

# Mulatto

**Mulatto** (/mjuːˈlætəʊ/) is a term that is used to refer to people born of one white parent and one black parent, or to describe a mixed race person in general. Historically it was used as a racial classification, though it is now chiefly considered to be derogatory or offensive.<sup>[3][4]</sup>

## Contents

### Etymology

#### Africa

- South Africa
- Afro-European clans

#### Latin America and the Caribbean

- Brazil
- Haiti
- Puerto Rico

#### United States

- Colonial and Antebellum eras
- Influence
- Contemporary era

#### Colonial references

#### See also

#### References

#### Further reading

#### External links

## Etymology

The English term "mulatto" is derived from the Spanish and Portuguese mulato. The origin of mulato is uncertain.

The term may derive from mula (current Portuguese word, from the Latin mūlus), meaning mule, the hybrid offspring of a horse and a donkey.<sup>[5][6]</sup> The Real Academia Española traces its origin to mulo in the sense of hybridity; originally used to refer to any mixed race person.<sup>[7]</sup>

Jack D. Forbes suggests it originated in the Arabic term muwallad, which means "a person of mixed ancestry".<sup>[8]</sup> Muwallad literally means "born, begotten, produced, generated; brought up", with the implication of being born and raised among Arabs, but not of Arab blood. Muwallad is derived from the root word WaLaD (Arabic: ولد, direct Arabic transliteration: waw, lam, dal), and colloquial Arabic pronunciation can vary greatly. Walad means, "descendant, offspring, scion; child; son; boy; young animal, young one".

<b>Mulatto</b>		
<b>Total population</b>		
No official worldwide estimates; c. 60 million		
<b>Regions with significant populations</b>		
Latin America, Caribbean, Southern Africa, West Africa, Europe, North America		
 Brazil	c. 42 million	
 Dominican Republic	c. 6.8 million	
 Cuba	c. 5 million (2012) <sup>[1]</sup>	
 South Africa	c. 4.6 million (2011)	
 United States	c. 1.8 million (2010) <sup>[2]</sup>	
 Angola	c. 1 million	
 United Kingdom	c. ~600,000 (2011)	
<b>Languages</b>		
Languages of Africa, languages of Asia, languages of Europe		
<b>Related ethnic groups</b>		
Pardos		

In al-Andalus, Muwallad referred to the offspring of non-Arab/Muslim people who adopted the Islamic religion and manners. Specifically, the term was historically applied to the descendants of indigenous Christian Iberians who, after several generations of living among a Muslim majority, adopted their culture and religion. Notable examples of this category include the famous Muslim scholar Ibn Hazm. According to Lisan al-Arab, one of the earliest Arab dictionaries (c. 13th century AD), applied the term to the children of Non-Muslim (often Christian) slaves, or Non-Muslim children who were captured in a war and were raised by Muslims to follow their religion and culture. Thus, in this context, the term "Muwalad" has a meaning close to "the adopted". According to the same source, the term does not denote being of mixed-race but rather being of foreign-blood and local culture.

In English, printed usage of mulatto dates to at least the 16th century. The 1595 work Drake's Voyages first used the term in the context of intimate unions producing biracial children. The Oxford English Dictionary defined mulatto as "one who is the offspring of a European and a Black". This earliest usage regarded "black" and "white" as discrete "species", with the "mulatto" constituting a third separate "species".<sup>[9]</sup>

According to Julio Izquierdo Labrado,<sup>[10]</sup> the 19th-century linguist Leopoldo Egilaz y Yanguas, as well as some Arabic sources<sup>[11]</sup> muwallad is the etymological origin of mulato. These sources specify that mulato would have been derived directly from muwallad independently of the related word muladí, a term that was applied to Iberian Christians who had converted to Islam during the Moorish governance of Iberia in the Middle Ages.

The Real Academia Española (Spanish Royal Academy) casts doubt on the muwallad theory. It states, "The term mulata is documented in our diachronic data bank in 1472 and is used in reference to livestock mules in Documentacion medieval de la Corte de Justicia de Ganaderos de Zaragoza, whereas muladí (from mullawadí) does not appear until the 18th century, according to [Joan] Corominas".<sup>[nb 1]</sup>

Scholars such as Werner Sollors cast doubt on the mule etymology for mulatto. In the 18th and 19th centuries, racialists such as Edward Long and Josiah Nott began to assert that mulattoes were sterile like mules. They projected this belief back onto the etymology of the word mulatto. Sollors points out that this etymology is anachronistic: "The Mulatto sterility hypothesis that has much to do with the rejection of the term by some writers is only half as old as the word 'Mulatto.'"<sup>[13]</sup>

## Africa

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Of São Tomé and Príncipe's 193,413 inhabitants, the largest segment is classified as mestiço, or mixed race.<sup>[14]</sup> 71% of the population of Cape Verde is also classified as such.<sup>[15]</sup> The great majority of their current populations descend from unions between the Portuguese, who settled the islands from the 15th century onward, and black Africans they brought from the African mainland to work as slaves. In the early years, mestiços began to form a third-class between the Portuguese colonists and African slaves, as they were usually bilingual and often served as interpreters between the populations.

In Angola and Mozambique, the mestiço constitute smaller but still important minorities; 2% in Angola<sup>[16]</sup> and 0.2% in Mozambique.<sup>[17]</sup>

Mulatto and mestiço are not terms commonly used in South Africa to refer to people of mixed ancestry. The persistence of some authors in using this term, anachronistically, reflects the old-school essentialist views of race as a de facto biological phenomenon, and the 'mixing' of race as legitimate grounds for the creation of a 'new race'. This disregards cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity and/or differences between regions and globally among populations of mixed ancestry.<sup>[18]</sup>



Juan de Pareja by Diego Velázquez, 1650 CE.

In Namibia, an ethnic group known as Rehoboth Basters, descend from historic liaisons between the Cape Colony Dutch and indigenous African women. The name Baster is derived from the Dutch word for "bastard" (or "crossbreed"). While some people consider this term demeaning, the Basters proudly use the term as an indication of their history. In the early 21st century, they number between 20,000 and 30,000 people. There are, of course, other people of mixed race in the country.



The Christmas Bands are a popular Cape Coloured cultural tradition in Cape Town.

## South Africa

In South Africa, Coloured is a term used to refer to individuals with some degree of sub-Saharan ancestry but subjectively 'not enough' to be considered black-African under the Apartheid era law of South Africa. Today people self-identify as 'Coloured'. Other Afrikaans terms used include Bruinmense (translates to "brown people"), Kleurlinge (translates to "Coloured") or Bruin Afrikaners (translates to "brown Africans" and is used to distinguish them from the main body of Afrikaners (translates to "African") who are white). Under Apartheid law through the latter half of the 20th century, the government established seven categories of Coloured people: Cape Coloured, Cape Malay, Griqua and Other Coloured - the aim of subdivisions was to enhance the meaning of the larger category of Coloured by making it all encompassing. Legally and politically speaking, all people of colour were classified "black" in the non-racial terms of anti-Apartheid rhetoric of the Black Consciousness Movement.<sup>[19]</sup>

In addition to European ancestry, the Coloured people usually had some portion of Asian ancestry from immigrants from India, Indonesia, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mauritius, Sri Lanka, China and/or Saint Helena. Based on the Population Registration Act to classify people, the government passed laws prohibiting mixed marriages. Many people who classified as in the "Asian" category could legally intermarry with "mixed-race" people because they shared the same nomenclature.<sup>[19]</sup> There was extensive combining of these diverse heritages in the Western Cape.

In other parts of South Africa and neighboring states, the coloured usually were descendants of two primary ethnic groups - primarily Africans of various tribes and European colonists of various tribes, with generations of coloured forming families. The use of the term 'Coloured' has changed over the course of history. For instance, in the first census after the South African war (1912), Indians were counted as 'Coloured'. But before and after this war, they were counted as 'Asiatic'.<sup>[20]</sup>

In KwaZulu-Natal, most Coloureds (that were classified as "other coloureds") had British and Zulu heritage. Zimbabwean coloureds were descended from Shona or Ndebele mixing with British and Afrikaner settlers.

Griqua, on the other hand, are descendants of Khoisan and Afrikaner trekboers, with contributions from central Southern African groups.<sup>[21]</sup> The Griqua were subjected to an ambiguity of other creole people within Southern African social order. According to Nurse and Jenkins (1975), the leader of this "mixed" group, Adam Kok I, was a former slave of the Dutch governor. He was manumitted and provided land outside Cape Town in the eighteenth century. With territories beyond the Dutch East India Company administration, Kok provided refuge to deserting soldiers, refugee slaves, and remaining members of various Khoikhoi tribes.<sup>[19]</sup>

## Afro-European clans

- Akus
- Americo-Liberians
- Fernandinos

- [Gold Coast Euro-Africans](#)
- [Sherbro Hubris](#)
- [Sherbro Tuckers](#)
- [Sherbro Caulkers](#)
- [Sherbro Rogers](#)
- [Sherbro Clevelands](#)
- [Sierra Leone Creole people](#)

## Latin America and the Caribbean

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Mulattoes represent a significant part of the population of various [Latin American](#) and Caribbean countries:<sup>[22]</sup> [Dominican Republic](#) (73%; all mixed-race people),<sup>[22][nb 2]</sup> [Brazil](#) (49.1% mixed-race, Gypsy and Black, Mulattoes (20.5%), Mestiços, Mamelucos or Caboclos (21.3%), Blacks (7.1%) and Eurasian (0.2%)),<sup>[23][24]</sup> [Belize](#) (25%), [Colombia](#) (10.4%),<sup>[22]</sup> [Cuba](#) (24.86%),<sup>[22]</sup> [Haiti](#) (15%).<sup>[22]</sup>

In colonial Latin America, mulato could also refer to an individual of mixed African and Native American ancestry.<sup>[25]</sup> In the 21st century, persons with indigenous and [black African](#) ancestry in Latin America are more frequently called [zambos](#) in Spanish or [cafuzo](#) in Portuguese.

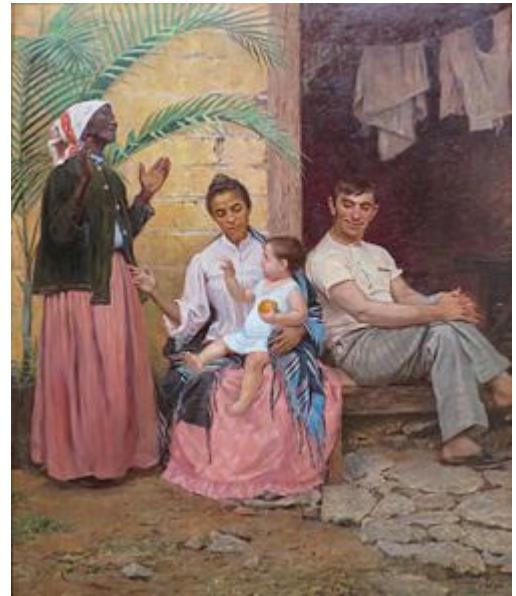
### Brazil

Studies carried out by the geneticist Sergio Pena conclude the average white Brazilian is 80% European, 10% Amerindian, and 10% African/black.<sup>[26]</sup> Another study, carried out by the Brazilian Journal of Medical and Biological Research, concludes the average white Brazilian is (>70%) European.<sup>[27]</sup>

According to the [IBGE](#) 2000 census, 38.5% of Brazilians identified as pardo, i.e. of mixed ancestry.<sup>[28][29]</sup> This figure includes mulatto and other multiracial people, such as people who have European and Amerindian ancestry (called [caboclos](#)), as well as assimilated, [westernized](#) Amerindians, and mestizos with [some Asian ancestry](#). A majority of mixed-race Brazilians have all three ancestries: Amerindian, European, and African. According to the [Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics](#) census 2006, some 42.6% of Brazilian identify as pardo, an increase over the 2000 census.<sup>[30]</sup>

According to genetic studies, some of those who identify as [White Brazilians](#) (48.4%) also have some mixed-race ancestry (both Subsaharan African and Amerindian ancestry). Brazilians who identify as de raça negra or de cor preta, i.e. Brazilians of Black African origin, make up 6.9% of the population; genetic studies show their average total ancestry is still mixed: 40% African, 50% European, and 10% Amerindian, but they likely grew up within visibly black communities.

Such [autosomal DNA](#) studies, which measure total genetic contribution, continue to reveal differences between how individuals identify, which is usually based in family and close community, with genetic ancestry, which may relate to a distant past they know little about.<sup>[31]</sup> Such DNA studies were conducted of students at a school in the poor periphery of Rio de Janeiro. It found that the multiracial "pardos" were genetically more than 80% European in ancestry. "The results



A Redenção de Cam (Redemption of Ham), Modesto Brocos, 1895, Museu Nacional de Belas Artes. The painting depicts a black grandmother, mulatta mother, white father and their quadroon child, hence three generations of hypergamy through racial whitening.

of the tests of genomic ancestry are quite different from the self made estimates of European ancestry", say the researchers. The test results showed that the proportion of European genetic ancestry was higher than students expected. When questioned before the test, students who identified as "pardos", for example, identified as 1/3 European, 1/3 African and 1/3 Amerindian.<sup>[32]</sup><sup>[33]</sup> On the other hand, students classified as "white" tended to overestimate their proportion of African and Amerindian genetic ancestry.<sup>[32]</sup>

## Haiti

Mulattoes account for up to 5% of the nation's population. In Haitian history, such mixed-race people, known in colonial times as free people of color, gained some education and property before the Revolution. In some cases, their white fathers arranged for multiracial sons to be educated in France and join the military, giving them an advance economically. Free people of color gained some social capital and political power before the Revolution, were influential during the Revolution and since then. The people of color have retained their elite position, based on education and social capital, that is apparent in the political, economic and cultural hierarchy in present-day Haiti. Numerous leaders throughout Haiti's history have been people of color.<sup>[34]</sup>

The struggle within Haiti between the people of color led by André Rigaud and the black Haitians led by Toussaint Louverture devolved into the War of Knives.<sup>[35]</sup><sup>[36]</sup> In the early period of independence, former slaves of majority-black ancestry led the government, as it was the many more numerous slaves who had done most of the fighting in the North, where the largest plantations were, to achieve independence.

## Puerto Rico

In a 2002 genetic study of maternal and paternal direct lines of ancestry of 800 Puerto Ricans, 61% had mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) from an Amerindian female ancestor, 27% inherited MtDNA from a female African ancestor and 12% had MtDNA from a female European ancestor.<sup>[37]</sup> Conversely, patrilineal direct lines, as indicated by the Y chromosome, showed that 70% of Puerto Rican males in the sample have Y chromosome DNA from a male European ancestor, 20% inherited Y-DNA from a male African ancestor, and less than 10% inherited Y-DNA from a male Amerindian ancestor.<sup>[38]</sup> As these tests measure only the DNA along the direct matrilineal and patrilineal lines of inheritance, they cannot tell what total percentage of European, Indigenous, or African ancestry any individual has.

In keeping with Spanish practice, for most of its colonial period, Puerto Rico had laws such as the Regla del Sacar or Gracias al Sacar. A person with African ancestry could be considered legally white if he could prove that at least one person per generation in the last four generations had been legally white. People of black ancestry with known white lineage were classified as white, in contrast to the "one-drop rule" put into law in the early 20th century in the United States. In colonial and antebellum times in certain locations, persons of three-quarters or more white ancestry were considered legally white.<sup>[39]</sup> If born to slave mothers, however, this status did not overrule their being considered slaves, like Sally Hemings, who was three-quarters white, and her children by Thomas Jefferson, who were seven-eighths white, and all born into slavery.



Don Miguel Enríquez, a Puerto Rican privateer, is the only known mulatto knighted by the Monarchy of Spain. After being born illegitimate, he became a shoemaker and privateer, ultimately one of the wealthiest men of the New World.

# United States

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## Colonial and Antebellum eras

Historians have documented sexual abuse of slave women during the colonial and post-revolutionary slavery times by white men in power: planters, their sons before marriage, overseers, etc., which resulted in many multiracial children born into slavery. Starting with Virginia in 1662, colonies adopted the principle of partus sequitur ventrem in slave law, which said that children born in the colony were born into the status of their mother. Thus, children born to slave mothers were born into slavery, regardless of who their fathers were and whether they were baptized as Christians. Children born to white mothers were free, even if they were mixed-race. Children born to free mixed-race mothers were also free.

Paul Heinegg has documented that most of the free people of color listed in the 1790–1810 censuses in the Upper South were descended from unions and marriages during the colonial period in Virginia between white women, who were free or indentured servants, and African or African-American men, servant, slave or free. In the early colonial years, such working-class people lived and worked closely together, and slavery was not as much of a racial caste. Slave law had established that children in the colony took the status of their mothers. This meant that multi-racial children born to white women were born free. The colony required them to serve lengthy indentures if the woman was not married, but nonetheless, numerous individuals with African ancestry were born free, and formed more free families. Over the decades, many of these free people of color became leaders in the African-American community; others married increasingly into the white community.<sup>[40][41]</sup> His findings have been supported by DNA studies and other contemporary researchers as well.<sup>[42]</sup>

A daughter born to a South Asian father and Irish mother in Maryland in 1680, both of whom probably came to the colony as indentured servants, was classified as a "mulatto" and sold into slavery.<sup>[43]</sup>

Historian F. James Davis says,

Rapes occurred, and many slave women were forced to submit regularly to white males or suffer harsh consequences. However, slave girls often courted a sexual relationship with the master, or another male in the family, as a way of gaining distinction among the slaves, avoiding field work, and obtaining special jobs and other favored treatment for their mixed children (Reuter, 1970:129). Sexual contacts between the races also included prostitution, adventure, concubinage, and sometimes love. In rare instances, where free blacks were concerned, there was marriage (Bennett, 1962:243–68).<sup>[44]</sup>

Historically in the American South, the term mulatto was also applied at times to persons with mixed Native American and African American ancestry.<sup>[45]</sup> For example, a 1705 Virginia statute reads as follows:

"And for clearing all manner of doubts which hereafter may happen to arise upon the construction of this act, or any other act, who shall be accounted a mulatto, Be it enacted and declared, and it is hereby enacted and declared, That the child of an Indian and the child, grand child, or great grand child, of a negro shall be deemed, accounted, held and taken to be a mulatto."<sup>[46]</sup>



Creole woman with black servant, New Orleans, 1867.

But southern colonies began to prohibit Indian slavery in the eighteenth century, so, according to their own laws, even mixed-race children born to Native American women should be considered free. The societies did not always observe this distinction.

Certain Native American tribes of the Inocoplo family in Texas referred to themselves as "mulatto".<sup>[47]</sup> At one time, Florida's laws declared that a person from any number of mixed ancestries would be legally defined as a mulatto, including White/Hispanic, Black/Native American, and just about any other mix as well.<sup>[48]</sup>

In the United States, due to the influence and laws making slavery a racial caste, and later practices of hypodescent, white colonists and settlers tended to classify persons of mixed African and Native American ancestry as black, regardless of how they identified themselves, or sometimes as Black Indians. But many tribes had matrilineal kinship systems and practices of absorbing other peoples into their cultures. Multiracial children born to Native American mothers were customarily raised in her family and specific tribal culture. Federally recognized Native American tribes have insisted that identity and membership is related to culture rather than race, and that individuals brought up within tribal culture are fully members, regardless of whether they also have some European or African ancestry. Many tribes have had mixed-race members who identify primarily as members of the tribes.

If the multiracial children were born to slave women (generally of at least partial African descent), they were classified under slave law as slaves. This was to the advantage of slaveowners, as Indian slavery had been abolished. If mixed-race children were born to Native American mothers, they should be considered free, but sometimes slaveholders kept them in slavery anyway. Multiracial children born to slave mothers were generally raised within the African-American community and considered "black".<sup>[45]</sup>

## **Influence**

Some mixed-race persons in the South became wealthy enough to become slave owners themselves. At times they held family members in slavery when there were many restrictions against freeing slaves. By the time of the Civil War, many mixed-race persons, or free people of color, who were accepted in the society supported the Confederacy. For example, William Ellison owned 60 slaves. Andrew Durnford of New Orleans, which had a large population of free people of color, mostly of French descent and Catholic culture, was listed in the census as owning 77 slaves. In Louisiana free people of color constituted a third class between white colonists and the mass of slaves.<sup>[49]</sup>

Other multiracial people became abolitionists and supported the Union. Frederick Douglass escaped slavery and became nationally known as an abolitionist in the North.

In other examples, Mary Ellen Pleasant and Thomy Lafon of New Orleans used their fortunes to support the abolitionist cause. Francis E. Dumas, also a free person of color in New Orleans, emancipated all his slaves and organized them into a company in the Second Regiment of the Louisiana Native Guards.<sup>[50]</sup>

The men of color below spanned the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.



[Frederick Douglass](#)



[P. B. S. Pinchback](#)



[Booker T. Washington](#)



[Norris Wright Cuney](#)

## Contemporary era

Mulatto was used as an official [census](#) racial category in the United States, to acknowledge multiracial persons, until 1930. (In the early 20th century, several southern states had adopted the [one-drop rule](#) as law, and southern Congressmen pressed the US Census Bureau to drop the mulatto category: they wanted all persons to be classified as "black" or "white".) [51][52][53]

In the [2000 United States Census](#), 6,171 Americans self-identified as having mulatto ancestry.<sup>[54]</sup> Since then, persons responding to the census have been allowed to identify as having more than one type of ethnic ancestry.

## Colonial references

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- [Fernandino](#)
- [Quadroon](#) – & other terms denoting the degree of African descent
- [Métis](#)
- [Mestizo](#)
- [Zambo](#)

## See also

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- [African diaspora in the Americas](#)
- [Afro-Argentines](#)
- [Afro-Colombians](#)
- [Afro-Latin Americans](#)
- [Cafres](#)
- [Cassare](#), a marriage alliance between European traders and African rulers.
- [Casta](#)
- [Cholo](#)
- [Free people of color](#)
- [Melungeon](#)
- [Multiracial](#)
- [Rhineland Bastard](#)
- [Tragic mulatto](#)

## References

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## Notes

1. Corominas describes his doubts on the theory as follows: "[Mulato] does not derive from the Arab muwállad, 'acculturated foreigner' and sometimes 'mulatto' (see 'Mdí'), as Eguílaz would have it, since this word was pronounced 'moo-EL-led' in the Arabic of Spain. In the 19th century, Reinhart Dozy (*Supplément aux Dictionnaires Arabes*, Vol. II, Leyden, 1881, 841a) rejected this Arabic etymology, indicating the true one, supported by the Arabic *nagîl*, 'mulatto', derived from *nagl*, 'mule'.<sup>[12]</sup>
2. In the Dominican Republic, the mulatto population absorbed remnants of the Taíno Amerindians historically present in that country, based on a 1960 census that included colour categories such as white, black, yellow, and mulatto. Since then, racial components have been dropped from the Dominican census.

## Citations

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