



Reclassify All Children Equally

August 13, 2014

National Advisory Committee on Race,
Ethnicity and Other Populations
US Census Bureau
Via email: census.national.advisory.committee@census.gov

Dear Committee Members:

This is the letter I mentioned in my comments during the Virtual Meeting on August 13, 2014. It contains information provided in a letter to Dr. Linda Marc on March 20, 2013 and addresses further concerns of the multiracial community and the Race & Hispanic Origin Research Working Group. This letter is a follow-up on the major issues and not a comprehensive list of all our concerns.

1. Terminology: Our initial concern for people who choose to reflect their entire heritage on Census Bureau forms, school forms, or employment forms, medical forms, etc., is the terminology used in the instructions and in tabulation. Although OMB did not suggest a box with the label of "multiracial," their guidance speaks to *minimum* requirements. OMB Bulletin NO. 00-02-Guidance on Aggregation and Allocation of Data on Race for Use in Civil Rights Monitoring and Enforcement states: *The five minimum categories are American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and White. Also note, the revised standards require, among other things, that agencies offer individuals the opportunity to select one or more races when reporting information on race in Federal data collections.*

Therefore, we see that there are *minimum*, but not *maximum* categories. For example, boxes are often added to accommodate Hmong, Samoan, Japanese, etc. In fact, the 2010 Decennial Census allowed people to indicate Guamanian or Chamorro, Tongan, and Vietnamese, just to name a few.

Our problem with the census forms arises from terminology. In the results of the 2000 Census, the bureau referred to "People of More Than One Race in the United States." For the 2010 Census, they adopted the acronyms TOMR (Two or More Races) people and MOOM (Mark One or More) people. Since 2010, the Census Bureau began referring to us as "combination people." They are *all* offensive to people who only wish to be regarded as being of multiple races. The

respectful and most inclusive term for this is "Multiracial." Multiracial is being used by progressive companies, organizations, educational institutions, journalists, and in many more areas.

We have devised a very well-received system that does not disturb any data, but stipulates the term "multiracial" on school forms. This is accomplished in the following instructions on the school enrollment and other forms: "What is your child's race? If your child is multiracial, you may select two or more races." This wording, or a simple form of it, is being used in many school districts. There is no reason that a form of this question could not be utilized on the US Census, such as:

✓ **Mark one. If you are multiracial, you may select two or more.**

One word can make a difference in a child's self-esteem. Imagine another student or a teacher asking a multiracial child, "What are you?" and the child not knowing the correct word for themselves. If they encounter a census enumerator, they could be asked if they are a combination person, which frankly sounds like something you would order at a drive-thru fast food window.

Self-identification is extremely important on the US Census, which in many ways sets the stage for how terminology is expressed every ten years. A census enumerator came to my home in 2010. We began discussing alternatives to the one race only configuration and she told me that she checks "some other race" just to show her resentment of the question.

2. Tabulation: The Census Bureau is all about data. We fully understand that, however, they need to strive for accuracy in the data. A factual example is that my son was considered white on the census, black at school and multiracial at home all at the same time. Something is wrong, and the way multiracial people are tabulated by race and ethnicity is more than a "margin of error." *Another example of this is that many people missed the wording "Mark one or more boxes," marked "Some other race" and wrote in "multiracial."* What may seem obvious to the Census Bureau may not be what the average census respondent sees. Then, instead of going into the "Two or more races" category for tabulation, the numbers were kept in the catchall "Some other race" category or re-tabulated in some way.

3. Part of the problem is with the Alternative Question Experiment (AQE) itself, because the ways the questions are asked are flawed. When they ask a multiracial person to state their race(s) followed by the question "Which one are you really?" it is not only the wrong question, it is discriminatory, insulting, and negates the multiracial population completely.

We were told by the Census Bureau prior to the 2000 Decennial Census that we would always be able to tell from the data the aggregate numbers of population that indicated they were multiracial. In reality, that has not happened. We get numbers "in combination" with other races, but not aggregated as one total number. In other words, when we see a pie-chart, it is not possible to see what sliver of the chart represents the multiracial population. We would not even be able to see how many people marked "Asian in combination," "Black in combination," etc. The aggregate multiracial population is rendered invisible once again. It forces us to question the tabulation and if multiracial people are being re-tabulated into one race categories.

The publication from the U.S. Department of Education that is supposed to guide K-12 grades, is called *Managing an Identity Crisis: Forum Guide to Implementing New Federal Race and Ethnicity Categories*. I wonder just who is having that identity crisis. OMB guidelines are hardly followed and scenarios are given that allow them to make Hispanic "trump" other single race categories. In other words, if a student checks "Hispanic" and *any* race, they "default" to Hispanic only.

If the Hispanic classification moves from an ethnicity to a race, it would obviously have a statistical effect on the multiracial tabulation and resulting data. This is a critical issue that directly impacts the multiracial community. Why should we not be part of the conversation and implications about this?

As a further example, OMB did not add Portuguese to the Hispanic category, although the Department of Transportation did, in fact, do just that. Again, shouldn't accuracy be the goal? How can that be true when the Census Bureau is different from the schools, which are different from some agencies, and not others? We have also been told by employers that they even question the data collected by EEOC as being different from other government agencies.

4. Current information: It is very difficult to find information about the NAC on the Internet. Most information is pre-2010, except for who has been named to the committee. Stakeholders *have no recourse* but to dialogue with those who head subcommittees and heads of the committee. Information should be immediate and readily available, especially to stakeholder groups. I can get a list of names of people on subcommittees, but my requests for precisely which groups committee members represent have gone unanswered for months. In fact, *this* virtual meeting is nowhere to be found on the NAC website.

5. Life or death in health care: We are not talking about a “feel good” solution for multiracial people when healthcare is involved. Multiracial data is not routinely sought in clinical studies, although most racial and ethnic information is collected. Bone marrow donors need to be a racial and ethnic match for the recipient. Some racial and ethnic factors are critical when culling out racial and ethnic problems, like sickle cell anemia and Tay-Sachs disease. Isn't it time to take our critical medical concerns seriously?

We know that not all of our issues directly come under the Census Bureau, but they often do set a standard. I received a letter from Katherine K. Wallman, Chief Statistician, Executive Office of the President, Office of Management and Budget who wrote, “We do not anticipate at this time a broad review of the standards currently in place, but we have encouraged the agencies to continue research on their implementation and may issue additional guidance based on their research. Any proposals for additional guidance likely will be discussed by the agencies and their respective advisory committees.”

Members of the multiracial community are stakeholders, not outliers in the Decennial Census and in other government data. We are more than MOOMs (Mark one or More people) or combination folks. We are striving to have our issues taken into account by this committee. The multiracial community is not satisfied that we have quality and equality of representation on the Committee. Any assistance you can give us is appreciated. I am hopeful that we can continue this dialogue and help be part of the solution.

Sincerely,

Susan Graham
Executive Director

cc: Jeri Green
Tom Loo

Meeting Comments
Susan Graham, Project RACE

Only *one* item concerning the multiracial population was addressed in the handouts from the March meeting: multiracial respondents are not always aware they have the option to select more than one race. I will address solutions for *this* item in my allotted time, and ask you to also read my written letter to this committee in full, which addresses additional issues.

The instructions for race selection on the AQE and 2010 Census were the same:

Mark (x) one or more boxes.

Project RACE works to ensure that multiracial children and our families have forms that reflect appropriate, respectful, and dignified terminology. Concise and very simple, we do not disturb any data or cause any changes in tabulation. We have had extremely positive feedback for our preferred instructions, which are:

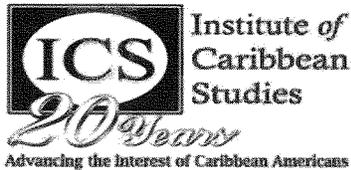
✓ **Mark one. If you are multiracial, you may select two or more.**

In the 1990s, we were advised by OMB to choose one word to describe people who are of more than one race. We agreed on the same word along with other advocates. That word was "Multiracial." Yes, times change, nomenclature changes, public preferences change, but the preferred term is *still* Multiracial. It is *not* "Mark Two or More Races" people, or the "Race in Combination" population.

Some possible changes are being tested in the race category, one of which is to add the Hispanic/Latino option. The instructions could then be:

✓ **Mark one. If you are multiracial *or* multiethnic, you may select two or more.**

Isn't America truly becoming multiracial *and* multiethnic? Why not use accurate and respectful terminology beginning with the 2020 Census? Project RACE urges you to include our model in further testing.



COMMENTS ON RACE QUESTION for NAC

Since 2009, the Institute of Caribbean Studies has been engaged with the US Census in encouraging a increase in effectiveness of reaching the Caribbean American community. To this end, ICS formed and chaired a Complete Count Committee for the 2010 Census; and was named a Profile Partner for the Census. In spite of our inability to secure adequate funding for desired outreach, through partnering with the National Black Coalition for Civic Participation, we were able to secure \$10K subvention to support marketing to key communities in Atlanta and South Florida. As you can well imagine, working with no paid staff was a limiting factor, yet in our outreach efforts we heard the same refrain – we don't see ourselves.

Fast forward to today, it is evident that the issue of racial and ethnic identity remains critical. In June of 2014, in commemoration of June as National Caribbean American Heritage Month, we requested and received a briefing from the US Census. We were privileged to be addressed by Ms. Karen Humes who presented state of research on the race question.

We remain concerned about the lack of recognition of the multi-cultural nature of the Black community. The fact is that Hispanic is NOT a race. Indeed Hispanics can be of any and every recognized race – that is to say, white, Black, Mestizo, Asian, or Indigenous. As such, the Hispanic question is actually a mother tongue question. And thus, there is no justification as to why the Hispanic question is broken down by country of origin, while the Black question which is a race question is not. The Black race question should have the same number of country of origin options – be it US born, Jamaica, Haiti, Nigeria, Ghana, Ethiopia, and so on.

Indeed, the truth is White communities (Caucasian) especially non European could also be open to the same issues of concern – Arabs, Turks, Persians, etc, which are growing in number. In short, the current race and ethnicity question privileges the Hispanic community and the Asian community to a lesser extent over the Black, White and Native American races.

The current racial question with lack of visibility and lack of equity for the hard-to-count Black community is problematic. This is especially so for immigrants who may have dissonance issues as they often equate the census with negative experiences.

It is our suggestion that the race question strives for equity in visibility, rather than the current form which privileges the Hispanic ethnicity issues over the ethnic identities of the Black racial group.

Claire A. Nelson Ph.D.,
Founder and President, Institute of Caribbean Studies
National Profile Partner, Census 2010 & Chair, Caribbean Complete Count Committee 2010