

Say No to Racial Classifications!

BY STEVE DASBACH

Is your racial classification government-approved?

Most Americans would find the question itself offensive. After all, what kind of government would dare to create a list of "officially approved" races?

Our government would.

The U.S. government has five official racial classifications, which were created by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in 1977 and laid out in a document coldly named Statistical Directive 15.

The categories appear on all U.S. census forms and hundreds of other government documents, and federal agencies use the resulting data to draft laws that treat Americans according to their racial makeup.

The classifications are White, Black, American Indian/Eskimo, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Hispanic. They're strikingly similar to those imposed under the racist government of South Africa under Apartheid: White, Black, Colored, and Indian.

The difference, of course, is that South Africa has abolished its official racial designations — while American politicians stubbornly cling to theirs. In fact, the U.S. government recently reaffirmed its commitment to American Apartheid. After a three-year study, it decided in July not to abolish its official racial classifications. Instead, the government told multiracial Americans that they could check several boxes, such as black and white, on census forms.

How did the government of a nation dedicated to liberty and equality under the law get away with keeping this demeaning system in place? By creating a racial spoils system that actually encourages people to think of themselves as hyphenated Americans.

Tellingly, before the OMB bureaucrats decided to leave the current classifications in place, they even considered adding more categories — including Hawaiian, multiracial, Middle Easterner, Arab-American, six different kinds of Latino, "other," Creole, and even Germanic.

Simply put, politicians and bureaucrats have a lot to gain by creating warring interest groups, then rewarding their supporters with special favors.

For example, the Federal Communications Commission awards 25% "bidding credits" to minority-owned companies, so a member of a government-approved minority would pay, for example, \$750,000 for a \$1 million radio station license.

Other federal agencies use the classifications to arrange low-interest loans, to enforce quotas

for college admissions — even to decide whom to hire and fire.

Even the courts are getting into the act, and have become America's latest racial battleground. In March, an Egyptian immigrant implored a federal court to change his government-mandated racial classification from white to black. The man, Mostafa Hefny of Detroit, says his “incorrect” classification has kept him from seeking jobs, grants, scholarships, and loans as a member of a minority group.

Such racially based policies may be one of the reasons why Americans have seemingly become less tolerant and more racially divided over the past three decades. After all, how can politicians possibly preach the virtues of non-discrimination when they use the power of government to *enforce* discrimination?

Fortunately, after 20 long years of allowing the U.S. government to pigeonhole us according to the color of our skin, Americans may be ready to fight back. A 1995 *Newsweek* poll found that 47% of whites and 48% of blacks thought the census should stop collecting data on race “even if it becomes more difficult to measure progress on civil rights and poverty programs.”

But since politicians insist on keeping this system, perhaps a little civil disobedience is in order. When the 2000 census rolls around, why not make the lives of the racial bean-counters at the Census Bureau a little more difficult by boycotting the census question on race? Imagine what would happen if 100 million Americans sent back their census forms with the racial question blank. The framework for American Apartheid would crash to the ground.

But think carefully before you practice any racial disobedience. Perhaps anticipating that Americans would someday reject the politics of race, politicians wrote into federal law a \$100 fine for anyone who “refuses or willfully neglects” to answer their census questions.

That’s right: Politicians and bureaucrats so desperately want to divide us by race that they’ll punish us if we don’t meekly check the proper racial box. Of course, the fine is rarely imposed, but the fact that it even exists is offensive.

Our journey toward a more colorblind society must start with a colorblind government — and that means abolishing racial classifications.

Isn’t it time we told these fill-in-the-blank bureaucrats that our race is none of their business? We’re all *Americans*. What else does the government need to know?

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