

Ethnic labels are part of census debate

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ly unseen, and on a democratic scale without precedent — the two agencies have enlisted help in and out of government to find up-to-date words for that awkward, yet persistent question: What kind of American are you?

How the various kinds cluster across the land helps weigh the fairness of bank loans and school assignments, of employment and pay. The labels aid scientists tracking diseases that plague certain groups, and drug companies selling the cures. They're used to ensure voting rights are upheld, and to attract federal, local and private aid for historic victims of bias.

George Washington was president barely a year when the first census was taken in August 1790. Its only purpose, then as now and fixed in the Constitution, was to apportion U.S. House seats.

Yet race mattered from the start. The first census counted

"free white" males and females, any other free persons, and slaves.

In the 1840s, the government began asking outside experts for help devising questions about all sorts of things. The 1850 census was the first to ask census takers to record race, under a "color" heading.

But it was the civil rights movement of the 1960s that paved the way for today's acute attention to what minorities and others have to say about how non-white, non-European people are counted in this country — not just for the census, but for a host of other government fact-gatherers.

Today, there are racial-minority advisers galore offering guidance. Plus top researchers from government, universities and private enterprise, demographers and anthropologists, civil rights lawyers and marketing experts. The National Academy of Sciences was enlisted. The public trooped into hearings from Boston

to Honolulu. Congress heard testimony.

John Beresford, a demographer whose career included two stints at the Census Bureau, died in 1995. But his skin-color chart survives amid the nearly 800 letters of advice for the government that fill four fat binders at the OMB.

Add the nameless good sports who submitted to test surveys and participation soars upwards of 250,000 Americans.

The OMB expects to issue its final decision on the basic racial and ethnic categories by mid-October, which should give the Census Bureau time to make any changes before its spring 1998 dress rehearsal.

Outside experts and advisers worked gratis, with only their modest accommodation and occasional travel costs paid, and many involved in the process were federal employees, so no extra labor costs were racked up. But officials estimate \$5 million has been spent so far in this endeavor, most

for research.

Government researchers spent months developing questionnaires, then trying them out on whites in West Virginia, Cajuns and Creoles in Louisiana, rural blacks in Mississippi, American Indians in Oklahoma, Hispanics in Texas and Asians on the West

Coast.

"This was just to work out question-wording," said Clyde Tucker, director of the Behavioral Science Research Center at the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

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Gerald O. Johnson
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Renovated Y sponsors festival

By John Minter
THE CHARLOTTE POST

The YMCA of Greater Charlotte will unveil its renovated Johnston YWCA facility Oct. 11 with a festival to which the mayor and the north Charlotte community has been invited.

The \$2.5 million renovation comes amid the YMCA's community outreach efforts and the facility on north Davidson Street houses a wide range of services and programs.

The two-story brick building was once owned by a mill and

provided recreational activities for its workers.

The renovation turns it into a family resource center.

The celebration, with the theme "Blending Together," will include 200 volunteers from various branches working on projects to enhance the Johnston facility and the surrounding neighborhoods.

The unveiling festival will feature food, children's activities, historical tours of the grounds, a gallery crawl, 3-on-3 tournament, music, mimes and clowns, face painting and aero-

bic and dance demonstrations.

Childwatch will be provided and EZ Rider has committed to help meet transportation needs for neighborhood residents.

WTVI (channel 42) is sponsoring the event.

In the past few years, the local YMCA, with a \$16.8 million capital fund raising campaign and \$22.7 million in tax exempt county bond issue, has opened two new 50,000-square-foot full-service YMCAs, in the University City area and near SouthPark, and a 25,000 square-foot addition to the Harris YMCA building.

Private schools more of an option

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Charlotte's Brisbane Tutoring Center & Academy is growing as more African Americans make the financial sacrifices necessary to find alternatives to public education. Brisbane, which opened in 1992, has 72 students, said founder Geraldine Brisbane-White.

"White said she hears parents complaining that children are not getting individual needs met in the larger settings common in public schools.

"Such needs can include such skills as phonetics, for example, she said. Often low self-esteem and peer pressure can affect performance.

"That's why we are seeing kids in high school who can't read," White said. "It is not that they can't learn to read."

"Smaller schools, with smaller classes, are the answer for many students, she said.

"Students have loss identity...and do not have a good sense of who they are," White said. "That can have an impact. Smaller settings allow you to get attention, even if you don't want attention. Even if you are shy, you still need attention."

"Those migrating from public education say the roots of their disenchantment vary. Some parents are frustrated with bureaucracy, others fear student violence. Some want their children to spend more time learning values; others call the one-size-fits-all model of most large public schools an ineffective and impersonal way to learn.

"There are so many reasons," said Carol Crabtree, whose two children once attended a tradi-

tional public school but are now enrolled in Blue Ridge Christian School in Bridgewater, Va. "Public schools have to be all things to all people, and I think many parents are starting to look for much more than that."

Not long ago, many public school officials virtually ignored that sentiment and scoffed at the growth of other options in education. But today those trends have begun to send a powerful message to public schools, even prompting some of them to acknowledge a threat of competition for the first time.

In Michigan this fall, public schools that have lost hundreds of students to new charter schools, which get taxpayer money but set their own teaching rules, have responded by creating all-day kindergarten classes as an enticement to wary parents. Others are featuring new enrichment programs for students, such as ballet, to compete with alternative schools. Some are even writing letters asking parents who have left the public school system to reconsider.

In Arizona, a state with rising interest in home schooling and more charter schools than any other state, one large public school district, in Mesa, has gone as far as placing full-page ads in local newspapers to win back grousing parents.

"We can't assume anymore that everyone is just going to come to our schools," said Judy Willis, the district's director of community relations. "It's a whole new arena."

Some of the story can be told in numbers: In 1992, there was one charter school in the entire nation. Today, there are more

than 800. The Clinton administration intends to spend \$100 million to help develop as many as 3,000 of them by the year 2000.

Home schooling is also flourishing. Researchers at the Education Department say the number of students being taught at home has tripled this decade and now exceeds 1 million. A new industry is emerging from that growth, complete with mail-order curricula, computer learning programs, even centers that offer home schooled children a chance to socialize with each other.

Meanwhile, enrollment at private academies that emphasize the Bible or Christian principles has doubled in the past 10 years. The Association of Christian Schools International was formed in 1980 with about 1,200 member schools. Now, it includes nearly 4,000 schools across the nation and more than 800,000 students.

Catholic schools, like some black institutions, are reversing decades of steep decline in enrollment, attracting more non-Catholic parents whose children had been in public schools, and expanding well beyond their traditional base — the center city — into suburbs.

What all of these changes mean is a subject of growing debate.

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In her books, Connie Briscoe deals with the struggle of facing and overcoming adversity. In her life, she's done the same thing. Afflicted with a gradually worsening hearing impairment since birth, Briscoe has never let that or anything else stop her from achieving her goals. Her first novel, *Sisters and Lovers*, sold over 425,000 copies. It is currently in production as a television miniseries.



Connie Briscoe has a way with words, even if she can't hear them.

Connie's most recent novel, *Big Girls Don't Cry* deals with the issues faced by a young black woman determined to be successful both professionally and romantically.

Come see this exceptional author on Thursday, October 23, 7:30pm at the North Carolina Blumenthal Performing Arts Center's Booth Theater, followed by an autographing reception in the theater lobby.

Connie Briscoe's presentation at the Novello Festival of Reading is sponsored by The Charlotte Post. The autographing reception is sponsored by Heritage House Books & Gifts. Tickets \$10. Call 336-2945.



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