Public Policy Brief

Reflecting the Changing Face of America

Multiracials, Racial Classification, and American Intermarriage

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Preface

Although the only constitutional requirement of the census is to count people in order to apportion seats in the U.S. House of Representatives, census data are used for a variety of purposes with more far-reaching consequences than the founding fathers could have even dreamed: voting rights enforcement, economic policy analyses, telemarketing strategies. They provide us with a sense of who we Americans are. Are we rich or poor? What type of work do we do? From what country did our ancestors come? How many of us are members of a minority group? If the census data are the materials from which we construct our images of who we are and what we need, careful attention must be paid to how we first collect and then assemble that data. The form and content of a question determine answers to it, and answers may be combined in many different ways to create startlingly different results.

Because many census questions ask for somewhat subjective responses and ultimately serve social purposes, definition of their terms is fluid and changes with changing attitudes and circumstances in U.S. society. The census question on race itself has racist roots, having first served to distinguish free white male and females from other free persons and slaves. At a later time Nordic, Alpine, and Mediterranean were recognized as racial categories within the "white" race, and many southeastern Europeans were not considered to be white. As Joel Perlmann points out in the pages that follow, the salient issue today is how the census will categorize and count offspring of racial intermarriages. Some people are demanding equal recognition of multiraciality in the government's racial classification system. Others fear that anything that changes the way minorities are counted will make it harder to enforce laws and

regulations promoting racial equality. Those who favor rescinding all legislation that protects or favors one racial category over another advocate abolishing all racial categories on the census. Others view racial classification in itself as racist.

These opposing views point to the social nature of the question on race. In a perfect society, deciding how to count people would not require taking civil rights legislation into consideration; a question on race would likely serve to satisfy genealogical curiosity. Absent perfection, that question serves to mark where society stands in reference to racial attitudes and discrimination.

Another important issue related to the classification system used by the Census Bureau is the validity and reliability of its data and the statistics derived from them. As Perlmann details, the current question on race ignores the present status of racial intermarriage, and projections of the racial composition of the United States are based on unrealistic assumptions about future intermarriage. Policies based on such forecasts are, then, as illusory as the forecasts they are based on.

Whatever the difficulties in resolving the opposing views on changes to the classification system, problems cannot be avoided by keeping the existing system intact. Even if OMB Directive 15 (which specifies how races are to be counted by the Census Bureau) remains unchanged, questions will undoubtedly come up, for example, in respect to some forms of legislation that are tied directly to local area census counts and regarding how to count multiracials in situations in which people are counted for determining employer discrimination. As Perlmann states, we must "hope that the civil rights of racial minorities, as well as civil rights law, will have evolved a great deal in a generation or two." However, in the meantime, we must be careful that Census Bureau's decisions about what to count and how to count do not reinforce racial barriers.

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Multiracials, Racial Classification, and American Intermarriage

If a child has a white mother and a black father, the child is racially . . . what? Presently, on the census form individuals are allowed to declare origins in one race only, and so multiracials must chose one race from the available list or classify themselves as "other." Deciding how the next census should handle the multiracial child is a hot topic now; the directions on how to count are being reconsidered. At issue is more than how just the Census Bureau counts racial origin; every government agency that counts races does so in roughly the same way. The current directions for counting races are found in Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Directive 15; decisions on if and how to change the directive can't be put off for long because the census forms for the year 2000 are needed in the spring of 1998.

Over the past several years the OMB coordinated an interagency task force to study Directive 15, and a good deal of relevant research has emerged, especially from the Census Bureau, on the implications of alternative procedures. In early July of this year the task force issued its recommendations, and the OMB will rule on the issues after considering responses to the report. Congress could intervene in the process; hearings were held in 1993 and this past May, more are scheduled, and there is a bill in committee. Finally, the president has declared a year of discussion on race, stressing the changing racial composition of the country. How to classify the mixed-race child is only one of several issues in the review of OMB Directive 15. In many ways, however, it is the most important; all the others look different after one thinks through the multiracial issue.

Interest groups have lined up on two sides to debate the classification of the mixed-race person.[1] On one side are organizations claiming to

represent the American multiracial population; among them are parents in mixed marriages who are concerned about the way they are asked to identify their children. These organizations demand equal recognition for multiracials in the government's racial classification system; they ask that the category "multiracial" be added to the specific racial categories—white, black, Native American, and Asian/Pacific Islander—that currently appear on the census form. People who select the multiracial category would then indicate from which two, three, or four of these racial groups they are descended. The demand here appears to be more for recognition of multiraciality than for any specific political or economic advantage for multiracials. The advocates do not want to deny a part of their own or their children's origins. I refer to this interest group as the *multiracial advocates*.[2]

The other side in this debate opposes adding a multiracial category and permitting people to list more than one race. This group includes civil rights organizations and representatives of blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, and Asians/Pacific Islanders. At the core of their opposition is the concern that if individuals are allowed to indicate origins in more than one racial group, the counting of races that undergirds so much civil rights legislation will be muddled and enforcement of civil rights thereby weakened. If, for example, who is black can be counted in various ways, it will be much harder to enforce laws promoting racial equality—antidiscrimination efforts, affirmative action, and voting rights could all be affected. Moreover, some argue, in a society still plagued by strong racial inequality, the tendency of mixed-race people will be to "head for the door," as one spokesperson put it; they will seek to be counted as something other than a member of the minority group in which they are now counted because they think it is to their advantage to do so. I refer to this interest group as the *civil rights advocates*.

Tens of thousands of public agencies, private business enterprises, and nonbusiness institutions (such as colleges) fill out reports on the racial composition of their employees and clients. Consequently, those with the slightest concern for orderly—and equitable—record keeping are also watching the debates carefully.

The key recommendation in the interagency task force's July report was that individuals henceforth be allowed to declare origins in more than one racial group, but that a new category called multiracial should not

be established.[3] The task force did much more than urge a compromise between the two contending positions; this is a case in which the most important demands of both sides can be accepted and, more important, it is in the public interest that they should be accepted. This brief supports the key task force recommendation, although it argues for it from a somewhat different perspective, stressing the need to understand racial intermarriage in the context of ethnic intermarriage generally.

Individuals should be allowed to report origins in more than one racial group, with mixed-race individuals counted in a way as consistent as possible with present counting procedures and probably with some guarantees that the changes in counting procedures will be pretty much "race-count neutral" in the immediate future. The task force did not resolve the best way to count multiracials in connection with civil rights enforcement, although some of the possible ways were elaborated in an earlier report by Census Bureau staff (Bennett et al. 1997). I add some variations on these suggestions in this brief.

The procedures arrived at may well satisfy both interest groups, but the issue has significance that extends well beyond the concerns of the advocates most directly involved. The way the multiracial issue is being treated, both at the Census Bureau and in the media, tells much about the state of American thinking about race. In the public discussion there is virtually no recognition that racial intermarriage is a form of ethnic intermarriage, despite the fact that most people are familiar with ethnic intermarriage and the Census Bureau has been counting the offspring of such marriages for over a century.

The method used to count ethnic intermarriages cannot be mindlessly adopted as a model for counting racial intermarriages because racial categories, unlike other ethnic categories, are the basis of civil rights legislation. This is the key point to appreciate: Counting the offspring of racial intermarriage would not be harder than counting the offspring of ethnic intermarriage were it not for the legal (civil rights) implications of the racial count. Nevertheless, the ethnic model can suggest guiding principles and the kind of modifications necessary in order to handle racial intermarriage sensibly in counts and in law.

Section 1 of this brief reviews the realities of ethnic blending in the United States, focusing on white immigrants and their descendants, and

examines how the Census Bureau has dealt with this blending. Section 2 contrasts the bureau's treatment of ethnicity with its treatment of race. Section 3 provides information on rates of racial intermarriage today. These first three sections, then, explain the issues, setting multiraciality in the context of ethnic blending in general. Sections 4 and 5 are the practical core of the brief, presenting arguments for and against certain policies. Section 4 argues that the context established in the preceding sections provides a rationale for adopting the interagency task force's key recommendation: Allow people to declare more than one racial origin, but do not list a multiracial category on government questionnaires. The remainder of the section considers proposals for counting the responses that the revised race question will elicit on the basis of how the new counts will impinge on civil rights law. Section 5 calls attention to a matter rarely discussed in connection with OMB Directive 15, namely, Census Bureau forecasts of the future racial composition of the United States. This topic regularly makes its way to the front page, but in misleading and confused ways. What links Sections 4 and 5 is the argument that evading discussion of racial intermarriage distorts our understanding of race data, whether we are discussing 1997 or 2050.

Finally, the brief contains two addenda that form extensions of the main argument. The first reviews the experience of racial blending in American history and its implications for the race data covered in present and proposed OMB directives. The second considers briefly another change that has been mentioned in connection with OMB Directive 15, namely, making "Hispanic" one of the race categories.

Ethnic Intermarriage

American as Apple Pie

American history would be unrecognizable without ethnic intermarriage. From colonial times to the present, immigrants typically married their own, the second generation did so much less consistently, and the third generation did so still less consistently, with probably a majority marrying members of other ethnic groups. By the fourth and fifth generations, who even kept track? The evidence for ethnic intermarriage is as overwhelming and unambiguous as for any generalization about the American population: from de Crèvecoeur's observations in the

eighteenth century on "this new man, the American" arising out of various European immigrant stocks to the data from census after census in the twentieth century (Heer 1980; Lieberson and Waters 1988).

Intermarriage occurred most often among the descendants of European groups; it was crucial to the making of "Americans" out of the descendants of "hyphenated Americans." It was decidedly less prevalent between these "whites" and other groups, a piece of the story to which I return later. For now, however, notice that among the Europeans the immigrant generation often drew firm lines of division between groups. Moreover, at the turn of the century many influential American thinkers discussed European immigrant groups in terms of different races, such as "Nordic," "Alpine," and "Mediterranean." Arguments for immigration restriction—in congressional debate and across the land—turned in part on the notion that the "racial composition" of the immigrant pool was changing. As late as 1920, telling many Americans that members of all these "races" were "white" would have elicited amused or heated rejoinders that the statement was untrue and that it missed crucial "inherent" divisions among the whites (Higham 1955).

Counting "Multiethnics"

How has the Census Bureau handled the offspring of ethnic intermarriages? It asks respondents to give their country of birth and, often, their parents' countries of birth.[4] When a native-born respondent says that his or her parents were born in two different countries, the bureau records two countries of origin. Both parents born in Italy? Fine. One born in Italy, one in Poland? One in Italy, one in the United States? All fine.

In 1980 and 1990 the Census Bureau also used the ancestry question. Each individual was asked to state with which ancestry he or she identified in order to allow Americans to state an ethnic affiliation even if they were descended from immigrants who had come to the United States many generations back. Three features of the ancestry question are crucially relevant to racial classification. First, the ancestry question asks people to declare the ancestry or ancestries *with which they most closely identify*. Thus a strong subjective element is built into the question. Unlike questions such as "Where were you born?" or "How many years of schooling have you had?" it does not ask for what might be

called an objective answer; rather, it explicitly encourages a statement of preferences. The rationale, developed in the late 1970s, for this question leads us back to intermarriage again. Many people are able to trace their origins to numerous ancestries (too many to list) or may not even know about all of them. So they are asked to list the ancestries they consider meaningful.[5]

The second relevant feature of the ancestry question is that it states explicitly that Americans can identify themselves as having *more than one* ethnic ancestry. Many millions of Americans list two ethnic ancestries; millions more list three. The bureau has taken the trouble to code first and second ancestry responses and (in 1980) even to detail the most prevalent combinations of three responses.

The third relevant feature is *how much the ancestry responses have varied* among the same people over time. The question calls for a subjective response about loyalties that for many might be very weak. In 1980 English was listed before German in the bureau's examples of ancestry; in 1990 the ordering was reversed. As a result of this seemingly trivial change, the percentage listing English ancestry declined by a large fraction, and the percentage claiming identity with German ancestry rose by a comparable amount; the percentage claiming Italian ancestry also fluctuated greatly for similar reasons. These examples of confusion in the responses tells us something important about the long-term results of population mixing and the attenuation of connections with the origins of ancestors. Keeping track of American ancestries at the bureau eventually gets messy because of intermarriage patterns—and that is as it should be. A simple answer to the question on ancestry would be a false answer. It would imply that people did not intermarry in American history or that Americans keep careful track of the ethnic origin of distant ancestors whom they never knew (Alba 1995).

The Hispanic Origin Question

For the past two decades the census form has included a question asking respondents if they are "of Hispanic origin" and, if so, of which specific Hispanic group. Since the answer to this question can be cross-classified with the race question, we often see the categories "non-Hispanic whites," "non-Hispanic blacks," and "Hispanics" (the last with the footnote

that "Hispanics may be of any race"). One of the issues in the current review of OMB Directive 15 is whether the Hispanic origin question and the race question should be combined into one question, or, put more crudely, whether Hispanic should be called a race (as discussed in Addendum 2). The point for us here, however, concerns the Hispanic question and intermarriage. Respondents are not told they have to be "entirely of Hispanic origin"; on the contrary, the question clearly permits them to indicate themselves as Hispanic if they are the product of mixed Hispanic and non-Hispanic origin. Indeed, like the ancestry question, the Hispanic origin question leaves it up to the mixed-origin individual to decide whether the "Hispanic" component in his or her background is large enough to answer the question in the affirmative. However, unlike the ancestry question, the Hispanic origin question calls for a direct response on one and only one specific ancestry, thus increasing the likelihood of a positive response.[6]

The Race Question and Racial Intermarriage

The Race Question

On all the questions that deal with ethnic origin—parental birthplace, ancestry, and Hispanic origin—the Census Bureau allows for the possibility that the respondent is of multiple ethnic origins and often tabulates the results of these ethnic intermarriages. On the race question, in contrast, there is an explicit instruction to mark only one category. What if a person demurs and marks two or more? Using certain rules (such as which race is listed first), the bureau recodes the response so that only one race is counted.[7]

For our purposes, this instruction to mark only one race is the most striking peculiarity of the census race question. However, there are others. A second is that the question is not labeled on the census form as a question about race; rather, the respondent is simply asked to complete the sentence "This person is . . ." and is given a choice of four specific racial designations—white, black, Native American, Asian/Pacific Islander—and the designation "other." Later, the bureau tabulates the answers under a heading of races. As the bureau's documentation explains, these categories derive from the guidelines in OMB Directive 15. A third peculiarity is that under some of the four specific race designations are listed

heterogeneous subgroupings of peoples, for example, the countries of birth or origin in Asia and specific Native American tribes.

The bureau's description of the race question reveals the subjective nature of the racial data it collects and its discomfort about the social scientific standing of what it is collecting. As described by the Census Bureau,

> The concept of race as used by the Census Bureau reflects self-identification; it does not denote any clear-cut scientific definition of biological stock. The data for race represent self-classification by people according to the race with which they most closely identify. Furthermore, it is recognized that the categories of the race item include both racial and national origin or sociocultural groups. (Bureau of the Census 1992, Appendix B)

This statement unequivocally rules out any need for government officials to believe that racial classification has a meaningful basis in biology or to define any objective meaning for a racial category at all: Race is a term in popular usage and whatever it may mean, a person belongs to whatever category of race that person believes he or she belongs to.

An interesting commentary on this process of self-identification appears in a recent joint study by the Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The authors report on their attempts to learn how respondents distinguished between

> such terms as race, ethnicity/ethnic origin, and ancestry. Despite several attempts to make these questions less abstract and easier to answer, the overwhelming majority of respondents found the questions too difficult. For all but a few, highly educated respondents, it appeared that the terms represented overlapping concepts which draw on a single semantic domain. (Tucker et al. 1996)

Thus the bureau warns us that the term race is not used in a precise "biological" way, but rather subjectively (for self-identification), and that its users do not distinguish it from related terms. Recall also that the term race itself is not mentioned in the question. However, if the answer is based on subjective identification, as in the ancestry question, why can't respondents chose two or more races with which to identify, as they can with ancestry? The answer is clear when one appreciates the current

use and origin of the race categories. They emerge from the OMB directive, and they are used in the counts that lie at the heart of a great deal of civil rights legislation.

The great irony here is that data on race are gathered through a more or less slippery and subjective procedure of self-identification and then used as the basis of legal status in an important domain of law and administrative regulation, namely, civil rights. That domain requires legal statuses that are, in the words of the original mandate to the OMB, "complete and nonoverlapping." As a result, the Census Bureau not only uses a subjective definition of race, but also places an unrealistic restriction on that subjectivity—only one race can be chosen (even though it routinely accepts multiple parental birthplaces and ethnic ancestries). In a sense, the race question could just as well be referred to as the "legally protected minority groups question" (although then the Census Bureau would have to add the responses to the Hispanic origin question, a possibility under consideration by the OMB).

The problem with this state of affairs is not just that it may offend the sensibilities of the multiracial advocates; there is something much deeper at stake. In order to have clear-cut racial categories for legal purposes, a system of counting has been created that ignores a widespread reality. Denying that members of different races marry is like treating them as members of different biological species. All the while, the Census Bureau is acknowledging the stunningly high rates of intermarriage among those ethnic groups not designated as racial groups. If racial barriers are to be broken down, racial intermarriage should be treated in the same matter-of-fact way that any other form of ethnic intermarriage is treated, while ensuring that civil rights legislation, which rests on clear counts of racial membership, is not hobbled by ambiguities.

A Kind of Ethnic Intermarriage

Whatever small residue of meaning "race" may still have for anthropologists or biologists today, for our purposes it does have an important meaning, as a subset of ethnicity. Ethnic groupings refer to the different countries or local areas of the world from which people or their ancestors came here during the five centuries since Columbus or to the fact that their ancestors were here prior to that time. Races as a subset of ethnicity are those ethnic groups that were treated in especially distinct

ways in the American past (and to some extent are still so treated). This way of defining ethnicity and race may be crude and imprecise, but it drives home two crucial points relevant to this discussion. First, races form a special subset of ethnic groups and therefore racial intermarriage forms a special subset of ethnic intermarriage. Second, a concern with racial classification is legitimate as it arises from such legacies as slavery, the near-extermination of Native American groups, and state laws forbidding interracial marriage—laws that survived in various states until 1967 when the U.S. Supreme Court finally ruled them unconstitutional. If we want to understand problems such as American economic inequality, we cannot ignore people's racial origins; to throw out race classifications in our present censuses would not be smart or fair.[8]

Patterns of Mixed-Race Marriage

How to deal with the mixed-race person depends in part on how common mixed-race marriages are in the United States. To understand these rates we need to appreciate that immigration is rapidly increasing the number of nonwhites who are Asian or Hispanic. Immigrants have always tended to marry their own (many, indeed, arrived as married couples), but their children have been more likely to intermarry. Asians and Hispanics follow the same pattern, and the native-born Asians and Hispanics often marry members of other groups. These intermarried couples and their children have not yet had their full impact on social patterns and social statistics because the second generation of the post-1965 immigration is only now reaching marriageable age. A high rate of intermarriage also occurs among Native Americans (although the absolute level is relatively small compared to Asians, Hispanics, and blacks).[9] By contrast, the black intermarriage rate is very low.

Consider, for example, native-born, young (25 to 34 years of age), married people in 1990. Some two-fifths of the Hispanics in this group and over half of the Asians and the Native Americans married members of other groups.[10] Yet more than nine-tenths of the blacks in the group married other blacks. (Nevertheless, even blacks have been out-marrying more than before; the rate for better-educated young black men rose from about 6 percent in 1980 to over 9 percent in 1990.[11]) So there are really two patterns of interracial marriage today: it is uncommon among blacks and common among other nonwhites.

Both of these patterns involve huge numbers of nonwhite Americans. Race has always meant first and foremost the black-white divide—hardly a surprise in a country in which that divide once distinguished slave from master and in which by far the greatest numbers of nonwhites have in the past been blacks. And so, until recently, racial intermarriage meant first and foremost black-white intermarriage. However, that way of thinking about interracial marriage has been made obsolete by the rising number of Asians and Hispanics.

The shifting proportion of blacks and other nonwhites in the United States is crucial to the issues discussed in this brief. It has become common to speak of the increasing share of nonwhites in the American population generally (as the president did in announcing the year of discussion on race). Nonwhites amounted to 16.5 percent of all Americans in 1970 and 24.2 percent in 1990. By 2020, the Census Bureau tells us, that proportion should exceed one-third and by 2050 it should reach one-half. Whatever the value of these specific forecasts (a theme taken up later), any forecast will show that the proportion of Americans with nonwhite ancestors will be much higher in the next century than it is today.

But also notice that the trend that is transforming the composition of the total American population (rising Asian and Hispanic immigration) is at the same time transforming the composition of *nonwhite* America. The proportion of blacks in this nonwhite population is dropping sharply. Before 1970 meeting a nonwhite American would likely have meant meeting a black person; today the chances are better than even that the nonwhite American will not be black. The percentage of blacks among all nonwhites stood at 66 percent in 1970 and 48 percent in 1990; it is expected to decline to 36 percent in 2020 and to 30 percent in 2050 (Harrison and Bennett 1995; Farley 1996).[12] The high intermarriage rates among the other nonwhites (those who are not blacks) is therefore crucial.

Legislation meant to protect minority races must be viewed from the perspective of these shifting proportions. That legislation was originally designed for blacks and was then extended to other nonwhites. The multiracial challenge to the clarity of civil rights law may still be relatively minor insofar as that legislation applies where it was originally intended to apply. However, the multiracial challenge to the

clarity of civil rights law is considerable and rapidly expanding insofar as that legislation also covers other nonwhites.

What will the future pattern of black intermarriage be? Will it accelerate appreciably? That, of course, is impossible to judge with any certainty today. One source of change is the children of today's black-white marriages; these children may intermarry more often than those blacks whose parents and grandparents were all blacks. Even a modest increase in the number of these mixed-race children is likely to increase considerably the number of people who had a black grandparent or parent and are married to a white person. If it seems hard to believe that large-scale intermarriage will ever occur between American blacks and white (or other nonwhite) Americans, consider the situation of blacks in states in which they are a tiny fraction (less than 5 percent of the population). In 12 of these states for which records were available, black intermarriage rates in the 1980s were well above the national norm; indeed, in 10 of these states the rate of black-white intermarriage exceeded 30 percent. These rates, of course, might be dismissed as irrelevant to most American blacks today, who live as part of a large and concentrated minority and consequently meet and marry other blacks. Nevertheless, even in the United States today, black-white marriage is not so strange that it cannot become commonplace when the usual demographic constraint on within-group marriage, namely, the absence of large numbers of potential mates from one's own group nearby, operates strongly (Kalmijn 1993).

Whatever the future of black out-marriage, interracial marriage among the native born in the other legally designated nonwhite groups is common. This is the context in which we must assess whether we can oblige people to claim origins in only one racial group.

Counting the Multiracials

People must be allowed to declare themselves as having origins in more than one race. To do otherwise is to deny that interracial marriages exist. Such denial would by implication encourage the dishonest and destructive message that members of different races do not "normally" intermarry. The manner in which mixed marriages are acknowledged, however, also will require careful thinking about how to count for civil

rights purposes the individuals who declare more than one racial origin. I return to the civil rights issue later in this section; first we should consider how to handle the individual who lists more than one racial origin.

Arguments against a Multiracial Race Category

Recall that the race question is worded "This person is . . ." and provides five choices with the instruction "Mark one only." One way to change this arrangement is simply to change the instruction—either to "Mark one or more" or to the somewhat stronger "Mark all that apply." Another way is to add a sixth racial category, "multiracial," and then ask individuals to indicate to which of the four specific races they trace their origins.

Should we care about whether we list multiracial as a distinct category? We should care and we should not list it. Learning that someone has black and white origins has meaning; learning *in addition* that the person is multiracial conveys no additional information. The added racial category should be opposed not only because it is redundant, but because it sends the message that somehow something more *is* being communicated, that multiraciality is equivalent to a new racial status. Such categorization tends to solidify the significance of race, instead of simply allowing the statistics on racial intermarriage to reflect how high or low the racial divide is. It suggests that to describe a person as multiracial is to say something important about that person. For some multiracials that status may be important, whether in a positive or negative sense, but for others it may be inconsequential; it may mean only that they have origins in two or more racial groups.

Here the comparison to the way we treat other ethnic origins is helpful. Americans may declare themselves to be, for example, Italian or both Italian and Irish in origin; nobody insists that people of mixed origin place themselves in a special multiethnic category. Children of immigrants can answer questions about their parents' birthplaces without first identifying themselves as "native born of mixed-foreign parentage." For those who want to know how many people list themselves as belonging to more than one race, such information could be obtained from a questionnaire that does not have multiracial listed as a race category.

The ancestry analogy is relevant in another way. It is not unrealistic to think that in the course of one or two generations the descendants of several races may be as uninterested in their racial roots as many whites are in their ancestral roots today. Although people may know that they are descendants of several races, choosing which to list may become as arbitrary to them as listing English or German is to tens of millions today. That time may seem far off for many minority races, especially Americans of black origin; however, the difference between blacks and other nonwhites is important here.

What wording should replace the current instruction on the race question? The analogy to ancestry suggests "Mark one or more," that is, giving respondents the option of indicating multiple origins and allowing them to list as many or as few origins as they identify with. They would not be required to try to list all the ancestries that a tireless genealogist would discover. The many agencies involved also prefer the "one or more" formulation as a less radical departure from the past. In addition, the "Mark all that apply" instruction might encourage people to list distant roots in any number of groups even if they do not feel any kinship with those groups (see Addendum 1, on racial blending). The crucial goals are to eliminate the instruction to mark one only and not to have a multiracial race category.

Implications for Civil Rights Legislation

If we allow individuals to be tabulated in more than one race, how will the resulting counts affect civil rights legislation? The changes in the reporting system should not be undertaken for the purpose of lowering (or raising) the numbers in any racial category, and the changes instituted should leave those numbers close to present counts.

We need to distinguish among the several issues being raised by the civil rights advocates in connection with counting multiracials. One argument sometimes heard attributes motives to the multiracial advocates, namely, that they seek to free multiracials from the burden and responsibility of minority racial status, thereby leaving their full-blooded minority brethren to cope with a still-larger burden. This argument can be dismissed; quite apart from the fact that it misstates the motives of the multiracial advocates, motivations are not at issue; the effect of the

proposed changes is what matters. Yet, something more needs to be said on this matter. Once again, the analogy to ethnicity is helpful. Loyal members of ethnic groups—Jews, Italians, Poles, Irish, Japanese—have often seen the person who intermarries as a traitor to their way of life. And when membership in a particular ethnic group carried a potential of discrimination (as was often the case), loyal group members saw the intermarrying or assimilating person as both traitorous and cowardly in the face of ethnic battle, denying his or her own identity to get ahead. The individual for whom ethnic origins were less meaningful than they were for the accusing group members saw the choices very differently. These intraethnic arguments are typically American. Nevertheless, each ethnic (and racial) group and each individual must work them out; government policy cannot be enlisted to firm up the battlements against the erosions of intermarriage. And it is not a valid criticism of government policy to point out that those who propose it are judged less loyal to their group than are others (Spencer 1997).

True civil rights concerns lie elsewhere. The main concern with regard to the reporting system is whether permitting multiple responses to the race question will reduce the total number of people counted as members of minority groups and thereby weaken the range of situations in which violations of civil rights can be tried. Several sorts of legislation are involved.

On the whole, legislation involving the status of a single individual, such as eligibility for affirmative action, should not be much affected (if at all). Past judicial decisions confirming the eligibility of multiracial individuals for admission to educational institutions, job-training programs, employment, and set-aside contracts should continue to have standing (Ballentine 1983).

Situations in which people are counted for determining employer discrimination within a firm may be more affected than situations involving the status of a single individual. However, before concluding that this difference is a strong argument against allowing people to list themselves as members of more than one race, two points should be appreciated. First, precedent may again be relevant, and this issue may well have come up before in connection with specific legislation. Even if it has not been discussed in the past, it is likely to come up in the near future, whether or not Directive 15 is changed, given the prevalence of intermarriage and

heightened public awareness of it. Second, it is not so clear that the requirement to list only one race favors civil rights in these situations. As multiracial advocates have correctly noted, a worker can be hired as a black and fired as a white. Similarly, the most promising multiracial hires can be classified in the minority column and the least promising in the white column—all to help an employer's civil rights record.

The most obvious area in which a change in the classification system could operate adversely upon civil rights interests is in connection with voting rights legislation and in other legislation that is directly dependent on the census count of the racial mix in local areas (for example, knowing the local racial mix as a context for discussions of possible hires by local firms). The issue, by the way, is *not* that the new legislation will permit (for example) those with some white and some black ancestry to claim *only* white origins for themselves (that option, after all, is no less available with the present race question), but that such multiracial persons might now claim, for example, only black origins and in the future claim white and black origins. How then will they be counted?[13]

So How to Count?

The critical point to notice is that the count—the aggregation of answers—is distinct from the race question on the form. The responses to the form will show that some people list themselves in more than one race category. How those responses are aggregated to derive the total number of people in a racial group for purposes of civil rights law is a separate matter.

A recent Census Bureau report points the way (Bennett et al. 1997, 1–15). Most of that report is devoted to determining how people would respond to various formulations of the race question, but the authors also considered how these responses might be aggregated. The authors give three "illustrative approaches to racial classification," which vary from the least to the most inclusive ways of treating people in more than one racial category.

- The least inclusive strategy, the *single race approach*, derives the total number in a racial group by counting only the people who list themselves in that category alone. For example, a person declaring origins

in the white and Asian races would not be counted toward the number of Asians or the number of whites, but only toward the number in a "multiple" category, rather like the present "other" category.

- A more inclusive strategy, the *historical series approach*, counts some of those who declare themselves of mixed racial background with minority groups. Specifically, those respondents who list only two races and only one of those two is black, Native American, or Asian/Pacific Islander would be counted with that minority group. Put differently, if the second race listed by an individual is white (or other), the individual's membership in this second race would not be counted.[14] If three or more racial categories are specified or if two minority races are specified, the individual would be counted under multiple race.
- The *all-inclusive approach* counts people as members of all the groups they check. This approach thus permits overlapping category counts that would result in aggregate counts totaling more than 100 percent. A person who checks white, black, and Native American, for example, would be counted three times.

The single race approach has the potential to be punitive to civil rights counts, because people of mixed racial descent who currently list themselves as members of a minority group would not be counted as members of that group if they added their other racial origin in the future. It is likely that the effect would be small, at present, but it would exist.

The historical series and all-inclusive approaches do not have that limitation and are thus much more likely to be taken seriously. Indeed, the authors of the bureau report comment that the historical series approach "might be useful to . . . federal agencies that use data on race and ethnicity to monitor civil rights legislation because it emphasizes classification into the race categories that have been used to monitor changes under extant legislation" (Bennett et al. 1997, 1–12). This approach also seems attractive because it preserves the concept of nonoverlapping races whose total number equals 100 percent of the population.[15]

Whether the preservation of nonoverlap is really so valuable is debatable, because it reinforces the myth that people of mixed descent can in fact be neatly placed in one racial category. It does so by ignoring their white (or other) descent. That simplification may not matter for civil rights law at the moment, but it may have long-term consequences.

Moreover, the historical series approach does appear to exclude one type of person who would be counted today as a member of a minority group, namely, a person descended from more than one minority group. For example, a person who today lists himself as black but who, given the chance, would list himself as black and Native American would not be counted as black or as Native American.

The all-inclusive approach may seem bizarre at first glance, and it may be problematic in the legal arena, but we should appreciate that it is in fact a sensible way to think about group origins in the context of intermarriage; that is why ethnic ancestries are treated in this manner. When many people trace their descent to more than one origin, the total of proportions descended from all origins will of necessity add up to more than 100 percent and origins will of necessity overlap. That mixed-race people are counted as white and as minority group members or as members of more than one minority group is an advantage as well. If ethnic ancestries are treated this way, why not racial origins? The answer, of course, is that legal status is not determined by answers to the ancestry question, but it is determined by answers to the race question. Can the demand for clear definition of legal status permit overlap and totals of over 100 percent?[16] I suspect it can. In any case, this is the question that needs to be confronted in aggregating responses for civil rights law.[17] Either the historical series or the all-inclusive approach should quite fully protect civil rights interests in the short run.

Effect of Changes on the Counts of Nonwhites

In order to find out how changes in the race question and aggregation approaches would affect racial counts, the Census Bureau carried out detailed surveys over the past year. In the most important of these surveys, areas with high concentrations of racial minorities were targeted. In the target areas, samples of people responded to one or another variant of the race question. These variants of the race question included (1) listing a multiracial category; (2a) not listing a multiracial category but giving instructions to mark one or more categories of race or (2b) not listing a multiracial category but giving instructions to mark all that apply. Also included were different ways of listing Hispanics (discussed in Appendum 2). The bureau tabulated these results in accord with the three illustrative approaches described (single race, historical series, and all-inclusive).

The results of these extensive tests showed relatively little change in the counts of racial minority groups. Even the single race approach had no statistically significant impact on the number of individuals who said they were white, black, or Native American. There was a statistically significant, although modest, difference in the count of Asians/Pacific Islanders (as well as among Native Alaskans) when counts were derived using the single race approach (the least inclusive of the three approaches (Bennett et al. 1997, 1–31).[18] These results from target areas confirm results of earlier, less detailed queries in a national sample of the population in which minimal changes to the racial minority counts were found when multiraciality was provided as a race option.[19]

A Ceiling for Short-Term Changes?

Thus we have some evidence that we can expect minimal immediate changes if we do change the instructions on the race question from "Mark one only" to "Mark one or more." Nevertheless, predicting policy outcomes is not exactly a procedure we've perfected, nor are those concerned with the policy likely to feel fully reassured by any test of its expected effects. Therefore a mechanism for restricting the impact of whatever change the numbers produce should be considered in connection with any approach to counting for legislative purposes. For example, any change resulting from new counting procedures could be introduced in steps over three years or that change could be limited to 10 percent until 2005. Even though changes will probably not be large, the provision for a ceiling might be reassuring.

A ceiling on changes due to changes in the race question implies comparisons between current and revised methods of classification and such a comparison in turn implies that the Census Bureau continue to use the current form of the race and Hispanic origin question for several more years in canvassing subsamples of the population. The Census Bureau has a long history of formulating question variants on the Current Population Survey (CPS), which is administered to some 50,000 households monthly. There is also a solid precedent for giving different questions to subsamples of households who receive the bureau's long form (detailed questionnaire) in the decennial census: in 1970 the bureau used two different long forms.

A Dilemma for the Long Term

In the long term (a generation or two) the effects of the Census Bureau's illustrative approaches might change dramatically from their apparently minimal effect today. Racial intermarriage may well become much more prevalent than it is today, and then the number of people whose classification depends on these rules (the children of racial intermarriage) would be much larger than today. It is also possible that individuals' responses to the race question will be more mutable than they are today (just as the responses to the ancestry question are today, reflecting weak affiliations among many of mixed origin).

In such a situation, how will the race count serve as the basis for civil rights law? It is not only that the numbers may be much less stable than today. It is also that the relevance of membership in a group will become harder to judge. Will it then be meaningful, for example, to treat a person who had one black grandparent as black for purposes of civil rights enforcement? The answer to that question surely turns on how we think people with one black grandparent will then be treated in American society. If they will suffer discrimination, they should probably be treated as members of the relevant minority race in the count. If they will not suffer discrimination as members of the group, should they still be counted as group members for civil rights purposes?

This is the long-term time bomb we leave in place with any of the bureau's illustrative approaches, and probably with any other approach. The single race approach excludes these mixed-race people from minority counts altogether, the historical series approach includes most, and the all-inclusive approach includes all of them in the count. We must hope that the civil rights of those with origins in racial minorities will have evolved a great deal in a generation or two and that civil rights law will have worked out better solutions for treating those of mixed descent by then. Nevertheless, it is well to remember that at least in our time changing the arrangements for civil rights–related counts has not been easy.

The authors of the bureau's report did not discuss, even for illustrative purposes, a variant of the all-inclusive approach in which a person would be allocated to each racial category that he or she listed, but would be counted in each category as a fraction of a person. Someone

who listed white and black, for example, would be counted as one-half of a person in each racial category; someone who listed white, black, and Native American would be counted as one-third of a person in each of the three categories.

The fractional strategy has many disadvantages. It runs the risk of being too gimmicky to command legitimacy in civil rights law; it recalls the distasteful antebellum congressional apportionment counting, in which each slave was tallied as three-fifths of a person; it may remind people of past racial laws in which a person was considered a member of a minority race by virtue of the fraction of "blood" he or she had inherited from that race; and, like the single race approach (but to a smaller extent), it might slightly reduce the number of people counted today as members of a minority group. For example, under current instructions someone who lists herself as black is counted as one person in the black category. With the fractional strategy, if she listed herself as having black and white origins, she would be counted as one-half in the black category and one-half in the white category. While the effect would be small at present, it would be hard to dispel the mistrust that the potential for a decline would engender.

On the other hand, fractional counting does have the advantages of the all-inclusive approach, while preserving the 100 percent total of nonoverlapping categories (without ignoring the impact of intermarriage). And, fractional counting does deal, however imperfectly, with the long-term danger of counting huge numbers of mixed-origin people as though they were only members of a minority group. Consequently, fractional counting should at least be discussed for heuristic reasons. Of the three approaches illustrated by the Census Bureau staff, the all-inclusive strategy may be preferable to the historical series in dealing with this long-term time bomb. While it will inflate the number of people counted as minority group members even more than the historical series approach does, the all-inclusive approach will also count the mixed-race people in all relevant groups, whether or not the groups are racial minorities. As the number of mixed-race responses increases, the amount by which the total number of responses exceeds 100 percent of the population will also increase. These counts should draw increasing attention then to the need to rethink the counting procedures.

Recognizing Racial Intermarriage: Long-Term Gains for Racial Minorities

Civil rights advocates are right to scrutinize the short-term implications of the proposed changes to OMB Directive 15. However, it would be a mistake to ignore the long-term potential advantage of these changes. Our present system of classifying races has been constructed on the principle that racial categories are immutable; continued use of such a principle is no way to end a racist legacy and no way to think realistically about our present and future society. Racial intermarriage inevitably confuses and distorts the racial divisions in the country, and in the present context it is natural to see that confusion simply as a threat to civil rights' gains. However, if racial intermarriage comes to be treated as analogous to ethnic intermarriage generally, the country should profit from the confusion of racial identity. If mixed-race people come to be numerous and are treated like other people of mixed ethnic ancestry, it will be harder for racial divisions to remain strong. Surely we already find some of that happening in the *faux pas* over Tiger Woods's racial origins.[20] The present debate over the race question and the resolution of those debates also have the potential to contribute to the erosion of the racial divides.[21]

Forecasting "the Browning of America"

Public discussion about listing the multiracials goes on separately from discussions about the future racial composition of the American people. Yet both issues turn on the same inadequate treatment of intermarriage by the Census Bureau and other government agencies. The projections of race drew the attention of the American people seven years ago as a result of a *Time* magazine article in which the phrase "the browning of America" was coined.[22] *Time* followed the Census Bureau in telling Americans that their country will be more than half nonwhite by the middle of the next century. This message invokes different reactions from different people. To some it says that the United States had better wake up to the needs of its "minorities"; they are soon to be its majority. To others it says the United States had better restrict immigration to avoid reaching the nonwhite majority. But any message drawn from that text will be misguided, because the projections are misguided. They ignore intermarriage.

The branch of the Census Bureau that undertakes several important projections (for example, of age, sex, and total population) somehow got saddled with making racial projections. Dedicated and discerning demographers became linked to a sadly misguided effort. The racial projections are based on the bizarre assumption that there will be no further intermixing of peoples across racial lines. Specifically, they assume that a child born to an interracial couple today will take the race of the mother and that, starting tomorrow, neither that child nor any other American will marry across race lines. If an Asian-American woman and a non-Hispanic white man marry today, the bureau projects that *all* of their descendants in the year 2050 will be Asian-American and will *only* be Asian-American. If two immigrants arrive from Guatemala today, the bureau projects that *all* of their descendants will marry *only* Hispanics through 2050 and beyond. Such assumptions are wonderfully simplifying and have some short-term political use to a few interest groups, but they are ludicrous—or would be if they were not taken seriously and did not contort our view of where we are.

Realistic assumptions about future intermarriage levels imply both more and less ethnic transformation in the United States than the projections suggest. If the descendants of Guatemalans marry non-Hispanics, it means that many more people will have some "Hispanic origin" by 2050 than would be the case if the descendants of Guatemalans married only other Hispanics. And yet, at the same time, many of these descendants will be only one-quarter or one-eighth Hispanic, with the other three-quarters or seven-eighths some other ethnic origin; very likely they will be part non-Hispanic white.

A recently completed study of immigration by a panel of the National Research Council takes a great step forward in confronting these limitations. The council's panel went on to make its own projections by building in assumptions about the extent of future intermarriage and its impact on future racial identification (Smith and Edmonston 1997). However, by laying bare the assumptions behind the panel's procedures, we come to the central problem inherent in their efforts. The panel assumes that the "Mark one only" instruction will remain in effect for the next six decades and that whatever the level of intermarriage, the children of the racially intermarried would remain members of one race only. The question that the panel therefore sets out to address in its projection is "What will our mixed-race descendants of 2050 mark when

instructed to 'Mark one only'?" The answer to that question, to put it gently, is a long way from an adequate statement about how our descendants will relate to their racial origins.

Consider a fairly extreme, but not unreasonable case. In 1990 the 10-year-old child of an Asian-white marriage is listed under one race; in 2000 this person marries the offspring of a Hispanic-white marriage (who also chooses one race). Their own child, born in 2005, is listed under one race, and in 2030 marries the offspring of a black-white marriage. The child of this marriage marries the offspring of a white–Native American marriage, and this couple has a child just as the long form of the 2050 census arrives in the mail; the form instructs them to mark the newborn under one race only. Just how meaningful can their response be? Notice that this example is only "fairly" extreme. On one side of the family there has been racial intermarriage in every generation since 1990, but I have not even specified the racial background of the other side of the family, except for the newborn's parent.[23] The point is not whether the panel correctly projects which race these parents of 2050 will mark for their newborn; rather the point is that the result of a "Mark one only" instruction on the race question cannot have a recognizable meaning in the society of 2050, any more than that instruction could produce meaningful results if used on the ethnic ancestry question today.

There is another kind of difficulty with such projections, one that would not go away even if the instruction were changed to "Mark one or more." Will Americans in 2050 perceive the major ethnic and racial groupings as they do today? Suppose the Census Bureau in 1900 or even in 1930 had projected the racial composition of 1997, while ignoring the subjective element in racial identity, the reality of intermarriage, and the coming shift in countries sending emigrants. It would not have fared too well. The bureau might have classified most of us as Nordic, Alpine, and Mediterranean, for example. Suppose that during the coming decades many new Slavic immigrants arrive from the countries of eastern Europe; would we be content to simply subsume these recent Slavic arrivals under the category white, along with those whose ancestors came from many lands eight or ten generations back? More likely we would create a subdivision "non-Slavic white" (or would it be "non-recent-Slavic-white"?). Or suppose that as a result of political and economic developments in Asia, immigrants from India and Pakistan increase sharply and arrivals from China, Taiwan, Korea, and the Phillippines decline sharply.

Will we still speak of Asians or will we make some distinction between the Indian subcontinent and the countries to its east? Admittedly, the difficulty of predicting the big "racial" divides might be seen as analogous to other difficulties that arise with any projections. The objection to predicting identity with just one race is the fundamental objection because it highlights the internal contradiction arising when we define race as "one only" and stresses the need for realistic assumptions about racial intermarriage.

I do not mean to suggest that the National Research Council's panel was unaware of such issues; it mentions caveats directly relevant to most of them; but caveats do not go into the model, and the public hears the count the model produces, not the caveats. Moreover, while the panel is indeed aware of most of these issues, it gives only the weakest of hints that the whole notion of estimating membership in one race only is not productive for a population that will include so many with multiple racial origins. The panel makes a great contribution in drawing public attention to the fact that the current bureau projections ignore intermarriage; but intermarriage cannot be meaningfully incorporated into the projections unless mixed racial membership is also incorporated. Intermarriage changes the salience, the meaning, of race.

Desideratum: The Genealogist's Projection

There is another kind of projection that could be undertaken and it would serve a truly educational purpose. We could estimate the true racial origins of Americans in 2050—the origins a genealogist would discover. This exercise would turn away from the subjective responses people must make when instructed to mark one only or even to mark one or more. The ancestry data show that even the latter instruction will be a simplification. The genealogist's forecast would underscore for the public just how much intermarriage is expected. It would also bring to center stage the uncertainties about the future prevalence of black-white intermarriage. The National Research Council, for example, projected it to remain at 1970 to 1990 levels through 2050.[24] Moreover, this sort of genealogist's exercise is much closer to what the public thinks it is getting in projections about the future racial composition of the country, namely, actual origins rather than subjective simplifications of misguided instructions. If media discussion of Tiger Woods is any

measure, awareness of multiraciality is rising; however, the public may still be surprised to learn the extent to which actual origins will be blended. Whatever the precise numbers, our genealogist will surely find that by 2050 many more Americans than today will have nonwhite parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents and that Americans with such nonwhite ancestors will also be more likely than today to have white parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents.

However, why should the Census Bureau be in the business of making long-term racial projections at all, beyond the next decade or so? Nongovernmental researchers can run these simulations. The bureau's other population projections, notably of age, sex, and population, are used in a variety of endeavors. But racial composition? Is the racial projection an atavism from a more racist era, or is it a misguided effort to forecast how many Americans in 2050 will be covered by the legal statuses inherent in the civil rights legislation of today?

The low quality of racial projection data is not the most serious outcome we can expect if we deny that races mingle and treat them differently than other ethnic groups in this regard. The greater danger is the perpetuation and strengthening of a barely articulated idea underlying the present way of counting races: that racial groups live in isolation from one another, that their members must be counted as members of different species might be counted. The Census Bureau does not just count; in choosing what to count and how to count, it is in danger of propping up barriers that would otherwise not be so high or so foolishly placed.

Addendum 1. Race Mixing in the American Past: Legacies and Implications for Today's Counts

In some sense, everyone has mixed origins. In terms of one or another of the differing definitions of race that have operated in this country since 1900, most Americans are of mixed "racial" origin; recall that at the turn of the century Nordic, Alpine, and Mediterranean were often classified as races. Even if we restrict ourselves to the current OMB definitions of race (black, white, Native American, and Asian/Pacific Islander), there is a good deal of mixed-race descent if one takes the long view. Will this long history of racial mixing distort responses to the race question when people are told they can fill in more than one race, as they can fill in more than

one ancestry? The answer in a word is no. First, people do not list every possible response to the ancestry question; rather, they list only those ancestries with which they identify. Second, the Census Bureau tests of the relevant variants of the race question give us empirical evidence that the long history of racial mixing does not much influence responses.

The long view of racial mixing is especially important in considering the historical experience of blacks, Native Americans, and Hispanics (Williamson 1995; Davis 1991; Snipp 1989; Nash 1995). The importance of a clear-cut difference between free and slave and later between subjugated blacks and subordinating whites meant that the black-white color line was sharply and unambiguously drawn. From early colonial times, for example, black-white marriages were illegal. However, notwithstanding the law and the ideology of race, black-white sexual unions occurred in a wide variety of social circumstances, including the sexual exploitation of the enslaved. An extensive mulatto population was documented when the census of 1850 first explored their prevalence nationally. Over the long course of slavery, these mixed-race people came to be defined as black in law and custom, according to the "one drop of blood" rule, by which membership in the white race was limited to those without any black ancestors. Not all societies built around a racial divide have been organized in this way; South Africa, for example, recognized the population of mixed-race descent as a separate legal status - labeled "colored." In the United States those in the middle were moved over the line to the black category.

Because a substantial mulatto population intermarried into the rest of the black population, demographers estimate that extraordinarily high proportions of "black Americans" in the United States in fact have some white ancestry (quite apart from any recent trends in interracial marriage). Moreover, some fraction of mulattoes fair-skinned enough to "pass for white" did so; and since they typically married into white America, a nontrivial proportion of "white Americans"—amounting to tens of millions of "white" people—have some black ancestry. Thus the black-white line was preserved, until recently, in law, in race theory, and in much of popular culture, but not in the true genealogical legacies of the population.[25]

Among Native-Americans, a somewhat different pattern emerged; there are many reasons for the difference, but certainly a crucial one is the

absence of institutionalized slavery for the Native American. By the early twentieth century many people who said they were Native American by race also noted that they were of mixed descent, with some white or black ancestors as well. When government dealt with tribal communities in the twentieth century for various purposes, tribal membership was defined in terms of the proportion of an individual's ancestors who had been tribal members. The required proportion differed from tribe to tribe: a quarter, an eighth, or less. In addition, the individual had to be recognized by the tribe as a part of the community. Thus, the definition was much more complex than the "one-drop rule"; it included both a "blood quantum" (a specific fraction of Native American ancestry) and a subjective element of communal recognition.

There is also another noteworthy difference between the black-white and red-white situations. Native American is a category on the census race question and on the census ancestry question. When the Census Bureau began using the ancestry question in 1980, it found that millions of people who declared they had some Native American ancestry listed themselves as white on the race question. By 1990 the number of such people had risen to nearly 9 million, while those who declared themselves as Native American on the race question numbered only about 2 million (Harrison and Bennett 1995, 209). In contrast, very few who identified themselves as black on the race question mentioned any European ancestry, and very few who identified themselves as white on the race question mentioned any African ancestry. If people knew and reported their family origins fully, presumably tens of millions would be reporting both black and white ancestry, just as millions report red and white ancestry.

Hispanic Americans present a third variant. The intermingling of Africans, Europeans, and native peoples in the societies of Latin America occurred under a variety of circumstances, but the upshot was that many Hispanic immigrants arrive in this country knowing that they have origins in two or more of these different peoples. At the same time, they learn that in the United States black and white are sharply divided. Which category of the race question, then, should the Hispanics mark? It is hardly surprising that many Hispanics mark other for their race.

It is one thing to appreciate that a great number of Americans have remote genealogical origins in more than one of the categories we label

as racial today. It is quite another thing to believe that people today will in fact change the way they answer the race question in order to capture that long ago racial mixing. In fact, the evidence suggests that the reverse is the case. The ancestry data from the censuses of 1980 and 1990 show us that whites rarely identify with an African ancestry and blacks rarely identify with a European ancestry (Farley 1990, 41–46).[26] In addition, the surveys conducted by the Census Bureau in connection with the current OMB review show that the results tabulated using different approaches generally did not yield statistically significant differences from the current method of tabulation. In sum, responses to the race question do not elicit an awareness of the high levels of multiraciality created over the long sweep of American history. To put it differently, the subjective element in the way we determine racial membership allows us to bypass the complexity that is inherent in the genealogical record; what we get for the most part is responses based on an awareness of recent family history.[27]

Addendum 2. Are Hispanics a Race?

Race is subjectively defined by the Census Bureau, with the available categories from which to chose determined administratively by the OMB directive. This arrangement is important for civil rights laws, which cover Hispanics. Hispanics have a hard time knowing what to call themselves in those administratively determined categories. For one thing the awareness of and feelings about a multiracial legacy vary from one society to another, and multiracial immigrants do not necessarily relate to their origins in the same way as the native born. It may well be harder for these immigrants, then, to chose one category. But more important, because of the way Americans talk about race, neither the black or white category seems to include Hispanics easily (thus, "non-Hispanic white"). With what race, then, is the Hispanic supposed to "subjectively identify"?

In the 1990 census, 57 percent of those who identified themselves as Hispanic (on the Hispanic origin question) selected one of the four specific racial categories listed on the census form. Of the 43 percent who did not do so, many placed themselves in the "other" race category, and they constitute the vast majority of the people who chose this category. When a major population group cannot meaningfully identify with an important question, it is natural to wonder whether the question is

misstated. Would it help to add "Hispanic" as a new racial category (Farley 1996, 211; Smith and Edmonston 1997, chap. 3, n. 17)? The government's interagency task force recommended against this change, and their recommendation should be supported. The task force suggested instead that listing the Hispanic question before the race question would help reduce the confusion of Hispanics when they confront the race question, and that is the only change that should be made.

On the one hand, it seems strange to treat Hispanic as a race, given the history of that term and the obvious connection of the term "Hispanic" to ethnicity; is "Slavic-American" then a race? Also, the racial count of "others" does not much complicate legal issues, since Hispanics are separated from whites and blacks by virtue of the Hispanic origin question. On the other hand, one can argue that the race question is no longer meant to elicit what used to be called race, so that it makes little difference if it is extended to cover Hispanics. Indeed, the race question nowhere mentions the word race, and the tabulation headings could easily be made to refer (as they already often do) to "race and Hispanic origin."

There is, however, another consideration. People tend to ignore subtleties, and listing Hispanic as a category in the race question may contribute to a more widespread willingness to refer to Hispanic as a race. Consider the following examples, taken from the two important technical reports recently produced on the race question changes by the Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

> ". . . when Hispanic was included as a racial category . . ."
> ". . . where Hispanic was a racial category . . ."
> "Preference for Including Hispanic as a Racial Category" [section title] (Tucker et al. 1996, 5, 41)
> "Hispanic origin is included in the list as though it is a race group" (Bennett et al. 1997, 1–13)

It is easy to understand why the terms are used in this way by responsible analysts; but the eliding of "Hispanic" and "race" is well underway in such usage. The rest of us are likely to be less, not more, careful than Census Bureau officials in eliding "Hispanic" and "race."

Finally, there is the matter of precedent. Because the OMB is going to tell us which groups will be listed as races, it is understandable that ethnic

groups other than those already discussed might request consideration for race status (U.S. Office of Management and Budget 1995, 44,681). If an ethnic group, such as one representing Arab-Americans, believes it is in its interest to have its progress scrutinized by government, then being listed as one of the racial groups is a big step in that direction. The subjective nature of the list, the fact that the list is determined by administrators, and the fact that the list is used to define legal status all make it hard to tell groups that they *cannot* be listed as a category in the race question. Including Hispanics will make it harder still to do so.

Notes

1. For a large sampling of views on this issue, see U.S. House of Representatives 1994. For the range of issues that the OMB has raised for review, see U.S. Office of Management and Budget 1995, 44,673–44,693.
2. While the demand may be for recognition, it is worth noting that should the multiracial population be defined as a distinct racial group, it might then become eligible for various benefits.
3. The task force also rejected the need to combine race and Hispanic origin into one question (U.S. Office of Management and Budget 1997, 36,873–36,946).
4. The respondent's birthplace question has been asked in every decennial census since 1850 and the parental birthplace questions in every decennial census between 1880 and 1970. In 1980 and 1990 the parental birthplace questions were dropped. It is to be hoped (probably vainly) that the 2000 census will include the parental birthplace questions, without which we cannot know, for example, whether a 25-year-old native-born individual of Chinese descent is the child of immigrants or the child of descendants who have been in this country since 1870 or before. In any event, the parental birthplace questions continue to be asked regularly on other census enumerations, such as monthly Current Population Surveys. For a convenient compendium of the census questions prior to 1990, see Bureau of the Census 1979; for a discussion of the ancestry question, discussed below, see Lieberson and Waters 1988.
5. Another rationale was thought to be that it would tap into putative ethnic loyalties related to the "white ethnic revival" of the late 1970s.
6. Critics have argued that the information produced by the Hispanic question is already embedded in the ancestry question and that the Hispanic origin question is a useless redundancy propelled by Hispanic interest groups. Defenders of the question note that the question explicitly asks the respondent for a yes or no answer on this *specific* ancestry, which is the only ancestry not covered by the race question that is relevant to legislation. See for example, Lieberson and Waters 1988, 16–18.

7. Similarly, in direct interviews (as opposed to mail-in forms, which most people fill out) "If a person could not provide a single race response, the race of the mother was used. If a single race response could not be provided for the person's mother, the first race reported by the person was used" (Bureau of the Census 1992, Appendix B).
8. A variant of the ancestry question could eventually do away with the race question, but that does not seem to be in the works any time soon.
9. The reference is to those who consider themselves Native American by race, not to the much larger group, nearly all of whom consider themselves white, but indicate that they have some Native American ancestry. On the 1990 intermarriage rates for individuals 25 to 34 years old, see Farley 1996, 264–265.
10. Of course, even a Hispanic or an Asian marrying within his or her own "racial" group might well be marrying someone with origins in a different country (a descendant of Chinese immigrants might marry a descendant of Asian Indians, for example).
11. The reference here is to native-born black males, 20 to 29 years of age (Qian 1998; see also Besharov and Sullivan 1996, 19–21).
12. In 1960 the Census Bureau did not take account of "Hispanics" in discussing race at all; among those it did count as nonwhite, some nine-tenths were blacks. The "chances of meeting" a black or other nonwhite obviously vary dramatically across the country; the example in the paragraph should be thought of as referring to randomly chosen nonwhites selected from the American population.
13. Relevant but apparently not a subject of discussion, are individuals who think that there are advantages to claiming partial minority status, such as to obtain civil rights protections intended for racial minorities. Presumably, at the level of individual job or school applications, such issues have already arisen or shortly will regardless of the changes to the directive. In the census, this individual has no personal stake in claiming multiple racial origins; however, a person may now chose to do so as a statement about his or her identity.
14. If white and other were the two listed races, the individual would be counted as white.
15. The authors stress that the specific individual might not end up being classified in the same category as under current enumerations, since given the choice of one race only, an individual might mark white rather than Asian, but under the historical series someone who marked white and Asian would be classified Asian. However, the resulting aggregate numbers are similar. Note also that my discussion is based on the premise that the instruction to respondents on the race question should be "Mark one or more" or "Mark all that apply." The authors also consider the possibility that a multiracial race category be added. They suggest that a person who marked only one of the indicated minority groups and multiracial would be classified with the marked minority group.

16. At the individual level, in fact, this strategy is probably the one in effect now: the triracial person in our example might be able to claim federal benefits as a member of a Native American tribe and file suit against an employer suspected of discrimination against blacks. However, presumably in a suit against an employer accused of discriminating against blacks and Native Americans, our triracial example would not be counted as two people.
17. In addition to the problems already raised, the treatment of such situations as Hispanics suing over voting domination by blacks should be considered.
18. In the target areas for Asian/Pacific Islander, 58.3 percent of respondents declared that they were Asian/Pacific Islander when given the instruction "Mark all that apply"; 65.0 percent did so when instructed to mark one only. The fraction was virtually identical (64.8 percent) when they were instructed to mark one or more (Bennett 1997, Panels A, C, and H, 1–31).
19. As a supplement to the Current Population Survey (CPS) for May 1995, the bureau asked the race question with and without a multiracial category as well as with and without listing Hispanic as a racial category. When the race question included a multiracial category, the instruction was changed from "Mark one only" to "Mark one or more." However, the option I am urging (changing the instruction without including a multiracial category) was not administered in this national sample. Nor were illustrative approaches to counting provided in reporting the results of this CPS supplement (Tucker et al. 1996). In this survey the major difference in racial counts (presumably using the single race approach) was that the proportion of Native Americans dropped from 0.97 to 0.73 of 1.0 percent when the multiracial category was included in the race question. The difference may seem trivial, but in relative terms, it is large for that small population. Nevertheless, it is not reflected in detailed, targeted counts of the second survey (Bennett et al. 1997, 1–29), and it would presumably not have emerged given less exclusive approaches to the count in the CPS supplement.
20. *Time*, May 5, 1997, 32.
21. Some observers of racial patterns worldwide fear the flip side of the scenario I've just outlined. In a society of strong racial divisions, they argue, multiracials may come to be defined (as they were in apartheid South Africa and in some other societies) as the "new colored people," with a distinct legal status. Instead of preserving the firm race line by the "one drop rule," we will, these people argue, do as South Africa did, by creating, instead of two sharply delineated races, one or two more, all with a standing in law (Spencer 1997). This scenario seems to me unrealistic because it ignores the difference between our moment in the evolution of race relations and the situation in South Africa in 1900 or 1950. It is true, however, that the legal recognition of a multiracial race category is subject to criticism from this perspective more than the alternative of allowing people to indicate more than one racial origin.
22. *Time*, April 9, 1990.

23. Notice, too, that the panel is obliged to assume that the racial choice for mixed-origin people will be made in the same way as it is today, although the number of races from which parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents descend may be larger on average than today.

24. In each racial group the panel distinguishes immigrants from the native born and distinguishes the native born in terms of how many generations back (one, two, three, four, or more) ancestors immigrated. The panel then applied rates of intermarriage (based on data from our own time) to these subcategories of the population. What, then, does the panel assume about the descendants of blacks brought here in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, that is, most American blacks? It assumes that since these blacks have been in this country for four or more generations, they will intermarry in the future no more often than they intermarry today (Smith and Edmonston 1997, chap. 3, section on "Exogamy Assumptions" and Table 3.B.3, "Exogamy Estimates").

25. Until very recently indeed! Laws against intermarriage were not ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court until 1967, and such laws were on the books in many states in the 1950s.

26. The picture is more mixed with regard to Native Americans. In 1980, for example, in addition to the large number of whites claiming some Native American ancestry, about 22 percent of those claiming Native American racial status also claimed some European Ancestry (Snipp 1989, 51). However, the crucial point is that the counts of Native Americans do not change in statistically significant ways when the instructions to the race question change.

27. In another test the Census Bureau asked people who said that they were multiracial whether they said so because their parents were of different races, because more distant ancestors were of different races, or because the nature of their group was multiracial. Some three-quarters chose the first reason (Tucker et al. 1996). But with regard to the second response, which concerns us here, the real point is that only a tiny fraction of those who could conceivably have declared a multiracial legacy did so. For example, in the black population alone a substantial majority would have had some rational basis for marking more than one category, if they were inclined to do so; had they done so, the number of multiracials would have been many times greater than it was. Similarly, Hispanics may be confused about whether to mark black, white, or other, but the confusion is not based on a desire to resolve their problem by marking two or three of the available race choices instead of one; rather, they are uncomfortable being labeled in any of the available race groups.

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