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CHAPTER 6. The Public Information Program

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Chapter 6. THE PUBLIC INFORMATION PROGRAM

BACKGROUND

The public information program for the 1970 decennial census was the most extensive ever developed for a United States census. Every practical channel of communication was utilized to acquaint the public with the need for the census being taken and the benefits it would provide to the individual, the community, and the country. Through emphasis on the confidentiality, simplicity, and significance of the census, the program sought to foster an atmosphere conducive to public cooperation and support for the national headcount.

Changes in attitude toward what was once considered a routine duty of citizenship, namely, furnishing census information, resulted in increased suspicion of and resistance to government data-gathering in 1970. These impediments as well as a certain amount of apathy, ignorance, and fear of invasion of privacy necessitated a more intensive public information campaign than in the past. In addition, the 1960 census experience had indicated that efforts to enumerate minorities, especially those in the inner cities, should be intensified in 1970. Further, the expanded use of mail enumeration presented the need for a large-scale campaign to educate the public on the workings of a "do-it-yourself" census.

Preparation for a comprehensive decennial public information program began with the test censuses. In every city where 1970 techniques were evolved, the pretests and dress rehearsals for the decennial census were publicized in a number of ways through the local communications media, community groups, and in some cases the school systems.

The Census '70 campaign, starting in January 1968, was organized in such a way as to utilize most fully the expertise of the Bureau and Department of Commerce public information organizations. The recognized need for outside professional assistance was fulfilled by the Advertising Council, an organization of national advertisers who donate a portion of their time and talents exclusively to public service projects. The Council initiated a full-scale promotional campaign devised and carried out by a New York advertising agency in close consultation with the Bureau. The campaign was keyed to the repeated theme, "We can't know where we're going if we don't know where we are." Its symbol was a stylized hand gripping a pencil and darkening the zero of "Census '70."



The Council program, supported and assisted by a number of national communications media organizations, was principally directed at the general public. That part of the program administered by the Bureau itself, however, was aimed not only at the mass audience but also at special segments of the public, minority groups in particular. It entailed the basic elements of a large-scale public relations project: a series of news and feature stories, prepared speeches, press kits, out-of-town news conferences with the Director of the Census Bureau, arrangements for printed and broadcast interviews, etc. In addition, the Bureau produced print and film materials for distribution and use by the public communications media.

PRESS AND PUBLICATION ACTIVITIES

The Council's print media program was initiated in January 1970. Cooperation of the large daily newspapers in carrying small display advertisements (two columns by 125 lines) prepared by the Council was arranged through a group of newspaper advertising executives. Many of the papers followed a complete 13-week publicity schedule with advertisements changing weekly. Additional newspaper space and attention were devoted to Census '70 by a number of syndicated columnists and cartoonists. Press conferences were held by various members of the Bureau staff, and there were also interviews and feature articles published in newspapers and news magazines. The Council reported that 481 newspapers participated in the campaign with a total of 3,758 advertisements printed, representing 939,500 lines of news space.

Independent of the Advertising Council campaign, the Bureau prepared and issued a series of 10 feature stories to daily and weekly newspapers. "Uncle Sam Counts," a booklet in the Department of Commerce Economic ABC's series, was mailed to all daily and weekly editors in early February for use as background material. At the local level, each district manager was supplied with a press book that contained news releases, mats, radio-TV interview scripts, spot announcements, and slides to implement their public information activities from the opening of the district office through the closing "Were You Counted?" campaign.

For ethnic and nationality newspapers, two releases were translated into 23 tongues. A set of special releases were translated into Spanish and illustrated reproduction sheets for photograph layouts were sent to Spanish language and other papers in Spanish-speaking localities. Census Form D-26, "Were You Counted?", was translated into eight languages: Spanish, Chinese, Yiddish, Polish, Croatian, Italian, Serbian, and Hungarian; and newspaper mats and prints of them were distributed for local publication.

Magazines with a combined circulation of 22,615,697 readers provided space for census publicity. Periodicals which carried census articles, prepared by their own staff members or Bureau information specialists, ranged from technical journals to popular magazines with mass circulation. In addition, business publications with a total circulation of 1,313,745 readers also publicized the census.

The Population Reference Bureau devoted its May 1969 issue of the Population Bulletin to "The Census Inquisition." The Congressional Quarterly's Editorial Research Reports detailed "Census Taking, 1970" in the March 18, 1970, edition. A number of house organs and company magazines, which had been circularized by the Bureau along with the general audience magazines, carried stories emphasizing the importance of the census.

An outdoor advertising effort was also initiated by the Advertising Council. Billboards, rotated monthly among sites, were placed for periods of 2-3 months in high-density locations in 20 metropolitan areas, from New York to Los Angeles, to promote Census '70. More than 18,000 11- by 21- inch car cards designed by the Council were shipped to transit companies for display in or on buses, subways, and streetcars. Display cards, designed and printed by the Bureau, were also used on U.S. mail trucks to advertise the census.

Five million flyers were distributed by school systems to children in 30 big cities. In others, 250,000 lapel buttons were passed out among youngsters. Posters were distributed for display on every post office bulletin board. Special posters were designed for Spanish- and Chinese-American communities and American Indian reservations.

The Bureau publications program produced more than 1.5 million copies of pamphlets and leaflets for circulation through census offices or cooperating groups. Apart from this program, the Urban League widely distributed its leaflet, "Make Black Count."

Bureau brochures and number of copies issued included the following:

For minorities and the disadvantaged:

Do Your Thing (400,000)
The 1970 Census and You (400,000 in English and 100,000 in Spanish)
We the Black People (200,000)¹
We the Mexican Americans (92,000 in English/Spanish)

For special audiences:

Census '70 is Coming (for broadcasters) (9,500)
Electronic Data Processing Equipment for Census '70 (5,000)
1970 Census Photo Log (for editors) (5,000)
Questions About Census 1970 (for Census Bureau personnel) (1,700)

¹For Bureau distribution, not counting copies printed for sale by the U.S. Government Printing Office.

For the public at large:

About Census '70 (60,000)
Census Confidentiality--How it Grew (25,000)
Inquiries for the 1970 Census of Population and Housing (28,000)
Some Facts About the Census (64,000)
The Nation's Census Taker (50,000)
The '70 Census of Population and Housing (80,000)
Uncle Sam Counts (56,000)¹
Understanding the Census (5,500)
Who Uses the Census (9,800)
The 1970 Census (Public Affairs Committee, Inc.) (50,000)²

RADIO AND TELEVISION CAMPAIGN

The electronic media program started in February and peaked in the latter part of March. The Bureau's television-radio campaign featured television endorsements by celebrities in the entertainment world. Prints of these spots were distributed to the networks, to commercial and some noncommercial stations in March and early April. In addition, spots filmed in Spanish and English by several entertainment personalities with Spanish backgrounds were distributed to Spanish-language and other stations in areas with a sizable Spanish-American population.

Kits, containing one 30-second and two 60-second film spots, two slides, scripts for live announcements, and a fact sheet, were distributed to 725 television stations. In addition, television networks received 10- and 20-second spots. Two of the major networks supplemented their use of prepared spots with voice-over announcements at program closings and separate public service messages. Networks specifically allocated time to the campaign concentrated around April 1, Census Day. Through network programs alone, Census '70 spots reportedly registered 652,130,000 home impressions. This did not include the audience covered by individual station use of census material, which was not measured by the Council.

A 6-minute film explaining 1970 census-taking procedures was made available to interested groups and television stations from the beginning of the Census '70 effort. Two 5-minute films concerning individual involvement and its importance were prepared for the peak census period, these were sent to television stations, Census regional offices, and, through a contract distributor, to schools, civic, business, industrial, and other groups. One of these films was also produced in Spanish and furnished, along with slides and videotapes of Spanish announcements, to stations in areas with high concentrations of the Spanish-speaking.

Some 4,500 radio stations received recorded spots, scripts for live announcements, and a fact sheet. The Advertising Council reported 110,597,000 listener impressions via radio networks, again excluding audiences covered by individual station use of census material.

²Purchased for Bureau distribution, not counting copies sold by the Public Affairs Committee, Inc.

More than 200 radio stations in Spanish-speaking markets received recordings, plus other spots in Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban idioms. They also received a set of scripts for live announcements in Spanish and a special series of news releases. Taped conversations in the three idioms were sent to selected stations, directly and via regional offices. Two radio spots were translated into 23 languages for stations with ethnic or nationality programs.

Starting in early February, scripts and brief spot announcements were distributed among "soul" stations and to individual disc jockeys. These followed a series of census items sent for more than a year preceding the census to newspapers and radio stations reaching black audiences. In March a recording of census messages by prominent black political and show business personalities was provided to 150 stations.

The Secretary of Commerce and the Director of the Bureau of the Census appeared on several network news programs, as well as pretaped TV-radio programs for national or regional audiences and on a variety of locally produced live programs. One radio network featured a series of interviews with a ranking Bureau official on four weekends in March. Bureau personnel and information coordinators on loan from the Department of Commerce appeared on news and discussion programs and helped produce census specials for television and radio in a number of large cities. Several educational television stations produced documentary-type census programs.

The President of the United States taped a 2-minute talk about the census that was distributed among radio networks for broadcast the morning of March 30. His message gave weight to a radio campaign also aimed at general and special audiences. The President also issued his census proclamation in March, and similar statements were solicited from governors and mayors throughout the country. More than 200 such documents were filed later with the Bureau.

OTHER SPECIAL ACTIVITIES

In mid-February 1970, the Bureau dispatched five public information specialists to coordinate publicity in the New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Detroit, and Los Angeles areas. In addition, the Department of Commerce provided experienced personnel to assist Bureau coordinators in three of those cities and to take charge of activity in four other areas--Boston, Cleveland, Dallas, and San Francisco. When feasible, community education specialists also served as local liaisons for the Bureau's public information office.

Bureau personnel put forth a special effort during the census followup period after April 1 in certain

large cities. Sound trucks and paid advertising in certain newspapers and by certain radio and television stations were used to inform the public of the followup effort (see p. 84 above).

It was recognized from the start that conventional avenues of communication with minority groups were essential but far from sufficient.

A black member of the public information staff was assigned specifically to publicize the census through "soul" stations and black press. During almost 2 years he personally visited nearly 100 stations and newspapers and prepared broadcast spots, news releases, leaflets, and recordings of endorsements by black personalities as aids to coverage improvement in black communities.

To expand the program for Spanish-American communities, the Bureau retained a consulting firm and a Mexican-American advisor to prepare materials and generate cooperation in selected areas. These efforts were bolstered by active support of the Cabinet Committee on Opportunities For Spanish Speaking People (known as the Inter-Agency Committee on Mexican American Affairs until December 1969).

The U.S. Departments of State and Defense, as well as firms whose house organs reached personnel overseas, helped publicize the census among Americans abroad. Through the Office of Education some 500,000 persons with limited reading and writing skills received questionnaire instructions in adult education classes.

PROGRAM EXPENSES

In all, the Advertising Council traced the use of Census '70 material worth \$10 million in media space and time. Approximately 2,550 of an estimated 4,400 radio and television stations broadcast public service announcements advertising the 1970 census and carried approximately 51,000 news stories about it. The commercial value of this service was estimated at \$3.7 million; about \$2.15 million of this was contributed by about 2,200 radio stations and \$1.55 million by about 350 television stations.

Bureau expenditures directly attributable to the public information program amounted to approximately \$495,000. This included about \$337,000 for printing, films, and other contract work, plus approximately \$158,000 in salaries, travel, and benefits specifically assigned to the 1970 census. Arbitrary prorating of overall PIO personnel and related expenses to the decennial census would result in an increase in the above costs by some \$200,000.