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RACE IN THE CANADIAN CENSUS

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UNLIKE HER NEIGHBOUR to the south, Canada has an erratic history of enumerating the racial composition of her population. This enumeration history is characterized by three components: 1) temporal variation in the presence, or absence, of a census question relevant to the collection of racial data; 2) variation in question wording such that at times "race" is explicit and at other subsumed by the "origin" concept; and 3) variation in the larger societal ideologies of race relations that motivate data collection.

At the moment, Canada is at a crossroad. Considerable demand for data on "visible minorities" currently exists as a result of changing models of social inequality and related public policies of multiculturalism and employment equity. Public discourse on "racism" and racial discrimination has also fuelled such data demands. However, the 1991 Census failed to include a question that explicitly asks for "race," despite formal consultation by Statistics Canada and considerable public attention to the issue. The 1996 Census asked a question on the country's visible minority population for the first time. Yet, during the 1996 Census collection, diverse blocks of public opinion threatened to perpetuate societal and statistical ambivalence about asking the question at all.

The purpose of this paper is twofold: 1) to document the variations in the Canadian Census with regard to enumerating race; and 2) to show that such variations covary with changing conceptualizations of race and race relations. Pursuit of these objectives serves to confirm both common sense and expert assessments of ethnic and racial origin questions. How and when ancestry and/or phenotypical or somatic characteristics are collected by the Census is determined not only by the principles of social survey research but also by laws, politics, and broader societal representations of ethnicity and race (Goldmann and McKenney, 1993).

In order to provide background information on the Census as a measuring instrument, we present a brief overview of census-taking in Canada. We then discuss the changing history of enumerating race in Canadian censuses. Temporal variations exist in approaches to the enumeration of race. These variations reflect prevailing models of racial discourse and nation-building. In a subsequent section, we examine the specific issues that associated with attempts to devise a question on race for the 1991 Census. We conclude with a brief assessment of the issues which must be confronted in renewing attempts to field a race question in the 1996 census.

TAKING STOCK

As Priest (1990:1) observes, "[i]t is difficult to discuss the collection and use of ethnicity [and, we add, race] in the Canadian Census without recounting ... the struggle of the French and the British for control of the North American continent and to consider the history of census-taking itself." Priest's review enriches the context of early census-taking, beginning in 1665 with Jean Talon's enumeration of the population in the French territory which is now part of Quebec. Motivated by questions of political and economic domination through the mechanism of European settlement, these early Censuses focused on age, sex, marital status, professions and trades. Race, religion and origins were new dimensions added to the 1767 British-instigated Censuses in Nova Scotia, and race and origins reappeared in the 1824 census in New Brunswick (Priest, 1990).

To the extent that race, religion and origins were found in other earlier Censuses, much of the emphasis was on collecting data by religion and/or birthplace. Such information was central to broader issues of nation-building and sovereignty in a land whose colonization had been so much contested in the preceding two centuries. However, the demographic and economic expansion of Canada's western regions during the late 1800s brought with it increasing awareness of, and conflict with, the Aboriginal populations resident there. Following the uprising of Louis Riel and his Métis force, an 1885 Census of Assiniboia, Saskatchewan and Alberta included a count of wigwams and introduced the concept of "half-breeds" through a modification of the origin question.

The British North America Act, 1867, formalized nation-building endeavours. To meet the administrative needs of the Canadian govern-

ment it provided the legal mechanism for the continuation of decennial Censuses undertaken in 1851 and 1861. Since then the government of Canada has been required to conduct a census of population in the first full year of every decade. More recently the decennial Census has been conducted under the authority of the Constitution Act, 1982. National quinquennial Censuses began in 1956 and since this time Canada has held a census every five years (Statistics Act, 1985).

Immigration was a major component of Canada's growth and national development in the centuries following the travels of the early European explorers. As Miles (1992) notes, how racially and ethnically diverse newcomers are to be incorporated is a major question facing such countries both then and now. Similar concerns and administrative needs appear to underlie the continued interest in enumerating the origins of Canada's population during the 1800s. Nevertheless, race as an explicit term did not then enter into the census-taking. Table 3.1 shows the temporal variations in the focus on origins, race and visible minority group.

TABLE 3.1

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF CANADA'S COLLECTION OF ETHNIC AND RACIAL ORIGIN DATA BY CENSUS YEAR, 1767 TO 1996

Census Year	Origins	Racial Origins	Ethnic Origins	Visible Minority Group
1767	X	X		
1824		X		
1851	X			
1861	X			
1871	X			
1881	X			
1891	NA	NA	NA	NA
1901		X		
1911		X		
1921		X		
1931		X		
1941		X		
1951			X	
1961			X	
1971			X	
1981			X	
1986			X	X*
1991			X	X*
1996			X	X*

X* Derived counts of visible minority population based on employment equity definitions.
NA= Not asked.
Source: White, Badets and Renaud, 1993. Modified to reflect 1996 Census.

Between 1851 and 1881, the primary focus was on the origins of the Canadian population. However, a discernible shift occurred following the 1891 Census, in which no question on origins or race was present, though information on persons of French Canadian background was collected. Between 1901 and 1941, racial origins were an explicit part of the wording of Census questions. Enumerators were provided with rules of enumeration that emphasized categorization according to lineage or descent. In 1951, however, explicit references to "race" were abruptly dropped. Between 1951 and 1991, data collection efforts relied on an ethnic origin question. In 1996, questions on ethnic origin, Aboriginal identity and visible minority group were asked.

If the explicit formulations of race questions vary, so too do the underlying conceptualizations of race. Given Canada's European settlement and attachments it is not surprising to find that images of, and discussion about, race parallel northern European changes in conceptualizing it. Miles (1989:31) argues that the idea of "race" emerged in the English language in the early sixteenth century, as part of nation-building and it largely referred to populations of emergent nation states. In its early usage in Europe the term "race" meant lineage or common descent and identified a population with a common origin and history, but not a population with a fixed biological character. However, the idea of race took on a new meaning with the development of science, its application to the natural world, and its extension to a social world (Miles, 1989). By the late 1800s, social Darwinism had permeated public and academic discourse.

Between 1901 and 1941, Canadian Censuses not only explicitly used the terms "race" and "racial origin," but also they contained elaborate instructions to enumerators on how to properly categorize respondents on the basis of race. The categories changed somewhat over time, but the emphasis was on demarcating a "white" population from groups which today are considered African, Asian or Aboriginal. As Table 3.2 shows, paternal ancestry was used to classify the European "white" groups. Indians [sic] were to be classified by the origin of the mother and all offspring of children of mixed marriages between white and other "races" were classified as belonging to the non-white "race."

In the Canadian Census questions on "race," the descent rules which were *de rigueur* up to 1941 are highly consistent with evolutionary theory. According to the nineteenth century evolutionary schemes, societies were classified on a scale that, based on Lewis Henry Morgan's

TABLE 3.2

DESCENT RULES, BY CENSUS YEAR AND BY ETHNIC/RACIAL/TRIBAL ORIGIN

Census	White/ European	Indian	Métis	Inuit/ Eskimo	Other Non-White	Other Mixed
1871	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified
1881	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified
1891	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
1901	Patrilineal	Tribal	Complex	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified
1911	Patrilineal	Matrilineal	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified	Non-white
1921	Patrilineal	Matrilineal	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified	Non-white
1931	Patrilineal	Matrilineal	Not specified	Not specified	Coloured	Non-white
1941	Patrilineal	Indian	Half-breed	Eskimo	Coloured	Non-white
1951	Patrilineal	Patrilineal	Place of residence	Not specified	Patrilineal	Patrilineal
1961	Patrilineal	Patrilineal	Place of residence	Not specified	Patrilineal	Patrilineal
1971	Patrilineal	Patrilineal	Patrilineal	Patrilineal	Patrilineal	Patrilineal
1981	Ambilineal	Ambilineal	Ambilineal	Ambilineal	Ambilineal	Ambilineal
1986	Ambilineal	Ambilineal	Ambilineal	Ambilineal	Ambilineal	Ambilineal
1991	Ambilineal	Ambilineal	Ambilineal	Ambilineal	Ambilineal	Ambilineal
1996	Ambilineal	Ambilineal	Ambilineal	Ambilineal	Ambilineal	Ambilineal

Note: In the 1996 Census, the Aboriginal Identity question asks respondents to self-identify as being North American, Indian, Metis or Inuit. Respondents can mark more than one group. Aboriginal respondents are not asked to respond to the question identifying visible minorities as the Employment Equity legislation defines visible minorities as persons who are other than Aboriginal persons.

interpretation, spanned a continuum from "savagery" to "barbarism" to "civilization" (Zeitlin,1990). Evolutionists commonly believed that in "civilized" societies descent was determined along patrilineal lines. They also believed that among "barbaric" societies descent was matrilineally based and that among "savages" it was based on, "tribal" affiliation. With regard to Canada's Census, it is interesting to note that according to this logic the Aboriginal population "evolved" from savagery to barbarism during the period 1901 and 1911. This contrasted with the specification of rights in the Indian Act which designated lineage according to patrilineal descent until changes were made by Bill C-31 (1985).

However, if one focuses on the descent rules in the 1901-1941 Canadian Censuses as reflecting the then existing conceptualizations of race one risks missing the broader motivating forces behind the adoption of such conceptualization and measurement. Migration involves contact with new societies, and in Canada's history it certainly con-

cerned the twofold activities of dominating the indigenous populations and creating a nation out of diverse peoples. Miles (1989:11) argues that such migration generates and reshapes imagery, beliefs and evaluations about the "Other" in order to formulate a strategy for interaction. In Canada, prior to the mid-1900s, the representations of the "Other" in "racial" terms emphasized biological properties associated with blood lineage. These representations, as embodied in descent rules, took different forms depending on the twin projects of colonialism and nationhood.

Colonialism is often defined as the military, political and/or economic dominance of one nation over a subordinate country. Internal colonialism exists where Europeans have settled in new lands, established European institutions and subjugated both indigenous and non-indigenous peoples (Satzewich and Wotherspoon, 1992). There are a number of dimensions to this internal colonialism, but one aspect of the colonization process is the creation of racism and a colour line to regulate social interaction between groups.

The settlement of the Prairies carried with it an agenda for the agricultural development of the region and the wresting away of control from the indigenous peoples. The establishment of a permanent Canadian presence in the West also diminished American influences. Evolutionary theory made it possible to develop a discourse of race that represented Aboriginals as the "Other," with capacities and achievements fixed by biological, natural and unalterable conditions (Miles, 1989). As observed by Satzewich and Wotherspoon (1992: 8), "ideologies of biological superiority and inferiority emerge[d] to justify the exploitation of Aboriginal people and their resources, to break down their resistance and to deter them from becoming full members of Canadian society." The Indian Act was a significant legislative instrument of policy, used by the Canadian government to maintain control over indigenous groups and to instill the notion of "Other."

However, non-European groups from abroad were not immune to social characterization. Late nineteenth-century reactions against the immigration of Chinese existed, with a head tax being imposed in 1886 and increased in 1900 and 1903. Indeed, the rules of descent as operationalized in the Census for the years 1901 to 1941 approximated the notion of the "one drop rule." This form of categorization had been in existence in the United States and prevented successive generations of mixed marriage offspring from ever being classified "white" (Davis, 1991).

As well, reputed biological properties were the basis of many admonitions against admitting European groups of dubious "suitability." As Porter (1965:64-65) notes British immigrants were never considered foreigners, but changing immigration patterns, reducing the proportion of Northern European and British settlers in favour of Eastern and Southern Europeans provoked debate about the desirability of other groups. Central to this debate was a focus on certain traits as biological, although there was much variation in opinion as to whether these traits were to be considered as cultural in origin, or as genetic, inherited and thus unalterable.

The 1908 book *Strangers at Our Gate*, written by J. S. Woodsworth, epitomized many of the beliefs and tensions regarding the relative desirability of various white "races." However, Woodsworth was not alone in his views. Such attitudes lasted well into the 1940s and served to exclude many groups from entry into Canada. For example, Abella and Tropper (1982) document the tragic consequences of Canadian immigration policies which prevented admission of Jews to Canada both before and after the Second World War.

The resulting schema of ranking clearly acknowledged the dominance of the British-origin group in Canada's economic, political and social life. For almost two centuries following the battle between British and French forces on the Plains of Abraham, international migration reinforced British domination. The Immigration Acts of 1910, 1927 and 1952 continued the exclusion of groups deemed undesirable according to ethnic/racial criteria and continued to favour the migration of people from the British Isles, Northern Europe and — if all else failed — other European areas (Harney, 1988). In actual fact, during the late 1800s and through the 1900s, migration from Europe ensured substantial ethnic diversification, yet the prevailing model remained that of assimilation to a British ethnic prototype (Breton, 1988; Harney, 1988). The creation of a common "Anglo" ideology and set of institutions and the pressing agenda of developing the western interior of Canada provided important contexts for debates on the characteristics of South and East European migrants. These debates accorded much attention to the ability of such groups to be assimilated and to strengthen Canada's nation-building endeavours.

To summarize: between 1901 and 1941 the context surrounding the "race" questions generated two models of incorporation into the Canadian mainstream. Both emphasized lineage and invoked distinctions between "we" and "they." In one model, firm unalterable bound-

aries existed around non-white groups. In the context of the Canadian Census, the instructions to census enumerators specified that the offspring of mixed marriages (white/non-white) were to be assigned the non-white "race." These boundaries both derived from and reaffirmed prevailing ideologies in which white was superior and dominant in relation to other non-white groups.

The second model permitted boundary crossing for the white population. Although various "white" immigrant groups were considered races, categorization in the Census was traced through the father's side. As a result, intermarriage for the white population could, and did, change the categorization of offspring. Such fluidity is consistent with the early twentieth century model of Anglo assimilation and with the transformation of the white "other" into the "self."

POST-SECOND WORLD WAR VIEW: OUT WITH RACE, IN WITH CULTURE

The period between 1941 and 1951 was in many respects a watershed. World War II sensitized the Western world to the genocidal policies that could — and did — accompany the conceptualization of race as biological and unalterable. This most certainly had an impact on the way in which the population was counted and classified in Canadian Censuses from that point on. The 1951 Census origins question contained no mention of "race" either in the instructions to enumerators or in the question description and wording. Instead, the emphasis was on ancestry or cultural origins on the father's side. Aboriginal peoples, Africans and persons of colour or with distinctive features continued to be enumerated as such, but the vocabulary of labelling and categorization officially changed to that of origin instead of race. With minor alterations, the approach adopted in the 1951 Census was repeated in 1961 and 1971. From 1981 onward, instructions to link origins to the paternal side were dropped and multiple responses were permitted.

While an important factor in the move away from an explicit "race" question, horror at Nazi termination policies does not adequately account for the protracted postwar history of Census questions on ethnic origins as opposed to race. Nation-building was again an important factor although the earlier ideologies of Anglo-conformity and colonialism were to be replaced by issues of multiculturalism and sovereignty.

In addition to Anglo-French relations (Breton,1988), demographic change in the form of large postwar immigration provided an impor-

tant impetus to development of the concept of nationhood and its legislative and institutional representations. During and after World War I the large numbers of migrants to Canada slowed considerably and became a trickle during the Depression years of the 1930s. After World War II, however, not only was Europe on the move, with the migration of displaced persons, but also there was an awareness in the Canadian government, due to the war, of the dangers of a sparsely settled country. In his 1947 statement to Parliament on immigration Prime Minister Mackenzie King explicitly noted that immigration would shore up Canada's small population. Europe was clearly the source for such reinforcements, given King's announcement that Canada did not wish there to be, as a result of mass immigration, any fundamental alteration in the character of the Canadian population. However, in 1962 and in 1967 changes in Canadian immigration regulations opened the doors to non-European groups. These changes, later embodied in the Immigration Act, 1976, replaced the national origins criteria for admission with those emphasizing family reunification and labour market contribution. Groups which previously could not immigrate to Canada because they were not from designated European countries were now admitted if they met family reunification, labour market or humanitarian criteria.

These policy changes altered the composition of Canada's migration flows and diversified the Canadian population. Of immigrants arriving before 1961 over 90 percent were born in the United States and Europe, while between one to two percent were Asian-born. In contrast, of those immigrating in the late 1980s, a little over 30 percent were from the United States and Europe, compared with over 40 percent from Asia. Today, close to three quarters of immigrants come from regions other than Europe and the United States.

Harney (1988) argues that the resultant ethnic diversity belied the old images of Canadian society and thus fuelled the search for a principle of collective national identity in the 1980s. However, the need to unify a country with major regional and linguistic/ethnic cleavages had been recognized by politicians much earlier. Starting in the late 1950s under Diefenbaker, and continuing under the Liberal governments of the 1960s and 1970s, a series of policies and actions were initiated which deliberately and directly appealed to Canada's inhabitants as Canadian regardless of where they lived or what language they spoke (Smith, 1989).

The development of Canada's multiculturalism policy can be interpreted as part of the efforts of the Canadian state to given recognition

to the role that ethnic diversity plays in the forging of a Canadian identity. The original impetus for such a policy came from the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, which was intended to review the status of the British and the French "founding peoples." However, non-British and French groups stressed in public hearings that their status too must be recognized (Sheridan and Saouab, 1992). As Stasiulius (1991) observes, various groups sought a policy of multiculturalism as a strategy for affirming their place in the nations's ethnocultural symbolic order.

Established in 1971, Canada's multiculturalism policy has gone through several evolutions (Sheridan and Saouab, 1992). In respect of data demands, the most significant events have been legislative. During the 1980s and early 1990s additional significant legislative developments included the creation of the Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship. Major programs managed by this federal department, currently known as Heritage Canada, include: Race Relations and Cross-Cultural Understanding; Heritage Cultures and Languages; and Community Support and Participation. The data requirements of these programs were reinforced by two additional documents. The first was the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982, which guaranteed rights regardless of origin, race, gender, age or disability. The second was the Employment Equity Act, 1986, which established a monitoring of hiring and promotion practices affecting visible minorities, women, Aboriginal peoples and persons with disabilities in federally regulated businesses.

Together, the creation of a federal department, the Charter and the Employment Equity Act created the policy rationales for collecting and disseminating information on various ethnocultural groups in Canada. Such matters as how the ethnic origin question is worded, whether ancestral origins, identity or visible minority status is captured or derived and whether or not multiple responses are permitted have become contested terrain for a large body of potential users including researchers, government agencies and ethnocultural groups. The debate in the public arena, discussed elsewhere (Boyd, 1993a, 1993b), derives as much from the politics of numbers as from the application of principles of sound survey design.

THE CHALLENGE OF THE 1990S

From 1971 onward, the collection of Census data through enumerators has been replaced by a methodology that primarily relies on self-

reporting by respondents. As a result, Canadian Census planning now includes extensive pretesting of census questions and nation-wide public consultation. Ethnocultural questions are an integral subset of such pretests and consultations. After a hiatus of nearly 50 years, the need to collect data on race was actively discussed and explicitly tested as part of the 1991 and the 1996 Census consultation and testing.

In a contrast to earlier practices the question on race was now motivated by reformulated concepts of equality and a growing concern with discrimination and racism in Canadian society. As in the United States (Blauner, 1991) structural models of inequality emphasizing institutionalized barriers and discrimination had come, by the 1980s, to replace earlier individualist models of inequality, in which the central concern was lack of opportunity for individual achievement (Agocs and Boyd, 1993). In addition to academic research and public discourse, this paradigmatic shift also characterized legislation and policy. For example, section 15(2) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982, removed obstacles to the subsequent passage of the Employment Equity Act, 1986. This Act and accompanying regulations were reviewed and strengthened in 1996.

The foundation document of Canadian employment equity policy was the 1984 report of the Royal Commission on Equality in Employment (Abella, 1984). This report corroborated the changed approaches to stratification, in which issues of difference were replaced in the 1960s by preoccupations with equality of opportunity. More recently, analysts have begun to emphasize the covert sources of disadvantage, produced as a result of traditional hiring and promotional practices (Agocs and Boyd, 1993).

Seeking to redress the effects of systemic discrimination, the Report of the Royal Commission on Equality in Employment recommended that the government of Canada pass legislation making employment equity mandatory for employers in the public and private sectors, and that there be effective arrangements to monitor compliance and impose sanctions for failure to demonstrate good faith efforts to attain employment equity goals. In response, the Conservative government of the day introduced two initiatives in 1986: the Employment Equity Act and the Federal Contractors Program.

Within the context of the Act, visible minorities are defined as "persons other than Aboriginal persons, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour and who so identify themselves to an employer or agree to be so identified by an employer for the purpose of the

Employment Equality Act" (Employment and Immigration Canada, 1989:25). The underlying concept of this definition is race. In the terminology the choice of "visible minority" is itself noteworthy. The term came into usage in the early 1980s. Given alternatives such as race (United States) and "ethnic minorities" (United Kingdom, Germany, Netherlands) an interesting question is what was the reason for constructing of a new nuance. While the answer may be partly found in the identity politics already practiced by Aboriginal people, another part of it may lie in the studied avoidance of the term "race" since the 1950s. Critics charge that this avoidance, and the accompanied nuances of "visible minorities," is also avoidance of the issue of racism (Stasiulius, 1991).

Under the Employment Equity Act, 1986 (and as reaffirmed in the 1996 legislation) federally regulated businesses are required to submit annual reports indicating their employment profiles in regard to the four target groups. These target populations are visible minorities, Aboriginal peoples, women and persons with disabilities. Self-identification categories for visible minority groups are Black, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, Indo-Pakistani, West Asian and Arab, Southeast Asian, Latin American, Indonesian and Pacific Islander (Employment and Immigration Canada, 1986). Compliance with the Act involves comparisons with a reference population, usually that of the local labour market. Given this methodology and the implied requirements for geographically defined information, Census data represent a potentially important source.

These legislative demands have obliged Statistics Canada to provide data on a new construct. The methodology developed for the 1981, 1986, and 1991 Census data derives visible minority status from responses to Census questions on birthplace, ethnic origins, mother tongue and religion (the latter was not collected in the 1986 Census). These procedures were developed in collaboration with the federal departments responsible for the Employment Equity Act. The reliance on existing Census questions means that self-identification plays no role in defining "visible minority," unlike the methodology used to collect data at the business firm level.

It is important to note that Statistics Canada has experienced considerable difficulty in measuring ethnic and cultural self-identification. In 1986, for example, a question asking persons of Aboriginal background whether they "considered themselves to be an aboriginal or native person of Canada" produced a high level of "false positive

response" on the part of respondents who did not understand such terms as Aboriginal and Inuit. At this time, Statistics Canada concluded that an identity question should not be edited for consistency with other responses, since the response provided was one based on respondent opinion and self-identity rather than fact. Data from this 1986 Census question were not published.

Similarly, testing after the 1986 Census revealed that the Federal Public Service question, which asked respondents to identify the visible minority group to which they considered themselves to belong, produced poor quality data when used in the 1986 Census Overcoverage Survey (White,1988). In this instance, respondents reported "immigrant," "Québécois" and "senior" as being the visible minority groups to which they belonged.

For the 1991 Census, questions were developed which asked respondents to report their ethnic origin while a certain subset of the population who completed the Aboriginal Peoples Survey responded to a question on Aboriginal identity. In 1996, however, the range of questions was expanded to include visible minority status, ethnic origin and Aboriginal identity.

Conscious of the need for data on the new concept of visible minority, Statistics Canada sought to determine if a direct question on race or visible minority status should be asked in the 1991 and the 1996 Censuses. During the Census content consultations, data users, ethnocultural groups and advisory bodies to Statistics Canada were asked to ponder the inclusion of a question on race, and its wording. In preparation for the 1991 and the 1996 Censuses, respondents to various surveys and pretests were asked a question on race, and qualitative assessments by focus groups on these questions were also undertaken (Breedon, 1988; White, 1988; Statistics Canada, 1994b).

The inquiry into racial differentiation of the Canadian population marked a fundamental turning point for the agency. Statistics Canada has been criticized in the past for being slow to measure social phenomena. To discuss the concepts of race, and to consider the measurement of race in a country which has frequently overlooked its racialized history (Abele and Stasiulius, 1989; Walker, 1985) is remarkable. The shift occurred in the aftermath of the 1980s, which was a turbulent period in the history of Canadian nation-building. Issues of Canadian identity, multiculturalism and the place of Quebec in a renewed federalism (Spicer, 1991) captured public attention, influenced Census consultations and generated discussions of the collection of visible

TABLE 3.3

1991 AND 1996 CENSUS: TEST AND CENSUS QUESTIONS

Survey	Question Asked	Response Categories	Comments
1986 Census Overcoverage Survey	Do you consider yourself to belong to Canada's visible or racial minority population?	No Yes: Specify Black Chinese South East Asian South Asian Pacific Islands Arab West Asian Indigenous Central/ South American Other (specify)	In the specified space entries included: immigrant Québécois, senior.
1987 Modular Test 2	Which of the following best describes your race or colour?	Black Korean Filipino Japanese Chinese Native/Aboriginal Peoples of North America South Asian South East Asian White Other (specify)	Small sample survey test used to test census questions. High non-response.
1988 National Census Test 1 (NCT1)	Which of the following best describes this person's race or colour?	White Asian Black Other (specify)	First 1991 NCT. Low non-response. Few backlash or non-sense responses. Persons of Arab and Latin American back-ground reported White.
1988 National Census Test 2 (NCT2)	Which of the following best describes this person's race or colour?	White Asian North American Indian Métis Eskimo/Inuit Black Other (specify)	Second 1991 NCT. Low non-response. Few backlash or nonsense responses. Persons of Arab, West Asian and Latin American background reported White.

Survey	Question Asked	Response Categories	Comments
1991 Census	To which ethnic or cultural group did this person's ancestors belong?	French English German Scottish Italian Irish Ukrainian Chinese Dutch Jewish Polish Black North American Indian Métis Inuit/Eskimo Other (specify)	No race question was asked. Visible minority data were derived (based on employment equity specifications).
1993 National Census Test (NCT 1993)	Is this person?	White Chinese South Asian Black Arab/West Asian Filipino South East Asian Latin American Japanese Korean Indonesian/Pacific Islander Other (specify)	1996 NCT. Low non-response. Few backlash responses. Some reporting of White by respondents having as ethnic origin Arab, West Asian and Latin American.
1996 Census	Ethnic origin To which ethnic or cultural group did this person's ancestors belong?	Four (4) write-in spaces.	List of ethnic groups included in the list of examples shown on the questionnaire: French, English, German, Scottish, Canadian, Italian, Irish, Chinese, Cree, Micmac, Métis, Inuit (Eskimo), Ukrainian, Dutch, East Indian, Polish, Portuguese, Jewish, Haitian, Jamaican, Vietnamese, Lebanese, Chilean, Somali, etc. Groups shown in order of incidence in the last census with Aboriginal group lists as well as same groups from all area world areas.

(Table 3.3 *cont'd*)

Survey	Question Asked	Response Categories	Comments
1996 Census	Population Group	White	Some of the mark-in
		Chinese	entries contained
	Is this person:	South Asian	examples. For example
		Black	Black (e.g., African,
		Arab/West Asian	Haitian, Jamaican,
		Filipino	Somali)
		South East Asian	
		Latin American	
		Japanese	
		Korean	
		Other (specify)	

minority and "Canadian" ethnic origin data (Boyd, 1993a, 1996; Pryor et al., 1992).

Four 1991 Census pretest instruments explored various approaches to measuring ethnic origin and visible minority status (Table 3.3). The 1986 Census Overcoverage Survey (fielded six weeks after the 1986 Census) asked respondents, "do you consider yourself to belong to Canada's visible or racial minority population." This question was similar to the one developed by Treasury Board in that the term "visible minority" was used. Analysis of responses indicated a number of difficulties, including underidentification and considerable confusion as to what was meant by the term "visible minority," even thought the term "racial" minority was also part of the question (White, 1988). There was also a strong tendency on the part of members of linguistic groups to define themselves as members of visible minority groups when, in fact, cross-tabulations with other ethnocultural questions indicated that these members were not members of the designated groups defined for Employment Equity Purposes. Focus group testing in Toronto, Montreal, Halifax, Winnipeg and Vancouver supported the findings of the Overcoverage Survey question. The term "visible minority" was not well understood by the general public; and there was no widespread awareness of the federal Employment Equity program. Together, the results of the Overcoverage Survey and the focus group tests formed the bases for the decision not to use the terms "visible minority" or "employment equity" in the 1991 Census.

The Modular Test-2, undertaken in 1988 in preparation for the National Census Test, departed from the perceptual wording of the Overcoverage Survey and asked respondents to indicate which category(ies) (largely precoded) best described their race or colour. There was a high level of non-response to this question (over 10 percent) and sub-

stantial discrepancy between responses to questions on race and on ethnicity, ancestry and ethnic identity (White, 1988). Factors which contributed to this high rate of non-response included the poor placement of the "white" circle. This mark-in entry was located well down the list of possible choices. In addition, the examples used to define the groups were confusing to respondents, as the question displayed a mixture of ethnic, race, and colour examples to explain the content of the employment equity designated groups.

A reformatted and simpler question on race was repeated in the two National Census Tests held prior to the 1991 Census. The National Census Test-2 was modified to improve responses by the Aboriginal respondents but otherwise retained the limited set of categories to be marked. Both of the National Census Test (NCT-1, NCT-2) race questions experienced relatively low rates of non-response. The non-response rate of five percent in the NCT-1 was comparable to rates obtained in other NCT ethnocultural questions and the non-response rate for the NCT-2 was four percent. Both questions experienced few crank, nonsense or backlash responses. As well, within the bounds of sampling variance, the two National Census Test questions on race reproduced population estimates of the visible minority population.

Nonetheless, difficulties remained. In both National Census Test questions on race there was a tendency for respondents reporting West Asian, Arab, or Latin/Central/South American origins to mark "White" as their race or colour. While such self-assignment may be understood within the context of phenotypical self-description, these groups are considered part of the designated visible minority groups for Employment Equity purposes. Thus, the responses posed potential problems, since the purpose of the race question was to generate information relevant for Employment Equity programs.

Alongside pretests of alternative questions on race the public debate continued on whether to collect such data at all. Focus tests revealed considerable concerns about the intent of the question on race and many participants found it offensive (Breedon, 1988). Moreover, the Ethnocultural Council of Canada (ECC), an umbrella group representing nearly 40 national organizations, also felt that a question on race could be perceived as offensive.

As an aside, it is important to note the ECC found the notion of race to be problematic. Their major concern was focused on the view that strong "Canadian" responses to an ancestry question had the potential to reduce counts for many of the long-standing member groups such as

Ukrainian, German and Dutch. Political lobbying, which led to a response by Statistics Canada to the Parliamentary Committee on Multiculturalism and Citizenship (Petrie, 1989) focused on the dilemma of "Canadian" origin, identity and citizenship and not on issues of race, colour or equity legislation.

In the end, however, there was no question on race or colour in the 1991 Census. Visible minority information continued to be derived using several ethnocultural and linguistic census questions. Factors contributing to this decision included limited space on the questionnaire and the need to reduce response burden.

As Boxhill (1990) notes the Employment Equity data requirement was not solely founded on a narrow definition of race but rather on an amalgam of race, ethnicity and cultural group. For example, Chileans are not part of the visible minority group, while Mexicans are. There are requirements for data on various Asian groups: Korean, Japanese, Chinese and Filipino. African origin groups are classified as Black and no distinction was made between Afro-Canadian, Caribbean and African-born groups. Thus, for the 1991 Census, it was concluded that the demands of the employment equity program would best be met by the ethnic origin question, since in combination with questions on religion, mother tongue and birthplace it would permit the construction of "visible minority" groups (Boyd, 1993a; White, Badets, and Renaud, 1993).

1996 CENSUS: DIRECT QUESTION ON VISIBLE MINORITIES

Given legislative requirements and a public that is increasingly aware of Employment Equity issues, race relations and racism, the issue of including a question on race in Canada's census did not fade away. Instead, it resurfaced with the 1996 Census-taking efforts. In these the past activities with respect to the 1991 Census have informed the ongoing debate.

The 1991 Census ethnic origin question, as previously discussed, was designed to collect information required for Employment Equity and Multiculturalism programs. Negative public reactions to the mark-in entry "Black" by Afro-Canadian groups, who viewed it as a "racial" term, rather than an ethnic category (White, 1992), as well as increasing support for the specification of the ethnic origin "Canadian," resulted in continued consultation and testing prior to the 1996 Census.

The issue of "Canadian" further complicated the issue of meeting visible minority data needs. "Canadian" was the fifth largest single response ethnic group in the 1991 Census. The practice in past Censuses has been to list the ethnic groups in numerical order. If this practice were continued, the category "Canadian" would have to be included among the list of examples of ethnic groups shown for the ethnic origin question in 1996. For example, if a mark-in question were to be developed, "Canadian" would have been shown as the fifth mark-in entry. Or, if only write-in entries were permitted, then "Canadian" would be the fifth group shown in the list of examples of ethnic entries.

In addition to public reaction and the potential consequences of "Canadian" responses, another ground for change was the derivation of visible minority groups from ethnocultural questions. The decision to continue with the derivation of visible minority counts from the ethnic origin, place of birth, religion and language questions was not without its critics. During the 1996 Census consultation, the majority of data users voiced support for the testing and inclusion in the 1996 Census of a direct question designed to count the country's visible minority population (Statistics Canada, 1994a). The ethnic origin question, in particular, came under criticism from Canadian Black groups, who expressed a strong preference for reporting their ethnic background as, for example, Haitian, Jamaican or African-Canadian. Aboriginal peoples indicated that they too wished to report a tribal or First Nation origin rather than mark the entry "North American Indian" which had appeared in earlier censuses.

In sum, three forces underlay the decision to test a different set of ethnocultural questions in the 1996 National Census Test, fielded in November 1993: 1) the renewed interest and support for a direct question on visible minorities; 2) the need to change prespecified categories; and 3) the requirement to include "Canadian" in the listing of examples of ethnic groups shown on the questionnaire. The November 1993 NCT asked a series of questions on ethnic origin, Aboriginal identity, visible minority group, Status/Treaty Indian, and Band/First Nation. Various language questions were also asked (first language learned, home language, official and non-official language knowledge, language used at work and language of schooling). Prior to the inclusion of these questions in the National Census Test extensive qualitative testing was undertaken on such topics as respondent reactions to terms, response to direct questions and the understanding of why questions were asked.

The results of the 1993 National Census Test indicated that about 30 percent of respondents would report "Canadian" to the ethnic origin question (Statistics Canada, 1994b). Discrepancies also existed between responses to the ethnic origin question and responses to direct questions on Aboriginal identity and visible minority group. Inspection of responses to the latter direct questions revealed that some Aboriginal and visible minority respondents provided responses that appeared to be inconsistent. That is, they reported their ethnic origin as being Canadian, English, French or Spanish. As well, there was some reporting of "White" by members of some designated visible minority groups.

The results of the testing undertaken prior to the 1996 Census led Statistics Canada to conclude that a direct visible minority question would yield estimates of improved data quality, as compared with those the ethnic origin approach (Statistics Canada, 1994a). The primary rationales for including a direct visible minority question in the 1996 Census were threefold: 1) the overall high quality of responses to the visible minority question; 2) a low level of non-response and few nonsense or backlash responses (Renaud, 1994a,b); and 3) the legislated requirement to provide data on visible minorities.

During the interval between the testing of the 1996 Census question in 1993 and the date of the Census (May 14, 1996), several factors intervened which brought the issue of Employment Equity and the 1996 Census question under close scrutiny. One was the election in Ontario of a government which adopted as one of its major election issues the elimination of *provincial* Employment Equity legislation. Another was a concern regarding the continuation of high immigration levels during a time of poor economic performance and the concentration of certain groups in major urban centres.

The public media reaction was swift once the 1996 Census questions were published in *Canada Gazette* on August 22, 1995 (Mitchell, 1995). Criticism of the question focused on the usefulness of the federal Employment Equity legislation. Certain commentators felt such a Census question was based on outmoded ideas of race and had the potential to be socially divisive (Gardner, 1995; Loney, 1995). It should also be noted that during this period social tensions were heightened by such issues as a need for social cohesion and the apparent lack of common vision for the country as it faced the outcome of the October 30, 1995 referendum in Quebec.

Media reaction therefore focused on three topics: 1) the need for data showing various ethnic and visible minority groups; 2) the aims of

Employment Equity and Multiculturalism legislation; and 3) the perception of some Canadians that identification of groups as being other than "Canadian" contributed to a lack of social cohesion and national identity. In addition, certain commentators questioned the premise of economically based racial discrimination (Greenfield, 1996), though this point of view was questioned by Pendakur and Pendakur (1996). In addition to these themes, reaction also focused on question content. Some commentators disagreed with the categories and examples shown on the questionnaire. The inclusion of some groups and not others was criticized (Gwyn, 1996). The category "White" was also seen by some as being unacceptable (Gunter, 1996).

In response, members of the visible minority community (Cardozo, 1996), the ethnic media (Editorial, *Share*, 1996), as well as journalists writing for the major daily papers (Editorial, *Edmonton Journal*, 1995) provided support for the questions, for Employment Equity legislation, and subsequent collection of data by the 1996 Census. Thus the debate on the appropriateness of the Census question, the usefulness of the legislation and the deeper question of the divisions — real or apparent — in Canadian society, had become intense well before the May 14, 1996 Census Day.

In the year following the 1996 Census, media and public concern and confusion regarding the potential impacts of a direct question on race has not abated. A private member's motion (M-277) introduced by the Reform Party member for Beaver River, Debra Grey, was discussed in Parliament on November 26, 1996. This motion proposed that the government return to the word "Canadian" in questions of ethnic origin in the Canadian Census (*Hansard*, November 26, 1996). In fact, the "Canadian" category was included in the list of examples of ethnic groups shown on the 1996 Census form. Comments accompanying the motion indicate that it was the omission of "Canadian" from the visible minority question that was of concern. Grey's comments, as well as those made by other Members of Parliament in subsequent discussions on Motion 277, indicate considerable confusion between the two questions (ethnic origin and visible minority). Legislative rationales for asking a question on the visible minority population appear either to have been poorly understood or judged to be offensive. Moreover, the topic of Canadian unity and the importance of being able to classify oneself as Canadian were themes addressed both by Grey and by others speaking to the motion.

SUMMARY: RACIAL DISCOURSE

Motion M-277 continues the themes found throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s in the larger public arena. What is clear is the considerable lack of consensus regarding the Canadian racialized identities in a public increasingly concerned about what Canada is and what it, as a nation, will become. In fact, general dismay regarding the future of the Canadian state, following the 1995 Quebec referendum, the pressures of social adaptation required by high levels of immigration, and a troubling economic situation in the early 1990s, combined to focus attention on the means of achieving a sense of pan-Canadian identity in a context of policies, viewed as competing, with Multiculturalism, Employment Equity, and Aboriginal Rights. To see Canadian society as being racially constructed was antithetical to the attributes of many people. To have the racialized and ethnic character of the country measured in a national census reinforces stereotypes for some while for others this procedure confirms the structure of the Canadian social fabric.

Thus, in the 130 years since Confederation (1867) the use of the term "race" and the collection of "race" data have been erratic and changing. Asking a question on race in the Canadian Census is an exercise that goes beyond measurement issues. The questions asked between 1901 and 1941 rested on prevailing race relations and models of nation-building and incorporation. Recent initiatives to return to a question on "race" also incorporate models of nation-building, integration and race relations although all the parameters of all three have greatly changed since the first half of the century.

RACE AND RACISM

CANADA'S CHALLENGE

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