U.S. Census Bureau

Findings on Questions on Race and Hispanic Origin Tested in the 1996 National Content Survey

INTRODUCTION

This report presents preliminary results of testing alternative versions of the questions on race and Hispanic origin in the 1996 National Content Survey (NCS),1/ conducted by the Bureau of the Census as part of its Census 2000 research and testing program. The principal test of questions on race and ethnicity in this program is, however, the 1996 Race and Ethnic Targeted Test (RAETT), also known as the 1996 Census Survey. Findings from the RAETT will be available in the Spring of 1997. The results from both the NCS and the RAETT will be considered in developing questions that will be included in Census 2000. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and its Interagency Committee for the Review of Racial and Ethnic Standards will also consider the NCS findings in their review of the Federal standards for the classification of data on race and ethnicity set forth in Statistical Policy Directive No. 15, Race and Ethnic Standards for Federal Statistics and Administrative Reporting.

The NCS, which was conducted from March through June 1996, is the primary vehicle for testing and evaluating the full subject content for Census 2000. Because the results are based on the responses from the households in the national sample that mailed back their questionnaires, the results do not represent the entire national population.

Furthermore, the NCS sample was not designed to detect possible effects of different treatments on relatively small population groups, such as American Indians and Alaska Natives, detailed Asian and Pacific Islander groups (such as Chinese or Hawaiians), or detailed Hispanic origin groups (such as Puerto Ricans or Cubans). In contrast, the RAETT was designed to provide findings for such small population groups. The RAETT, conducted from June through September 1996, focused exclusively on testing and evaluating possible changes to the questions on race and ethnicity 2/ for Census 2000, and to the classifications set forth in OMB Statistical Policy Directive No. 15.

This report focuses on the effects that the following three treatments tested in the NCS have on how people report race and Hispanic origin. The treatments are:

- Adding a multiracial response category in the race question;
- Placing the Hispanic origin question immediately before the race question; and
- Combining both of these changes.

More detailed findings on these and other issues on race and Hispanic origin covered in the NCS (such as preferred terminology) will be available from the Census Bureau by writing to *Population Division, Bureau of the Census, Washington, DC 20233-8800*.

SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS

The major findings from the NCS testing of questions on race and Hispanic origin are:

Multiracial or Biracial Response Category

- About one percent of persons reported as multiracial in the versions of the race question that included a multiracial or biracial response category.
- The presence of a multiracial response category in the race question did not have statistically significant effects at the 90-percent confidence level on the percentages of persons who reported as White, as Black, as American Indian, 3/ or as Asian and Pacific Islander. This finding held regardless of the sequence of the race and Hispanic origin questions.
- An apparent decline in the proportion of persons who reported as Asian and Pacific Islander when a multiracial category was included was not statistically significant at the 90-percent confidence level. However, because the relatively small sample size in the NCS might not detect a sizable proportionate decline in the Asian and Pacific Islander population, and because a substantial proportion of the write-ins to the multiracial category included Asian and Pacific Islander responses, one cannot rule out the possibility that adding a multiracial category affects this population.
- Including a multiracial category in the race-followed-by-Hispanic origin-sequence reduced the percentage of persons reporting in the "Other race" category of the race question.

Sequencing of Race and Hispanic Origin Questions

- Placing the Hispanic origin question before the race question significantly reduced nonresponse to the Hispanic origin question.
- Placing the Hispanic origin question before a race question that did not include a multiracial option--
    - Reduced the percentage of persons reporting in the "Other race" category of the race question;
    - Increased reporting by Hispanics in the White category of the race question.

  More information on these and other NCS findings are presented in the sections below on Detailed Findings.

BACKGROUND ON THE OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET'S STATISTICAL POLICY DIRECTIVE NO. 15

In response to legislative, program, and administrative needs, the OMB issued in 1977 the "Race and Ethnic Standards for Federal Statistics and Administrative Reporting." These standards are now contained in Statistical Policy Directive No. 15. The racial classifications set forth in the Directive are American Indian or Alaskan Native; Asian or Pacific Islander; Black; and White. The ethnic classifications specified are " Hispanic origin" and "Not of Hispanic origin." The standards have been used throughout the Federal Government for almost two decades--in two decennial censuses, in

various surveys of the population, in data collections to meet statutory requirements associated with monitoring and enforcing civil rights, and in other administrative reporting for Federal programs. 4/

During the past several years, the standards have come under growing criticism from those who believe that the minimum set of categories no longer reflects the increasing racial and ethnic diversity of the Nation's population. In response to this and related concerns, the OMB solicited public comment on Statistical Policy Directive No. 15 in a *Federal Register* notice published on June 9, 1994, and held four public hearings in July 1994. The OMB summarized the comments it received in a second *Federal Register* notice issued on August 28, 1995. 5/

The OMB established an Interagency Committee for the Review of Racial and Ethnic Standards. Its members, drawn from more than 30 agencies, represent the many and diverse Federal needs for data on race and ethnicity, including needs arising from statutory requirements. A Research Working Group of the Interagency Committee identified several issues requiring research and testing to determine the possible effects on the quality and usefulness of the resulting data. They include:

- A multiracial classification;
- A combined race and Hispanic origin classification;
- A combined race, Hispanic origin, and ancestry classification; and
- New or renamed classifications.

Since the review began, the Census Bureau and several other Federal agencies have conducted research on these issues. 6/ One of these research projects was a Supplement on Race and Ethnicity to the May 1995 Current Population Survey (CPS), sponsored by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). Due to the different sample and methodology in the CPS Supplement, findings from it are not directly comparable with those from the NCS. (For further information, see section on Relationship to Other Research.)

1/ The National Content Survey is also know as the U.S. Census 2000 Test.

2/ Questions on ethnicity include Hispanic origin and ancestry.

3/ The NCS was not designed to detect differences among questionnaire versions for this population. The RAETT sample was designed to do this. The mail return data examined for this report included, on average, only about 50 American Indians per panel, and no persons who reported as Alaska Native.

4/ The decennial census collects greater detail on race and ethnicity than the Directive No. 15 categories; however, as required by the Directive, the detail can be combined into the standard categories.

5/ Federal Register Notice, Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity, Office of Management and Budget, Federal Register Vol. 59, No. 123 (59FR 29831-35), Thursday, June 9, 1994, pages 29831-29835.

Federal Register Notice, Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity, Office of Management and Budget, Federal Register Vol. 60, No. 166 (60FR 44674-93), Monday August 28, 1995, pages 44674-44693.

6/ Federal Register Notice, Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity, Office of Management and Budget, Federal Register Vol. 60, No. 166 (60FR 44674-93), Monday August 28, 1995, pages 44674-44693.