

Kenneth Prewitt
Director
Bureau of the Census
Department of Commerce
Washington, D.C. 20233

17 March 2000

Dear Director Prewitt:

I am writing a series of articles about the 2000 census for Indigenous periodicals and several issues have been raised in the press for which I need answers. These issues are very important to Native American communities.

First, some people are concerned about the loss of anonymity if they put down their tribal affiliation in the Race question, because they may be the only person from their tribe in the particular census tract or even in the town or city. Will the tribal designation remain attached to any confidential information ?

Second, we are being told by a Native advisory group to the census that if we mark yes for the Hispanic category and then check American Indian in the race category, we will NOT BE COUNTED AS AMERICAN INDIAN. This is of tremendous concern because of the huge numbers of indigenous people in Florida, Texas, and the Southwest who have Spanish-surnames or who come from a Latin American country. Is this correct information, and if so, why does the Bureau favor the Hispanic count over the Native count?

Third, we are also being told that if we check more than one race under the race category that we will be aggregated in a racially-mixed category and not counted as American Indian. Is this so? If so, why would this be, when American Indian status is a matter of tribal affiliation or community identity and not a matter of "purity" of blood under federal law as well as tribal custom?

We are also being told that the Bureau still has the policy of "assigning" persons of Mexican and other Latin American origin to the "white" category when they select "other" or leave race blank or write in Mexican, Chicano, or some other term. Is this still Bureau policy? If so, why is this done, given the

overwhelming anthropological evidence that Mexicans are 80% of American Indian ancestry and only about 10% European?

Is it not correct that the OMB has redefined American Indian and Alaska Native to include all persons of pre-Columbian ancestry from North, South and Central America? Is this information being conveyed to census workers who will be helping people fill out their forms?

Your responses are needed so that Indian people can decide what to check on the forms if they are to protect their right to be counted as American Indian.

Sincerely yours,

Jack D. Forbes
Professor Emeritus
NATIVE AMERICAN STUDIES