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STATEMENT OF

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BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON CENSUS AND POPULATION

COMMITTEE ON POST OFFICE AND CIVIL SERVICE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

AND THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, CONSUMER, AND

MONETARY AFFAIRS

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

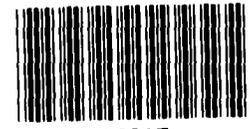
ON

[BUREAU OF THE CENSUS'

DEVELOPMENT OF THE MAIL LIST,

PERSONNEL POLICIES AND PROMOTION

FOR THE 1980 CENSUS]



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I am pleased to appear at your request to testify on our reports "Problems in Developing the 1980 Census Mail List," issued on March 31, 1980, and "Problems in Test Censuses Cause Concern for 1980 Census," issued on June 3, 1980. I am accompanied by Mr. Jack Kaufman, who was responsible for the audits leading to these reports.

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PROBLEMS IN DEVELOPING THE MAIL LIST

In our report on the mail list, we discussed the problems the Census Bureau encountered in developing a mail list for about 90 percent of the estimated 86 million households and 222 million persons. The other persons, primarily in sparsely-settled areas, have been or are being counted by the traditional door-to-door canvass. A mail list serves as the basis for mailing out questionnaires and as the control list of the nonrespondents for followup activities.

To initially compile its master mail list--called the address register--the Bureau purchased addresses from commercial mailing list firms for major urban areas and physically canvassed the other areas. The Bureau had developed computerized geographic files for the major urban areas that provided street address ranges needed to code addresses to various levels of census geography. Data identification is needed so that tabulations can be associated with the proper geographic area. However, for rural and small urban areas not covered by these files, the Bureau must identify addresses and must code them manually to lower level census geography, such as blocks and enumeration districts. Maps are produced for these areas, and enumerators canvass the areas to identify addresses. The Census Bureau refers to this latter operation as "prelisting."

The Bureau used two procedures to update and refine the mail list developed from the purchase of addresses and the prelist operation. The Bureau physically canvassed (precanvassed)

those areas covered by the commercial mailing list, and for all areas the Bureau contracted with the U.S. Postal Service to review the list for accuracy and completeness. The Bureau planned for the Postal Service to make three reviews of the list: the first, about 10 months prior to census day; the second, on March 5, 1980; and the third on March 28, 1980.

The Bureau also developed some post-census-day operations to identify missed addresses. For example, the Bureau is recanvassing the rural portion of the prelist area. Also, the Bureau is checking for differences in the number of housing units in a building as shown in the address registers and the number reported by respondents to the census questionnaire. In addition, the Bureau is providing address and population counts to local communities. The communities are asked to report any large discrepancies between Bureau housing counts and their housing estimates. The Bureau will recanvass areas as time and resources permit.

Rural and Small Urban Areas

Commercial mailing lists, even if available, were not appropriate for rural and small urban areas. Therefore, the Bureau had to resort to a complex, labor-intensive effort (physical canvassing) to identify households in these areas.

In developing the mail list for rural and small urban areas, the Bureau encountered operational problems which delayed completing the canvassing operation. This delay was

a major cause in cancelling the important first post office check of the mail list, which, as stated above, was scheduled for 10 months prior to census day. This cancellation put a greater work burden on the Postal Service and on the Bureau in the last few weeks before census day.

Prelist activity in rural and small urban areas was late in getting started, about 12 weeks on the average. The canvassing and listing which the Bureau thought would take about 4 weeks at each office actually took between 16 and 24 weeks in most cases. The various census offices had staggered start and completion target dates, and overall, listing operations originally expected to take 3-1/2 months took 8 months.

Several problems contributed to the late start and extended operations:

- The delayed preparation of prelist area maps created a ripple effect on subsequent prelist activities.
- The poor quality of the maps hindered canvassing. Many prelist maps were inaccurate, too small in scale for marking address locations, and often difficult to read.
- Listing workloads for many prelist geographic areas were greater than planned, causing alteration of work assignments, and hiring of more personnel.
- High enumerator turnover and unexpectedly heavy workloads made full staffing difficult to achieve and maintain.

The Bureau took several actions to compensate for these problems, including:

- hiring and assigning additional enumerators,
- using experienced Bureau regional staff to assist in the operation, and
- hiring additional supervisors to assist in recruiting and training enumerators.

Unfortunately, some of these actions were not taken quickly enough to overcome all of the problems delaying listing operations.

Major Urban Areas

Another aspect of developing the mail list for the 1980 census--that is, obtaining addresses for major urban areas--also fell short of Bureau expectations. The Bureau experienced limitations with the quality of commercial mail lists, which provided fewer and more inaccurate addresses than expected for major urban areas.

Complete and accurate mail lists are not available for those parts of major urban areas where only limited demand for a commercial list exists. For example, the president of the mail list firm which supplied most of the purchased addresses, including the ones for New York, testified in March 1979 before the House Subcommittee on Census and Population that his company had probably not mailed anything to the South Bronx portion of New York City for 10 years. When an area has a high poverty

rate, as does the South Bronx, a firm has no incentive to maintain a current list for such purposes as commercial advertising.

Moreover, mail lists developed and maintained by commercial firms generally consist of residential mailing addresses that sometimes contain the name of the addressee but usually lack the complete mailing address, such as apartment unit designations. This type of address, although incomplete, does not affect delivery because postal carriers can usually identify the specific mailing address using the addressee's name and street address.

However, because census questionnaires distributed in major urban areas do not include the name of the addressee as part of the mailing address, the Bureau requires greater detail. Addresses for census use must contain the following elements: house number, street name and type, directional prefix and/or suffix, post office name, State name, and zip code. In addition, addresses must contain, where applicable, apartment designation or location description for each unit in a multiunit structure as well as site or lot numbers for residential sites in trailer courts. These specific address elements provide increased control in counting households by identifying those questionnaires mailed back and those requiring followup activity.

The Bureau expected that the commercial mail lists prior to postal corrections would provide coverage rates between

80 and 90 percent. Based on the Postal Service reviews, the overall accuracy of the mail list for all the major urban areas was a little below 80 percent. However, the accuracy rates for many urban areas fell far below this level. Corrections from the first Postal Service review of the mail list indicate that about 30 percent of the areas had address change levels above 20 percent. For example, Albuquerque had about a 35 percent change in its mail list; Honolulu, 44 percent; Phoenix, 58 percent; and Austin, 30 percent. Some of the largest urban areas also had high change rates: New York and Chicago (29 percent each); and Detroit (24 percent).

The Bureau physically canvassed the major urban areas to improve the mail list. The operation was originally scheduled for January 31, 1980. However, because of problems with other operations, the canvassing was delayed and did not start until February 21. Therefore, canvassing was performed under severe time constraints. Some quality controls that could have helped were deleted.

QUALITY CONTROLS OVER POSTAL REVIEWS COULD IMPROVE LISTS

The Postal Service provides a valuable check through successive reviews of the census mail lists. However, it does miss a sizable number of addresses in each review. The Bureau evaluates the quality of the Postal Service reviews by withholding a sample of addresses. The results of these evaluations show that the Postal Service generally can be expected to miss an average of 30 percent of the withheld

addresses. In an evaluation made during the 1980 census, preliminary results indicate the Postal Service missed about 38 percent of the withheld addresses. The Bureau has found that the quality of the Postal Service's review improves with the quality of the list provided. Overall, the miss rate by the Postal Service is not alarming when it is provided a good list and when successive reviews are made. Some of the Bureau's lists for the major urban areas, however, were not of that quality. Also, the list developed for the rural and small urban areas was not reviewed during the first of the three post office checks.

To improve on its operation and in response to our findings, the Postal Service added a quality control to its procedures. That control involved a reconciliation between Postal Service records on the number of residential delivery points and the combined number of questionnaires and add-address cards already prepared. When the combined number of questionnaires and add-address cards was less than the number of addresses on a route, and the carrier could not reconcile the discrepancies, the missing addresses would be identified and add-cards prepared. We did not review the effectiveness of this control.

PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED IN TEST CENSUSES

In our June report, we identified problems that occurred in test censuses preparatory to the 1980 census and actions taken by the Bureau to remedy these problems. Because of these problems, the Bureau significantly overran scheduled

test census completion dates. Bureau officials advised us that if the 1980 census process fell behind schedule, procedures for taking the census would have to be altered or eliminated. These changes would affect procedures designed to improve population coverage and data quality.

The principal problems experienced in the test censuses were: low mail response, difficulties in recruiting and retaining personnel, and lower than expected productivity.

To improve mail response rates during the 1980 census, the Bureau used a full scale promotion, including: advertising with the assistance of the Advertising Council, public information, communications with national organizations, and a grassroots program. The promotion appears to have been successful because the mail response rates attained were better than in the test censuses. The mail response rate determines to a great degree the amount of followup work required.

In the test censuses, recruiting shortfalls and high turnover delayed the completion of followup enumeration. The Bureau expanded enumerator recruiting and training programs. However, the basis for enumerator pay--the major cause of high turnover in the test censuses--remained generally unchanged. Also, the Bureau did not revise its strategy to take advantage of the part-time work force.

Bureau and GAO surveys of enumerators who worked on test censuses showed that inadequate pay was a primary factor in enumerator resignations. Piece work payment scales which

the Bureau established for enumeration in the 1980 census do not reflect all test census experience.

Test census production records indicate that average enumerator productivity in most test censuses was generally below that which would be required in the 1980 census to earn the advertised wage. And some enumerators may not even earn the minimum wage. For the 1980 census, the Bureau obtained an exemption from the minimum wage provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act.

Although the Bureau expanded enumerator recruiting for the actual census, it did not, with some minor exceptions, take advantage of the part-time labor force. It directed its recruiting efforts at prospective employees available for 40-hour work weeks. Bureau studies show that the most productive time for enumeration work is in the evenings and on weekends and that each weekday contains only 4 to 5 hours in which enumeration work is likely to be productive. Experience in the 1980 census shows that most enumerators have worked a part-time schedule although they were hired as full-time employees.

Bureau data showed that the Bureau did not fully meet staffing goals for the 1980 census. For example, as of early May, the Bureau had on its rolls 70.2 percent of the required number of enumerators. Four of the 12 regions had less than 70 percent: New York (59.5 percent); Dallas (62.9 percent);

Philadelphia (64.4 percent); and Denver (67.1 percent). The Bureau considers that a regional office with less than 70 percent is having recruiting problems.

The census followup operations at the district offices generally started about a week late in mid to late April and were originally scheduled to be completed by July 8th. But Bureau reports show that as of July 11 only 16 of the 385 offices at which mail lists were used had finished the followup operations. Moreover, as of that date, 41 of these offices had not started the second stage of the followup operations. The Bureau had estimated that each stage of the operations would require about 4 weeks.

This concludes my prepared statement. I will be happy to respond to any questions you may have.