RETHINKING U.S. CENSUS RACIAL AND ETHNIC CATEGORIES

SHARON M. LEE [1] and SONYA M. TAFOYA[2]

[1] Direct correspondence to Sharon M. Lee, Department of Sociology, University of Victoria, Victoria, B.C. V8W 3P5, Canada; (250) 721-7572; (250) 721-6217 (fax); sml@uvic.ca.

[2] Center for Families, Children, and the Courts, San Francisco, CA 94102; sonya.tafoya@jud.ca.gov.

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ABSTRACT

Racial and ethnic categories in the U.S. census have continually changed. In this paper, we address the question: How do high levels of immigration and a growing multiracial population challenge census racial and ethnic categories? We examined data from the 2000 Census 5 percent IPUMS to compare racial responses of native- and foreign-born Hispanics, Asians, and Middle Easterners, and native-born multiracial Hispanics, Asians, and Middle Easterners, by ancestry. The relationship between race and ancestry can be instructive. If people understand and identify with census racial categories, we expect considerable overlap between their reported race and ancestry. For some groups, including Europeans, Africans, and Middle Easterners (regardless of nativity) and foreign-born Asians, we found that ancestry and race overlapped well. However, a serious challenge to current census racial categories is the large and growing numbers of people who reported Some Other Race (SOR) alone (primarily non-Cuban Hispanics) or in combination with another race (a diverse population that includes multiracial Hispanics, Middle Easterners, and Asians). We discuss possible changes to how the census collects racial and ethnic data, including merging the current race and Hispanic questions, dropping the SOR category, and adding the ancestry question to the short-form census, changes that may more effectively meet statistical, government, and other needs.

Keywords: Race, Ethnicity, Ancestry, U.S. Census

I. INTRODUCTION

Three separate but overlapping concepts are involved in considering how the U.S. Census tracks racial and ethnic trends in the U.S. population: race, ethnicity, and ancestry. Currently, federal agencies, including the Census Bureau, follow guidelines provided by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) on racial and ethnic statistics.[11] In the 2000 Census, data on race and ethnicity were collected from every household on the short form while data on ancestry were collected from a sample of households on the long form.[16] The 2010 Census will differ from the 2000 and previous censuses because only the short form will be used.[1]

i. Race and Racial Categories

The United States has a long history of collecting racial statistics, beginning with the first census in 1790. In this history, the U.S. Census plays a key role as both collector and disseminator of racial statistics for the nation. For much of this history, racial statistics functioned to maintain a social order and policies that excluded non-White groups from civil and political rights. For example, non-Whites such as Chinese were excluded from immigrating to the United States when Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, an exclusion that was later extended to all Asians. Asian immigrants were also denied the right to naturalization. Census data were used to formulate restrictive immigration laws in the 1920s to severely limit immigration of undesirable groups, including southern, central, and eastern European groups who were

[1] The U.S. Census Bureau is preparing for what is termed a "reengineered" census in 2010, using only the short form. The content of the 2010 Census is currently being tested and evaluated. In the 2000 Census, the short form was sent to every household and asked for information on race, Hispanic ethnicity, age, and sex for each person in the household. Questions that had been on the long-form in the 2000 and previous censuses are part of the American Community Survey, an annual household survey that is intended to replace the long-form beginning with the 2010 Census. See the Census Bureau's website for additional details (www.census.gov).

often referred to as races then. Race-based policies have restricted or denied Blacks, American Indians, and other non-Whites access to voting, education, employment, and housing, and anti-miscegenation laws even extended race-based policies into the private personal sphere of marriage.

The era of civil rights dramatically changed the role of racial statistics. In civil rights court cases, racial statistics were used to document racial discrimination and injustice in education, employment, housing, and elections. New laws and policies were consequently implemented to redress institutional and systemic racial inequalities.

In their contrasting roles as maintainer or redresser of racial inequality, racial statistics shared a similar fundamental premise: that is, the population can be categorized into distinct, separate, mutually exclusive racial groups. This was the regime until the 2000 census. It is a common misperception that there has always been a consistent understanding and measurement of race in federal statistics.[1,7] In the past, race was understood as a biological concept. Today, there is general consensus that race and ethnicity are social constructions, that is, the definitions and measurements of race and ethnicity are mainly shaped by history, political, social, cultural, and other factors, and are therefore dynamic, as illustrated by changes in the number and labels of racial categories from census to census.[7,18]

The U.S. population has grown and changed dramatically since the 1790 Census. How the census categorizes and counts the U.S. population by race has also changed, reflecting demographic trends as well as political and social forces. Almost every census for the past two hundred years has collected racial data differently than the one before it. This is a key point to bear in mind, because it means that the notion of maintaining

comparable census data is not a valid argument against future changes in how the census categorizes and collects racial statistics.

Current guidelines on racial and ethnic data collection are set by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and are based on Statistical Directive 15, issued in 1977.[11] Directive 15 was designed to bring consistency to how federal agencies collected and presented racial and ethnic statistics. In response to demographic, social, and political changes in the 1990s [3], the OMB issued new guidelines on racial and ethnic data in 1997.[11] The revised guidelines were used in the 2000 Census, as described below.

The first change was the shift to allow Americans to report more than one race in the 2000 Census (see Figure 1, Question 6). The change to allow reporting of multiple races in the 2000 Census was primarily driven by the growing population of Americans with multiple racial origins in recent years. Racial intermarriage rates have been increasing since the 1970s.[8] Multiracial Americans and their advocates argued successfully for the 2000 Census to allow multiracial reporting.[3] With the 2000 Census, census racial categories took on the additional function of reflecting affirmation of multiracial identity by the growing population of multiracial Americans.

- Figure 1 Here -

A second notable feature in the 2000 Census was the inclusion of the racial category, "Some Other Race", on the census form even though the OMB's 1997 revised guidelines on race listed only five official racial categories. These are: White, African American/Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander. With OMB's approval, the Census Bureau included a sixth racial

category, “Some Other Race”, in the 2000 Census, as in several prior censuses. This was intended to reduce non-response to the race question by Hispanics, particularly Hispanics of Mexican-origin who are most likely to choose this category because they do not identify with existing racial categories. Mexican-origin Hispanics are among the largest groups of immigrants in recent years, and like many immigrants, are unfamiliar with the standard racial categories in the U.S. Census, and often find them inappropriate.

ii. Ethnicity: Hispanic/Non-Hispanic

As the Hispanic population rapidly grew fueled by high levels of immigration in recent decades, a question on Hispanic origin was first asked of sub-samples in the 1970 census. Beginning with the 1980 census, every household was asked about the Hispanic origin of its occupants. The measurement of ethnicity in the U.S. census is also guided by OMB guidelines which currently define ethnicity in terms of Hispanic/non-Hispanic status. This was how ethnicity was defined in the 1977 Statistical Directive 15, a definition that continues till today. This is a limiting and unusual conception of ethnicity and differs from conventional social scientific understanding of ethnicity to refer to any group with distinct cultural characteristics. OMB guidelines consider ethnicity to be a separate concept from race; thus, Hispanics can be any race. In the 2000 Census, the Hispanic ethnicity question preceded the race question, a change that was designed to increase Hispanics’ response rates to both the race and Hispanic questions (see Figure1, Question 5).

iii. Ancestry

In addition to the two questions on race and Hispanic ethnicity, the U.S. Census had also asked a question on ancestry (see Figure 1, Question 10). Unlike the race and

Hispanic ethnicity questions, the ancestry question was asked only of a sample of households in the 2000 and previous censuses. Ancestry data were used to supplement data on race and Hispanic ethnicity to provide a statistical portrait of the U.S. population.[2] Ancestry data were also used by the Census Bureau to impute race and Hispanic ethnicity when such data were missing.

While the three concepts – race, ethnicity, and ancestry – are distinct and are measured differently by the U.S. Census, they overlap considerably. For example, an individual who reports White race can be Hispanic or non-Hispanic (since Hispanics can be any race and in the 2000 Census, about half of Hispanics reported White race only) and is likely to report an ancestry that is associated with being White racially (for example, English or Swedish or Spanish). At the same time, the overlaps between race, Hispanic ethnicity, and ancestry may not be so evident for some sub-populations. For example, as discussed above, an immigrant from Mexico or the Middle East may not identify with OMB's list of five official races. For such individuals, race, ethnicity, and ancestry may not map in expected ways.

An additional important factor in thinking about racial, ethnic, and ancestry data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau is the changes in mode of data collection over time. Prior to the 1970 census, census enumerators visited each household and determined a person's race by observation. The 1970 census form was designed to be completed by respondents rather than an enumerator, so respondents chose their race from a list of racial categories provided. Beginning with the 1980 census, responses to the race and Hispanic origin questions were based primarily on self-identification as most census questionnaires were received by mail. Shifts in mode of data collection by the census

also reflect how the U.S. Census Bureau has come to define race, ethnicity, and ancestry as self-identification items.

Interracial unions, including intermarriage, and immigration have continued into the 21st century, with important consequences for the future racial and Hispanic composition of the U.S. population.[4] These trends continue to motivate discussions of how best to measure and track the changing racial and ethnic populations of the United States, and whether current OMB guidelines should be revised.[12]

In this paper, we focus on three sub-populations: Hispanics, Asians, and Middle Easterners. Hispanics are the largest minority in the U.S. and immigration is a key factor in recent growth of the U.S. Hispanic population. As discussed earlier, many Hispanics, particularly those of Mexican origins, do not identify with OMB's guidelines on official racial categories. Hispanic intermarriage rates are relatively high, especially among native-born Hispanics, which will further blur racial boundaries for growing numbers of Hispanics who are children of intermarried Hispanics.[9] The large and growing Hispanic population therefore poses a critical challenge for the collection of racial and ethnic data.

The Asian population has also experienced substantial growth in recent years because of immigration.[17] In addition, similar to Hispanics, native-born Asians have fairly high intermarriage rates, with implications for how children of intermarried Asians identify racially.[8]

Finally, we include people of Middle Eastern ancestries in our analysis because this sub-population has been advocating for a separate racial category for its members on the census although OMB decided against this in revising racial and ethnic data guidelines in

1997.[3,11] Middle Easterners are a diverse population that includes people of Arab, Turkish, Israeli and Moroccan origins. Many are Muslims and many individuals from this sub-population do not identify as White, which is how they are categorized under current guidelines. As the population of people of Middle Eastern ancestries increase through immigration and natural increase, it too will further challenge current racial categories and guidelines.

II. DATA AND METHODS

We analyze data from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) 5 percent sample of Census 2000 to illustrate some of the challenges to current racial and ethnic categories. [14] The data analysis for this paper was generated using SAS/STAT software, Version 9.1.3 of the SAS System for Windows XP 64-bit OS (Copyright © 2005 SAS Institute Inc.).[2] Because immigration levels and the percent foreign-born in the U.S. are approaching historical peak levels,[17] we compare how immigrants and the native-born respond to the race question, given their self-reported ancestry. An examination of the relationship between race and ancestry can be instructive. If respondents understand and identify with the racial categories provided in the census, then there should be overlap between their responses to the race question and their reported ancestry or ancestries. For example, a person who reported her race as White only is expected to report an ancestry that is consistent with reported White race, for example, English or German ancestry.

In the 2000 Census, 59 percent of respondents reported at least one ancestry; another 22 percent reported two ancestries and the remaining 19 percent did not report an

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ancestry.[2] In this paper, we examine the race/ancestry profiles for individuals who reported one ancestry.

We first compare race responses of individuals who reported the same ancestry, for native- and foreign-born Hispanics and non-Hispanics separately. If the foreign-born view race in the same way that the native-born do, their responses to the race question, given a common ancestry response, should be similar. In the comparison of non-Hispanics, we highlight Asian ancestry groups, who are the main groups among the foreign-born. Second, we examine the relationship between race and ancestry responses for native- and foreign-born Middle Easterners. Finally, we compare reported races of native-born Hispanics, Asians, and Middle Easterners who reported more than one race because we expect such responses will shed additional light on the complexity and ambiguity of race for these individuals.[5,15] In this analysis, we limit our examination to the native-born because the proportions reporting more than one race are generally low among the foreign-born.

Generally, we select the ten to fifteen most commonly reported ancestry groups for native-born and foreign-born Hispanics, non-Hispanics, and Middle Easterners. In the case of Hispanics, we added three more ancestry categories that are related to Mexican ancestry. For example, the most common Mexican ancestry response was "Mexican;" however, additional ancestries such as "Mexicano/Mexicana", "Mexican American", and "Mexican State" were also frequently reported.

III. RESULTS

i. Hispanics

We begin with a comparison of native- and foreign-born Hispanics. Table 1 shows the relationship between ancestry and race for native-born Hispanics. Close to half (48 percent) reported White race alone and 43 percent reported Some Other Race (SOR) alone (see last line, Table 1). The corresponding figures for foreign-born Hispanics show 46 percent reporting as White only and 47 percent reporting SOR only (see last line, Table 2). Foreign-born Hispanics were slightly less likely to report as White and more likely to report as SOR, suggesting that native-born Hispanics may be more familiar with the standard official racial scheme in the U.S., which does not include SOR, or that various factors helped increase racial identification as White among native-born Hispanics, including intermarriage with White non-Hispanics.[3]

- Tables 1 and 2 Here -

Reported race among Hispanic groups varied by ancestry. The majority of Hispanics who reported Cuban, Colombian, Spanish, or Spaniard ancestries reported their race as White only. The remaining Hispanic ancestry groups reported racially as either White or Some Other Race (SOR) in roughly equal proportions.

A comparison of Tables 1 and 2 suggests little difference by nativity in the relationship between reported ancestry and race for most Hispanic ancestry groups with two exceptions -- those who reported either Mexican or Spaniard as their ancestries. Among the foreign-born who reported Mexican ancestry, 41 percent reported White race alone and the majority, 54 percent, reported as SOR alone. Among the native-born who

[3] We further examined foreign-born Hispanics by period of arrival to the U.S. (before 1990; 1990 and later). We expected foreign-born Hispanics who have resided in the U.S. longer to be more similar to native-born Hispanics in their reported race, given a common ancestry. However, there were little or no differences by period of arrival. We therefore do not show and discuss these results. This was also the case with foreign-born non-Hispanics and Middle Easterners.

reported their ancestry as Mexican, almost half (49 percent) reported their race as White alone while 46 percent identified racially as SOR alone. Thus, among native-born Mexican Hispanics, there were two related shifts: increased propensity to identify racially as White and reduced propensity to identify as SOR.

Whereas foreign-born Hispanics who identified their ancestry as Mexican were less likely to report themselves as White compared with their native-born counterparts, the opposite pattern was observed for Hispanics who reported their ancestry as Spaniard. A large majority of foreign-born Hispanics of Spaniard ancestry (82 percent) reported their race as White only and just 12 percent reported as SOR only (see Table 2). Native-born Hispanics of Spaniard ancestry were less likely to report their race as White only (69 percent) and 25 percent reported SOR racially (see Table 1).

The decline in the proportion of native-born Hispanics of Spaniard ancestry reporting as White only, compared with their foreign-born counterparts, may reflect changes in these individuals' understanding of "White" race in the United States. This shift was also observed among native-born Hispanics of Cuban, Spanish, and Colombian ancestries, although to much smaller extents. The opposite pattern exemplified by Hispanics of Mexican ancestry is quite intriguing and may be related to intermarriage with Whites.[8,9] However, the key point remains that for Hispanics as a whole, current OMB guidelines on race are problematic. Almost half of foreign-born Hispanics and 43 percent of native-born Hispanics identified as SOR, which is not an official racial category. One interpretation of the slight reduction in the proportion reporting as SOR among native-born Hispanics may be that native-born Hispanics are becoming familiar with official racial categories and are identifying with them. However, among the main

Hispanic ancestry groups (Mexican, Cuban, and Puerto Rican), only Cubans appear to find current racial categories appropriate, with the majority identifying as White.[4]

ii. Non-Hispanics

- Tables 3 and 4 Here -

The main ancestry groups reported by the non-Hispanic population include African American, European, and Asian ancestries (see Tables 3 and 4). We included the main Asian ancestry groups in Tables 3 and 4 even though the numbers and proportions are not large because the Asian population is among the fastest growing sub-population.

The overwhelming majority of native-born non-Hispanics identified racially as White only (77 percent), with another 18 percent reporting Black race only, reflecting the demographic history of the U.S. (see last line, Table 3). Native-born persons of European ancestries overwhelmingly reported White race only and native-born persons of African American ancestry overwhelmingly reported Black race only. For the native-born White and Black populations, the overlap between race and ancestry is almost complete.

In contrast, among foreign-born non-Hispanics, the proportions identifying as White or Black were much lower (39 percent and 12 percent, respectively) while 42 percent reported Asian race, reflecting recent large immigration flows from Asia (see last line, Table 4).

For most non-Hispanic groups, there is high overlap between ancestry and race. This overlap is especially notable among the foreign-born. For example, almost all foreign-born people of Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese ancestries reported an Asian

[4] It is interesting to ask what characteristics are associated with the propensity to identify as White, SOR, or other races. For example, are Hispanics with higher educational attainment more or less likely to report their race as White? We can ask similar questions of other ancestry groups. However, this and other questions related to choice of racial identity are beyond the scope of this paper.

race only; almost all foreign-born people of German, Italian, Polish, and English ancestries reported White race only (see Table 4).

When we compared race by ancestry groups by nativity, we found little or no difference among European ancestry groups – that is, reported race for the same ancestry groups did not differ substantially by nativity. For example, almost all people of German or Italian ancestries reported their race as White only, regardless of nativity.

While foreign-born individuals who reported Asian ancestries such as Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Korean or Vietnamese almost universally reported a race of Asian alone, among similar ancestry groups of the native-born, the proportions who reported an Asian race alone were lower while the proportions who reported more than one race grew. For example, just 1 percent of foreign-born Chinese reported more than one race, compared with 5 percent of native-born individuals who reported Chinese ancestry, and while just 2 percent of foreign-born individuals of Korean ancestry reported more than one race, 12 percent of the native-born did. Among the native-born, three Asian ancestry groups – Filipino, Korean, and Japanese – had more than 10 percent reporting multiple races. In addition, about five percent of native-born Asians of Filipino or Korean or Japanese ancestry reported their race as White only.

Two ancestry groups that are neither European nor Asian -- Jamaican and Haitian -- are included in Table 4. The majority in these two groups reported Black race only. However, unlike European and Asian ancestry groups, 8 percent of people reporting Jamaican ancestry and 14 percent of people reporting Haitian ancestry reported more than one race.

Therefore, among non-Hispanics, there seems to be generally good overlaps between race and ancestry, particularly among the foreign-born as well as for European and African ancestry groups. Only Asian ancestry groups display notable differences in the relationship between ancestry and race once we considered nativity. Native-born Asians appeared less bound to Asian racial categories, with sizable proportions reporting races other than Asian alone. For example, about 20 percent of native-born Asians of Filipino or Korean or Japanese ancestry did not report an Asian only race. These patterns are consistent with trends in intermarriage among native-born Asian Americans.[8] As these trends continue and grow, the overlap between Asian ancestry and race may further weaken among native-born Asian Americans.

iii. Middle Easterners

- Tables 5 and 6 Here -

Current guidelines on racial categories consider people of Middle Eastern origins to be White. We see from Tables 5 and 6 that the majority of this sub-population reported White race alone (last line, Tables 5 and 6). Higher proportions of the native-born reported their race as White (86 percent) compared with 77 percent among the foreign-born, suggesting increased understanding and acceptance of racial categories by native-born Americans of Middle Eastern ancestries. Increased reporting as White by native-born Americans of Middle Eastern ancestries may also signal their knowledge of the U.S. racial hierarchy and the benefits of identification as White, a trend that was also observed among native-born Hispanics.

Fairly high proportions of Middle Easterners reported more than one race. The proportion is higher among the foreign-born, with over one-fifth reporting more than one

race compared with 13 percent among the native-born. This is surprising as multiple race reporting is expected to be higher among the native-born as a result of intermarriage and greater familiarity with the concepts of race and multiracialism. The high proportions of Middle Eastern people reporting more than one race may also indicate unfamiliarity and misunderstanding of the race question and racial categories.

Moroccans present a racial profile that is distinct from other Middle Eastern ancestry groups. While all other Middle Eastern ancestry groups displayed an increased trend to reporting White race among the native-born, the proportion of native-born individuals of Moroccan ancestry reporting White race is much lower than their foreign-born counterparts (36 percent versus 66 percent). Native-born people of Moroccan ancestry were also unusual in the relatively high proportion who reported Black race only (25 percent). In contrast, just 3 percent of foreign-born individuals of Moroccan ancestry had reported Black race only. The Moroccan ancestry group is therefore distinctive in two ways: first, U.S. birth is associated with decreased reporting as White, unlike all other Middle Eastern ancestry groups, and second, U.S. birth is associated with increased reporting as Black. For people of Moroccan descent, being born in the U.S. and socialization in the U.S. racial environment produced a greater identification with being Black.

iv. Ancestry and Multiraciality

- Table 7 Here -

Table 7 presents results from an examination of reported races by native-born Hispanics, Asians, and Middle Easterners who reported two races. We show the main

ancestry groups for each sub-population. Note that the main ancestry groups in Table 7 may differ from previous tables because it is based on persons who reported two races.

a. Hispanics

About 5 percent of native-born people reporting Hispanic ancestry reported two races. The two most common races reported were White and SOR, with 72 percent reporting this combination (see Table 7, Panel A, last line). Another 10 percent reported Black and SOR. Taken together, over 85 percent of multiracial Hispanics reported SOR as one of their races.

There were differences across Hispanic ancestry groups, further underlining the racial diversity of the Hispanic population. For example, most multiracial Hispanics of Mexican, Salvadoran, and Spanish ancestries reported their races as White and SOR (80 percent or more) but non-trivial proportions multiracial Hispanics of Puerto Rican and Dominican ancestries reported their races as Black and SOR (20 to 25 percent). Large proportions of Hispanics of Mexican-American Indian ancestry reported their races as White and American Indian (55 percent) or American Indian and SOR (33 percent).

b. Asians

About 11 percent of native-born people who reported Asian ancestries reported two races. Most Asians (over 60 percent) who reported two races reported White and an Asian race (see Table 7, Panel B, last line). Not surprisingly, the most common Asian race reported in combination with White race reflected the ancestry group; for example, 85 percent of multiracial Japanese reported White and Japanese races and 78 percent of multiracial Chinese reported White and Chinese races.

Fairly large proportions of some groups reported an Asian race and SOR; for example, 66 percent of multiracial Asians of Pakistani ancestry reported Pakistani race (Other Asian in Table 7) and SOR and almost 60 percent of multiracial Asians of Cambodian ancestry reported Cambodian race (Other Asian in Table 7) and SOR.

It appears that Asians in interracial unions have mainly White partners. If the option to allow more than one race reporting introduced in the 2000 Census continues, most multiracial Asians will probably be able to respond using current official racial categories. However, a smaller proportion of multiracial Asians reported Asian and SOR races. Thus, the numbers of people resorting to the SOR category appears to be expanding to include people of Asian ancestries who are multiracial.

c. Middle Easterners

The role of interracial unions in the growth of the SOR population is evident when we examined multiracial Middle Easterners (see Table 7, Panel C). About 12 percent of native-born people of Middle Eastern ancestries reported two races. Of these, about 80 percent reported their races as White and SOR, which is higher than the proportion among multiracial Hispanics. The next most common combination was White and Asian races (16 percent).

Most Middle Eastern ancestry groups display the overall pattern of predominantly White and SOR multiraciality, followed by White and Asian multiraciality. The sole exception was Moroccans. Multiracial Moroccans were most likely to report their races as Black and SOR (54 percent), followed by other combinations and White/SOR (about 20 percent each).

Interracial unions involving people of Middle Eastern ancestries is generating further growth of the SOR population given the racial responses of multiracial people with Middle Eastern ancestries.

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

We approached this paper beginning with the observation that racial and ethnic categories in the U.S. census have continually changed in response to demographic trends and social and political forces. We had a fairly straightforward research question: How do high levels of immigration and a growing multiracial population challenge the way in which the census collects and disseminates racial and ethnic data? To address this question, we compared racial responses of native- and foreign-born Hispanics, Asians, and Middle Easterners, and native-born multiracial Hispanics, Asians, and Middle Easterners, by ancestry. We found that for some sub-populations, such as people of European and African ancestries, ancestry and race overlapped to a high degree. For these groups, current racial guidelines and categories appear to work well.

The role of nativity varied across groups and was complex. Foreign-born Asian ancestry groups, native-born African ancestry groups, and European ancestry groups (regardless of nativity) showed high overlaps between ancestry and race. Some Hispanic and Middle Eastern ancestry groups appeared to be "assimilating" into the U.S. racial system: higher proportions of the native-born reported White race (for example, native-born Mexican Hispanics and most Middle Eastern groups). Many factors may have contributed to this shift among the native-born, including intermarriage with Whites and greater understanding of the U.S. racial hierarchy where being classified as White brings certain benefits. The shift to higher likelihood of reporting White race among these sub-

groups has interesting implications for the changing meaning of White race in the U.S., as the White category expands to include more diverse groups that are not from "traditional" European ancestry groups. However, this process is not new as scholars have discussed the gradual "assimilation" of many sub-groups (including European sub-groups that were not considered White before) into the dominant White population over time.[6]

The large and growing numbers and proportions of people who reported Some Other Race (SOR) alone or in combination with another race pose an awkward challenge for the Census Bureau. Over 40 percent of all Hispanics reported SOR alone in the 2000 Census, with higher proportions among some Hispanic ancestry groups such as Mexicans and Puerto Ricans and foreign-born Hispanics. The numbers of people reporting SOR are also being increased through interracial unions. Our examination of reported races by native-born multiracial Hispanics, Asians, and Middle Easterners showed that SOR was reported by over 80 percent of multiracial Hispanics and Middle Easterners, and about 10 percent of multiracial Asians.

Many state and federal agencies do not offer the SOR option, and the Some Other Race is not recognized by OMB as an official race. Moreover, SOR is neither recognized as an official race in federal program administrative and grant reporting, nor for the purposes of civil rights compliance and monitoring. In the 2000 Census, OMB approved the inclusion of the SOR category with the intention of lowering non-response rates for those who did not identify with the standard racial categories. However, the inclusion of the SOR category created problems for the Census Bureau when it had to reconcile census data with that of other federal agencies that do not use the SOR category. In these

cases, the Census Bureau had to allocate a race to people who reported SOR on the census, a process that introduced potential errors and that also countered the Census Bureau's stance that race and ethnicity are self-reported items.

Results presented in this paper show that large numbers of people chose the SOR option in the 2000 Census. Our results also show that the majority of people who reported their race as SOR were of Hispanic origin (except for Cubans), but there are growing numbers of people of Middle Eastern and Asian ancestries who also reported SOR. It is therefore likely that the SOR population will continue to increase.

What does a growing SOR population mean for research and for federal government programs? Many researchers who study racial group differences do not investigate SOR as a category. Rather, because most respondents who choose SOR are Hispanic, researchers use the Hispanic ethnicity question to identify a Hispanic category that is examined along with the standard racial categories of White, Black, and Asian.

In recognition of some of the problems associated with the SOR category, the Census Bureau hoped to remove the SOR category in the 2010 Census, but Congress passed legislation in November 2005 requiring the inclusion of SOR in the 2010 Census. Some researchers have recommended dropping the SOR category as a racial option and merging the current questions on Hispanic origin and race, now asked separately (as shown in Figure 1). They suggest that if "Hispanic" is offered as a co-equal category in the merged question, this may actually increase response by Hispanics who are unfamiliar with the current format of having to answer separate questions on Hispanic origin and race.

Moreover, a combined question need not refer to "race" or "ethnicity", and can simply ask: Is this person _____? Eliminating reference to race and ethnicity is not a new idea; for example, the 1980 Census question on race did not mention race.[7] A combined question that did not refer to "race" or "ethnicity" would free the Census Bureau from having to explain why ethnicity and race are treated as separate concepts in the Census and why Hispanic/non-Hispanic ethnicity are singled out from other ethnicities in the Hispanic origin question.

A final argument in favor of a combined question is that data from a combined question would be more consistent with how other federal and state agencies collect data on race and Hispanic origin, and would be easily interpreted for civil rights monitoring and compliance.

If a combined question were used, it should still include the possibility of multiple responses. For example, we showed in this paper that native-born people of Asian ancestries who reported two races were for the most part able to choose from the racial categories presented in the 2000 Census. As interracial unions continue to increase, allowing multiracial people to report their racial backgrounds acknowledges demographic and social reality. An additional advantage of a merged race/Hispanic question is that this could be designed to allow people to report both Hispanic and non-Hispanic responses, an important reflection of Hispanic intermarriage and identification by offspring of Hispanic/non-Hispanic parents.[9]

Our analysis also showed the benefits of having ancestry data to help illuminate the complexities of how people respond to the census questions of race and Hispanic ethnicity, an endeavor that was used to great effect by Lieberson and Waters who

analyzed 1980 Census data.[10] If the combined census question were adopted, including an ancestry question on the short form would be helpful. This recommendation has been promoted by others.[12] If the census were to eventually adopt a combined race/Hispanic ethnicity question, data from the combined question together with ancestry data would provide the kind of information that would (i) allow the census to more accurately track and portray changes in the U.S. population; (ii) comply with Constitutional and federal legislative requirements; (iii) benefit researchers, policy analysts and makers, and others; and (iv) be likely to satisfy major concerns of most community advocacy groups. However, as long as racial and ethnic data are seen as necessary and useful, debates over whether and how the census categorizes and collects data on race and ethnicity will undoubtedly continue.

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Table 1. Race distribution of Native-born Hispanics by Ancestry, 2000

	Percent Distribution by Race[a]								
Ancestry	White	Black	Asian	AI/AN	SOR	NH/OPI	Multiple	Total %[b]	N
Mexican	49	0	0	1	46	0	4	100	6,999,232
Mexican American	48	0	0	1	46	0	5	100	1,448,441
Mexicano/Mexicana	55	0	0	1	39	0	5	100	458,752
Mexican State	51	0	0	1	44	0	4	100	118,699
Puerto Rican	46	4	0	0	43	0	6	99	2,115,080
Hispanic	37	1	0	0	55	0	6	99	1,594,539
Spanish	58	1	0	1	35	0	6	101	747,728
Dominican	23	8	0	1	60	0	8	99	232,702
Cuban	84	3	0	0	10	0	3	100	229,843
Salvadoran	34	0	0	0	59	0	6	99	160,059
Colombian	60	1	0	0	32	0	7	100	96,085
Latino/Latina	30	2	0	0	62	0	6	100	82,412
Guatemalan	37	1	0	1	53	1	7	100	77,445
Spaniard	69	1	0	0	25	0	5	100	74,511
Ecuadorian	47	1	0	0	44	0	7	99	54,438
Peruvian	47	1	0	0	45	0	7	100	42,642
Honduran	43	8	0	1	42	0	7	101	40,767
Nicaraguan	55	1	0	0	36	0	7	100	38,224
Any other	51	8	1	5	25	1	9	100	1,216,811
Not Reported	84	3	0	1	10	0	3	101	2,942,016
Total	48	2	0	1	44	0	5	100	18,695,871

Notes:

[a] Each race category refers to responses to that category alone (for example, White=White Alone, AI/AN=American Indian/Alaska Native Alone, SOR=Some Other Race Alone, NH/OPI=Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander Alone). Multiple refers to more than one race.

[b] Total percent may not add to 100 because of rounding.

Source: Authors' tabulations from the 2000 5 percent IPUMS.

Table 2. Race Distribution of Foreign-born Hispanics by Ancestry, 2000

	Percent Distribution by Race[a]								
Ancestry	White	Black	Asian	AI/AN	SOR	NH/OPI	Multiple	Total %[b]	N
Mexican	41	0	0	1	54	0	3	99	6,071,128
Mexicano/Mexicana	54	0	0	1	38	0	7	100	1,352,498
Mexican State	46	1	0	1	49	0	4	101	183,939
Mexican American	46	1	0	1	48	0	4	100	55,999
Cuban	87	3	0	0	7	0	3	100	596,784
Hispanic	33	1	0	0	61	0	5	100	554,695
Salvadoran	35	0	0	0	58	0	6	99	549,735
Dominican	22	8	0	1	60	0	9	100	548,952
Colombian	62	1	0	0	29	0	8	100	393,212
Spanish	61	1	0	0	34	0	4	100	361,898
Guatemalan	37	1	0	1	54	1	7	101	317,148
Ecuadorian	48	1	0	0	43	0	8	100	209,998
Peruvian	46	0	0	1	46	0	7	100	183,270
Honduran	44	4	0	1	43	0	8	100	182,136
Nicaraguan	56	1	0	0	35	0	7	99	158,951
Spaniard	82	0	0	0	12	0	5	99	114,597
Latino/Latina	31	1	0	0	60	0	8	100	77,600
Venezuelan	66	2	0	1	24	0	7	100	57,969
Any other	51	7	3	2	28	0	9	100	520,030
Not Reported	46	2	0	1	44	0	7	100	1,417,514
Total	46	1	0	1	47	0	5	100	13,908,053

Notes: [a, b,] As in Table 1.

Source: Authors' tabulations from the 2000 5 percent IPUMS.

Table 3. Race Distribution of Native-born Non-Hispanics by Ancestry, 2000

	Percent Distribution by Race[a]								
Ancestry	White	Black	Asian	AI/AN	SOR	NHOPI	Multiple	Total %[b]	N
African American	0	99	0	0	0	0	1	100	21,635,209
German	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	100	15,197,197
Irish	99	0	0	0	0	0	0	99	9,198,561
English	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	100	8,632,859
Italian	99	0	0	0	0	0	1	100	6,806,895
Polish	99	0	0	0	0	0	0	99	3,120,256
French	99	1	0	0	0	0	1	100	1,763,048
Scottish	99	0	0	0	0	0	0	99	1,509,529
French Canadian	99	0	0	0	0	0	1	100	1,123,302
Dutch	99	0	0	0	0	0	0	99	1,101,755
Asian Groups									
Filipino	5	0	79	0	0	0	15	99	597,837
Chinese	1	0	93	0	0	0	5	99	584,271
Japanese	6	0	81	0	0	0	13	100	521,395
Indian	3	1	90	0	0	0	6	99	309,493
Korean	6	0	79	0	1	0	14	100	258,755
Vietnamese	2	0	91	0	0	0	7	100	226,076
Asian	10	4	61	0	2	0	23	100	90,906
Any Other Ancestry	61	34	1	2	0	0	2	100	97,776,478
Not Reported	86	11	1	1	0	0	1	100	48,033,742
Total	78	18	2	1	0	0	1	100	170,453,822

Notes: [a, b,] As in Table 1.

Source: Authors' tabulations from the 2000 5 % IPUMS.

Table 4. Race Distribution of Foreign-born Non-Hispanics by Ancestry, 2000

	Percent Distribution by Race[a]								
Ancestry	White	Black	Asian	AI/AN	SOR	NH/OPI	Multiple	Total %[b]	N
Chinese	0	0	99	0	0	0	1	100	1,383,618
Filipino	1	0	96	0	0	0	3	100	1,157,833
Indian	0	1	92	0	2	0	4	99	1,041,040
Korean	1	0	98	0	0	0	2	101	827,289
Vietnamese	0	0	98	0	0	0	1	99	743,428
German	98	0	0	0	0	0	1	99	595,396
Italian	97	0	0	0	0	0	3	100	482,833
Jamaican	1	90	1	0	0	0	8	100	467,424
Russian	95	0	0	0	0	0	5	100	389,655
Haitian	0	85	0	0	0	0	14	99	352,019
English	98	1	0	0	0	0	1	100	322,578
Japanese	1	0	97	0	0	0	2	100	303,694
Ukrainian	96	0	0	0	0	0	4	100	225,850
Iranian	79	0	1	0	0	0	20	100	224,363
Taiwanese	0	0	96	0	0	0	4	100	211,958
Any Other Ancestry	52	17	20	0	1	1	9	100	7,908,012
Not Reported	39	15	38	0	2	1	5	100	1,301,817
Total	39	12	42	0	1	0	6	100	16,363,990

Notes: [a, b,] As in Table 1.

Source: Authors' tabulations from the 2000 5 % IPUMS.

Table 5. Race Distribution of Native-born Middle Easterners by Ancestry, 2000

	Percent Distribution by Race[a]								
Ancestry	White	Black	Asian	AI/AN	SOR	NH/OPI	Multiple	Total %[b]	N
Lebanese	94	0	0	0	0	0	5	99	161,518
Armenian	93	0	0	0	0	0	7	100	123,675
Iranian	83	0	1	0	0	0	15	99	71,869
Arab/Arabic	63	1	1	0	1	0	34	100	70,609
Syrian	95	0	0	0	0	0	5	100	47,470
Egyptian	75	3	0	0	2	0	21	101	32,998
Israeli	90	4	1	0	1	0	4	100	30,540
Palestinian	81	0	2	0	0	1	16	100	28,180
Turkish	89	0	0	0	1	0	9	99	23,287
Jordanian	79	0	0	0	0	0	21	100	12,460
Chaldean	86	0	1	0	0	0	13	100	11,871
Assyrian	86	0	0	0	0	0	14	100	11,680
Middle Eastern	73	0	1	0	0	0	26	100	9,681
Moroccan	36	25	7	1	3	0	28	100	8,970
Iraqi	79	0	1	0	0	0	21	101	5,717
Yemeni	65	0	3	0	0	0	32	100	4,016
Total	86	1	1	0	0	0	12	100	654,541

Notes: [a, b,] As in Table 1.

Source: Authors' tabulations from the 2000 5 % IPUMS.

Table 6. Race Distribution of Foreign-born Middle Easterners by Ancestry, 2000

	Percent Distribution by Race[a]								
Ancestry	White	Black	Asian	AI/AN	SOR	NH/OPI	Multiple	Total %[b]	N
Iranian	79	0	1	0	0	0	20	100	224,363
Armenian	81	0	0	0	0	0	18	99	159,693
Arab/Arabic	53	1	1	0	1	0	44	100	97,065
Egyptian	73	2	1	0	1	0	23	100	89,312
Lebanese	85	0	1	0	0	0	14	100	84,520
Turkish	82	0	1	0	0	0	17	100	62,448
Israeli	93	0	0	0	1	0	5	99	57,803
Palestinian	78	0	1	0	1	0	19	99	35,969
Syrian	82	0	1	0	1	0	16	100	31,536
Jordanian	77	0	1	0	0	0	22	100	24,905
Iraqi	75	0	1	0	0	0	23	99	22,106
Chaldean	85	0	0	0	0	0	15	100	21,447
Assyrian	82	0	0	0	0	0	18	100	20,972
Moroccan	66	3	1	0	5	0	25	100	19,061
Middle Eastern	62	0	4	0	0	0	34	100	13,208
Yemeni	60	2	2	0	0	0	35	99	6,056
Total	77	0	1	0	1	0	21	100	970,464

Notes: [a, b,] As in Table 1.

Source: Authors' tabulations from the 2000 5 % IPUMS.

Table 7. Race Distributions of Native-born Multiracial Hispanics, Asians, and Middle Easterners[a]

	Reported Combinations of Two Races[b]									
A. Hispanics Ancestry	White/ SOR	Black/ SOR	White/ AIAN	White/ Black	AIAN/ SOR	White/ Filipino	Filipino/ SOR	Any other combo	Total %	N
Mexican	81	5	4	1	4	1	1	4	100	248,658
Puerto Rican	60	18	1	10	2	0	0	8	100	115,861
Hispanic	78	11	2	2	2	0	1	4	100	92,157
Mexican American	87	2	4	1	2	0	0	2	100	76,059
Spanish	80	7	4	2	2	0	0	4	100	39,795
Mexicano/Mexicana	92	2	1	1	1	0	0	3	100	23,227
American	65	6	9	5	3	2	1	9	100	22,533
Dominican	49	25	1	15	4	0	0	7	100	16,978
Salvadoran	84	4	2	1	4	0	0	4	100	9,250
Mexican American Indian	10	1	55	0	33	0	0	1	100	8,254
Any other ancestry	55	11	7	5	5	2	1	14	100	113,511
Not Reported	66	9	6	5	3	1	1	10	100	174,551
Total	72	9	4	4	3	1	1	7	100	948,478

B. Asians

Ancestry	Other Asian/PI	Other Asian/ SOR	White/ Chinese	White/ Filipino	White/ Japanese	White/ Korean	White/ Other Asian	Any other combo[c]	Total %	N
Filipino	2	0	0	75	0	0	1	21	100	86,101
Japanese	4	3	0	0	85	0	1	6	100	64,832
Korean	0	3	0	0	0	83	1	13	100	34,034
Chinese	1	0	78	0	0	0	2	19	100	29,400
Other Asian	2	2	6	13	8	3	12	54	100	19,803
Indian	8	1	0	0	0	0	0	92	100	16,587
Vietnamese	1	11	0	0	0	0	1	88	100	12,724
Pakistani	1	66	0	0	0	0	18	15	100	10,030
Thai	4	12	1	0	0	0	65	18	100	7,205
Cambodian	7	57	0	0	0	0	18	18	100	6,226
Any other ancestry	12	24	10	1	2	1	11	39	100	30,808
Total	3	8	9	21	18	9	5	27	100	317,750

C. Middle Easterners

Ancestry	White/ SOR	White/ Asian	Black/ SOR	White/ Black	White/ AIAN	Any other combo	Total %	N
Arab/Arabic	83	14	1	1	0	1	100	23,703
Iranian	68	30	0	0	0	1	100	10,851
Egyptian	88	5	5	1	0	0	100	6,795
Turkish	69	25	0	3	0	3	100	2,098
Israeli	66	23	2	3	1	4	100	1,161
Armenian	93	5	0	1	1	1	100	8,699
Assyrian	79	20	0	0	0	1	100	1,681
Chaldean	82	16	0	0	0	2	100	1,569
Iraqi	79	17	0	0	1	2	100	1,176
Jordanian	69	29	0	0	0	2	100	2,580
Lebanese	84	12	0	1	2	1	100	7,870
Middle Eastern	80	18	0	1	0	1	100	2,440
Moroccan	19	5	54	1	0	20	100	2,483
Palestinian	86	13	0	0	0	0	100	4,381
Syrian	78	16	1	0	2	3	100	2,349
Yemeni	68	32	0	0	0	0	100	1,276
Total	79	16	3	1	1	2	100	81,112

Notes:

[a] Reported races of native-born Hispanics, Asians, and Middle Easterners who reported two races and at least one ancestry.

[b] SOR=Some Other Race; AIAN=American Indian or Alaska Native; Other Asian=Asian *race* other than those listed; and PI=Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.

[c] For this category, the most common combination is White/Indian for individuals of Indian ancestry and White/Vietnamese for individuals of Vietnamese ancestry.

Source: Authors' tabulations of 2000 5% IPUMS.

Figure 1: Hispanic, Race, and Ancestry Questions, 2000 Census

NOTE: Please answer BOTH Questions 5 and 6.

5. Is this person Spanish/Hispanic/Latino? *Mark* [X] *the **"No"** box if **not** Spanish/Hispanic/Latino.*
O **No**, not Spanish/Hispanic/Latino
O Yes, Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano
O Yes, Puerto Rican
O Yes, Cuban
O Yes, other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino - *Print group.*
[ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ]
[ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ]

6. What is this person's race? ***Mark*** **[X]** ***one or more races*** *to indicate what this person considers himself/herself to be.*

O White
O Black, African Am., or Negro
O American Indian or Alaska Native - *Print name of enrolled or principal tribe.*
[ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ]
[ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ]
O Asian Indian
O Chinese
O Filipino
O Japanese
O Korean
O Vietnamese
O Other Asian - *Print race.*
[ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ]
O Native Hawaiian
O Guamanian or Chamorro
O Samoan
O Other Pacific Islander - *Print race.*
[ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ]
O Some other race - *Print race.*
[ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ]

10. What is this person's ancestry or ethnic origin?
[ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ]
[ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ]
(For example: Italian, Jamaican, African Am., Cambodian, Cape Verdean, Norwegian, Dominican, French Canadian, Haitian, Korean, Lebanese, Polish, Nigerian, Mexican, Taiwanese, Ukrainian, and so on.)