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Rebecca Chiyoko King

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## **RACIALIZATION, RECOGNITION, AND RIGHTS:**

*Lumping and Splitting Multiracial  
Asian Americans in the 2000 Census*

rebecca chiyoko **king**

**T**HE 2000 CENSUS WILL MARK a dramatic change in the way that “race” is officially enumerated in the United States to allow people to check more than one race. This is a significant change for the way people do and understand the concept of race, and will have potentially far-reaching effects for multiracial Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, and Asian Pacific Islander communities. The Census, as a representation of the state, is an ideal place to see how race is changing both practically and conceptually as people lobby the Census Bureau to change racial categories to accurately reflect their multiracial understanding.<sup>1</sup> In this article, I examine the impact of changing the Census to allow people to check more than one race box on Asian Pacific Americans (APAs).<sup>2</sup>

Race is now widely recognized as being a contested and changing, socially constructed category.<sup>3</sup> As historical proof of this, APAs have long been unable to fit the racial labels used by the U.S. government to classify them. For example, the plaintiffs in the infamous cases of *Ozawa v. United States*, 260 U.S. 178 (1922) and *United States v. Thind*, 261 U.S. 204 (1923) failed in their attempts to be considered “not Asian, Caucasian/white” in order to become naturalized citizens of the U.S. Those cases foreshadowed a legal framework that would continue throughout the 1900s to remind APAs that they were racially different, not white, and therefore ineligible for American citizenship.<sup>4</sup> There has never been a comfortable fit historically for Asian Americans with racial categories used by the U.S.

Census and that discomfort with racial categories and the use of those categories has taken on new meaning for Asian Pacific Islander (API) Americans as we approach a new millennium and the 2000 Census where race can be multiply enumerated. The policy implications of changing the way we do race has particularly far-reaching effects for APIs because of the size of the community. This in turn will impact the uses of racial data for the purpose of voting districts, affirmative action, equal opportunity employment, as well as federal funding for API issues and organizations. In this article, I examine the push to change the Census and the way it enumerates race. I focus, in particular, on one successful change — the ability to check one or more racial box. As we will see, allowing people to mark one or more races will possibly alter the size and definition of *who* is a part of the APA community. This is directly linked to questions that continue to be posed about how the data will be tabulated and used. This strategy of checking one or more represents a move towards splitting the Asian American community into parts instead of the past tendency to lump Asian Americans together either out of ignorance of their diversity or for political gain.

### **HISTORICAL LUMPING**

In 1900, there was recognition of the differences amongst APAs as they were categorized in the U.S. Census as Chinese and Japanese.<sup>5</sup> Often these ethnic differences were thought of as racial differences, and this was reinforced by the immigrants themselves as they thought of themselves as not just different Asian ethnicities, but as different races altogether. For example, Japanese racial thinking about being a “pure and superior” race, especially compared to Chinese and Koreans, may have been a factor in the conflicts in the Pacific.<sup>6</sup> Even today, many APAs don’t identify themselves as such but instead by their ethnic identity and think of “Asian Pacific American” as a political label and not a racial one.<sup>7</sup> It wasn’t until the push for accountable civil rights, based on racial protected group status, produced Directive 15 in 1977 in the Office of Management and Budget, that the impetus to lump Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Korean, South Asian, and Southeast Asian together as “Asian/Pacific Islander American” came

about. Even so, throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, the Census continued to collect racial data separating Asian Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, and Vietnamese. However, when these categories were operationalized to examine the community as a whole they were often lumped, as per the directions of Directive 15, into one category of Asian/Pacific Islander. This allowed for collecting specific ethnic data within the racial category Asian Pacific Islander, while still complying with the five racial category format of black, white, Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaskan Native, or other.<sup>8</sup>

The push for protected group status in the application of civil rights legislation was the driving force behind Directive 15. This meant that there was an apparent fusing of individual and collective identities around the construction of race as a precursor to gaining rights — that is one needed to be identified as a member of a protected group in order to make claims for equal rights in housing, employment, and voting. Because discrimination was occurring along racial lines it therefore was to be tracked along those same lines. Directive 15 then linked a certain understanding of race with rights. Because most APAs were undisputedly members of the category “Asian Pacific American,” there was no debate about recognition. It was clear who was considered Asian Pacific American, and membership automatically brought with it the possibility to be recognized as a protected group member, who could claim certain rights. Recognition and race automatically went together and were the precursors to claims for rights. Recognition and rights become attached to the same racialized identity — what we call today Asian Pacific American. In other words, before Directive 15 and the Asian power movement in the 1970s, there really was no term Asian Pacific American. Both the state, in order to conduct civil rights compliance, and the Asian American community via the Asian power movement, pushed for lumping as a way to solve representational problems.<sup>9</sup> This linked inextricably individual identities along racial lines and simplified them in order for the state (and some social movements) to utilize them.

While this lumping served a political purpose to make larger and more powerful the Asian American lobby and political organizations, thus creating a pan-ethnic identity, it may have come at a cost:

Lumping various groups together may result in a flattening of important differences we, as researchers and policy makers, may wish to discern and analyze. Some groups may “all look alike” but they are not homogenous. How meaningful, for example, is an Asian American category for analysis when both Japanese and Laotian Americans are subsumed under it? . . .The conflation of important “differences” is a hazard with the construction and use of particular categories.<sup>10</sup>

The Asian Pacific American category has therefore been an important rallying point for political action, but it may not accurately capture the increasing diversity and hierarchies within its boundaries. The challenge then will be to examine how changes in the category of Asian Pacific American, particularly in the case of the 2000 Census, will change not only the discourse about who is Asian American, but also will have very real and profound impacts on APA community organizations of all types.<sup>11</sup> Lumping may be an important political strategy, which will be undermined by the efforts in the 2000 Census to recognize multiplicity. Yet perhaps lumping is a bygone strategy which masks the problems of the less fortunate within the category “Asian Pacific American” and therefore is not a good political strategy.

### **CONTEMPORARY SPLITTING**

Problematizing the assumptions of a monolithic community and recognizing difference in the Asian American community is an important task that has been taken on by the Census. I argue that it is because the Census attempts to recognize both *individual* racial/ethnic identities and *collective* racial identities *simultaneously* that the change in the Census has been so controversial. By trying to respect the self-esteem of mixed race people (politics of recognition) and allowing them to check more than one racial box on the Census, the Census may be undermining the collective racial goals (politics of rights) that it is supposed to resolve such as equal opportunity employment and the like.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, it may be fundamentally a conflict between the politics of recognition and the politics of rights that the check more than one policy reveals or even creates. It is the tension between these two goals in the Census that has created a unique opportunity to see how recognition and rights are each

linked to unique understandings of racialization. It is their conceptualizations of race that has led some social actors to understand rights to be fundamentally about individual recognition and others to see rights as a collective political recognition. Examining different strategies to get the Census to recognize multiracial people reveals the different racialized thinking and assumptions behind each type of racial category proposal. By seeking recognition across racial categories, multiracial activists were fundamentally undermining the racial basis of the categories themselves. These groups used their politics of recognition and rights to challenge institutional modes of racialization in the Census.

The check one or more strategy, while it may satisfy individual multiracial goals, may leave many monoracial groups unable to gain the reparations that they need because check one or more undermines the foundation of current monoracial understandings by allowing people to be more than one race. Lisa Lowe discusses a similar tension between the politics of recognition and rights when she describes the social construction of the category and culture “Asian American.”

To the extent that Asian American culture dynamically expands to include both internal critical dialogues about difference and the interrogation of dominant interpellations, however, Asian American culture can likewise be a site in which the “horizontal” affiliations with other groups can be imagined and realized. In this respect, a politics based exclusively on racial or ethnic identity willingly accepts the terms of the dominant logic that organizes the heterogeneous picture of differences into a binary schema of “the one” and “the other.”<sup>13</sup>

The changes in the census might be seen as an example of how APAs have challenged dominant racial meanings by insisting that the Census Bureau recognize the difference within the category Asian American particularly by including those who are of mixed descent and want to check multiple boxes. However, that recognition of difference, if done solely along racial (i.e. Asian American) lines may in fact be reinforcing dominant racial norms. Therefore, because the Census seems contradictory in that it is trying to meet individual and collective goals, it may be that recognition of the multiplicity/diversity within the category “Asian Pacific American” may come at the cost of losing the political connectivity between Asian Americans that has historically been so important.

Allowing people to check more than one box on the Census, I argue, is a direct challenge to the political clout that lumping gave Asian Americans initially. This change in census format could stand to decrease the number of people, who identify as and thus check Asian American. If this loss of numbers plays out empirically, it will mean fewer dollars for funding Asian American causes. Indeed, when the Census Bureau ran a Racial and Ethnic Target Test (RAETT) in the summer of 1996, Asian and Pacific Islanders were hit hard by the results. Using a multiracial category did in fact decrease the API community in the target sample from sixty-five percent to sixty percent, and using instructions that told people to mark all that apply decreased it even more to fifty-eight percent. Ironically, the mark one or more instruction did not affect the total percentage of responses to the API category.<sup>14</sup> This loss of numbers is a testament to the fact that Asian Americans may have indeed outgrown the API label and that our identities as Asian American may be more racially diverse than we had previously recognized. Particularly, it may mean that multiracial Asian Americans are having a disproportionate effect on the category “Asian American” as APIs lost more of their population than any other group when multiple responses were allowed.

#### **THE MULTIRACIAL MOVEMENT: AMEA, PROJECT RACE, AND HAPA ISSUES FORUM**

Many groups spoke at the federal hearings in 1994 about changing the way that race would be enumerated in the 2000 U.S. Census. The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee wanted an “Arab American” (other groups wanted “Middle Eastern”) category added to track racially motivated crimes such as those acts of violence that took place during the Persian Gulf War. The National European American Society wanted to add a “European-American” category arguing that “white- non Hispanic” was a culturally meaningless term. Many Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Groups (primarily Samoan and Chamoros) wanted their own category or to be considered in the same category as “Native Americans/Alaskan Natives.” Interestingly, the Native Hawaiian/ other Pacific Islander activists were successful in splitting the category

“Asian” from the category “Pacific Islander” which has gained little to no attention in the media and amongst community groups. The new categories will split “Asians” from “Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders.” The splitting of Asian from Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander roughly creates a hierarchy between the groups. Asians will then be mainly East Asian ethnic groups while less economically advantaged Pacific Islander groups will be together. This will help those in the latter category to get needed health and economic attention that they deserve and couldn’t accurately be made visible by lumping Asian and Pacific Islander together. Also, Native Hawaiian groups wanted, for the most part for Native Hawaiians, to have their own racial category or at least be counted separately from Asian Americans. The reason to split the categories, in their minds, was to recognize the different historical relationship that Native Hawaiians have/had, particularly in relation to the U.S. government, from that of Asian Americans. They also wanted to clearly recognize the differential immigration status that Asians had and Native Hawaiians do not. They did not immigrate to their homeland, but instead were there and subjected to a history of colonization differently from Asian immigrants. This important difference has also shaped the types of social issues that are pertinent to each group, and by splitting the two racial categories this would allow for the Census to track more accurately different social problems, such as health and educational issues, and to see the stark differences between Asians and Pacific Islanders.<sup>15</sup> This argument was a strong one which was supported by much research on API Americans which shows that there are indeed deep class divisions which are difficult, at times, to capture given current racial data.<sup>16</sup>

Within this context, multiracial activists argued that they wanted to be allowed to check more than one box on the Census in order to represent their multiple racial identities. Tired of having to cram their multiple identities into one box, Carlos Fernandez, of the Association for Multiethnic Americans (AMEA), argued that it was a civil rights issue for mixed-race people to be able to express their actual identity on the Census.<sup>17</sup> He further argued that this recognition of multiracial people was an individual right in and of itself, and felt it important to count how many mixed-race people there were for use in tracking multiracial rights



violations such as hate crimes. Therefore, for AMEA recognition was a right, but additionally important because it was a precursor to tracing rights violations. This was a messy issue at best: how would “multiethnic” be defined? Who was it targeting? What was the goal?

The AMEA proposed a screening question on the Census which would ask if you are multiethnic or not and if so, would separate multiethnic people out from the rest of the racial/ethnic categories, but would allow them to check more than one box. Carlos Fernandez (the then president of AMEA and a multiracial person himself) had written a proposal based on his legal training which would recognize multiethnic people and defend their civil rights. He wanted the proposal to accomplish three things:

- 1) count people accurately according to their actual identity[;]
- 2) provide statistical continuity . . . and
- 3) avoid unnecessary and unwarranted government influence and interference in the very sensitive and private matter of personal identity, namely, forcing individuals to choose one parent over the other.<sup>18</sup>

He argued vehemently that recognition which could be separated from a traditionally understood racial (i.e., monoracial black, API, or Native American) identity was a right equally protected under the U.S. Constitution. “. . . Our right to identify ourselves accurately is at least equal to the rights of people who may be classified monoracially,” he stated.<sup>19</sup> Fernandez’s thinking was that if there were a legal case of a hate crime against a multiracial person, there would be no way to track that crime if there were no collection of multiracial data. Perhaps the case of Revonda Bowen, who was told by her principal in Arkansas that he was forbidding an interracial prom to go ahead as planned to prevent “mistakes like you from happening” would have been an ideal case to prove his point if she had decided to pursue a legal suit.<sup>20</sup> Or the case of a mixed-race Japanese/white student, who was beaten up in Japantown, San Francisco by a group of Asian young men because he was wearing a Japanese *kanji* necklace, but “wasn’t Asian and shouldn’t try to be.”<sup>21</sup>

These types of cases would indeed be untraceable as *multiracially* motivated hate crimes precisely because there would be no multiracial category to track them. The AMEA’s proposal focused on rights built upon concepts like Maria Root’s “Bill of Rights for Multiracial People,” and

framed the issue of the Census category as a civil right for mixed-race people to be able to identify themselves accurately and truthfully on the Census.<sup>22</sup> This framing of the issue as one of rights harkens back to the earlier civil rights movements, which worked hard to gain the right for people of color to have an equal opportunity in voting, housing, and employment. Now, AMEA and Fernandez were extending civil rights to include the right to recognition. So while the traditional civil rights agenda was about collective oppression, the new multiracial civil rights agenda added the recognition of multiple collective identities as a right. This language of rights and its legal implications imply a focus on individual self-identification first and then a focus on being allowed to have multiple allegiances to multiple groups reflected on the Census. In addition, it assumes that for monoracial people of color, it is not necessary to argue for recognition because it is assumed. For mixed-race people, though, multiracial identity and membership in one or more racial categories, is not assumed and therefore needed to be claimed as a right.

Project RACE (Reclassify All Children Equally) also had a proposal, one that differed from the AMEA, which asked for a stand-alone multiracial category. In their proposal, mixed-race people would not be black and white (i.e., checking the black and white boxes) but instead would be “multiracial” (a sixth, separate racial box). This proposal was also based on a logic of individual rights, but with a slightly different focus. Susan Graham (the founder and then executive director of Project RACE) argued that there should be representation on the Census of multiracial people in a stand-alone category because their racial experience was different from those of their parents’ races. She framed the issue as one about self-esteem and cited real world examples from education and health care amongst others to support her case.

She argued, for example, that

A fourth grade student takes a national test with his peers. The first question he is asked is his race. He is multiracial, and his race is not listed on the test, although his peers see their races. He feels singled out and becomes upset. His emotional state affects his test scores. Should a multiracial child be subjected to lower performance and achievement scores because OMB Directive No. 15 does not reflect his race?<sup>23</sup>

Ultimately for Graham and supporters of Project RACE, the debate was about feeling good and gaining self-esteem by finally being recognized as racially legitimate. In addition, she felt it important to have a stand-alone category to track health issues. For example, she writes:

It is much more likely for people of the same racial or ethnic background to match as bone marrow donors, because human leukocyte antigens (HLA) follow racial background. The National Bone Marrow Registry, for example, is government funded and mandated, and it therefore follows racial and ethnic guidelines as set forth in OMB Directive No. 15. No donor drives have been directed toward multiracial people, as they have with other racial and ethnic groups, therefore the donor pool for our children is inadequate. . . . How many multiracial children will suffer or die as a result of inadequate medical classifications?<sup>24</sup>

Project RACE cited the case of baseball player Rod Carew's daughter, who died of leukemia because no bone donor match could be found because she was mixed (black Panamanian and Jewish) in part because there was no collection of mixed-race data.

This is an interesting argument because if racial/ethnic data were collected in the categories white, black, Asian Pacific Islander, Native American, or multiracial, it would still be difficult to discover what exact mix a child in need of a bone marrow transplant is because the stand-alone category does not give specificity to the mix. Both of these Project RACE arguments for mixed-race representation were based primarily and fundamentally on an individual level about individual self-esteem and rights. For Project RACE supporters, recognition was the main right that they were seeking. They saw the Census primarily as the place to gain attention for these issues and did not frame their fight as one about housing, voting, or employment for mixed-race people, but instead ultimately as one only of recognition. Project RACE and Susan Graham differed from AMEA because for them the civil rights issue was *just* about recognition. For AMEA and Carlos Fernandez, the right to recognition was important, but it was also an extension of civil rights and was to be the basis for claiming other civil rights such as protection from discrimination. Project RACE and AMEA link recognition and rights differently although they shared the goal of adding "multiracial/

multiethnic” representation to the Census. For AMEA it was about adding a new “multirace” group as a way to get into the ranks of protected groups just like other protected racial groups. Project RACE, in contrast, saw the Census as a way to enable self identification primarily as an individual identity issue. Both positions though retain the idea of clearly defined racial boundaries and add multiracial as yet another racial group to the already existing groups.<sup>25</sup>

The multiracial group that had the most contact and membership in reference to the Asian American community was the Hapa Issues Forum (HIF). HIF is a non-profit, national, multiracial Asian American organization.<sup>26</sup> HIF differed from AMEA and Project RACE because it was a multiracial group specifically focused on issues of multiraciality for people of Asian descent and in relation to Asian American communities. It was also different in that it was founded by younger students, who were all multiracial themselves, unlike Project RACE which was conceived by Graham, a white mother of black/white children. It is possible that because the leadership and membership of HIF was all mixed race, part Asian, and all born after the civil rights movement, that this shaped their conception of what could be, or needed to be, accomplished in the multiracial movement. AMEA, founded by Fernandez and later run by Ramona Douglass bore the hallmarks of their veteran civil rights movement experience. It is because Fernandez and Douglass were more experienced and had been active in the civil rights movement that they saw the issue of rights as integrally tied to recognition and sought this for multiracial people on familiar territory by arguing along the lines of other, monoracially protected groups. The focus on the legal aspects of the mixed-race experience again came out of Fernandez’s training as a lawyer and long experience as a civil rights activist. The experiences of Fernandez and Douglass then were premised on understanding racialization as a bounded group collective claiming certain rights. Project RACE bore none of these trademarks and it is significant that it was founded by a self-identified monoracial white woman and mother of mixed-race children. Like many parents, Susan Graham couldn’t stand to see her children hurt by racial classification and therefore her focus became squarely placed on the issue of self-esteem and health issues for mixed-race young people.

For Graham, racialization was an individual identity issue.

HIF, in contrast, was a student-based organization and therefore had different strategies from AMEA or Project RACE. HIF formulated its own agenda in relation to the Census early on and its origins, youth, and completely mixed-descent membership allowed it to pursue a different organizing strategy in reference to the Census. In early 1997, HIF's board of directors examined the issues carefully and decided not to support either of the Census category formats proposed by AMEA and Project RACE. Instead, most of the members on the board wanted a format, which would support their ability to identify with the Asian American community as well as their other ethnic communities.<sup>27</sup> This perspective was shaped by the fact that HIF was always, from its inception, aimed at gaining acceptance for mixed-race Asian descent people in the traditional Asian ethnic communities. Unlike Project RACE and AMEA, HIF saw the Census as a chance to challenge the very boundaries of racial groups. In essence, HIF had a different model of racialization — one that would allow them to be in more than one racial category without being entirely separated from the other racial categories. This different understanding of racialization led to a different understanding of rights and recognition. HIF fundamentally did not want to relinquish part of the identification with their monoracial Asian heritage, parent, or community. Instead they sought recognition based on the ability to check more than one and still be counted with their Asian American brethren and sisters.

Sensing that their proposals were at odds and thinking that working together would further their multiracial cause, on June 7, 1997, AMEA, Project RACE and HIF (as well as other multiracial activists) sat down together to discuss the proposal to change the Census. They sought to present a united, multiracial front to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Census Bureau. Project RACE and AMEA's original proposals were used to discuss this issue and ultimately this "Multiracial Leadership Summit" produced a statement from these multiracial organizations that argued for a check one or more format that would be a part of the race question that everyone answered on the Census.

We advocate a "check one or more" format for the collection of racial data which will not adversely affect existing civil rights protections. We

do not advocate a stand alone multiracial category on the federal level. A “check one or more” format will enable all Americans to respond truthfully on the census and other forms that collect racial data.<sup>28</sup>

The argument for a stand-alone multiracial category, promoted by Project RACE, did not win out as it was agreed that the term “multiracial” did not have the same meaning for all mixed-race people. It was too broad a category to subsume all multiracial people under it.

This is an important point that categorizing all multiracial people together would perpetuate the lumping strategy and still not address the diversity of the multiracial experience within different ethnic groups. For example, it is clear that it is just as inappropriate to compare a mixed-race *yonsei* (fourth-generation) Japanese American with a Vietnamese Amerasian of the same age. In this sense, the multiracial experience for people of Asian descent is shaped by the hierarchy within monoracial API communities (i.e., Japanese Americans can be and are more tolerant of mixed-race descendants than Vietnamese because of economic status and past history such that people in the Japanese American community are not linked with memories and resentments against American soldiers). However, the experience of multiracial Asian descent people is also shaped by the hierarchy within Asian American ethnic groups. In other words, it is easier to be mixed-race Asian in some communities than others, but as a whole mixed-race Asian Americans are still seen as less than Asian in many communities. This affects attitudes towards the Census because if mixed-race people within a particular Asian ethnic community were large in number, respected and tolerated, and vocal they might be heard whereas if they were small in number, resented, and shamed, they may not be a consideration in people’s decisions whether to support multiple checks on the Census or not.

By recognizing the limits of lumping, Project RACE and AMEA’s proposals may have run into the limits of their own racial thinking. Mixed-race people were, and wanted to be, identified with each and all of their racial and ethnic communities as well as identified as mixed race. HIF was always strongly aware, as the only multiracial Asian American group, of the particular issues surrounding the push for multiple checks on the Census in relation to the larger Asian American community. For example,

many HIF members, and certainly the board members, were aware that having multiple checks on the Census could possibly decrease the number of people marking the Asian American box. In addition, since the Asian American community is small relative to other racial groups and because of undercount problems, multiracial Asian American activists knew that their actions could have far reaching effects. HIF was uniquely concerned with balancing the civil rights agendas of the existing groups with the push by multiracial people for recognition. Looking for a way to balance those two issues, HIF thought that check more than one would allow the data to be collected in a way that allowed for expression of mixed-race Asian descent identity, and the data could still be used in the five racial category format to track discrimination against Asian Americans.

### **TRADITIONAL CIVIL RIGHTS GROUPS WEIGH IN**

With that concern in mind, HIF worked tirelessly to get the word out to other Asian American groups to encourage their support of the check more than one format on the 2000 Census. One such group was the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), which was the only mainstream civil rights organization to support multiracial representation on the Census. JACL responded that it felt that it must take a stand as a civil rights organization to support the right of mixed-race people to identify multiply. I think they also recognized the importance of this issue particularly within the Japanese American community because they have one of the highest rates of intermarriage (forty-two percent marry non-Japanese Americans) among racial/ethnic groups.<sup>29</sup> In addition, they wanted to retain racial data on APIs for use in employment discrimination cases, affirmative action, voting rights, and civil rights enforcement. The JACL responded officially with a press release in July 1997 that stated:

The current system of taking the census must be revised to allow multiracial persons to have the opportunity to respond truthfully and accurately. Because there are many questions still unanswered regarding the impact of how to correctly count persons of multiracial heritage, the JACL supports the following principles in developing a more accurate method of counting multiracial populations:

- 1) The JACL believes multiracial marriages and policies and programs that celebrate cultural pluralism are positive and compatible values for American society.
- 2) The JACL believes the multiracial population in America will continue to increase.
- 3) The JACL believes the impact of a rapidly growing multiracial population on America's social, economic, and political institutions and values could be significant but largely unmeasured with out accurate data and information.
- 4) The JACL believes any change in the census taking procedures that incorporates the various combinations of multiracial persons must be compiled and processed in a manner that is based on sound statistical reasoning for those new categories.
- 5) The JACL believes census data should further greater common understanding and not be used to divide people or to reinforce beliefs in racial purity.
- 6) The JACL believes a single stand-alone multiracial category in the census, would unfairly hurt minority communities in terms of their population count and should therefore not be adopted<sup>30</sup>.

By publicly recognizing the need for a multiracial category and putting their own concerns about diluting Asian American numbers aside, the JACL, unlike the NAACP and the National Council de la Raza, supported the check more than one box format on the Census.

However, the JACL seemed to be in the minority in the Asian American community as many organizations (Chinese for Affirmative Action, Asian Americans for an Accurate Count) seemed to oppose recognizing multiraciality on the Census. Many of these organizations asked if perhaps the Census was the appropriate place to work out racial self-esteem and self-identity issues. They, in effect, rejected the notion that census recognition was a civil right and reinforced the racialization format of basing recognition on monoracial, mutually exclusive racial categories. Others wanted to support multiracial Asian Americans, but not at the cost of shrinking down the numbers needed to keep Asian American issues and groups on the map. At best, the multiracial push for changing the Census was perceived as being a threat to diluting the Asian American demographic base and therefore undermining the strides made by the traditional civil rights movement. In this instance, recognition and



rights were in conflict as civil rights. Many saw it as a zero sum game and a roll back in terms of voting, employment, political representation, and funding for Asian American programs.

Perhaps the most interesting development came when the issue of how these boxes would be tabulated was being discussed. Both the NAACP and the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF) urged those who were part white to identify themselves as simply black or Asian on the Census. Other civil rights organizations are pressuring the government to reassign multiracial Americans back into the traditional racial categories to resist dilution of any individual non-white racial group.<sup>31</sup> Clearly, AALDEF was resisting the separation of the racial category Asian American from the recognition of civil rights. It is because the concept of race is so closely tied with the concept of recognition that the AALDEF could not envision recognizing multiracial Asian Americans without possibly undoing the race and rights nexus. They therefore advocated compliance and control of mixed-race Asian Americans to tow the racial line by checking only Asian only on the Census.

The JACL in contrast, had a more flexible view of what race will look like in the year 2000 and were less concerned about losing numbers. This may be in part because the Japanese American community, which the JACL sees as its main constituency, is shrinking relative to other Asian ethnic groups and therefore has fewer numbers to lose than larger Asian ethnic groups such as South Asians who could withstand some numerical loss. Instead, the Japanese American community is so quickly becoming the largest out-married Asian ethnic group that the JACL might have thought it could score points and get membership from mixed-race Japanese Americans and this would only increase their numbers. However, the JACL statement is clear and framed within the tone that recognizing mixed-race Japanese Americans is just the right thing to do.

While the change in the way race is enumerated in the 2000 census may not seem that radical of a change, the implications are far-reaching. To recognize the multiraciality and hybridity present in the Asian American community may mean the categories have to change to allow for multiplicity. This seems a humane thing to do, but causes difficulties in the context of the Census because as it is currently envisioned and

used it is fundamentally about collecting racial/ethnic data to make sure that there are civil rights compliance, equal opportunities, and fair voting practices. In this logic, AMEA may be right, that it is not only how we see ourselves as mixed-race people, but also in cases of discrimination how others see us as well. If that seeing is the basis for discrimination in hiring or housing, there may be a need to know how many mixed-race people there are in order to insure compliance to equal housing and hiring laws. In this vein, if people were to perceive mixed-race people as the same and lump them together in their treatment racially, then there might be a call for mixed-race data. The Census has long been seen, and clearly still is seen by some mixed-race activists, particularly AMEA, as a place to lobby for collective racial identities, representation, and rights. At the same time, the Census has increasingly tried to recognize both group racial identities and individual racial identities. Some believe that the goal of the Census is to track discrimination against certain racial/ethnic groups. Others believe that the goal of the Census is fundamentally to represent individual racial identities. Because the mechanism for recognizing racial groups is racial group membership which is mutually exclusive to other racial groups and it is this membership that leads to recognition (as the basis as a claim for rights), and because the Census has been formulated along mutually exclusive racial lines and is tied directly to recognition, traditional civil rights groups see unlinking race and recognition as the end of rights. Ultimately, the state, represented here by the Census, likes to construct fixed categories of citizens under the law, and this conflicts fundamentally with the nature of the proposed changes to the Census where race will be tabulated multiply for different uses in different contexts. The racial rigidity that the state needs to enforce civil right laws competes with the flexibility proposed by multiracial activists.

### **RACE-ING THE STATE: THE CENSUS BUREAU AND THE OMB DECIDE**

In October of 1997, the OMB announced that it would indeed change and recommended that:

When self-identification is used, a method for reporting more than one race should be adopted. The method for respondents to report more

than one race should take the form of multiple responses to a single question and not a “multiracial” category. When a list of races is provided to respondents, the list should not contain a “multiracial” category.<sup>32</sup>

While other groups such as the European Americans and Middle Eastern Americans were unsuccessful in instigating change, the OMB was convinced by the “Multiracial Leadership Summit.” The main argument that seemed to motivate the OMB and U.S. Census Bureau to change the way it enumerated race, was that the Census was not representing multiracial people accurately when they had to choose one side of their racial/ethnic identity over another. This was not the first time the Census thought of allowing for self-expression on the Census. In the 1960s when the Census first began self-identification on the race question, they decided that the Census Bureau would no longer decide and designate people’s race as they had in the past (i.e., brown paper bag test).<sup>33</sup> Instead, they would allow people to self-identify their own racial identity, but of course in 1977, there would only be one correct way to do that and that would be to mark a single racial identity for each person. There was no room for multiple races within a single person. The announcement in 1997 to recognize the multiplicity of races for a single person seems to be an extension of the trend to allow people more room for self-identification. Therefore, in the 1970s the issue of recognition was addressed *within* racial categories. However in the 1990s, the decision to allow multiple checks on the race question makes it clear that the issue of recognition is being raised *across* racial categories.

### **TABULATING IN 2000**

To combine this individual goal of self-recognition with the explicit goals of the Census to monitor civil rights violations seems to have created contradictory purposes for the Census — on the one hand, accurate, individual self-identification and on the other, collective reparations along civil rights lines. For this reason, the Census uses race to translate between recognition and civil rights. Again, the connections between these concepts becomes tangled up in the state because the fixedness that the state needs to enforce rights equally does not take account of the fluid and multiple

nature of the identities expressed by checking more than one racial box. The issue then is not just the change in the way the Census collects racial data in the year 2000, but also in the tabulation and use of that data. Jorge de Pinal, of the population division of the U.S. Bureau of the Census, proposed five ways in which the data could be tabulated: (1) full racial distribution; (2) all inclusive; (3) collapsing; (4) combining or priority reassignment; or (5) algorithmic.<sup>34</sup> The full racial distribution would report the five major pre-existing racial identities alone and all possible combinations of these races separately. In other words, multiracial people would not be counted as a part of their monoracial communities even though they may think so because they checked the Asian American box (in addition to the white box) for example. Instead, each set of racial combinations would be reported as a mutually exclusive group. For example, all black:Japanese mixed-race people would be counted separately and would be a distinct group from all Japanese:white mixed-race people and separate again from people who checked just the Japanese box. This is an unrealistic way to constitute racial communities and is the ultimate example of splitting racial combinations into so many minute individual identity groups that they cease to have meaning. In addition, this method has been used by some conservative politicians to argue that racial categories no longer make meaningful sense and therefore should be done away with altogether.<sup>35</sup> This position, which was supported by Republican Newt Gingrich, attacks policies like affirmative action through the recognition of multiraciality. In this instance, he would be using recognition to attack rights. It is a quick trip from this way of thinking to doing away with tabulating racial/ethnic data all together.

The all-inclusive strategy would add together all the people who chose a single racial category. For example, if a person marked Asian American and black they would be counted as a member of *both* racial categories.<sup>36</sup> This would obviously add up to more than 100 percent of the population as mixed-race people, who check more than one box would be counted as a whole person in each of the categories that they marked. This seems to give mixed-race people undue influence in that they magically get counted as more than one person. If this method is used, the Asian American category and Asian American community, as well as other highly mixed

communities such as Native Americans, would certainly benefit as they would most certainly grow in size given the results of the RAETT of 1997. It would allow Asian Americans to have lumped in with them the mixed-race members who identify as Asian American *and* something else, but it would ultimately split mixed-race individuals into two (albeit more accurate) groups. This method would allow for individual self-esteem issues to be met, but the racial bar might be raised for Asian American groups in terms of their whole numbers if the government recognizes that the numbers may be inflated because of this double-counting method. In addition, it will be difficult if not impossible for the data, if collected this way, to be compared historically with past Census data.<sup>37</sup> This method would clearly give mixed-race people the recognition that they want and in fact, would boost traditional groups of color civil rights agendas.

The collapsing method would only count multiple respondents separately if the number of a multiracial population reached a number deemed significant by the Census Bureau. This could possibly split some mixed-race Asian Americans from others and the threshold required to be counted separately is unclear. For example, if the number of people who identify as Asian and Native American is considered sufficiently small enough by the Census Bureau, this multiracial category would be collapsed into its component groups (*how is unclear*) and would not appear as a separate racial category.<sup>38</sup> This would hurt the overall Asian American numbers if there were a large number of multiracial Asian categories. For example, if there were a significant number of Asian:white respondents, then they would most likely be split off from the Asian American category. But it could be a potential lumping method for Asian Americans to gain numbers if mixed-race Asian Americans, who wouldn't fit in their own separate or another racial category, were to be collapsed into the Asian American category.

The combining/priority reassignment method would place the multiracial person in the category that has the smallest national population. For example, someone who is Asian American and black would be placed in the Asian American category because that group is smaller on the whole than the black group. However, if someone were mixed Asian and Native American, they would be reassigned to the Native

American group since it is smaller. This might help Asian American numbers on the whole because many multiracial Asian Americans are mixed with larger groups (i.e. white and black) and because most groups are bigger than Asian American (except Native Americans), they would benefit numerically. This might not solve the individual self-esteem issues for some mixed-race people as this method of tabulation would not recognize multiple group memberships at the same time. Therefore, this is an example of how self-esteem is an issue not only in collecting the data, but also in how the data are used.

Finally, the algorithmic method would reassign multiple-raced respondents into one of the existing racial categories. This could be done in four ways. First, they could split a mixed-race person into fractions, which would spread them equally amongst all the categories they chose. Second, they could randomly reassign mixed-race respondents to one of the categories. Third, they could use the imputation method and use some other social characteristic such as the race of their closest neighbor and put them in that category (using the hypothesis that most neighborhoods are racially homogenous), and this may or may not have anything to do with your racial backgrounds. Or fourth, they could distribute multiracial people in fractions according to the proportion of their major racial categories. If the majority of mixed-race people were mixed with white, then the white category would receive the highest number of mixed-race respondents. Even so, this would not necessarily mean the largest proportional increase since the white community is larger than most others. They could absorb many mixed-race people and it still might not have a big effect. This method would hurt the Asian American community since it is not one of the largest. It would also have the net effect of splitting mixed-race people in ways that don't seem to make sense and don't truly recognize the dual identification that some mixed-race people may have with one or more racial groups. This method also raises constitutional questions by counting people in fractions, similar to how slaves were tabulated prior to the adoption of the Thirteenth Amendment.<sup>39</sup>

Hapa Issues Forum (HIF) wanted to support the rights of mixed-race groups and they understood this as mixed-race individuals. However, they also wanted to actively boost the civil rights of the communities to

which they belong. They therefore advocated the all inclusive method because it seemed to best recognize the individual need to be recognized as a full member of more than one racial group with the ability to see the boundaries of the multiracial community. The challenge clearly in all of these methods is to balance recognizing multiraciality on some level without threatening the whole of racial communities, particularly small groups of color like Asian Americans. Asian Americans could possibly benefit from the all inclusive method if it is chosen. Officially, the OMB and Census Bureau have not made a decision, but some believe that they will go with the full distribution tabulation method, which is likely to damage Asian Americans.

## **CONCLUSION**

On a larger theoretical level, this study uses the case of multiracial Asian Americans to show how the instantiation of race by the state can be changed to represent changes in racialization, recognition, and rights. The example of the fight to change the Census in the year 2000 to recognize mixed-race people and its threat to the civil rights of traditional groups of color illustrates how different conceptualizations of race are intimately tied to understandings of rights and recognition.<sup>40</sup> This connection between race, recognition, and rights used to be acceptable because it was easy to translate race as meaning a citizen with the concomitant rights. Now, however, it is a complex situation indeed and one that cannot assume a direct connection between those three concepts. In addition, this case highlights what seem to be contradictory census goals, which try to offer recognition and rights both to individuals and groups. We can see in this example of mixed-race Asian Americans that the goal of recognition of those individuals may indeed contradict and undermine the goal of larger collective recognition by Asian American communities themselves. This creates an unfortunate dynamic where mixed-race Asian Americans fighting for recognition on the Census are blamed for undoing the strides of the Asian American movement. Ironically it seems possible that this may be used as a cultural tactic to get some multiracial Asian Americans not to speak out in public because they will ruin it for other Asian

Americans. Race, in this sense, is used to silence mixed-race Asian Americans for the good of the group.<sup>41</sup> Framing the debate in racial terms, pits mixed-race Asian American against full-blooded Asian American activists on the issue of the Census creating the danger of falling into the trap that Lisa Lowe warned against. In playing by mainstream racial standards and only along racial lines, those of us involved in the debate reinforce the power of those standards. In a sense, we become prisoners of racial thinking by strategizing only along the lines of what we can gain within these racial boundaries. There is some extreme individualized racial thinking as in the case of mixed-race activists who want a multiracial category for self-esteem and see the Census as a place to attain that. However, there is also extreme racial groupism where oppressed racial groups have unbending hard boundaries and cannot even begin to entertain the idea of shifting those boundaries for fear of losing the small piece of the economic/political pie that they already have.

The alliance between the JACL and HIF though provides some hope for cooperation on the issue of the Census. The NAACP, and other like minded traditional civil rights groups see civil (group) rights as the main issue and see the issue of mixed-race recognition as a secondary issue, one that now threatens the first. The JACL/HIF alliance however attempts to move beyond this zero sum game. By asserting both recognition and rights, they are putting forth a new model of racialization where one does not have to surrender her/his individual mixed identity and recognition in order to continue to be mindful that his/her actions affect the communities to which that person belong, especially those who are of color and need to track discrimination. By supporting the all-inclusive method, HIF is acting on that different understanding of race, but not at the risk of losing numbers (in fact they could be gaining numbers by adding mixed-race people) and with it Asian American programming, funding, and support. The Census changes will clearly have very real effects for Asian Americans and Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiians in the year 2000. But most important now is how individuals, community groups and collectivities are able to incorporate these new narratives of race, recognition, and rights into their understanding of what it means to be Asian Pacific Islander in the new millennium.



It is still not clear how the Census will tabulate the results of Census 2000 or what effect splitting Asian from Pacific Islander or the check more than one will have, but the question remains whether this is a move toward dismantling racism or not. HIF/JACL are playing a brave, but potentially dangerous game in attempting to support recognition and rights of multiracial people. This move would challenge not just racism, but also racialization as it is embedded in state institutions like the Census. This is good for multiracial people, but it also could dangerously open the door for others to argue that race doesn't have meaning and need to be tracked anymore. The main obstacle for understanding racialization in the state is that race as it is currently understood in the Census needs a one-to-one correspondence between race and individual across all social contexts. To change this assumption and allow for multiplicity and flexibility across social contexts, would be a truly radical change and would constitute a major rethinking of legal understandings of race. Until that happens, the scope and effects of the changes for the Census 2000 will depend heavily on how the racial data is tabulated and used.

### Notes

1. Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994).
2. I would like to thank Sheila Chung, Deirdre Howard, Greg Mayeda, and Tony Yuen of Hapa Issues Forum for crucial data, documents, and great insights that made this paper possible, and also Nazli Kibria and Seán Ó Riain for much needed feedback and comments.
3. See Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*; and Yen Le Espiritu, *Asian American Panethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992).
4. Ian Haney Lopez, *White By Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 1996).
5. Mary Washington, "The Institutional and Social Movement of Mixed Race Classification in the United States Census: 1850-1920," unpublished paper, 1998.
6. John Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986).
7. Mia Tuan, *Forever Foreigners or Honorary Whites? The Asian Ethnic Experience Today* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1998).
8. See appendices in Maria P.P. Root (ed.), *The Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders as the New Frontiers* (Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications, 1996).

9. For more on this see, William Wei, *The Asian American Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).
10. Michael Omi, "Racial Identity and the State: The Dilemmas of Classification," *Law and Inequality* 15:1 (1997):18.
11. Michael Omi and Yen Le Espiritu, in *The State of Asian Pacific America: Transforming Race Relations*, edited by Paul Ong (Los Angeles: LEAP and Asian American Studies Center, UCLA, 2000).
12. Judith Butler, "Merely Cultural," *New Left Review* 227 (1998): 33-44; and Nancy Fraser, "Heterosexism, Misrecognition, and Capitalism: A Response to Judith Butler," *New Left Review* 228 (1998): 140-49.
13. Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 71.
14. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Population Division, *Results of the 1996 Race and Ethnic Targeted Test*, Working Paper No. 18 (Washington D.C., May 1997).
15. Office of Management and Budget Hearings Transcripts, vol.1, 1994, 39.
16. Timothy Fong, *The Contemporary Asian American Experience: Beyond the Model Minority* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1998).
17. The use of terminology is interesting here and reveals the certain understandings of race that each group had. AMEA, uses the word "multiethnic" to include all people who consider themselves to be of mixed heritage. In their original census proposal they supported splitting race from ethnicity and adding "multiracial" to the race list and "multiethnic" to the ethnicity list or doing a combined race/ethnicity format which added "multiethnic/multiracial" to the list of possibilities along with traditional racial categories. This illustrates some of the slippage in the their understanding between race and ethnicity as concepts. Project RACE, on the other hand, wanted just one additional category to read "multiracial." They had no additional interest in tracking people's ethnic choices.
18. Carlos A. Fernandez, "Government Classification of Multiracial/Multiethnic People," in Root, *Multiracial Experience*, 29.
19. *Ibid.*, 32.
20. Caroline Streeter, "Ambiguous Bodies: Locating Black/White Women in Cultural Representations," in Root, *Multiracial Experience*, 305.
21. For more on the Revonda Bowen case see *ibid.*, 305-20. For more on hate crime in Japantown see, Rocky Mitarai, "Hatecrime in Japantown," in Pearl Fuyo Gaskins (ed.), *What Are You?* (New York: Henry Holt, 1999).
22. Maria Root, "A Bill of Rights for Racially Mixed People," in Root, *Multiracial Experience*, 3-14; and Fernandez, "Government Classification," 15-36.
23. Susan Graham, "The Real World," in Root, *Multiracial Experience*, 39.
24. *Ibid.*, 41-42.
25. For more on this logic of racial reasoning or lack thereof, see Ranier Spencer, *Spurious Issues: Race and Multiracial Identity Politics in the U.S.* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1999).
26. HIF started out as a student group at UC Berkeley and when the founders,

Greg Mayeda, Steve Ropp, Jeff Yoshimi, Maggie Gabel, and Eric Tate, left Berkeley they took HIF with them. It now is a national non-profit association with branches in San Francisco, southern California, the Pacific Northwest, and Japan and has been used as a model for other multiracial Asian descent organizations.

27. This research is based on a larger project of two years of ethnographic fieldwork and document based research conducted from 1996-98. For more information see, Rebecca Chiyoko King, "The Changing Face of Japanese America: The Making and Remaking of Race in the Japanese American Community," Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1998.
28. N.a., "Hapa Issues Forum Takes a Stand on the Census: Check One or More," in *What=s Hapa=ning* (HIF Newsletter) 4:2 (Summer1997), 5.
29. Larry Shinagawa, "Intermarriage and Inequality," Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1994; and Harry Kitano, *Generations and Identity: The Japanese American* (Needham Heights, Massachusetts: Ginn Press,1993).
30. JACL Policy Position on the Multiracial Category, 7/8/97, 2. Can be found at: <http://www.jacl.org>.
31. Gregory Rodriguez, "Do the Multiracial Count?" *Salon*, February 15, 2000, <http://www.salon.com/news/feature/2000/02/15/census>.
32. Federal Register, Office of Management and Budget, "Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity; Notices," October, 30, 1997, 58,785.
33. Washington writes about how census-takers in the 1870 Census were instructed to eyeball people to make the distinction between black, mulatto, and white. One such test was if the person in question was darker skinned than a brown paper bag, they were considered black or mulatto, and if they were lighter than the bag, they were white.
34. Jorge de Pinal, Jorge, "Approaches for Developing Tabulations of Race Data from the 2000 Census," Population Division, U.S. Bureau of the Census, June 3, 1998.
35. Steven A. Holmes, "People Can Claim More Than 1 Race on Federal Forms," *New York Times*, October 30, 1997, A19.
36. Greg Mayeda, "2000 Census Tabulation Method Uncertain," *Pacific Citizen*, September 4, 1998, 2.
37. *Ibid.*, 2.
38. *Ibid.*, 3.
39. *Ibid.*
40. I use the term "traditional groups of color" to mean racial/ethnic groups in the past twenty-five years which base themselves loosely on the five category format, i.e. black, white, Native American, Latino, etc. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) would be an example. This terminology is circular in that it is impossible to talk about racial groups that have yet to be formed without using language which seems to reify race.

41. For another example of this, see Peter Kwong, *The New Chinatown* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996).