census, Northwest
Provinces

Censuses

Census returns are official Government of Canada records that enumerate the country's population. They are an invaluable source of information for genealogy research. Starting in 1851, most census records included the names of every resident, their country or province of birth, age and many other details.

Library and Archives Canada holds an extensive collection of Canadian census records from 1640 to 1926, and for Newfoundland from 1671 to 1945. Our holdings are listed in the sections below.

- [About the census](#)
- [Databases \(1825 to 1926\)](#)
- [Finding Aid 300: Other census and related documents \(1640 to 1945\)](#)
- [Digitized microfilm \(1871\)](#)
- [First Nations: Census records in RG10](#)
- [Newfoundland and Labrador: Census and Enumerations \(1921 to 1945\)](#)
- [Research tips](#)
- [Abbreviations for places of birth in Canada](#)
- [Census databases and indexes on other websites](#)
- [Other resources](#)
- [Census after 1926](#)

About the census

From 1851 to 1901, a census occurred every 10 years in Canada; this was confirmed by the British North America Act, also known as the [Constitution Act, 1867](#). The original purpose of the census was to help determine parliamentary representation based on population.

The first census of the Dominion of Canada was taken in 1871. Before that, census enumerations were conducted in different areas in various years. Many of those early records have not survived, including portions of the 1851 census. As provinces joined Confederation, they were included in subsequent federal census returns, for example Prince

Census Search^{BETA}



Census Search
(bac-lac.gc.ca)

[Help](#) [Feedback](#) [Historical language and content notice](#)



Census Search is a BETA research tool

Census Search is a new product and we are making continuous improvements. Please [email us your comments](#) or [sign up for a 10-minute feedback session](#).

You can still access the old [stand-alone census databases](#).

[↔ Advanced search](#)

Census year(s)

All censuses [Select year\(s\)](#)



Who

First name:

e.g. Marie, John

Last name:

e.g. Smith, Tremblay

[More](#)



When

Year of birth:

YYYY

[Set range](#)

Year of immigration:

YYYY

[Set range](#)



Library and
Canada



Where

All provinces and territories [Select province\(s\) and territories](#)

Canada

Reactions

Two main flavours of resistance to change from our dedicated amateur group:

1) Perceived threat to expertise

I have been a long time user of your site. It was always easy to find things.... Are you kidding? Do you now require a PhD in Archival Sciences to use your site?



Meaning: I put in the time to understand the old system, and changing it makes me feel like I wasted my time.

This site is supposed to be for everyone, ordinary people, the people who pay the taxes that pay for this site. You have now made the site unusable to most everyone. **I am not a stupid person. I have a Masters Degree in Human Biology from Oxford and I can't figure out how to use your site.**



Meaning: If I don't understand something immediately, it is bad, and my mind is too valuable to use on figuring out this change.

PLEASE make this site user friendly again!



Reactions

Two main flavours of resistance to change from our dedicated amateur group:

2) Perceived threat to privilege

I had a relative who immigrated to Canada in 1860 to 1865 from London UK. **I am snow white colored and was wondering if there is any information for us...**or is it just for the aboriginal first nations natives who change names every week, or just for the 21st century immigrants? Someone has sure spent a lot of time complicating every government site...must think it makes them look intelligent or something.

Ethnic origin:

e.g. Irish, Cree, Chinese

Ethnic origin

[More details](#)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> All | <input type="checkbox"/> African |
| <input type="checkbox"/> North American | <input type="checkbox"/> Asian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> First Nations | <input type="checkbox"/> Caribbean |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Métis | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> European |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Inuit | <input type="checkbox"/> Latin, Central and South American |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Oceania |

Ethnic origin

German X Pol

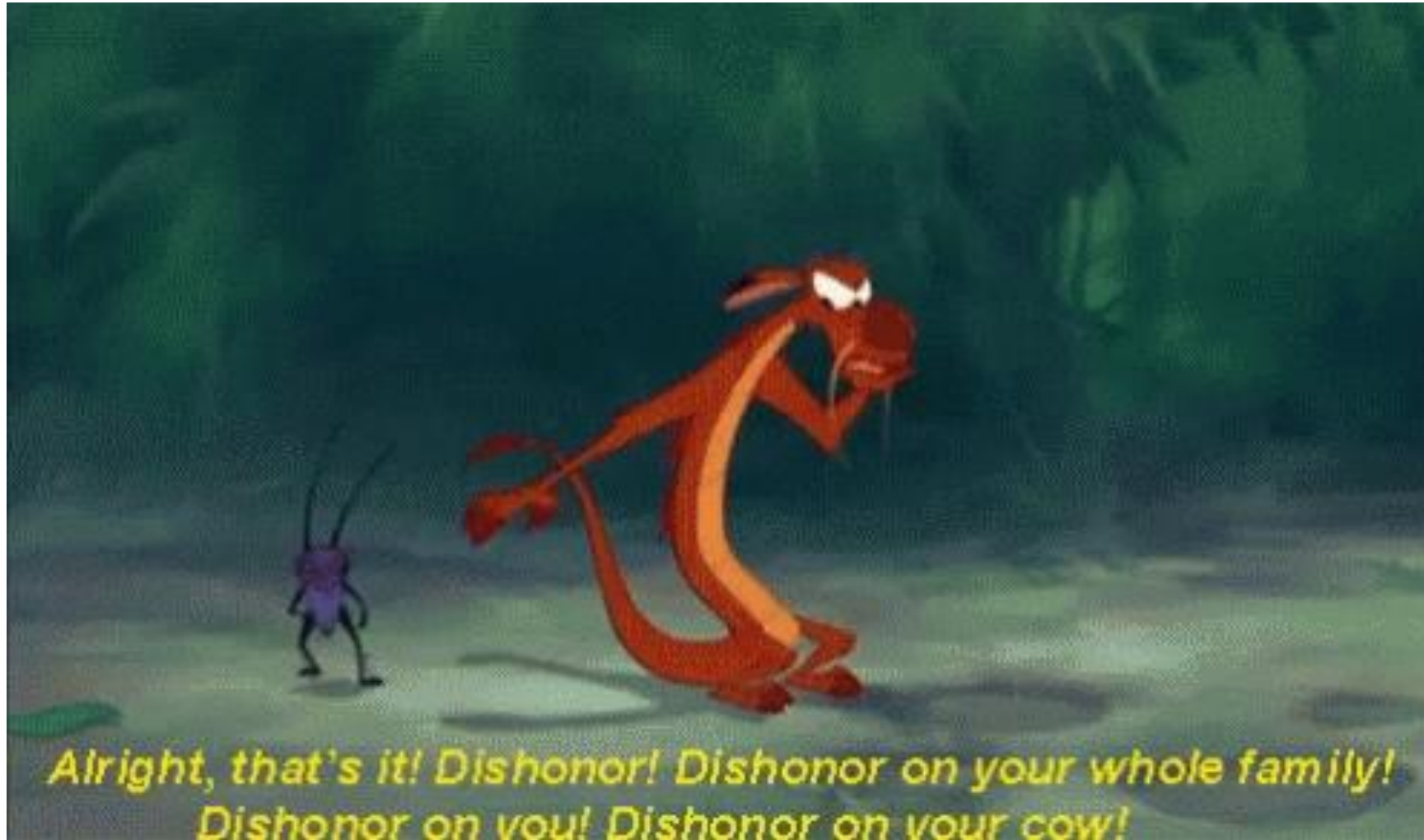
Polish
Polynesian

[More details](#)



Reactions

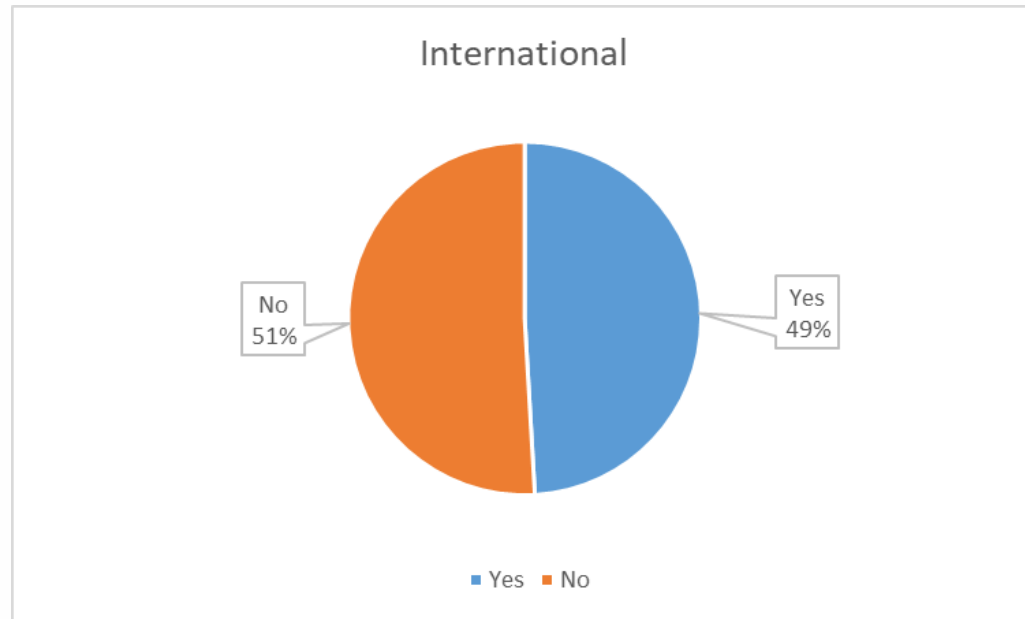
2) Perceived threat to privilege



Reactions

A different user group: people whose direct ancestors are **not** in a presently available census

Partnership with Carleton University



Top fields they used to search

- **Ethnic Origin**
- **Place of birth**
- Gender
- First name
- Last name
- Province
- Place

Reactions

A different user group: people whose direct ancestors are **not** in a presently available census

CENSUS YEAR	CENSUS DISTRICT	NAME	PLACE OF BIRTH	SEX	AGE	MARRIAGE	RELIGION	EDUCATION	PROFESSION	NATURALIZATION	CITIZENSHIP	MARRIAGE		EDUCATION	PROFESSION	
												DATE	PLACE		DATE	PLACE
1851	10	Wagner James	Aylesford Kings	M	30	0	NS	12		Canada	English	1848	1848	18	18	18
1851	10	Wagner Mary	Aylesford Kings	F	27	0	NS	12		Canada	English	1848	1848	18	18	18
1851	10	Wagner Elizabeth	Aylesford Kings	F	17	0	NS	12		Canada	English	1848	1848	18	18	18
1851	10	Wagner Thomas	Aylesford Kings	M	16	0	NS	12		Canada	English	1848	1848	18	18	18
1851	10	Wagner John	Aylesford Kings	M	15	0	NS	12		Canada	English	1848	1848	18	18	18
1851	10	Wagner William	Aylesford Kings	M	14	0	NS	12		Canada	English	1848	1848	18	18	18
1851	10	Wagner James	Aylesford Kings	M	13	0	NS	12		Canada	English	1848	1848	18	18	18
1851	10	Wagner Mary	Aylesford Kings	F	12	0	NS	12		Canada	English	1848	1848	18	18	18
1851	10	Wagner Elizabeth	Aylesford Kings	F	11	0	NS	12		Canada	English	1848	1848	18	18	18
1851	10	Wagner Thomas	Aylesford Kings	M	10	0	NS	12		Canada	English	1848	1848	18	18	18
1851	10	Wagner John	Aylesford Kings	M	9	0	NS	12		Canada	English	1848	1848	18	18	18
1851	10	Wagner William	Aylesford Kings	M	8	0	NS	12		Canada	English	1848	1848	18	18	18
1851	10	Wagner James	Aylesford Kings	M	7	0	NS	12		Canada	English	1848	1848	18	18	18
1851	10	Wagner Mary	Aylesford Kings	F	6	0	NS	12		Canada	English	1848	1848	18	18	18
1851	10	Wagner Elizabeth	Aylesford Kings	F	5	0	NS	12		Canada	English	1848	1848	18	18	18
1851	10	Wagner Thomas	Aylesford Kings	M	4	0	NS	12		Canada	English	1848	1848	18	18	18
1851	10	Wagner John	Aylesford Kings	M	3	0	NS	12		Canada	English	1848	1848	18	18	18
1851	10	Wagner William	Aylesford Kings	M	2	0	NS	12		Canada	English	1848	1848	18	18	18
1851	10	Wagner James	Aylesford Kings	M	1	0	NS	12		Canada	English	1848	1848	18	18	18



Conclusions?

- Making fewer assumptions about users makes our products more democratic.
 - Instead, use a combination of data, usage information from real users, and empathy.
- Deepening access to a document can be as powerful as broadening access to documents.
- Archival institutions can choose whether to gate keep access and create an atmosphere of privilege, or they can choose to be open and accessible. It all depends on thoughtful design.

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