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COMMENTS

COMMENTS BY
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ON RACE AND HISPANIC ORIGIN QUESTIONS
FOR THE CENSUS 2000 DRESS REHEARSAL

SUBMITTED TO THE
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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One of the more confusing elements of dealing with the plethora of data available from the Bureau of the Census is the manner in which the Race and Hispanic Origin questions were asked, tabulated and inconsistently reported in both paper and electronic products. My general comments are:

- 1. Either combine the two questions, ask the Hispanic Origin question first, or somehow make sure that Hispanics should answer a race question and not respond as Other.*
- 2. However the new multi-racial responses are tabulated, provide internal consistency in reporting so that adding the number of responses somehow adds up to 100% through the use of Subgroups which are Additive and Mutually Exclusive (SAME).*

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3. Provide more consistent reporting of the Race and Hispanic Origin responses, no matter how the multi-race questions are tabulated, along the lines of the 1990 Modified Age Race Sex (MARS) file, so that Hispanics are broken out by race as well. (See attached)

4. Avoid the problems associated with the Ancestry responses from 1990. For example, it is easy to calculate a number which compares the relative concentration of any particular ancestry group with another, but it is difficult to agree on just how a percentage can be calculated for any particular group.

On a strictly personal level, it pains me to think that the racial element, still a major focus in politics and certainly in redistricting, will become more confused with the addition of any multi-racial responses. As the federal census has grown to represent all sorts of characteristics of the population, I applaud the effort to provide some sort of mechanism whereby those Americans who feel they are a part of several racial groups can have an opportunity to enumerate that. However, I can not see any reason why we already have several questions which relate to the same personal perception yet which are rarely treated as a group.

The related questions are Q4-RACE; Q7-IS THIS PERSON OF SPANISH/HISPANIC ORIGIN?; and Q13-WHAT IS THIS PERSON'S ANCESTRY OR ETHNIC ORIGIN? Why is the Ancestry question not always considered as part of this group? We hear the combined term of Race/Ethnicity and sometime later on we hear Ancestry. Is there a difference between Race and Ethnic Origin? Presumably one is biological/physical/immutable and one is cultural/mental/variable. Why does the Bureau ask respondents about the Hispanic Origin and not just treat them as another group under the Ancestry question?

The answer is, of course, politics. The 22.354 million Hispanics are a protected minority language group under the federal Voting Rights Act. The 57.974 millions of German Ancestry are not, nor are the 38.736 millions of Irish ethnic origin, nor the 32.652 millions of English ethnic origin, nor the 14.665 millions of Italian ethnic origin, nor the 10.321 millions of French ethnic origin. Now there will be another response to be added, multi-racial, however it is worded or placed.

Under the federal Voting Rights Act (VRA), the groups protected by racial or language classification have very definite interests. Herein lies the crux of the main concern I have about which the Department of Commerce can do something. Under judicial edicts from the U.S. Supreme Court and other courts, both state and federal, the identification of these groups, even in jurisdictions not



covered by the preclearance aspects of the VRA, is a critical element of the redistricting process, itself a critical element of our representative democracy.

Under the test enunciated by the U.S. Supreme Court in the Gingles case from North Carolina, a threshold question is whether members of a protected group are numerous enough, and compact enough, to be placed in a single-member district. Another threshold question revolves around the existence of racial bloc voting in elections in the area. Answering any of these questions necessarily revolves around the use of data from the Bureau of the Census.

One of the touchstones for redistricting is equality of population among districts. This is going to be, in my opinion, at significant risk already given the Department's initiative to integrate an adjustment through the use of sampling and estimation. The other major touchstone in redistricting is the creation of majority-minority districts. The extent to which these can be, or need to be, created is a matter still under review in the court systems.

Notwithstanding Shaw and its progeny, racial considerations will still be a major part of redistricting following the 2000 Census. Redistricting is already a highly intense process bringing together a whole host of political interests. At least one thing we did not have to worry about before was what numbers we would use. For the 2000 Census, given the adjustment element and the eventual appearance of numbers with error rates attached, even this part will be no longer a given. Now, the simple initiative of providing Americans another way to respond means that even the racial numbers will be an area for debate and the initial battles will be over not just which set of *total* population numbers to use but how the racial breaks are tabulated.

As I stated above in the Ancestry discussion, tabulation of a question to which multiple responses are allowed, but not required, present another set of problems. Consider a district which is drawn to include 55% African-American. In most cases this represents 55% of the total population in the area bounded by the new district lines. The threshold debate will be if it really is 55% given the adjustment factors. The second threshold debate will be as to how the 55% were counted. Is a person who responds both Black and White counted as a) Black, b) White, c) one-half to each, or d) as one respondent who answered multiple race categories, or e) one who answered to two categories and not three? Under the Ancestry tabulations we know that 90% of Americans responded to a single Ancestry group and 30% reported a second ancestry. Does this help us in analyzing the actual number of persons who reported they were Norwegian? Not really. Unless the Bureau, the custodian of the initial survey instrument, tabulates the responses appropriately, we are left in the dark.



Unfortunately, I am not sure it is possible that any universal agreement as to the appropriate categories for tabulation can be made which will survive redistricting. Again, as the redistricting process is so time intensive, expending effort on the tabulation of data during the process will not be productive. However, given the litigation which always follows, or intervenes in, the process, this will certainly be an area over which new fights will be initiated.

Reviewing the May 22, 1997 paper on the RAETT produced by the Bureau's Population Division, I would recommend that the questioning be worded generally as in Panel E, the combined question wherein only 1 response is requested. Given the follow-up ancestry question fill-in-the-blanks, if anyone wants to break out the multi-racial respondents to their advantage, at least there will be the minimal data to consider this as a possibility.

I hesitate to recommend any extended cross-tabulation of the multi-racial responses, no matter what the wording or response options. Given the numbers of responses anticipated and the enormous increase in resources to report cross-tabulated data, I am not sure it's worth it at every level of geography. However, I would recommend that the Bureau produce detailed cross tabulation information for the race, ethnic origin, and ancestry at at least the state level, if not the county or metropolitan statistical area so that some general guidelines could be referenced during the redistricting data debate.

Use of the Panel E format would, however, require some modification in the release of the PL94-171 redistricting data for the block level. My recommendation is that a) the data continue to be broken vertically into total population and voting age population; and b) that the Subgroups which are Additive and Mutually Exclusive (SAME) methodology be used (Panel E accomplishes this but this method should be used regardless of wording options) and that the horizontal columns be as follows:

- 1) TOTAL: the total for the population, or voting age population;
- 2a) RACE/ORIGIN: White, 2b) Black, 2c) Am. Indian, etc., 2d) Asian, etc., 2e) Hispanic, 2f) Multiracial, and 2g) Other;
- 3a) ANCESTRY: persons reporting at least one ancestry response, 3b) persons reporting more than one ancestry response, 3c) persons reporting only one ancestry response, 3d) persons reporting a second ancestry response, 3e) persons reporting American or U.S., 3f) persons not reporting any ancestry response, and 3g) number of responses.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to comment.

