

Take This Census & Shove It!

Fifth Estate Collective

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For the last several months I have been inundated with press releases and other propaganda disseminated by the United States government concerning the census which is to begin, appropriately, on April Fool's Day, 1980. The census presents itself as an innocuous gathering of facts which will make it possible for "us Americans" to know how our society is changing and, as President Carter wrote in a White House release last November, "to make intelligent decisions for the future."

Much of the propaganda is spent in assuring the reader that the results of the census are confidential and could never be used to deny personal liberty. Anyone who fears answering the six-page questionnaire is pictured as a paranoid who hasn't quite entered the twentieth century. All of the many safeguards against government agencies getting their hands on this "confidential" information are listed in long texts. After reading over the government releases, I for one have decided that there is no way that I will willingly cooperate with this noxious affront to my personal freedom. I make too many compromises with this society as it is—I won't fill out this police report.

Why won't I cooperate? For the very reasons that the Bureau of the Census tells me that I should. A letter from Carter describes the census as "a valuable tool" which provides "all Americans" with "vital...facts and figures." "This information," Peanutman continues, "forms the basis for countless decisions made by government, industry, labor, academia, the communications industry and many others." Reason enough alone to boycott the process!

I have absolutely no interest in lifting a finger to help any one of these bureaucrats make their important decisions about my future. The tyranny of facts and figures which transforms human beings into statistics and leaves fundamental human problems unquestioned is an integral part of that process being perfected in the twentieth century whereby human beings are pulverized under the immense weight of the state. Any real facts which revealed the true nature of this society would declare openly to these parasites that their way of life is a living death, but those truths could never be answered in a square inch of a bureaucratic form.

Secondly, I will not cooperate because Mr. Carter reminds me in his message that "under the law it is the duty of every person to participate in the census by answering all questions." Once the sweet talk is concluded, the state makes it clear that one must go along With the program or break the law. I prefer to break the law.

Then there is the question of the form itself. It is an immense, tiresome and exacting examination, resembling the most annoying job application one could imagine. You must give your name. Everyone must be accounted for. The most ridiculous, boring and miniscule questions concerning the living quarters must be answered. Number of vehicles used by the household, all insurance and tax-related information must be given, how well "this person" (this is how you are referred to throughout the questionnaire) speaks any languages besides English must be told. Other questions: "Where did this person live five years ago?...At what location did this person work last week? Last week, how long did it usually take this person to get from home to work (one way)...

Was this person temporarily absent or on layoff or business last week?"

Ad nauseam. It is bad enough going to work at all last week, but answering these idiotic questions is intolerable. It would take perhaps an hour to fill out this form. That is reason enough to throw it into the wastebasket.

All of the assurances of confidentiality make me nervous, too. A description of the compilation of the information: "After the questionnaires have been edited, checked, and verified (?) on the local level in the District Offices, they are boxed and shipped to one of three centers that will process them. We are talking about 800,000 boxes. Once the forms reach the processing centers, their entire contents are microfilmed, including the names of the respondents and the answers to the questions." I won't cooperate because I refuse to be microfilmed. And I don't believe the assurances that the information will not be used against me (why give my name if it is confidential?). "How safe are these safeguards (of privacy) in the future?" asks Vincent P. Barabba, Director of the Bureau of Census. "It is almost inconceivable that they would be eroded, except in the catastrophic event of a breakdown in our whole democratic tradition of protecting individual rights." It may be inconceivable to government bureaucrats the likes of Barabba, but to me it is quite plausible, since the U.S. government would gladly allow for just such a "catastrophe" if it became necessary to insure its own maintenance in the face of mass rebellion or war.

No, I will not let you invade my life, with your tedious and insulting census! I won't give you my precious time, and I certainly won't give you any information! I won't be computerized, scrutinized, folded, spindled, documented, categorized, filed and cross-referenced. Take your census and shove it!

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