

## **AS SIMPLE AS ONE, TWO, THREE: CENSUS UNDERENUMERATION AMONG THE AMERICAN INDIANS AND ALASKA NATIVES**

by

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### **INTRODUCTION**

This paper focuses on allegations and evidence of the United States Bureau of the Census (Census Bureau) undercount of the American Indian population. To develop a comprehensive understanding of the census enumeration process as it concerns American Indians it is important to examine previous methods, procedures, and practices of the Census Bureau regarding the American Indian population. This will be undertaken by first presenting an initial overview of the unique legal and political status and relationship that Indian tribes have with the federal government. Second, actual documentation of underenumeration among various tribes will be presented. Last, reasons for the undercount will be explored.

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

American Indians have a unique legal and political relationship with the United States government. Their status is that of domestic dependent nations within a nation. No other ethnic minority group in the country has this type of relationship with the federal government. The special status is based on treaty obligations enacted between the federal government and various tribes. These treaties are legally binding agreements. Policies that result from the treaties were codified by the first Congress in the Indian Trade and Intercourse Act of 1790 (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1981). The act prohibited any land transactions with Indian nations or tribes of Indians without the participation of the US government.

In the treaty relationship the tribes gave up external sovereignty -- the right to go to war with or make treaties with foreign powers -- in return for the protection of the United States. The trust relationship centers on three components: land, tribal self-government, and social services (US Civil Rights Commission, 1981). Most specific to the Census Bureau are the issues of land and taxation. Because Indian land is held in trust by the federal government it is non-taxable. The decision not to include Indians in the initial

census process resulted from their non-taxable status, which is referred to in Article I, Section 2 of the Constitution mandating the census process.

Article I Section § 2 of the U S Constitution states:

“Representatives and direct taxes shall be apportioned among the several states which may be included within this Union according to their respective numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole number of free persons, including those bound to service for a term of years, and **excluding Indians not taxed**, three-fifths of all other persons. The exact enumeration shall be made within three years after the first meetings of the Congress of the United States, and within every subsequent term of ten years, in such manner as they shall by law direct.”

As a result of the above mandate, American Indians were excluded from the first six censuses from 1790 through 1850. Indians not paying taxes were not to be counted when determining the population of states, based on the presumption that those Indians immune from state and federal taxes were in some kind of political allegiance to their own tribes and thus not truly part of the United States (Deloria and Lytle, 1984). However, with the advent of Andrew Jackson's forced assimilation policies of the early 1800's, the Census Bureau began the process of enumerating Indians by counting certain segments of the American Indian population. Beginning in 1860, only those Indians who were considered assimilated were officially counted and noted as "civilized Indians" in census documents. Identifying civilized Indians was primarily contingent on land ownership. As Clemence (no date: 11) states:

“The determination was administrative: apparently Indians on reservations who received 'allotments' under the General Allotment Act of 1887 were considered citizens. The Bureau determined whether a reservation had been allotted, and if so, the residents were enumerated as taxed Indians. “

Another issue which further complicated the process of enumerating Indian people was counting Indian people of mixed blood. It was decided that persons of mixed white and Indian blood, living in white communities, who were assimilated would be counted as white. However, if the mixed bloods lived among Indians, they would be counted as Indian (Drees, 1968:2). These definitions of Indians were applied in the federal censuses of 1850, 1860, and 1870, in determining the country's population (Drees 1968).

In 1880, the Census Bureau cooperated with the Commissioner of Indian Affairs and collected information on both taxed and not-taxed Indians. However, the information

was not published in the 1880 Census report (Drees, 1968). It was not until 1890 that the Census Bureau not only performed an in-depth enumeration of both taxed and non-taxed Indians but also published the information. The 1890 census report on Indians is presented in Volume X of the Eleventh Census publication and contains extensive information on living conditions, vital statistics, land, and customs. The 1890 enumeration had the advantage that residence patterns of Indians had stabilized because the federal policies of forced removal had ended. Consequently, most of the Indians were living on reservations, on land owned by themselves, or in white communities.

Problems encountered during the 1890 enumeration are concerns which continue to affect census taking among American Indians. Barriers to a more accurate count included language differences, resistance to federal government activities, high mobility rates, and lack of sufficiently trained interviewers. The census report for the Five Tribes (the Creeks, Cherokees, Seminoles, Choctaws and Chickasaws) indicates that two or three interpreters were needed to administer the census. In addition, many of the tribes were opposed to the census process. On the Creek and Seminole reservations, meetings were held by the Indian leaders to resist actively participating in the census count (Bureau of the Census, 1943, viii: 301). In large isolated reservation areas such as the Navajo reservation, insufficient coverage was given. A lone agent was assigned to enumerate the entire Navajo reservation (Bureau of the Census, 1943: vi, 112).

Thus, Indians have been included in the census count since 1890. However, for purpose of apportioning representatives to Congress, Indians not taxes were deducted from the total population count until 1940. In 1939, the Census Bureau solicited an opinion from the U.S. Attorney General to resolve the problem of excluding certain segments of the Indian population from the total count. Two events which most likely serves as an impetus were a 1935 Supreme Court decision (*Superintendent v. Commissioner*) which held that all Indians are subject to federal taxation regardless of land ownership (Clemence, no date) and the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924. The Indian Citizenship Act gave all Indians born within the territorial limits of the United States full citizenship. This status, however, did not infringe upon the rights enjoyed as members of their respective tribes, thus implying a dual citizenship status for Indians (Deloria and Lytle 1983). Hence, in 1940 the Indian population was finally included in the total U. S. census count.

Because of various problems experienced in enumerating the American Indian population it was difficult to get an accurate count. Inaccuracies of the early censuses were emphasized by Lewis B. Meriam in 1928. Meriam's book, entitled, **The Problem of Indian Administration** (more widely known as the Meriam Report), cited the lack of accurate statistics about Indians as a major problem and suggested the need for additional questions in the general population schedule such as degree of Indian blood. Partly as a response to the Meriam Report, the 1930 census scheduled included a more thorough account on the American Indian population. This is reflected not only in the method and type of information gathered but by the 36 per cent increase over the 1920 census (Bureau

of the Census 1933). The 1930 census evidenced three major improvements over past procedures, including (1) the use of the general schedule, (2) enumerating Indians at the same time as the rest of the population, and (3) the use of trained census employees as enumerators rather than the Bureau of Indian Affairs employees as had been done in all previous counts (Drees 1968).

The 1940 census does not indicate any special treatment for the Indians. The 1950 census included a supplemental schedule used to assist the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) in policy decision. With input from the BIA, maps were utilized to designate the boundaries of the reservations.

The 1960 census differed from earlier decennials in that the respondents self-reported their race. In the 1940 and 1950 census counts the enumerators indicated the race of the respondent. This method was reportedly criticized by the BIA stating that "a trained anthropologist would not be able to tell upon sight whether a person was an Indian" (Drees 1968:10). In 1970 race was once again obtained on the basis of observation by enumerators in rural areas of the country, including most reservations (Bureau of the Census 1984:9).

In 1980, 1, 420, 400 American Indians and Alaska Natives were enumerated.<sup>1</sup> This decennial census includes the highest official count of the American Indian and Alaska Native population through its date. The 1980 count represents a 72 per cent increase over the 1970 census count (Bureau of the Census 1984). Passel and Berman (1986) note that this type of natural increase is demographically impossible and suggest an overcount of Indians in certain segments of the country. However, caution must be taken when comparing previous decennial censuses of American Indians with more recent ones since the accuracy of the past and present censuses is highly questionable. Moreover, a number of other factors made comparisons between censuses on American Indians and Alaska Natives difficult. For example, in the 1970 census, the item race was obtained on the basis of observation by enumerators in rural areas, including on reservations. For the 1980 census respondents self-identified their race. In addition, differences in the wording of the question on race and improvements in enumeration procedures may also have influenced the outcome of the 1980 census (Bureau of the Census 1984).

In summary, the review of the decennial censuses among American Indian and Alaska Natives reveals a complex process centering on both political and methodological issues. The political concerns stem from the unique status that Indian tribes have within the federal government and ultimately affect the methodological process of enumerating Indians. For example, race is an important component of the census schedules. However not only is biological race involved but, in the case of the American Indian and Alaska Native population, it is also politically and culturally grounded.

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<sup>1</sup>This is the first time that Alaska Native have been mentioned separately in the census literature.

In general three criteria for classification of individuals as Indian are: (1) legally Indian e.g. individuals enumerated on tribal rolls, (2) Indian by residence: e.g. legal Indians who reside within Indian reservations or Indian communities, and (3) cultural Indians: e.g. Indians who are functional participants in an on-going Indian society and who identify as Indians (Wahrhafting, 1968).

For the purposes of the Census Bureau, the more recent definition of an Indian (in 1960, 1980 and, to some extent, 1970) has been a social one that has relied upon "self-identification." This procedure can be problematic since the individual may or may not be culturally Indian or may or may not have any degree of Indian blood (Weber, 1989). This type of ambiguity leads to inaccurate counts among the Indian population. Another methodological problem related to political considerations is the lack of American Indian involvement in the census process. As the review of the census records indicates until recently the Census Bureau by-passed tribal governments and worked directly with the Bureau of Indian Affairs official to assist in the data collection process. It has also been pointed out that government officials have systematically enumerated American Indians for purposes other than counting, including fiscal control over annuity payments and land allotments (Dobyns 1984). In summary, the Census Bureau has experienced a number of unique problems in counting the American Indian and Alaska Native populations. Many of those problems center on political as well as cultural considerations. As a result, the population estimates for the Indians is more an approximation of their numbers rather than an accurate count.

## **DOCUMENTATION OF THE UNDERCOUNT**

The second part of this analysis will attempt to understand the demographic undercount of American Indians by an examination of the literature and other documents. Recently, there have been an increasing number of allegations concerning the census undercount by various Indian tribes and Indian groups. However, there is a lack of written documentation to support these charges. This review indicates the paucity of published research in this area. The most recent studies which examine undercounting among the American Indian population are those which have been done with the support of the Census Bureau.

### **Undercount**

Numerous researchers have alluded to the inaccuracies of the census data on American Indians (Weber 1987; Dobyns 1984, Sanderfur and McKinnell 1986; Thornten 1987; Snipp 1986). The studies which do examine the census undercount of American Indians have focused primarily on historical underenumeration among specific tribes. For example, ethnohistorians have revealed undercounts among the Cherokee (McLoughlin and Conser 1977); the Mandan (Glassner 1974), and the Pima and Maricopa Indians

(Meister 1975). Within the more recent past, research by Hillery and Essene (1963) indicate that there was an undercount of approximately 20,000 Navajos residing on the reservation during the 1960 census. Their figures are based on a comparison of the 1960 U.S. Census count with the 1960 Bureau of Indian Affairs records.

Research concerning the 1980 census and the 1988 dress rehearsal count also reveals an undercount among American Indian population. A preliminary report by David Fein (1989) using data from the 1980 Census Post Enumeration Program found that the 1980 census undercounted American Indians by approximately 8 per cent.

One of the few studies which examines the urban Indian population was submitted to the Census Bureau by Van A. Reidhead. In his non-random sample of urban Indians in the St. Louis Area, Reidhead (1989) indicates that a large number of American Indian households that area either did not receive a 1988 dress rehearsal form in the mail or were not visited by a census taker.

Two other research papers submitted to the Census Bureau include the Colville Indian reservation study and the St. Regis research. The Colville study was undertaken by Lillian Ackerman (1989) during the fall of 1988. The study provides comparative information between the spring 1988 census dress rehearsal and the ethnographic research in the fall of the same year. Inconsistencies in the two selected study blocks were found between the spring dress rehearsal count and the fall enumeration. Undercounts of 13 per cent to 23 per cent were documented in these small sample areas (Ackerman 1989). The reasons for the discrepancies include clerical errors made by the census workers, high mobility patterns among Colville residents as well as resistance and apathy on the part of the Indian respondents. An Additional study prepared by Ackerman (1988) concentrates on mobility patterns in Colville. She found a 25 to 35 per cent mobility rate in the areas studied.

The study on the St. Regis Mohawk reservation focuses on issues that affect the outcomes of census counting. In particular, Nancy Bonvillain (1989) concentrates on the mobility and work patterns of the Mohawk population as these relate to residence patterns which ultimately affect accurate population counts by the Census Bureau.

In addition to the research presented by ethnographers, there have also been reports by tribes concerning underenumeration. According to tribal officials, Santo Domingo Pueblo in New Mexico was underenumerated for the 1980 census. The discrepancy was due primarily to the mapping procedure employed by the Census Bureau. The tribe received the maps by bulk mail from the Bureau. Not only were some of the maps damaged in transport -- which made them difficult to read, but they were also incomplete (Atencio, personal communication, 1989). Consequently, entire sections of the reservation were excluded from the maps which led to the omission of a number of households in the 1980 count. In 1984, the Census Bureau performed a special count of Santo Domingo that

revealed an undercount of approximately 24 per cent.

The Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians formally complained of an undercount. In November of 1980, the tribe filed a complaint in federal district court against the Census Bureau for undercounting the Red Lake Chippewa Reservation community. Although a number of charges were listed in the suit against the Bureau, such as failing to enumerate all persons living on the reservation, failing to enumerate and properly classify all housing units on the reservation, and failing to employ sufficiently skilled employees to conduct the census, the suit was dismissed by the court in November of 1988 for lack of adequate documentation. However, according to the tribe's suit, the Census Bureau failed to provide data that would allow them to provide proper documentation.

The documented evidence of census undercounting among American Indian population indicates that it is not concentrated among any particular tribe or region but encompasses a wide range of circumstances and situations. For example, undercounting has occurred among urban and reservation based Indians and in large and small tribes. An undercount has also been established in traditional tribes as well as fairly modernized tribes. A number of reasons have been presented to explain the undercount. And, the last section of this paper will delve into the possible causes of the undercount.

### **Undercount and Overcount**

Research by Cary Meister (1980) on the Salt River Pima-Maricopa reservation in Arizona shows an undercount in the 1970 census by as much as 65 per cent. In addition, Meister (1975, 1978) demonstrates discrepancies within the Census Bureau's own data reporting. The Census Bureau's 1970 subject report on American Indians was based on 20 per cent sample data and included inaccurate population characteristics for four reservations. Meister indicates that sampling is useful and of low error for large populations. However sampling error can be extreme when applied to small populations. Consequently, he found both an undercount and overcount in the four reservations studied. In comparing the complete census count tape with the 10 per cent sample, it was revealed that the 20 per cent sample fell 3.7 per cent short of the complete national Indian count. The sample undercounted Gila River Reservation by 2.5 per cent and Ft. McDowell by 23.4 per cent. In addition, it over reported Salt River by one per cent and Ak Chin by 33.8 per cent. In studying age groups of the 1970 census and comparing this with birth and death statistics, Jeffrey Passel (1976) found a possible undercount of 6.9 per cent for the American Indian population under 20 years of age and an overcount for other age groups.

### **Overcount?**

The study by Passel and Berman (1985) on the 1980 census attribute the dramatic increase to the respondents change in racial identification rather than more accurate reporting. Based on other demographic data they suggest an overcount among American Indians for the 1980 census particularly in 'non-Indian' states.

## **CAUSES OF UNDERENUMERATION**

A number of hypotheses have been presented in an attempt to understand the undercount among American Indians and Alaska Natives. The three most common explanations given for undercounting Indians are (1) high mobility patterns among the Indian population, (2) resistance because of distrust of government and fear of losing government assistance, and (3) methodological problems such as inconsistent data collection procedures and culturally biased schedules.

### **Mobility**

According to the literature, the most readily perceived cause for undercounting the Indian population is mobility. Included in mobility are the differentiated living patterns found among many American Indian tribes (i.e. extended family households) which is conducive to movement among households. The subject of mobility and census undercounting has recently generated several in depth studies. Ackerman's (1988) thorough study of the Colville Indian Reservation community gives a good account of household structure and mobility patterns that is applicable to a number of different tribes. Factors that contribute to mobility include both traditional and contemporary influences. Traditional reasons for mobility involve attendance at celebrations and participation in ceremonies. As mentioned above, the extended family structure is conducive to greater movement between extended family households.

Contemporary factors contributing to mobility center primarily on employment, education, and travel. Employment and education are two major reasons for mobility. Economic conditions on most reservations limit employment opportunities (Gilbreath, 1974; Prucha, 1984). Therefore, a major portion of the reservation population must seek employment opportunities away from the reservation. Bonvillain (1988) elaborates on the type of residential arrangement among the St. Regis Mohawk tribe. The Mohawk men are noted for their skill as high steel workers and are in demand by construction companies. Rather than move their families to the cities where the jobs are available, the men set up temporary group households in their current city of employment. Upon completion of their work, they return to their permanent homes on St. Regis. The study by Hillery and Essene (1963) also attributes the undercount among the Navajo to their high mobility rate in the 1970 census enumeration.

### **Resistance**

Historically the federal government has viewed American Indians in a paternalistic and ethnocentric manner (Prucha 1985; Zuern 1983; Jarvenpa 1985). This perspective has been reflected in various governmental policies directed at American Indians such as the Indian Removal Act of 1830, the Dawes Severalty Act of 1887, and more recently the Indian Civil Rights Act of 1968. Given the internal colonial relationship that has existed between the United States government and American Indians, resistance to the census is not an uncommon response.

One of the earliest reports which documents resistance as a reason for undercounting American Indians was presented in 1866 by Washington Matthews, an assistant surgeon for the United States Army. He indicates that the counts among the Mandans in Ft. Berthold, North Dakota, were inaccurate because the Mandans did not trust the intentions of the Census Bureau and refused to be counted. The reason for their resistance was a smallpox epidemic which devastated the community in 1837. Prior to that epidemic, a census had been taken. The Mandans believed that the epidemic resulted from the census and have since resisted all efforts to be counted (Glassner 1974).

Recent studies also mention resistance as a cause for underenumerations. Ackerman's (1988) work among the Colville notes that some respondents were reluctant to participate in the count for various reasons including cohabitation and violation of housing regulations in tribal HUD homes. Reidhead's 1989 study on Indian attitudes toward the census found that the urban Indian population in St. Louis held ambiguous views of the census. When asked if they would cooperate with the census, 23 per cent said they would not. The explanations given for not participating centered around general distrust of the federal government and uncertainty about confidentiality.

### **Methodology**

Areas that were listed as problems in the 1890 census of American Indians, including language, resistance, high mobility rates, and lack of sufficiently trained interviewers continue to be emphasized by researchers as reasons for undercounts in the more recent censuses. With some exceptions, language is less problematic today since more American Indians are familiar with English and the Census Bureau has made a concerted effort to recruit, hire, and train American Indian census enumerators familiar with their tribal language from the communities. Despite improvements in language and some tribal involvement at the local level, major methodological problems exist.

A most evident methodological problem, as mentioned earlier, is the uncertain and inconsistent definition of "Indian." In recent census counts, the definition has been a social one that has relied upon "self-identification." There are two reasons why this is problematic and can lead to undercounting. First, the unclear definition of who is an Indian leads to uncertainty about census results. Researchers and practitioners alike are cautious about making projections from census data. This was particularly evident with the 1980 census results. The 1980 census count showed an increase of approximately 70 per cent over the 1970 census. A number of researchers and practitioners claimed an overcount of American Indians while a number of tribal leaders claimed an undercount of their people. Claims of an undercount by tribal leaders appeared to be overshadowed by the overcount claims. The claims of the overcount were based on the self-identification procedures used in the 1980 census (Snipp, 1986). The uncertainty about the accuracy of census data on American Indians can also result in negative policy and program decisions for the Indian population. A second problem with uncertain definition of Indian is the inability of the Census Bureau to recognize the unique relationship that American Indian tribes and

Alaska Natives have with the federal government. Tribal identification is not only biological; it is also political.

Therefore, to avoid confusion the race item should include questions on tribal identification and tribal enrollment. For example, the 1990 questionnaire states, "If Indian (Amer.) print the name of the enrolled or principal tribe." To distinguish between individuals who identify as American Indian and those who are actually enrolled members of their tribe, a follow up question could read, "Is this person an enrolled member of the above mentioned tribe?"

Another methodological problem is the cultural bias of the census questionnaire. Due to the fact, the census schedule is founded on a western European image of how society is organized. An example is the question on residence. Specifically, residence is defined by the census is one that is based on the nuclear family household. Most American Indian tribes and Alaska Native villages are based on the extended family concept and current residence patterns reflect this lifestyle. The research by Ackerman (1988) and Bonvillain (1989) reflect the incongruence between the census format and the actual residence patterns of the Indian tribes they studied. These studies indicate that residence patterns on Colville and St. Regis are fluid and complex. They include extended families, inter-household mobility, on/off reservation employment with temporary out-migration, and frequent returns to the reservation. Currently, the census items on the schedules fail to incorporate the residence patterns of many ethnic minority groups thus resulting in an undercount. Other methodological problems that have resulted in underenumeration include mapping problems and unclear boundary divisions. Some of the maps received for the 1980 census were illegible and inaccurate. As a result, a significant number of households were missed in several Indian communities.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

Historically, the relationship between the Census Bureau and American Indians and Alaska Natives has been complex, involving both political considerations and methodological problems. In preparing for the 1990 census, the Bureau has initiated the process of involving American Indians and Alaska Natives in its structural procedures and activities. Indian involvement has been accomplished by (1) increasing the number of American Indians employed at the main office of the Census Bureau, (2) establishing a Tribal Liaison Program to increase awareness of the 1990 census in the Indian population, and (3) establishing a national American Indian and Alaska Native Advisory Committee. This is the first time that American Indians and Alaska Natives have been included in the procedures of the Census Bureau.

The research on the undercount among the American Indian and Alaska Native populations suggests a number of important policy implications. First, the Census Bureau must become more flexible in relating to the American Indians and Alaska Natives as well

as to other racial and ethnic population in America. Specifically, programs which promote cultural sensitivity should be implemented at the initial employee orientation and should be integrated throughout the Bureau's training programs.

Second, more initiatives should be undertaken by the Bureau to encourage American Indians and Alaska Native researchers to use census data in studying their communities. Such initiatives would provide a means of building greater trust in the census, and assuring that the collection and interpretation of census data would be culturally sensitive. Two specific initiatives should be considered. One, the Bureau should conduct an aggressive search to staff and promote American Indians and Alaska Natives within the various divisions of the Census Bureau. Two, the Bureau should develop an outreach seminar, similar to the multi-agency sponsored American Indian/ Alaska Native Research Development Seminar to network those American Indian and Alaska Native researchers working in universities and their communities who might use census data in their research.

Parallel to this initiative, the Census Bureau should underwrite or directly organize a seminar for non-Indians and non-Native Alaska researchers, inside and outside the federal government, who use census data to conduct inquiries of these communities. Such an effort could enhance the cultural sensitivity of these researchers and provide insights as to how their research can be made meaningful to the communities they are investigating.

Third, more American Indians and Alaska Natives must be involved in the decision-making process of the Census Bureau by placing them in positions of authority. This can be accomplished through an aggressive recruitment and training process. In 1990, only five American Indians were employed in the Census Bureau's central office which is located in Suitland, Maryland. This number is equal to approximately 00.1 per cent of the five thousand people currently employed at the main office. Because of the difficulty of recruiting American Indians to work in the Washington area, consideration should be given to placing Indians in regional offices. In addition, field visits to Indian reservations and villages and soliciting continuous involvement of tribal leaders will also assist in establishing a cooperative relationship between the Indian population and the Bureau.

Last, it is essential that the Bureau establish an office or "desk" that is specifically intended to work with American Indian and Alaska Native issues and concerns. This would further institutionalize the Bureau's efforts to involve the Indian population in Bureau activities.

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#### DISCLAIMER

1990: The views expressed are attributable to the author and do not necessarily represent those of the Census Bureau.

#### EDITOR'S UPDATE (1998)

"The 1990 census counted over 1.9 million American Indians, Eskimos, and Aleuts compared with 1.4 million in 1980. ... Preliminary analysis suggests a number of factors— improved outreach through the American Indian Liaison Program, changing self-identification, seeking ethnic roots, and improvements in census procedures, especially automated coding— might explain the larger than expected growth." (See "Preliminary Evaluation of data from the race and ethnic origin questions in the 1990 Census" by Arthur R. Cresce, Susan J. Lapham, and Stanley J. Rolark, a paper presented at the 1992 annual meeting of the American Statistical Association.) The 1991 March Current Population Survey, by contrast, estimated a national American Indian population on the order of 1.5 million.

Additional information concerning census coverage --whether persons who are American Indians were or were not enumerated-- was produced by the special 1990 Post Enumeration Survey conducted on the ten largest American Indian reservations. The post-strata of American Indians on reservations registered the highest net undercount of any of the post-strata, which were defined by region, size of settlement, race, and other demographic or geographic characteristics. The PES elsewhere did not measure coverage of persons self identified as American Indian, however. The ethnographic evaluation program reported coverage of American Indians in sample areas on Isleta Pueblo, New Mexico (see Jojola 1992), urban Indians in Chicago (see Straus 1991), Creek Indians in Oklahoma (see Moore 1991) and a community of a tribe recognized by the State of North Carolina which had applied but not yet received federal recognition (Lerch).

Final counts reported were affected by edits, especially those to "impute" a race to the millions of Americans reported in the census without any race ascribed or reported as an "other race". Some impacts of these edits were examined in the Demographic Evaluation Project D 8 and discussed in "Uncertainty for models to translate the 1990 census concepts into historical racial classifications/ PREM 81 " by J. Gregory Robinson, David L. Word, and Gregory S. Spencer.

As a result of recommendations of the American Indian and Alaska Native advisory committee to the Census Bureau, on the 1998 dress rehearsal census questionnaires and the proposed year 2000 census forms, one possible answer option to the question, "What is this person's race?" reads "American Indian or Alaska Native" (instead of the "Indian (Amer.)" that appeared pre-printed on the 1990 and 1980 census forms. The race question instructions for the last 20th century census of population and housing are "Mark one or more races to indicate what this person considers himself/herself to be" and to those persons marking American Indian or Alaska Native "race" the instruction: "Print name of enrolled or principal tribe" in a write-in section (as in 1980 and 1990). Although the sample for the 1996 National Content Survey which tested alternative versions of questions on race and ethnicity (Hispanic origin) was not designed to detect differences in the questions among American Indian and Alaska Natives (and no persons reported as Alaska Native from this survey) the mark one or more race instruction did not register a statistically significant effect at the 90 per cent confidence interval on the percentages of persons who reported as White, as Black, as American Indian, or as Asian and Pacific Islander in this survey. See "Findings on Questions on Race and Hispanic Origin tested in the 1996 National Content Survey," (December 1996).