

# U.S. Census Bureau Workshop on Advancing Research on Race, Ethnicity, and Inequality

Director's remarks as prepared for delivery

November 14, 2023

- Good morning, everyone!
- Thanks for joining our virtual workshop.
- Research on race, ethnicity, and inequality is incredibly important, especially at this point in our country's history.
- Why? Because our nation is becoming increasingly and beautifully more diverse.
- Hey, seven states including the two most populous—Texas and California—can now boast that a majority of their population is represented by persons of color.
- And the number of states will only rise with time. It's who we are.
- Y'know, I've always seen the diversity of our country as a great asset.
- Our insights, our knowledge base and, indeed, our lives are enriched when people from different cultures, life experiences, and languages share their diverse perspectives with us.
- Yet, racial and ethnic disparities and inequities have been documented and they persist to this day.
- We'll learn more about that over the next 2 days, thanks to the researchers who will be presenting at the workshop.
- Now, a critical step in addressing any problem is that of isolating and documenting it...of understanding its depth and breadth.
- And, of course, the best way to do that is with data.
- That's why I'm so proud that the U.S. Census Bureau provides statistical data that can be used to understand who we are, including our blossoms and our blemishes.
- We need to know the straight facts.
- That's partly why we're today...to meet and discuss research on race and ethnicity.
- We'll see new perspectives on how data resources can help us better understand the dimensions of race and ethnicity in America.
- And we'll see research that explores systemic inequalities by race and ethnicity within our society.
- The ability to provide statistical data to improve society is essentially our mission at the Census Bureau.
- We provide quality data about the nation's people and economy.
- We produce data that reflect an accurate portrait of America...and that includes data about race and ethnicity.
- And it includes the ability to use these data to reveal inequalities and inequities.
- During my almost 2-year tenure as director of the Census Bureau, I've launched an extensive external engagement effort across America.

- I've spoken to pastors, mayors, and other elected officials; to chambers of commerce, businesses, scientific communities; to college students, tribes, community groups, nonprofits; just to mention a few.
- I've greatly appreciated their willingness to engage in a two-way flow of ideas, suggestions, and concerns.
- A key, reoccurring message was the need for more relevant data that better captures communities' and tribes' local experience...data that better reflects the rich diversity of communities and neighbors.
- This included the value of disaggregated data, especially by race and ethnicity, especially at lower levels of geography.
- Combining race-ethnicity data with rich socioeconomic data creates great potential for understanding economic development possibilities, addressing community needs, and mitigating inequities in areas like housing, voting, language, employment, and education.
- We're working to develop new ways to collect data that are more accurate, timely, relevant...and most of all meet the needs of the public.
- We're continuously assessing the improvement of our statistical programs from the perspective of underserved groups.
- For example, we're working closely with the Chief Statistician of the United States and the U.S. Office of Management and Budget in their review of Statistical Policy Directive 15.
- That directive governs how the federal government collects and reports race and ethnicity data.
- We're also continuously researching strategies to improve respondent cognition of survey questions for diverse populations.
- I mentioned earlier that our country is becoming increasingly and beautifully more diverse.
- So, I'd like to leave you with story about an experience I had that was so simple, yet it had great impact on who I am as leader and how I value data for equity.
- It fits with the purpose of this workshop.
- It's a story that comes from the late 1990s when I was a study section member for a federal grant-making agency.
- As part of that work, I'd receive a newsletter that would talk about recent and ongoing grant research.
- So, one day I was casually perusing the newsletter when I came upon the results of a grant that looked at the impact of a comparative study of Spanish-speaking patients who sought health care at clinics.
- It's the results that drew my attention.
- So, the research found that when Spanish-speaking patients presented at a clinic where some of the health care staff had even a little proficiency in Spanish, then the patient outcomes were more favorable than situations where health care staff didn't speak Spanish.
- Now, my first reaction was to break out loud laughing.
- Do we really need to do research to verify that people who understand health care instructions have better outcomes than those who don't?
- But then I had an epiphany...It hit me like a bolt of lightning.
- I realized that this was the first time I'd ever seen a research project that showed how an industry—in this case the health care industry—was acculturating to an increasingly diverse population.
- Instead of insisting that people who seek health care learn English or face the consequences, the institution itself was recognizing its obligation to adapt culturally to its customer base.

- And whether fully aware or implicit, the federal grant-making agency was acting on that obligation through that grant.
- No more English only. That was a big deal.
- But y’know, that lesson still applies today...especially now as we become increasingly diverse.
- If we’re to fulfill our mission to provide quality data on our nation’s population and economy, the Census Bureau—and indeed all federal statistical agencies—need to be adapting...to be acculturating to our increasingly diverse society.
- That means providing more relevant data, be it disaggregated racial/ethnic data or data that capture the full spectrum of our diversity, including sex, age, gender, geography, and so on.
- We need to offer new and expanded data platforms that better serve our diverse constituencies.
- That includes researchers, policymakers, governments, tribal nations, inner city and rural communities, and businesses, just to name a few.
- That’s why it’s so important to actively seek and value diverse perspectives from the public.
- We need to better understand how to acculturate.
- In a sense, this story brings us back to the purpose of this workshop...to present research on race, ethnicity, and inequality.
- And the way I see it, population disparities and inequities represent the outcome of interactions between people and our institutions.
- Think about that.
- Both need attention, and data from the Census Bureau can help make that happen.
- Thank you for being here today, for engaging with us and sharing your research.