

The Box

Cassandra G. Febles

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Purchase College, State University of New York

Abstract

This paper explains the historical background and rich history of the United States Census. It will evaluate how the United States Census serves our purposes today. The data that these surveys collect may be beneficial in improving the population. By showing states within the United States being occupied by the migration or degradation of people. The United States Census can also serve as a national response system for the national guard to know how many people should be sent to an area to protect or help an area. Although there are benefits to the Census, it has overall affected communities negatively. In this paper, the explanation of the negative causes brought to certain American communities when taking these surveys. Through analysis, readers will get the opportunity to see how some survey questions may be seen as a tool for racial discrimination rather than improving the nation. The paper will explain the problems individuals face when they don't meet the standards for what the government considers to be "white" and how it mentally takes a toll on them. The United States Census should be used for more than keeping accountability. We are accounted for and categorized and placed into groups on a survey. This should not affect our daily lives or communities in a negative way; it should push us to be our best and to reach our greatest potential as United States Citizens; by not letting racism take the good from this great resource America has founded. We cannot let the U.S census have a negative impact on the country. This must be something that works in the United States and favors all American citizens, the country should avoid conflict within its borders.

Keywords: United States Census, American Community Survey, Diversity, and Race Recognition

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Introduction

As children, we all go through the stage of asking our parents questions, from why the sky is blue to why the color of the grass is green. As children, our minds would wander off, we would ask anything that our little innocent minds could think of. Growing up to mixed parents, I would constantly ask them both, “what am I?”, to which my parents would respond, “human of course.” Unfortunately, that question continued to play a role in my life as I grew older, having to respond to living in an inner city and getting a job was the first experience I came face to face to Census survey questions. Confusion entered my mind immediately, from the simple fact that I was sure what I considered myself to be, or to what ethnic group I belong. Most would find this question easy to answer, but for me it was a difficult task to complete. At the age of sixteen I received my first job; while filling out the paperwork, a question that stumbled upon me asked what race I considered myself. I felt like an outcast because I couldn’t decide on a box to check or if this was a form of racism without anyone knowing it. Which lead me to question, are the United States Census race demographic questions helpful to our society?

Although the United States is known for being a large nation of diversity, the life of an American can be tough for those who are not considered white. The research conducted throughout this paper will be presented as explanatory because the main focus is to explain how race demographic questions can be considered a tool used for racism. There will be qualitative and quantitative methods, because the explanation of the United States Census history is

provided, as well as the concerns individuals feel answering these race-based questions. The purpose of responding to the survey questions will be explained, and the issues concerning racial demographics and identifying conflicts will be addressed. Geographically, the paper will be focusing on the United States as a whole, but the focal point is on the population that considers themselves as nonwhite.

In the United States Census, there is a section asking individuals to answer what race they considered themselves, what ethnic group do they belong to, and is the person from Latino origins. This required section was initially created in 1790 to record the name of the head of the household. These records also recorded the number of free white males under age 16 and ages 16 and older, free white females, other free persons, and slaves in each household (Rogers, 2018, p.4). This act was conducted under the watchful eye of the United States Treasury, and was authorized by our first Congress because the Constitution required the count of “all persons.” The existence of these questions may have been created to gather information on United States citizens, but it has created much more of a complication than Congress had perhaps anticipated.

The Constitution required enslaved peoples and free population (those who were not considered slaves and owned themselves) to be considered in separate counts (Anderson Conk 1980, P.8). The Constitution required the count of citizens’ household members in order to determine representatives in Congress. “Representatives shall be apportioned among the several States according to their respective numbers, counting the whole number of persons in each State” (Hurta, 2015, P.148). The census was to help provide information to the political districts

electing the House of Representatives in order to cover same numbers of citizens. The population has been counted every ten years (“decennially”) since 1790 because of this.

Over the years, the United States Census began to document new data concerning the nation. The Constitution had no interest in requiring information on occupation or industry, but that was soon changed by founder James Madison, who insisted that the census should require data on economic and military planning. It wasn’t until 1820, that questions started requiring proper data information on how many individuals (including those who were considered enslaved) had been working in economic sectors like agriculture, commerce, or manufactures (Meyer,2009,P.151). Congress and the United States government started to notice upholding this information could degrade the nation due to the population increasing, while also answering questions on certain topics. As represented in figure x, the United States started to add new races into their race portion to adapt to their diverse communities.

FIGURE X. Historical Overview of Changing Racial Classifications on the U.S. Census Form
1870-2000

Year Classifications

1870 White, Black, Indian

1880 White, Black, Indian

1890 White, Black, Mulatto, Quadroon, Octoroon, Indian, Chinese, Japanese

1900 White, Black, Indian, Chinese, Japanese 1910 White, Black, Indian, Chinese, Japanese,

Other

1920 White, Black, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Other

1930 White, Negro, Mexican, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Hindu, Korean, Other

1940 White, Negro, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Hindu, Korean, Other

1950 White, Negro, American Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Other

1960 White, Negro, American Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Hawaiian, Part Hawaiian, Aleut, Eskimo, Other, etc.

1970 White, Negro or Black, Indian (American), Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Hawaiian, Korean, Other

1980 White, Black or Negro, Indian (American), Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Vietnamese, Asian Indian, Hawaiian, Guamanian, Samoan, Eskimo, Aleut, Other

1990 White, Black or Negro, Indian (American), Eskimo, Aleut, Asian or Pacific Islander, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Hawaiian, Korean, Vietnamese, Asian Indian, Samoan, Guamanian, Other

2000 White, Black, African American or Negro, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian Indian, Japanese, Native Hawaiian, Chinese, Korean, Guamanian or Chomorro, Filipino, Vietnamese, Samoan, Other Asian, Other Pacific Islander

Source .U.S. Census Bureau, Measuring America: The Decennial Censuses from 1790 to 2000.

Since the United States Census is decennial (every ten years), it collects its data through an outgoing survey branch called The American Community Survey (ACS). ACS is a part of the United States Census Bureau that regularly gathers information that they will later be calculate into decennial census. The surveys focus on topics such as race, education, income, language

proficiency, migration, disability, employment, and housing information. ACS also focus on citizenship, but tries to limit the amount of times questioning about immigrants' legal status (Van Hook and Balistreri, 2013, P.2).

The purpose of this written essay is to understand the positives and negatives of the United States Census and if existence of standard race demographic questions are helpful to our society. The information studied to answer this question will be researched through scholarly articles about the United States Census and how it affects our racial demographics. Through literature of the authors and how they convey these issues is how I intended to define my measures. Sociology is where most of the concepts that will be used to provide support and evidence from my research within the United States Census. The research obtained to support statements within this paper will be through the mixture of mostly qualitative data as well as some of quantitative. The essay will focus on the history of census. The combination of primary and secondary sources will included throughout the entire essay because evidence from both sides will help support why aspects of the census are harmful to our society.

A particular method that will be conducted for my research will be through participant observation, systematic observation, and participatory action research. Inquiring those particular areas will benefit my research because it focuses on citizens' feelings and behaviors in response to the census. Those pieces of information will explain if people find being categorized harmful or even disgraceful since our society today typically values respecting all races. The essay will also provide historical and comparative research, and secondary data analysis since my topic

focuses on that. Comparing census in historical times to our society today will show that it's harmful and not useful to continue. The methods that were stated to help provide information for my research are the best suited because both areas deal within human actions and views. My research question focuses on how Americans feel having to check a box based on their race while our government pushes our society to look past race. Throughout American history, Census has been a part of making decisions for the government. Census started with only three choices for people to check off for their race, which are the following: white male/female, other free persons, and slaves. After having it around for centuries the government added in other ethnic groups to accommodate their citizens. Having that information will shed some light on American citizens and if they are happy or displeased with the treatment many have to face in America. This all leads itself to the participant observation, systematic observation, and participatory action research.

My analysis will focus on individuals and neighborhoods because I want every voice to be heard. Presently, Census is working alongside with the government on certain communities, crime, ratings around the United States that were provided through race questions. The information I gather will be anyone who has taken a survey and publicly made a comment on how it negatively affected them. Information on how unfair many poverty black communities have to endorse will also be provided. I will not concentrate on an exclusive age range, or gender because my research question is focusing everyone as a whole.

Positives Outcomes United States Census Brings

The U.S census started with the idea of bringing about a generated number for our population but has grown to be way more than its original purpose. The United States Census can track socio-economics topics, such as income, education, employment and much more (O’Hare, 2013, P.769). Jacqueline Leonard, a professor with a doctorate degree in mathematics, explained how the United States Census provides a helping hand towards children brain development through three techniques that are learned. The first skill is the children being able to read and write large numbers, the second skill is being able to interpret data and statistics, and lastly that the children are being able to apply algebraic concepts. This all ties into teaching students process standards such as communication, connections, problem solving, and representation (Leonard, 2010, P.38). The United States Census provides data on the increase of the population, as well as providing diversity information within the United States. All this data is achieved when responders provide their race, Hispanic origin, preferred language spoken in household, place of birth, country of citizenship, and year of entry; this is later used by the government to create policies and develop programs (Leonard, 2010, P.39). The United States Census even has the ability to track air pollution and identify which race and community pollutes the most based on a monthly land use regression model incorporating satellite-based and ground-based observations (Clark, L. P., Millet, D. B., & Marshall, J. D, 2017, P.2).

Separating America

An issue the United States Census faces is, when there's a good, there's a bad. In that case, the United States Census causes separation amongst American communities. Since race and ethnic group are documented from the surveys, researchers will identify what communities consist of what race and provide it to the public. Howard Zinn, who was an American historian, playwright, and social activist stated in "*A People's History of the United States*" (2003): "There is not a country in world history in which racism has been more important, for a long time, as the United States" (Zinn, 2003, P.23). This causes conflict within real estate because minority groups are seen as a threat to white community areas since whites comprise a larger portion of the population (John Iceland, & Gregory Sharp, 2013, P.666). Racism is well alive within this nation, causing minority groups to be placed in areas that deprive them of opportunities to intermingle and advance. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor a professor of African-American Studies at Princeton University states in her book "*How Real Estate Segregated America*," "Fifty years after the passage of 'fair housing,' racial discrimination remains embedded in the operations of the American housing market" (Taylor, 2018, P.25). Companies determine who the majority of people are in their surrounding communities, and base their products on the given population. While performing this act, companies also promote deals for communities based on the people nearby. An example of this is real estate markets or food markets placing deals on unhealthy produce in minority communities because demographic results showed that is what the community can afford. Kelly B. Bower, a professor at Johns Hopkins School of Nursing conducted research to find if certain races are treated unfairly due to their neighborhoods; the results were shocking. Bower discovered at equal poverty levels, neighborhoods who have the least amount of supermarkets are black communities, these communities also have a decent

percentage of convenience (grocery) stores. This is unfortunate for individuals within those communities because supermarkets provide quality food while convenient stores are stocked with more energy dense, processed, high-fat, sugary, and salty foods (Bower, 2014, P.2). The interruption of racial segregation of neighborhoods across America is harming individuals by dismissing their ability to receive healthier food options.

Degrading Nonwhites

For many citizens, a sense of displacement occurs because they have to be placed into a box. Just because the government sees them a certain way does not mean that they see themselves that way. Movements like Black Lives Matter, All Lives Matter, Dreamers (DACA recipients) force citizens to look at what the government is causing. These movement groups are demanding through protesting to be seen not as nonwhite, but as equal Americans to be seen not as nonwhite, but as equal Americans. Eleanor Townsley, a sociologist who specializes in the cultural sociology, social theory, sociology of gender, and survey research and data analysis at Mount Holyoke College performed an experiment in class to see how students would answer census race questions. The results were remarkable because some students did not know how to answer the boxes. They felt that the boxes lacked who they were since the government was categorizing them into races with which they had no involvement (Townsley, 2007, p.230). “The government of United States established laws ... such as, Article I, Section 2, of the United States Constitution, The Nationality Acts of 1790 & 1870, and The Immigration Act of 1924, that implied that true American citizenship belonged to Whites only. The institution of the U.S.

Census has served as the governmental vehicle to do more than just enumerate its citizens, but also to promote a class hierarchy that dichotomously separated its citizens into the two groups of White or nonwhite” (Miller Jr, 2008 ,p.130). The United States government degraded individuals who weren’t white and put them into a broad “other “category. This gave citizens in that “other” category a sense of inferiority and general identity issues.

Conclusion

It is clear to see discrimination is well alive within the United States and taking tolls on those who do not fall into the social norms. United States citizens can only hope for a change in their society that Americans are to be seen as many races not just as a white race. Neither the government nor a racial box should have the power to cause individuals to feel empowered or marginalized for their race and have to be categorized as such. Overall, the research provided helpful explanations on the negative affects the United States Census brings to communities. A key trend that cannot go unnoticed is the favoritism towards white Americans compare to those who are non-white, which leads to the confusion on where non-whites belong. In Townsley’s experiment, students felt unsure what they would be considered because they did not fit the social norms. Important findings that supported the argument of the United States Census not being helpful to our society is from its nation’s past history, which infers whites only have the ability to gain true American citizenship. The future goal of the research is gathering enough information to lead to the United States Census elimination of the racial portion in their surveys. In the case of having the opportunity to continue this paper, there could’ve been individuals own

opinions on this topic added in. This would give readers a better connection to what other Americans experience within the United States.

The research collected to displayed the unfairness individuals face for being non-white in America is outrageous. It is time to change how the government views our fellow Americans. The broad implication that was intended for readers to receive is that the government does not always have the best intentions for individuals and the research they use can be seen as racism because it categorizes people in an unfair manner. Individuals can now question if the government still discriminates those who consider themselves as non-white and if the government is purposely trying to separate diversity within community. Another question that can be raised is if our society is at the point where being racially colorblind is the social norm. The implication my research presented to be useful in the “real-world” is being aware of the silent race acts put on individuals that many fail to notice.

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