

Texas Officials: Texan or Republican? Census Paranoia

By Bill Hobby

The State of Texas has lost about \$1,000,000,000 of federal aid in the last decade because the Census Bureau failed to count 483,000 Texans in the 1990 census.¹ That's \$200,000,000 a biennium-enough for a teacher pay raise or whatever is dearest to your heart among the services provided by state government. Hardly chump change.

The 1990 census undercounted about 8.4 million people. The 2000 census may undercount even more, and Texans may lose even more of their own money. And that's the way Governor Bush and the two Texas Senators--Phil Gramm and Kay Bailey Hutchinson--want it.

All of them are, of course, Republican. The question is: Are they more Republican than Texan?

The controversy is about sampling. Americans get harder to count with every census. The reasons for the undercount are familiar: increased mobility, households with two people working, limited English skills, distrust of government.

The Census Bureau wants to account for the last ten percent of the people--those who cannot be reached by mail or in person--by sampling. Sampling is authorized by Congress for many purposes but not apportionment.²

The original purpose of the census was to apportion each state's electoral votes and seats in Congress. More recently the data has been used to allocate about \$180 billion a year in federal aid among state and local governments and to shape state and local political districts.

Census paranoia on the part of Congressional Republicans is nothing new in our history. Twice in the past--before the censuses of 1870 and 1920--it has led to ludicrous results and shameful chapters in our history. Then and now the Republican concern has been not so much that the census would count more people as that it would count those OTHER people who are out there but have been not been counted before - blacks (1870), immigrants and city dwellers (1920, 2000), and people who just don't want the government to know they exist (1790-2000).

The irony is that a lot of those OTHER people, who certainly are not voters, live in Texas, Florida, and California-states that vote Republican in recent presidential elections. Republicans should want an accurate census count and more electoral votes for those states.

The Republicans feared that the newly freed slaves to be counted in the 1870 census would give defeated Southerners more electoral votes and seats in Congress. In 1920, the census showed that cities (and states with lots of them) had grown so much that the Republican Congress did not reapportion the House of Representatives as the Constitution requires.³ So much for Republican concerns about the Constitution.

The parallels (Then and Now) with the past fiascoes are instructive.

THE 1870 FIASCO

(Then: A Republican majority in Congress had tried but failed to remove a President. The Republicans feared the results of the 1870 census because previously uncounted people--former slaves--were counted for the first time.

(Now: A Republican majority in Congress had tried but failed to remove a President. The Republicans fear the results of the 2000 census because previously uncounted people may be counted for the first time.)

The end of the Civil War left an extraordinarily vicious Republican majority in Congress with two unexpected problems: a Southern President and the prospect that the southern states might have a lot more members in the House of Representatives than they did before the war.

The Republicans tried to deal with the first problem by telling President Andrew Johnson from Tennessee that he couldn't fire his own cabinet members and then impeaching him for doing so. The impeachment of Johnson by the House was a sorry chapter, with which the 1999 Republican impeachment fiasco has made us all too familiar.

The U.S. Constitution provided that three-fifths of the slaves be counted for apportionment purposes. When slavery was abolished by the Thirteenth Amendment ALL the former slaves were to be so counted.⁴ (The actual undercount was probably greater. Until 1880, U.S. Marshals did the counting.)

It was one thing to free the slaves. But allowing them to be represented in Congress might put more Democrats in Congress! Abolition of slavery (13th Amendment) would give the former Confederate States sixteen new seats in Congress unless the U.S. Constitution was further amended to base representation on voters rather than people. Sixteen new Southern electoral votes and seats in Congress certainly were not what the Republicans had in mind.

After all, the North won the war, right?

So the Republican Congress passed--and then ignored--the 14th Amendment to base representation on voters rather than people. They ignored the amendment they had just passed because somebody figured out that if representation were based on voters, women and immigrants would not be counted. To be sure there were more newly freed slaves (blacks) in the South than in the North, but there were more women and immigrants in the North than the South. Oops!

There was talk even then of letting women vote, but the Republicans wouldn't go THAT far for another fifty-two years!⁵

As it turned out, the Republicans need not have worried. The former Confederate States did not, in fact, increase their share of seats in the United States Congress. The 1870 census showed that the count of freed slaves increased the population of the former Confederate States by only 14 percent, less than the national increase of about 25 percent. Also, later figures showed that the South had probably been undercounted by 1.26 million, about 3 percent.

Western states (California, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Oregon) had grown more than 50 percent. (The Homestead Act had been passed in 1862.) Eastern States lost relative population but not seats in Congress, because the size of the House of Representatives was increased from 243 to 292.⁶

THE 1920 FIASCO

(Then: It is the second year of the second and last term of Democratic President Woodrow Wilson. The Republicans feared the results of the 1920 census because it showed that a lot more people live in cities than had before.

(Now: It is the second year of the second and last term of Democratic President Bill Clinton. The Republicans fear the results of the 2000 census because it may count a lot of people who were not counted before.)

The 1920 census showed that population grown by 14 million in the decade. The Republicans' problem was that 19 million of that growth was in the cities. The rural population had dropped 5 million. Newspapers wondered if there would be enough farmers to feed the nation.

Many of the new city dwellers were European immigrants. The nativist Republicans feared that Irish and German immigrants would somehow subvert American politics. Then, as now, racism played its part. Congress changed the immigration laws to favor the northern and western European immigrants at the expense of the "newer" OTHER immigrants from southern and eastern Europe.

THE 2000 FIASCO

Let's hope there won't be one, but the Republican leadership in Congress has already shown its willingness to shut down the government over the census issue.

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¹General Accounting Office. *Effects of Adjusted Population Counts on Federal Funding to States*. GAO/HEHES-99-69. February, 1999.

² 13 USC Sec.195. Quoted in Opinion of the Court, *Commerce v. US House of Representatives*, Justice O'Connor, p.21. Justice O'Connor's decision is an excellent statement of the controversy.

³U.S. Constitution, Article 1, Section 2.

⁴Ibid.

⁵*Not until 1920*. See Appendix 2.

⁶ Margo Anderson, *The American Census: A Social History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988). Census. Chapter 3, *Counting Slaves and Blacks*, passim. See also Kevin Phillips. *The Cousins' Wars*, Basic Books. 1999, p. 466.

Abstract of the U.S. Census Bureau Web Site

<http://www.census.gov>

Public administrators who take a few minutes to explore the U.S. Census Bureau's Web site will find a resource they can turn to often to answer specific questions and help them make planning and policy decisions.

The scope and volume of resources at the site are overwhelming. But the site design allows visitors to quickly find what they seek through key subject headings, a subject index, and a search feature.

Subject headings group the major types of data available on the home page under: People, Business, Geographic, News, and Special Topics. As expected, under the People heading are data on population broken down by national, state, county, and metropolitan area, as well as data on population projections and plans for the 2000 Census.

There also are data on poverty, income and housing and links to international population information. Government is listed a subtopics under Business. The data available includes information on state and local government structure, finance data for the largest city county governments, school finance data, state government finance data by state, state government tax collections by state public employment and payroll, employee retirement systems of state and local governments, and a quarterly summary of state and local tax revenue.

Visitors can also view and download the Governments Finance and Employment Classification Manual. The manual contains definitions of governmental units and the revenue, expenditure, debt, and asset categories used for collecting and disseminating statistics. Also listed under Business are local to national data from the 1997 Economic Census.

Information includes statistics on construction, governments, international trade, manufacturing, mining, retail, and transportation. Interactive map-making tools available under the Geographic heading are one of the site's best features. The powerful U.S. Gazetteer creates custom maps based on a five-digit ZIP code or city. The map maker can request the map show more than 20 features, including water bodies, Indian reservations, county lines, and congressional districts and can easily retrieve demographic data about the area. Those involved in Geographic Information System mapping can download more extensive data from the bureau's TIGER, or Topologically Integrated Geographic Encoding and Referencing, map database.

The News and Special Topics headings round out the topics with links to the latest information in the bureau's monthly newsletter, special studies, as well as links to 70 federal agencies that produce their own statistics.

The home page also provides easy access to a list of tools for extracting specific pieces of data from the bureau's vast databases and also links to bureau information, including bureau job listings, a catalogue of products, staff contact listings and a catalogue of publications.

Abstract by Elizabeth Carmack