

# Victoria Hattam

## *Ethnicity & the boundaries of race: rereading Directive 15*

Most of the racial and ethnic categories current in American life can be traced to an obscure government edict: Statistical Policy Directive No. 15, promulgated by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) on May 12, 1977.<sup>1</sup> Although the directive was officially limited to federal statistics and administrative reporting, its categories quickly became the de facto standard for American society at large, setting the terms ever since for racial and ethnic classification in the United States.

The OMB categories – specifically the Census Bureau’s use of them – are currently being renegotiated. Stripped of important particulars, the question on the table is whether Hispanics, to use the Census Bureau term, will continue to be classified as an ethnic group and not as a race. Ethnicity has long served to establish the boundaries of race by marking the dividing line between black and

white. Where that line is drawn, who is designated as an ethnic, establishes the terms within which racial politics is waged in the United States.<sup>2</sup>

To comprehend the political choices at hand, we need to recover the somewhat arcane history of Directive 15. Retracing the OMB race categories is no simple antiquarian delight; it is required currency for following contemporary debates over racial classification and politics in the twenty-first-century United States.

Directive 15 was initially created as a means of standardizing the racial and ethnic categories used in government statistics. These data took on new political import after the passage of several civil rights laws. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Fair Housing Act of 1968, the Equal

1 See “Directive No. 15, Race and Ethnic Standards for Federal Statistics and Administrative Reporting,” *Federal Register* 48 (87) (May 4, 1978): 19269 – 19270. The directive is accessible electronically as an appendix in “Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity,” *Federal Register* 59 (June 9, 1994): 29834 – 29835. All citations to the directive will be to the 1994 reprint.

2 I use the term ‘Hispanic’ throughout because this was the term initially adopted by the OMB. The OMB did not use the term ‘Latino’ until the 1997 revision of the directive.

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Credit Opportunity Act of 1974, the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act of 1975 – all required the federal government to monitor discrimination in a variety of policy domains. In order to assess discriminatory practices, agencies first had to specify the relevant protected groups, which in turn required stipulating racial and ethnic categories. Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, key civil rights bureaucracies established their own terms in order to comply with these new legislative mandates. This dispersed multiagency process of data collection proved unwieldy – hence federal government efforts to standardize the racial and ethnic categories via an interagency committee whose report the OMB codified in Statistical Policy Directive 15.<sup>3</sup>

3 The federal interagency Committee on Education was established in June of 1974. The committee's report, published in April of 1975, lays out almost all the features later promulgated by the OMB in Directive 15. For the directive's history, see "Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity," 29831 – 29832; Barry Edmonston, Joshua Goldstein, and Juanita Tamayo Lott, eds., *Spotlight on Heterogeneity: The Federal Standards for Racial and Ethnic Classification* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1996); Katherine K. Wallman, "Data on Race and Ethnicity: Revisiting the Federal Standard," *The American Statistician* 52 (1) (February 1998): 31 – 33. For useful secondary sources on the directive, see Michael Omi, "Racial Identity and the State: The Dilemmas of Classification," *Law and Inequality: A Journal of Theory and Practice* 25 (1) (1997): 7 – 23; Margo J. Anderson and Stephen E. Fienberg, *Who Counts? The Politics of Census-Taking in Contemporary America* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999); David Hollinger, *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism*, postscript (New York: Basic Books, 2000); Melissa Nobles, *Shades of Citizenship: Race and the Census in Modern Politics* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000); Clara E. Rodriguez, *Changing Race: Latinos, the Census, and the History of Ethnicity in the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 2000); Peter Skerry, *Counting on the Census: Race, Group Identity,*

On first reading, Statistical Policy Directive 15 appears to be quite straightforward. The two-page document specifies that all federal agencies are to collect data under four racial and one ethnic heading. The four racial categories are black, white, American Indian or Alaskan Native, and Asian or Pacific Islander. The one ethnic category is Hispanic. (In 1997, the OMB added Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander as a fifth racial category.<sup>4</sup>)

Two aspects of the directive's taxonomy are especially noteworthy: the mutual exclusivity of the four racial categories, and the sharp distinction the directive draws between race and ethnicity. Even though the directive variously specifies race as origin, geography, nationality, culture, and cultural identification, it nevertheless stipulates that census respondents must choose only one race. Someone of mixed race is instructed to select the "category which most closely reflects the individual's recognition in his community."<sup>5</sup> This instruction was strongly contested in the 1990s, leading the OMB to revise the directive and

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*and the Evasion of Politics* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2000); Darryl Fears, "The Roots of 'Hispanic': 1975 Committee of Bureaucrats Produced Designation," *The Washington Post*, October 15, 2003, A21.

4 The five OMB race categories post 1997 are "American Indian or Alaskan Native," "Asian," "Black or African American," "Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander," and "White." The 1997 revision also allowed respondents to "check one or more" races for the first time. However, the 1997 revisions did not change the distinction between race and ethnicity. See "Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of Data on Race and Ethnicity," *Federal Register* 62 (210) (October 30, 1997): 58781 – 58790.

5 See Directive 15, 29834.

adopt the “mark one or more” race option in 1997.<sup>6</sup>

The ways in which the directive distinguishes ethnicity from race have by comparison received little attention – despite this distinction’s centrality to debates over the race question for census 2010 and for changes underway in contemporary American racial politics more broadly. It is to this second aspect of the directive that I attend.

The directive explicitly recommends that agencies “collect data on race and ethnicity separately.” The four racial categories stipulated by the directive parallel the classic nineteenth-century color designations of black, white, red (American Indian or Alaskan native), and yellow (Asian or Pacific Islander); there is no brown race in the American ethnoraacial taxonomy. According to the directive, one is Hispanic because of one’s “Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race.” As a result, Hispanics must check a race box in addition to the one identifying their ethnicity. The directive specifies that “when race and ethnicity are collected separately, the number of White and Black persons who are Hispanic must be identifiable, and capable

6 The directive defines each of the categories in terms of origins: American Indians or Alaskan Natives are said to have “origins in any of the original peoples of North America”; blacks to have “origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa”; whites to have “origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, North Africa, or the Middle East”; and Hispanics to be persons of “Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race.” (Note that the category ‘black’ is the only one in which the directive explicitly refers to race.) The directive allows for more detailed categories than these, but they must be “organized in such a way that the additional categories can be aggregated into these basic racial categories.” See Directive 15, 29834.

of being reported in that category.”<sup>7</sup> All of this underscores the directive’s presumption that race and ethnicity be considered separate phenomena. To be sure, the directive allows for a “combined format” in which the race and ethnic categories are presented in a single question. But even here the OMB intends to keep the social phenomena distinct.

Why were Hispanics designated as an ethnic group rather than as a race? The distinction has deep roots in American culture that make debates over question format considerably more than issues of bureaucratic politics.

American conceptions of ethnicity as different from race can be traced back to the first two decades of the twentieth century, when the category of ethnicity was invented. Men such as Louis Brandeis, Alfred Kroeber, Isaac Berkson, Julius Draschler, and Horace Kallen argued that ethnicity ought to be distinguished from race, and they went to considerable lengths to elaborate the nature and importance of the comparison. Ethnicity was cast by these New York intellectuals as cultural, plural, and malleable – in stark contrast to race, which they understood to be biologically fixed. One was an ethnic to the extent that one’s principle point of identification was tied to culture rather than to race. For these pioneering cultural pluralists, to be an ethnic meant being *different* from other Americans – but different in ways that were not tied to race.<sup>8</sup> By signaling differences of culture rather than of blood, this conception of ethnicity served to delimit notions of race. From

7 Ibid.

8 See Victoria Hattam, “Ethnicity: An American Genealogy,” in Nancy Foner and George Fredrickson, eds., *Not Just Black and White* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004).

this perspective, Directive 15 appears as a quite remarkable codification of New York Zionists' conceptions of ethnicity elaborated fifty years earlier.

In the 1940s and 1950s, the Census Bureau began to count those of Spanish surname and to classify them as an ethnic group and not a race. Perhaps the most pressing reason for doing so lay in the racial heterogeneity of peoples from Mexico, the Caribbean, Puerto Rico, and Central and South America. All were thought to share a common Spanish culture, but were not racially similar. But designating racial heterogeneity as the problem begs the question. Because the categories were in formation, their boundaries might have been drawn differently so as to diminish the fractured nature of the group. Indeed, many have bemoaned the category 'Hispanic' precisely because it suggests cultural commonality where they claim none exists.<sup>9</sup>

Yet the OMB opted for an expansive definition of 'Hispanic.' The numerical advantage of an omnibus category that avoided the contentious distinctions of race was clear, and most relevant stakeholders came to support the broad designation.

Despite the racial heterogeneity of the Hispanic population, there were long-standing pressures to acknowledge the historic discrimination against Mexican Americans in particular and against Hispanics more generally.

Indeed, all federal efforts to end discrimination across the twentieth centu-

ry considered discrimination broadly. FDR's Executive Order 8802, signed on June 25, 1941, prohibited discrimination on the basis of "race, creed, color, or national origin." Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson all followed the FDR blueprint when they issued successive executive orders that prohibited discrimination in these very same terms. The mantra of "race, creed, color, or national origin" quickly became a hallmark of national policy. The problem of discrimination in America, federal policy makes clear, was never limited to race narrowly conceived. When Directive 15 cast the federal ethn racial taxonomy in broad terms, it drew on a long-standing tradition.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, it is worth remembering that Directive 15 appeared at a time of heightened concern about language rights and bilingual education. These were the years when the Subcommittee on Minority Education of the Federal Interagency Committee on Education was reconsidering the demands of some Spanish-speaking families that their children be taught in Spanish. The language rights movement was bolstered by *Lau v. Nichols*, the 1974 landmark Supreme Court decision mandating bilingual education under Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. That decision, which involved a class action suit on behalf of non-English-speaking Chinese students in the California public school system, established language discrimination as

9 For a powerful critique of the category 'Hispanic,' see Martha E. Gimenez, "Latino/'Hispanic' – Who Needs a Name? The Case Against a Standardized Terminology," *International Journal of Health Services* 19 (3) (1989): 557–571. For an early defense of the category, see Marta Tienda and Vilma Ortiz, "'Hispanicity' and the 1980 Census," *Social Science Quarterly* 67 (1) (March 1986): 3–20.

10 See Executive Order 8802, *Federal Register* 6 (June 27, 1941): 3109; Executive Order 9346, *Fed. Reg.* 8 (May 29, 1943): 7183; Executive Order 9980, *Fed. Reg.* 13 (July 28, 1948): 4311; Executive Order 9981, *Fed. Reg.* 13 (July 28, 1948): 4313; Executive Order 10308, *Fed. Reg.* 16 (January 4, 1951): 12303; Executive Order 10479, *Fed. Reg.* 18 (August 18, 1953): 4899; Executive Order 10925, *Fed. Reg.* 26 (March 8, 1961): 1977; Executive Order 11246, *Fed. Reg.* 30 (September 28, 1965): 12319.

a central component of the civil rights agenda.<sup>11</sup>

Pressure to create a separate statistical category for Hispanics was consolidated when Congress passed Public Law 94-311 in June of 1976. That law mandated the collection and dissemination of “economic and social statistics for Americans of Spanish origin or descent.” Congress thus ensured that whenever the government was to count the various population groups, Hispanics would be included.<sup>12</sup>

In sum, Hispanics are ambiguously situated in American culture and politics, at once recognized as subject to persistent discrimination and yet not readily classified as a homogeneous racial group. OMB navigated these conflicting pressures by including Hispanics within the official American taxonomy as an ethnic group, not a race.

Almost as soon as the directive was promulgated, groups began to protest its formulation and to call for the revision of its categories. Demands for change intensified as several groups, especially the emerging mixed-race movement, claimed that the directive no longer reflected the increasing diversity of the

American population. In 1993, the OMB initiated an extensive four-year review of the directive that included several public hearings it hosted in the spring and summer of 1993 and again in the summer of 1994. In March of 1994, the OMB established the Interagency Committee for the Review of Racial and Ethnic Standards.<sup>13</sup> In addition, the OMB asked the Committee on National Statistics of the National Academy of Sciences to convene a workshop to discuss issues surrounding category revision.

The extended review considered several changes, including the possibility of adopting a question in which the federal government would cease distinguishing between race and ethnicity. In October of 1997, the OMB issued revised standards for maintaining, collecting, and presenting federal data on race and ethnicity that replaced Directive 15. In the end, the OMB focused primarily on the mixed-race issue, introducing the “mark more than one” option for the census race question. The distinction between ethnicity and race was not changed.<sup>14</sup>

What does it matter that the American ethnoracial taxonomy distinguishes ethnicity from race? I have argued elsewhere that the distinction sets in play a relational dynamic between the two categories in which the meaning of one helps to secure the meaning of the oth-

11 The Subcommittee on Minority Education produced a 1973 report that called for the creation of common definitions of racial and ethnic groups, which Casper Weinberger took up for further action. See *Federal Register* 59 (110) (June 9, 1994): 29831. See also *Lau v. Nichols* 414 U.S. 563 (1974). For an overview of language policy, see Ronald Schmidt, Sr., *Language Policy and Identity Politics in the United States* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000).

12 See Public Law 94-311 90 STAT. 688. The quotation is from Katherine K. Wallman, “Statistics for Americans of Spanish Origin or Descent,” *Statistical Reporter* 78-5 (February 1978): 148. See also Jeanne E. Griffith, “Update on Statistics for Americans of Spanish Origin or Descent,” *Statistical Reporter* (September 1980): 401–405.

13 See *Federal Register* 59 (110) (June 9, 1994): 29832; Edmonston, Goldstein, and Lott, eds., *Spotlight on Heterogeneity*.

14 For the 1997 standards, see “Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of Data on Race and Ethnicity.” For an overview of the revision, see Suzann Evinger, “How Shall We Measure Our Nation’s Diversity,” *Chance* 8 (1) (1995): 7–14.

er.<sup>15</sup> That dynamic relation, established in the culture at large, is institutionalized in Directive 15. Although the directive explicitly eschews a biological definition of race, it treats race as a singular and evidently immutable fact, while it defines ethnicity in purely cultural terms that imply its malleability. In short, how race works in the United States, and what meaning it comes to embody, is constituted to a significant degree by the comparison with ethnicity. The OMB did not create this dialogic relation single-handedly; it had been in formation for half a century or more. Rather, Directive 15 formalized a set of cultural understandings already in play by incorporating the race-ethnicity distinction into the official classificatory scheme.

The full significance of the race-ethnicity distinction within the federal taxonomy has been obscured for the last three decades by the Census Bureau's inclusion of "some other race" as an option on the census race question. By obtaining special approval to modify Directive 15, the Census Bureau has elided the boundary between race and ethnicity. If OMB standards had been strictly adhered to, the census would have required Hispanics to select one of the four (later five) official race categories: black, white, Asian, Native American, and Pacific Islander. For many Hispanics, none of the OMB race categories seems especially appropriate, leaving them with no easy point of identification on the race question.

For the past three decades, Hispanics have been able to check Hispanic ethnicity along with "some other race" on the census. (An unprecedented 42.2 percent of Hispanics checked "some other race" on the 2000 census. Moreover, 97 per-

cent of those checking "some other race" were Hispanics.) Put differently, the "some other race" option has served as a political safety valve for the Census Bureau by masking the stark opposition that the official U.S. taxonomy mandates between ethnicity and race, and the rather inadequate race options available to Hispanics.

But the political safety valve offered by "some other race" may soon disappear. The Census Bureau is seriously contemplating dropping the option in 2010 in order to comply with the OMB race and ethnic standards. Doing so will politicize the designation of Hispanics as an ethnic group rather than a race, by leaving the vast majority of Hispanics with no other option than to identify as racially white. Dropping "some other race," I predict, will force us to revisit the long-standing distinction between race and ethnicity that pervades American culture and politics.

Indeed, I think it somewhat perverse for the Census Bureau to be sharpening the distinction between ethnicity and race at the very moment when most observers are noting demographic shifts in the opposite direction. Many scholars have noted how increased immigration and intermarriage have made diversity, and the discrimination that often follows, a more complex social phenomenon than the standard race categories record. While many are attending to increased demographic complexities, the Census Bureau is poised to reinstate the sharp distinction between an ethnic group and a race. Why?

The push to remove the "some other race" option stems from the dramatic increase in those selecting it in the last two decades and from the data quality concerns this has raised.<sup>16</sup> Because other

15 See Hattam, "Ethnicity: An American Genealogy."

16 Only 0.03 percent of the total population checked "some other race" in 1950, 0.01 percent

government departments do not collect data under the heading “some other race,” recent census data are not compatible with the data gathered by other agencies. To address this incompatibility, the Census Bureau sorts all of those who selected “some other race” into one of the racial categories officially recognized by the OMB. This process of sorting, or imputation, is achieved via a statistical formula that imputes an officially recognized race to each respondent who marks that box on the census form. The Census Bureau then generates a Modified Age, Race, and Sex (MARS) file to be used by other federal departments and agencies for civil rights enforcement. Indeed, it is the MARS file, rather than the census returns, that provides the denominator for most government agencies requiring demographic data for policy implementation and evaluation.

The Census Bureau worries about escalating imputation rates, since it wants to avoid modifying census returns whenever possible. In order to get out of the imputation business, the Bureau is considering removing “some other race” from the 2010 census form. But removing this option may well create new problems. It may lead to a drop-off in the response rate from Hispanics on the race question – particularly if a growing number of Hispanics do regard themselves as an independent racial group that the OMB has yet to recognize officially. From the Census Bureau’s point of view, failure to answer the race question is as much of a problem as the “some

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in 1960, and 0.03 percent in 1970. That number jumped to 3 percent in 1980, 3.9 percent in 1990, and 5.6 percent in 2000 – almost a two-fold increase in the last two decades. See Nancy M. Gordon, “Race and Ethnicity Testing: Update and Discussion,” handout distributed at May 2004 REAC meetings, Washington, D.C., p. 4.

other race” option, since the Bureau will impute an officially recognized race to nonresponses as well.<sup>17</sup>

The root of the problem lies in the inadequacy of the racial and ethnic categories created by Statistical Policy Directive 15 and the 1997 revision. Many Hispanics simply do not recognize themselves within the existing categories. And a return to the sharp distinction between race and ethnicity will leave most Hispanics with little other choice than to identify as white ethnics. What should the Census Bureau do?

To see how the Census Bureau is dealing with the “some other race” option and how Hispanics are responding, I attended one of the Census Bureau’s Race and Ethnic Advisory Committee (REAC) meetings in Crystal City, Virginia, in May of 2004.<sup>18</sup> The first Race Advisory Committee was established in the early 1970s as a means of ensuring African Americans and their advocates a voice in the census process. Eventually, the Census Bureau added subcommittees for each of the principal racial groups and for Hispanics as well.

Almost all current members of the Bureau’s Hispanic Advisory Committee were Republican appointees who could hardly be taken to represent the views of Hispanics as a whole. Six of the nine

17 For the Census Bureau’s concern with imputation rates and current efforts to reduce them, see Gordon, “Race and Ethnicity Testing”; Elizabeth Martin, David Sheppard, Michael Bentley, and Claudette Bennett, “Results of 2003 National Census Test of Race and Hispanic Questions,” U.S. Census Bureau, October 1, 2003. For pretests planned for 2005 and 2006, see “Cognitive Questions for Nancy Gordon,” handout distributed at the May REAC meetings.

18 The Race and Ethnicity Advisory Committee meetings began on the afternoon of May 4, but I was only able to attend on May 5 and 6.

committee members have been appointed since May of 2003, and eight of the nine appointed since the election of 2000. When introducing themselves at the beginning of the concurrent sessions, three mentioned professional ties to George H. Bush, Pete Wilson, and Colin Powell. I was surprised to see that the current REAC bears the imprint of the Bush administration so directly; in this it differs greatly from the REAC of the 1970s, which served principally as a forum where civil rights activists could express their concerns. (One indication of how times have changed: during the Nixon administration, the director of the Census Bureau asked Bobby Seale, the prominent Black Panther, to serve on the first Race Advisory Committee.<sup>19</sup>)

The very first item up for discussion in the Hispanic Advisory Committee that I observed was the proposal that “some other race” be eliminated as a choice on the 2010 census form. In the course of their discussion, the committee members agreed that eliminating “some other race” would likely mean an increase in the number of Hispanics who would check “white” for the race question in 2010. No one argued this was a problem: indeed, one committee member said “the whole issue is for the census to give guidance to Hispanics as to where they belong.” In the end, not a single member of the Hispanic Advisory Committee protested dropping the “some other race” option. No one mentioned or ex-

plored the obvious alternatives – such as allowing Hispanic respondents to identify themselves as a race (as Ian Haney López has proposed), or eliminating altogether the distinction between race and ethnicity (as Kenneth Prewitt has proposed). What I saw in Crystal City was the intersection of Census Bureau data quality concerns with Bush Republicans’ preference that most Hispanics identify themselves as racially white – a convergence that is taking place largely under the political radar.

The choices the Census Bureau makes about the race question for 2010 are of considerable import. At issue is the longstanding meaning of ‘Hispanic’ and its relation to race. Where the line is drawn between race and ethnicity, and on what terms, will shape the contours of American racial politics for decades to come. Put simply, whether Hispanics identify as white or as people of color may shift the balance of power between the Democratic and Republican Parties, since racial identification and party allegiance have long been aligned. Certainly it will shape the contours of racial politics broadly conceived by redrawing the perimeter of those who might identify as people of color.<sup>20</sup> Nor is it difficult to imagine that white racial identification might eventually weaken some of the civil rights protections currently extended to Hispanics.

19 After some negotiation, Seale agreed to serve on the Advisory Committee as long as the Bureau paid for his bodyguard. In the end, Seale did not take up the appointment because he had to go underground. For discussion of the Seale incident and the early Race Advisory Committee, see Barbara Milton and David Pemberton, “Oral History Interview with Vincent P. Barabba,” August 7, 1989, 28 – 30. A transcript of the interview is available from the Census Bureau.

20 See Orlando Patterson, “Race by the Numbers,” op-ed, *The New York Times*, May 8, 2001, and the website of the National Association for the Advancement of Caucasian Latinos. For discussions of the fluidity of Hispanic party identification, see also Tamar Jacoby, “Republicans and Their Amigos,” *The Weekly Standard*, November 25, 2002, 18. For appeals to Hispanics as people of color, see Fernando Ferrer’s “other New York” campaign in the Democratic primary for the New York mayoral race in 2001.



Where do we want to draw the boundaries of race? On what grounds? And with what political effects? We face a rare opportunity for rethinking the American ethnracial taxonomy. At the very least, the politics of census race categories are important enough to warrant a more serious public debate than has occurred to date. Moreover, it is imperative that the issues be aired now, while the Census Bureau is making decisions for 2010. Once census questions have been set it will be too late. The choices we make, or that are made on our behalf, are likely to establish the parameters of ethnic and racial identifications in American politics for years to come.

There are four principal taxonomic options for us to consider: continue with the status quo; eliminate “some other race”; shift Hispanic from an ethnic to a racial identification; blur the categorical distinction between race and ethnicity. While none of these options is without problems, my own preference is for the fourth one, with an important caveat. Let me briefly spell out why I come to this conclusion.

The status quo fails to address the very real problems of Census Bureau imputation – especially for the large number of Hispanics who select “some other race” only to have their responses imputed back to the official race categories. Removing “some other race,” currently the Census Bureau’s preferred option, would unnecessarily narrow the range of racial identifications available to Hispanics, leaving most of them with little choice but to identify as white ethnics. Changing ‘Hispanic’ from an ethnic into a racial category would likely meet with considerable resistance from the very population that option seeks to accommodate. After all, it was the racial heterogeneity of the various national origin groups that led to the creation of an

omnibus Hispanic category in the first place.

Finally, there is the possibility of *dis-mantling* the distinction between race and ethnicity from the federal statistical system by shifting to a combined race/ethnicity question. A respondent might select ‘Hispanic’ as either an ethnic or a racial identification, but the federal statistical system would no longer reify the distinction. You will recall that Directive 15 and the revised standards allow for such a combined format.

However, the combined option is not without its dangers. Eliding the formal distinction between race and ethnicity might well lead to a false sense of equality in which Americans assume, to paraphrase Nathan Glazer, that we are all ethnics now.<sup>21</sup> Establishing formal equality without simultaneously changing the broader social practices that continue to secure ethnic privilege by distinguishing ethnicity from race may only mask persistent ethnic and racial divisions.

Thus, I advocate a double move: I think we should remove the formal distinction between race and ethnicity from the federal classificatory system, but we must also remain alert to, and seek to change, the complex ways in which ethnic privilege has long been secured by defining ethnicity against race. Changes in the taxonomy *alone* cannot redress the complex relation between ethnic and racial identification in place in the United States. Formal taxonomic equality will only be meaningful if it is sustained by more equitable social and political practices in American society at large.

21 Nathan Glazer, *We Are All Multiculturalists Now* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997).