

ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATORY RESEARCH
REPORT SERIES
(#2007-2)

**Toward the Social Meaning of the Census
to the Inner City Poor:
Considerations for the Census Undercount**

Elijah Anderson

University of Pennsylvania

Citation: Elijah Anderson. (1989) *Toward the Social Meaning of the Census to the Inner City Poor: Considerations for the Census Undercount*. Paper prepared for the U.S. Census Bureau. May 14 1989.

Report Issued: October 23, 2007

Disclaimer: This report is released to inform interested parties of research and to encourage discussion. The views expressed are those of the author and not necessarily those of the U.S. Census Bureau.

"Toward the Social Meaning of the Census to the Inner City Poor:
Considerations for the Census Undercount"

Elijah Anderson
Department of Sociology
University of Pennsylvania

Presented to the Bureau of the Census
Survey Methods Research Center
Washington, D.C. 14 May 1989

The issue of the undercount of poor, black, inner-city residents in the past two censuses has generated considerable controversy. Although no one disputes the fact of the undercount, there is substantial disagreement as to its significance and its cause. ¹ Prejudice in the Census Bureau has been cited in the past. A hostile attitude towards the poor black population has in the past resulted in indifference towards the gathering of accurate information, and hence in an inability to overcome the difficulties a thorough census-taking entails in so many poor inner city communities. In reaction to these realities, black leaders have on occasion raised objections to classification according to color, thus compounding the problem. But few commentators have considered the census from the point of view of the underclass itself. Many poor people, not to mention what seems to be growing numbers of the middle class who have become highly concerned about protecting their privacy from investigators, in fact have what they see to be "good" reasons of their own for not being counted or for providing inaccurate or misleading information to the census taker.

This paper examines the social meaning of the census for a conceptual category of black underclass residents of Philadelphia in the light of their feelings of alienation from the wider American society. The paper is based on social experience in local black neighborhoods and on ethnographic interviews of poor blacks, census enumerators, and shelter counselors from around the city. This is not a formal ethnographic study but rather a ethnographic representation of generalized attitudes and meanings with which such people approach the subject of "the census." It is a suggestive account that reflects my sense of what is true. Hence, these "unsystematic" data have resulted in

a number of observations which can be taken as important considerations for those concerned with public policy who are interested in enhancing and improving the quality of the census. As such, these ideas point to some of the reasons for the alienation that many poor people feel, while illuminating some of the practical ramifications resulting from misunderstandings about the purpose of the census.

Underenumeration is as old as the census itself.² There have always been people who have had cause to avoid being counted or to hide pertinent information from the census taker. Since the original purpose of the census in history was to determine the number of men available to fight and later the number of taxpayers, those seeking to avoid conscription or taxation were evasive. Even when the value of knowing the number of a nation's population apart from these considerations was realized, it proved impossible to gain the people's full confidence and thus their total co-operation. In prerevolutionary France, a census was attempted several times. However, since the very people responsible for raising soldiers and collecting taxes were enlisted to conduct it, the results of their work were so obviously³ incorrect as to be useless.

In the United States today, however, the Census Bureau is a separate agency with no ulterior motives. Why then are some people still unwilling to be enumerated? Alterman gives this answer:

The reason for the failure of a census to be completely inclusive lies in the fact that it is a social enterprise. It is affected by a nation's history, customs, and the patterns of thought of its people. Most of the failure can be traced to the answer that a nation gives to the question, "Who are people?"⁴

The sad but stark reality is that many of the persistently poor do not consider themselves "people" in the context of American society at large. Many are so alienated from the legitimate structures of society at all levels,

including federal and local agencies of social control, that a significant proportion are prepared to define their relationship with representatives of those agencies as a priori adversarial. Alterman continues:

A census is a cooperative undertaking between the enumerator, who represents the government, and the enumerated, the people. Whatever stands in the way of full cooperation tends to reduce the completeness of the census. 5

When a large number of citizens, in this case many who are persistently poor and many who are documented aliens, feels alienated from society and seeks to thwart the taking of the census, the results of the surveys are bound to be tainted with inaccuracies.

In approaching the problem of the census undercount, a number of issues emerge. Based upon my observations and interviews with working class to poor inner city black people, a basic question is: what is the social meaning of the census for lower-income black people residing in innercity neighborhoods?

The first thing that strikes the ethnographer on talking with many of the local residents is their profound ignorance or distrust of the stated goals of the census. The following account of an impoverished and elderly black man of a local inner city area expresses a mixture of ignorance, distrust, but also a willingness to comply with the census enterprise, to carry out what he viewed as his civic duty.

The census is necessary. It's necessary! I don't like doin' it, but we got to do it. See, years ago where I was raised (South Carolina), we had to go to the courthouse to register. They call it City Hall up here, but we called it the courthouse down there. They call themselves taking the census. We did it. You need it to get your birth certificate, or your discharge, you know stuff like that. Up here, so many people think they [Government] tryin' to be nosey, trying to get into they business, you know. I know a lot of people like that. But you know, there have been a lot of people who done got burned by it [the census]. They let they business out, and then they welfare check stop. But we do need it.

Despite the claims of public officials, many such residents cannot see that

it is in their interest at all. Rather, they tend to see the census enterprise as a bother, an intrusion into their lives, or as actually dangerous, having the potential of bringing the law down on the respondent. Further, some people also feel that the census is in league with their "enemies" (the white gentrifiers) and/or competitors (Asians setting up businesses in poor black neighborhoods). On the other hand, there are people who welcome it, who even take a certain pride in being interviewed, thus giving all the information the census taker asks for, and then some. These are people who tend to feel their co-operation is required by law, or is even their patriotic duty, which they take very seriously. Strikingly, they seem not to mind too much such intrusions into their lives.

The "census" to a good number of poor people represents a worrisome intrusion into their lives, one that many are not really willing to accept or accomodate. The following field note is illustrative:

I visited Mr. Roberts' barbershop in Southwest Philadelphia in order to observe census takers interviewing respondents. The census takers were two middle-aged black women, Mary Howard and Shirley Townsend. Mr. Roberts' complained that he was busy, and that the women should come back another time to interview him. Mary Howard persisted, though, and he gave in. He grudgingly gave up information. This attitude seems to have affected the attitude of his son, Gerry, who was standing nearby. And when it came his turn to be interviewed, he was something less than forthcoming, though he did answer most of the questions they put to him.

After awhile, we left Mr. Roberts' shop and travelled around the corner to one of the rowhouses nearby. We knocked on three successive doors, all to no avail, for the women inside were busy with dinner. Mary later told me that the women were generally more co-operative than the men. The men were usually reticent, particularly when a male was interviewing them. After having no success with these people, we drove to another area. This, too, proved to be fruitless, though we did gain a look at the neighborhood, observing blacks and poor whites living together on a narrow street in Southwest Philadelphia.

In many ways, it is not the census as such that is the problem, but rather it

is the sense that people have of it (of the taking of it) as being such a bother. The "papers in the mail"; i.e., the census forms themselves, are long and overly complicated for many poor residents. In dealing with the chore of completing the form, many simply put it off; they may not reject it outright, they "just never get around to it." The census enterprise takes on little importance in their lives. When the subject of the census taker, a remembered presence from the past, is brought up, residents offer negative comments along with knowing smiles. As one innercity resident put it:

I don't think nothin'. They incorrect, they're not right. I don't think nothin' of the census. It's an honest-to-goodness waste of time. When they come out to take the census, half the people not home. People workin', and they don't come back. I tell 'em what they want to know. I don't think nothin' of the whole shebang. I know they dole out money according to how many people here and how many is there, but they don't start the thing right to begin with. They should work people in shifts where they can get everybody. They send people out at nine, ten o'clock in the morning so they get [count some people], so they don't get, so that's that. Just a waste of time.

Numerous inner city residents think of the enumerator (inner city residents have a recollection of such a person from past years) as a stranger who has not yet negotiated a good place within their own social orbit, and hence he or she must be kept at some distance. But more than this, the intruder is viewed as prying into their lives, effectively trying to gain personal information about them. Here the social importance of such personal information and privacy should not be underestimated, as it is one of the few things in life that persistently poor people can maintain some sense of control over. In the context of the census enterprise, in effect, they may see themselves risking control of this very important resource.

Gender

Another factor in determining the success of the census enterprise is that

6
2720

of gender. Whether the respondent is male or female affects the outcome of the interview. Some minority men are intimidated by white men in authority positions. Some black working class men take issue at being interviewed by a white man; the social interaction is often very delicate, and must be deftly negotiated in order to be successful.

Also important, whether the minority woman is married or single can be an important issue. Whether the woman's husband is at home is a consideration. Many working class and poor men demand that their wives clam up when confronted by an interviewer in their presence. Too much talking makes the husband look bad, and the woman knows it and may remain quiet for fear of getting into a fight with her husband after the census taker leaves. If a man is around but out of sight, a woman may declare he is not around. In fact, his presence may be part-time.

This relates to the structure of male/female relations in black, inner-city communities. As Hainer has aptly pointed out,⁸ the family structure among poor blacks is different from that of the middle class to which the census forms are geared. People in the inner city often cannot be categorized according to the definitions used by the census enumerator, and respondents shy from those categorizations which imply kinds of relationships which do not accurately describe their living arrangements. The status of men is a particularly delicate point. Among these men, personal freedom is a very important value.⁹ In domestic situations, men often want to "come as I want and to go as I please". If a man is to be involved, the relationship often must be on his terms. And given the severe shortage of men in the black community, and the way in which this affects the social value of "a man" for the women, many women will very often accede to his wishes, including specific conditions he places upon the conjugal relationship. In this way the man can take advantage

of something of a buyer's market in matters of male/female relations. This has led to a kind of "serial monogamy" among some men. Consistent with this, the man is thus able to be absent from the home situation for a while, playing his conjugal role in a part-time manner, often on his own terms.

But if the man is not to be found in these domestic situations, then where is he to be found? A number of the men spend a large portion of their time on ghetto streetcorners, socializing with their "running buddies" and friends. Others spend a good portion of their time working; some work two or more jobs in order to make ends meet. And still others, a large and undetermined number, are to be found in the local jails and prisons. As one informant said:

Black men is gone or either in jail somewhere, for a crime they committed years ago. Where's the men? Somewhere. I went to a wedding and stuff, and wasn't nothin' but a bunch o' women there. I said, "Damn, where the men at! Where the men at!" And a lot o' 'em be in jail. But some o' 'em be workin' or whatever, you know. 'Cause my man, he worked that day I went to a wedding, you know. Yeah, they be gone with somebody else, or they on the streets beggin' or stealing. And that's where they at. Or working. You got 'em workin', beggin', stealin', in jail, that's where they at. You go in jail, look at all them men in jail. G-- d--, look at all them men in jail. It's a lot of 'em in there. There's a lot of 'em in jail. Like, G-- d--, I went to visit my brother one day. I say, G-- d--, look at all 'dese men! That's where they at. That's why welfare can't go after half of 'em. 'Cause they incarcerated. Gone.

People are loathe to discuss this state of affairs with an outsider (the census enumerator) or to "put out" such information on an anonymous census form.

In talking with people connected with local shelters for the homeless, it becomes clear that the response rate is greatly influenced by whether one is male or female, or whether one is gaining something from the shelter, or simply "out there." It appears that so many of those who use the shelters are minority women and children, and these people tend to be very cooperative with the census taker. On the "night of census" for the homeless, they were the ones who gave up information most freely, as though they are trying to reciprocate for their room and board, and they are thus quite receptive to the speeches given in

support of the census enterprise. The men of these families are often to be found on the streets, in the alleys, and on the vents of the city. These individuals are the least cooperative, for they perceive nothing "in it for them," and often they are deeply alienated from the more conventional society.

Danger

There are numerous people who are very easily intimidated by the prospect of being interviewed by census enumerators and see danger in the situation. Many of these individuals see sinister motivations from the taking of the census. Ideologically, they have come to believe that the "powers that be" have concocted a grand scheme to undermine black people, and particularly the urban poor. The plan involves "gentrification," the influx of "Koreans into black neighborhoods" as merchants, the proliferation of drugs, and high unemployment in the ghetto community. Thus, to stand up and to be counted is sensed to aid in the community's destruction, and by implication oneself at the hands of the powerful. In order to have an effective census, residents must be disabused of these beliefs. But the worsening urban economic situation provides fertile ground for the spread of such ideologies.

For many of those people who believe most deeply in "the plan" may be counted among those often living at or near the very margin of economic survival. Many feel deep alienation toward the wider society. And in trying to survive, many of these residents with few compunctions may be actively engaged in the inner-city "underground economy", or they may know friends and relatives who are. Some may be involved in activities they know are illegal, and justify their involvements in the name of survival, or that "everybody else" is doing it. And even if they are not actively involved in this underground economy, they may envision the day when they, too, may be drawn into it, again for rea-

sons of economic survival. The following fieldnote is illustrative:

On a Sunday night, I visited a laundromat in a local underclass area. After speaking with the elderly black manager for about thirty minutes, a young black man appeared. The young man was about 35 years of age. The older man was his stepfather. The young man was looking for his sister, and wondered if the older man had seen her. In the course of the exchange, the young man revealed that he had moved around three times in the course of two months, and that he presently "got a real job," instead of working in "the streets," in the underground economy. The implication was that the real job was preferable, because of its dependability. Yet, the young man was more than willing to work in the streets, if he "had to." Another implication of this was that such a person would normally have little to say to a census enumerator, particularly since he was so recently involved in the underground economy.

Moreover, for so many of the people, the underground economy is a real presence, at times in the form of minor crimes or of drug dealing to get by financially. People may not necessarily be directly involved in it, but great numbers of people participate in it in the sense of using it to buy something of value cheaply, to get by. They may not become directly involved in crime, but they know that, if given the choice, say, when coming upon a "bargain", they might participate in it. Given that many low-income people are living on the economic margins, barely making ends meet, many feel they are justified in surviving as best they can by whatever means they can other than out-and-out crime. This means, however, that many things short of crime may be acceptable to them, and often there are fine lines between what is legal and what is not.

But what is acceptable to them may be questionable behavior to a Government agent, who in effect represents the "law". People know this and often take precautions appropriate for their own personal defense. So even if the person has done nothing wrong, very often he does not even want the question being raised, for the agent could make a mistake or simply hold him accountable for something long forgotten about by him. Many inner-city residents fear being found out for something they have done or may be contemplating doing.

A good number of working class and poor black people are not interested in answering questions put to them by census takers. People are especially averse to answering those questions that are determined to be "personal". Moreover, complying with the census is to some extent akin to "putting one's business in the streets" (having one's most personal secrets out for anyone to hear and judge).⁸ Such considerations easily relate to questions about "who lives here," about people who are supposed to live in a particular dwelling, or querries concerning income and the way income is used. Hesitancy here probably has to do with the low "absolute" threshold many poorer people have for sensing trouble, which is complicated by the severely limited ability of poorer people to prevail in troublesome personal situations involving questions of legality. Many women on welfare will hesitate or clam up when the question of a man arises during the interview. Their check is contingent on the absence of a man in the house, but, as discussed above, a man may in fact be present, at least part of the time. Many people are afraid of giving a "wrong" answer that may work to terminate their check. Here it is important to understand that the interview session is something likely to be participated in under a certain amount of duress on the part of the respondent. The sense that the session is something of an examination speaks volumes on how it is interpreted by those who are poor, ignorant, and living on the economic margins of the society. The following comment from Maurice, a poor black man of the ghetto streets, is germane:

When I got the form (census form), I just threw it out. Why should I fill it out? What I want to tell them [Government] my business for. Think I'm a damn fool?! Why should I? I don't want them all up in my business.

In addition, many inner-city residents fail to draw distinctions between and among the various divisions of the Government, local and national. Horror

stories circulate about this or that person being audited by the IRS. And while the census takers swear the IRS has nothing to do with their operation, some people believe that the long arm of the Government opens its hand to all agencies. And that information made available could be used not only by Federal authorities but even by local ones. There seems to be a good amount of fear and uncertainty about the census and just whom its agents are serving. Many inner-city residents believe the agents are not serving their interests and thus they feel little incentive to co-operate.

To many, the census taker represents a major intrusion into their lives. The census taker in the most immediate sense represents the Government. To many of these people, the Government is not seen as friendly, but as mysterious, if not hostile, as something to avoid and to defend oneself from, particularly when it comes to paper work. "Paper" seems to be fearsome for so many, representing a major problem. For in paper, there is the prospect of records and of record-keeping, which could work to get a person "in trouble." Any trouble of significance can be traced to paper. And to some, trouble and paper go hand in hand. Good examples that are sometimes invoked are newspapers, bills, insurance policies, lottery tickets, marriage licenses, income tax forms, legal summonses, and money, to name a few types of paper meaningful for the lives of so many low-income innercity residents. Thus, even a census form which arrives in the mail unencumbered by a possibly "untrustworthy" enumerator may be treated with deep suspicion.

But even more significantly for this report, many residents become very concerned about being "written up," or having someone write something down about them in their presence.⁹ So very many of the low-income residents of the innercity are poor readers, and, as mentioned above, are easily intimidated by the printed page, particularly in the presence of someone effectively posing as

literate. And thus, to have such a person writing down "facts" about them that they know will go to the Government is for many to be confronted with the prospect of a certain reminder of their own powerlessness.

The Government as represented in the form of so many census takers easily represents trouble. And what many of the lower-income people of the innercity feel they do not need is more trouble, and many would rather be left alone by those people who stand for such in their minds.

In addition to the foregoing concerns, which reflect fear of consequences to the individual if he co-operates with the census taker, there is an idea in the black inner city that the census threatens the neighborhood. Many inner city black residents residing in close proximity to gentrifying areas are obsessed with the notion that "the whites are coming" to take over our community. In part this is due to the recent movement among some middle and upper income professional people who now want to return to the innercity and do so in the form of gentrification: they buy up older homes in rundown urban areas, refurbish them, and reside in them, thereby changing the neighborhood to reflect their own class and often racial status.

In observing this social process take place, many innercity residents are completely dumbfounded, at times wondering aloud how such a thing could happen. But they see that their own homes and their own communities are under some threat. In this perspective, the census taker is not a simple abstraction but becomes something concrete to many residents. And when the census taker appears and begins asking questions about income and such, some residents, already suspicious about the "white power structure" simply collapse all concerns and easily question the census taker's relationship to recent and impending neighborhood changes. The inner city resident may easily come up with the notion that the census taker is part of a conspiracy he sees occurring, thinking that

the part he plays in cooperating with the census taker makes it that much easier for him to "get the shaft," while "the whites take over."

It is also important that "the Asians" are seeming to prosper in so many black urban areas. Many black residents wonder aloud "Who helped them out?" A common answer is that the Government is giving them grants. Many such blacks feel a sense of betrayal by the Government, for they see themselves as having been struggling for so long in this land and ending up with relatively little, while the Asians are seen as residing in the land for a relatively short while and now owning the very stores and small businesses that service the local black community. Among many race-conscious blacks, there is a growing amount of resentment of "the Asians," but some of this resentment is placed on the doorstep of the Government. In order to gain an understanding of the undercount, it is important to note the implications of these considerations.

In sum, what are some of the reasons underlying so many of these attitudes? Generally speaking, so very many persons of the inner city see themselves as having little at stake in the census. At the bottom of this view is a certain alienation -- political and social, but also there is a large measure of feelings of powerlessness. Many feel that by responding to the census takers, they are simply making themselves vulnerable to those inimical to their own interests, but particularly those serving as agents of social control. And while many may not believe this to be fully so, many will simply say to themselves, "What's in it [fully cooperating with the census taker] for me?" and answer "Nothing!" So why should I co-operate with the census taker?" When confronted by the census taker, the person with such a view may dissemble, lie, or simply refuse to be interviewed.

I think the reluctance to participate is strongly affected by structural influences. A large number of people who have so little and who feel themselves

to be powerless seem somewhat frightened by the prospect of dealing with the Government. Many who have so little become concerned that by cooperation fully with a census taker may come back to haunt them, and that they may somehow wind up having even less. Hence, many people simply feel reluctant give up information freely. As mentioned above, to many, the Government represents trouble, red tape, and the census is easily viewed as an arm of the Government. The census taker is held suspect, or he/she may even be an object of fear in the local community.

11

This brings us to the particular role of the census enumerator. To obtain full and accurate information, the enumerator must get close to the people of the innercity community. The enumerator must gain the community's trust and respect, which necessarily takes time. Many enumerators probably fail to gain their interviewee's trust, thus diminishing the quality of the data obtained from the interview. In part, this problem of credibility is due to the very limited amount of time the interviewer spends with the interviewee mixed with the nature of the questions he/she asks.

The racial or ethnic identity of the enumerator is important. Black enumerators are sometimes seen as lackeys for the Government, people out for their own aggrandizement. But another barrier the black enumerator encounters is that of being taken as a nosey neighbor. If the census taker reminds one of his next door neighbor, through skin color or ethnicity, then the interviewee might have some hesitation about giving up too much information. He or she might feel that "I could see this person again," perhaps on the block, or at a party, and that the interviewer is thus capable of putting the interviewee's "business in the streets." The extent that the census taker is viewed as a complete stranger may be the extent to which the interviewee can rest assured that information [or "business"] will go no further than the enu-

erator. This may be an issue that could be worked on by some enumerators.

Poor innercity people who have little contact with formal organizations and officials often perceive census takers on a personal level, not as professionals doing their jobs. Enumerators would have to possess excellent interpersonal skills to overcome this handicap. Are there solutions to these problems? I can propose two.

Like so many Americans, poor or marginally employed blacks appear to want something for their trouble. For a small price, even the most intransigent interviewee might comply with the wishes of the enumerator. Payment for their information would help innercity residents feel they have a stake in the census undertaking, though such an approach would require new legislation.

Another approach would be to hire census takers with excellent interpersonal skills and train them to build interviewee trust. Although such a task may take a long time, at the least enumerators should be trained to phrase questions in nonthreatening ways, particularly as they come face to face with dependent inner city populations.

As mentioned above, poor inner city people often feel the census will harm, not benefit, them. So many poor blacks see absolutely nothing of value connected with cooperating with the census taker, except perhaps being law-abiding. Responses born of "legal" intimidation, however, may be false or purposely misleading, a ruse for getting around a troublesome interviewer, and of ultimately "cooling the person out."

The problem of census undercount is not new and they may never be fully resolved. But it is clear that an important aspect of the problem is related to problems of race and class in society. As mentioned above, there are many people in the innercity communities who feel the census taker is simply not worth bothering with. But they may comply with the enumerator's wishes out

of fear of "getting in trouble with the law," while feeling themselves at some risk by giving up important information on themselves and their loved ones. At the same time, many people have no idea of how they benefit from the taking of the census. It would seem important here for the Government to develop a massive program concerned with educating people about the census. For this effort, it would be important to enlist important local community leaders, including ministers, local school personnel, local black merchants, and others. It may be that such a program would encourage more people to participate, but it would also give them a realistic perspective on the nature of the United States census and its real uses.

Many poor black people care very little about the census. They care even less about the census takers intruding into their lives, asking all kinds of personal questions. A significant number believe the census is a mandatory matter, that the respondent must answer all questions on the census form or those put to them by the surveyor; such people may be inclined to comply with the form or the census taker as best they can, particularly if they see themselves as patriotic Americans. The intrusions seem not to matter so much.

On the other hand, there are a significant number of people for whom the census taker represents a major intrusion into their lives. The anonymous census form or the worrisome census taker in the most immediate sense represents the Government. To many of these people, the Government is not seen as a friend, but as something to get by and to defend oneself from. It has been suggested that given recent major trials of Government figures such as Oliver North and others including Richard Nixon [Watergate], many would-be respondents are afraid to respond to questions posed to them by the Government. Government in the person of the census taker represents trouble.

And what many of the lower income people feel they do not need is trouble, and would rather be left alone by those people who stand for such in their own minds. Given that many low-income people are living on the margins, barely making ends meet, many feel they must survive as best they can by whatever means they can other than out and out crime. This means that many things short of crime are acceptable to them. But if it is acceptable to them, it may be questionable behavior to a Government agent, who in effect represents the "law." So even if the person has done nothing wrong, very often he does not even want the question being raised, for the agent could make a mistake, or simply hold him accountable for something long forgotten about by him. In many innercity communities, horror stories about this or that person being audited by the IRS are rife. And while the census takers swear the IRS has nothing to do with their operation, some people believe that the long arm of the government opens its hands to all agencies. And that information made available could be used not only by Federal authorities, but even by local ones. For many innercity residents fail to make distinctions between and among the various divisions of the Government, including local and national. There seems to be a good amount of fear and uncertainty about the census and just who its agents are serving. Many innercity residents believe the agents are not serving their own interests, and thus they feel little incentive to cooperate.

Generally speaking, so very many persons of the innercity see themselves as having little at stake in the census. Many feel that by responding to the census-takers, they are simply making themselves vulnerable to the law. And while they may not believe this to be fully so, many will simply say to themselves "What's in it for me?" and answer "Nothing! So why should I cooperate with the census-taker." These are issues that scream out for understanding, and thus require an expanded research

agenda (including much more serious ethnographic work in urban communities), research that is at present just beginning to scratch the surface of the problem of enumerating a vast and increasingly pluralistic population. Until such understanding and knowledge are obtained along with practical ways of dealing with the great amount of fear, alienation, and distrust existing in so many inner city areas, the census will continue to be incomplete in America's inner cities.

Notes

1. See William Petersen, "The Protection of Privacy and the United States Census", in Martin Bulmer, ed., Censuses, Surveys, and Privacy, New York, Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1979, pp.176-183; Reynolds Farley and Walter R. Allen, "Appendix: The Quality of Census Data", in The Color Line and the Quality of Life in America, New York, Russell Sage Foundation, 1987, pp.420-438; and New York State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, "Census Undercounts and Preparations for the 1990 Census", December, 1988, for three different perspectives. Hyman Alterman, Counting People: The Census in History, New York, Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969 offers an excellent general history of the census. Part II, Chapter 7, "The Negro in the American Census", pp.262-290 deals with the problem of the black undercount from slavery through the inner city.

2. Alterman, op. cit., pp.17-64.

3. Ibid., pp.42-51.

4. Ibid., p.65.

5. Ibid., p.73.

6. See Howard S. Becker, Sociological Work, Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1972.; John Dollard, Caste and Class in a Southern Town, New York: Anchor Books, 1937.

7. Opposition to giving out personal information is not limited to the black underclass. See Petersen op. cit. and Alterman, pp.258-261.

8. Peter C. Hainer, "A Brief and Qualitative Anthropological Study Exploring the Reasons for Census Coverage Error among Low Income Black Households", Curry College, Milton, MA, April 8, 1987.

9. See Elijah Anderson, "Sex Codes and Family Life Among Innercity Youths" in William J. Wilson (ed.), The Ghetto Underclass. Annals AAPSS, Vol. 501, January 1989.

10. It is interesting to compare this anxiety with the superstitious fear of being counted at all in some tribal societies (see Alterman, op. cit., pp. 73-74). Such an attitude highlights the gap between the community's reality and the structures of the larger society which the census represents.

11. See Alterman, op. cit., pp. 287-290, and the New York State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, op. cit.

20

REFERENCES

- Alterman, Hyman. Counting People: The Census in History. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969.
- Anderson, Elijah. "Sex Codes and Family Life Among Innercity Youth" in William J. Wilson, The Ghetto Underclass. Annals AAPSS. Vol. 501, January 1989.
- Bailar, Barbara A. "Statistical Practice and Research: The Essential Interactions." Journal of the American Statistical Association 43:401 (Mar 1988).
- Becker, Howard S. Sociological Work. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1972.
- Coale, Ansley J. "The Population of the United States in 1950 Classified by Age, Sex, and Color: A Revision of Census Figures." Journal of the American Statistical Association (Mar 1955), pp. 16-54.
- Dollard, John. Caste and Class in a Southern Town. New York: Anchor Books, 1937.
- Farley, Reynolds and Walter R. Allen. "The Quality of Census Data." Appendix to The Color Line and the Quality of Life in America. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1987.
- Fein, David J. and Kirsten K. West. "Toward a Theory of Coverage Error: An Explanatory Assessment of Data from the 1986 Los Angeles Tees Census." Paper presented at the Bureau of the Census Fourth Annual Research Conference (Mar 20-23, 1988).
- Hainer, Peter C. "A Brief and Qualitative Anthropological Study Exploring the Reasons for Census Coverage Error among Low Income Black Households." Curry College, Milton, MA (Apr 8, 1987).
- "Advertising the Decennial Census." An anthropological report prepared for Olgivy & Mather Advertising, 2 East 48th Street, New York (June 1, 1987).
- Hainer, Peter, Catherine Hines, Elizabeth Martin, and Gary Shapiro. "Research on Improving Coverage in Household Surveys." Paper presented at the Bureau of the Census Fourth Annual Research Conference (Mar 20-23, 1988).
- Hanson, Robert H. and Eli S. Marks. "Influence of the Interviewer on the Accuracy of Survey Results." Journal of the American Statistical Association (Sept, 1958), pp. 635-655.
- Kean, John G. "Counting the Hard to Enumerate." Paper presented at the Bureau of the Census Fourth Annual Research Conference (Mar 20-23, 1988).
- Miller, Dr. Kelly. "Enumeration Errors in the Negro Population." The Scientific Monthly XIV (Feb 1922), pp. 168-177.
- New York State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. "Census Undercounts and Preparations for the 1990 Census." Summary Report (Dec 1988).

Parsons, Carole W., ed. "America's Uncounted People." National Academy of Sciences, Washington, D.C., 1972. Report of the Advisory Committee on Problems of Census Enumeration, Division of Behavioral Sciences, National Research Council.

Petersen, William. "The Protection of Privacy and the United States Census." In Bulmer, Martin. Censuses, Surveys, and Privacy. New York (Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1979).

Pritzker, Leon and N. D. Rothwell. "Procedural Difficulties in Taking Past Censuses in Predominantly Negro, Puerto Rican, and Mexican Areas." Paper presented at the Conference on Social Statistics and the City, Washington, sponsored by Joint Center for Urban Studies, Cambridge, MA (Jun 22-23, 1967).

Valien, Preston. "General Demographic Characteristics of the Negro Population in the United States." Journal of Negro Education 32:4 (Fall, 1963), pp. 329-336.

Walker, President Francis A. "Statistics of the Colored Race in the United States." Journal of the American Statistical Association 2:11,12 (Sep., Dec., 1890), pp. 91-106.