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Toward A Critical Demography of Race and Ethnicity: Introduction of the “R” Word

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Toward A Critical Demography of Race and Ethnicity: Introduction of the “*R*” Word

Abstract

Racism is a concept that has been all but ignored in the literature on racial and ethnic demography. This is in spite of the fact that racism has become increasingly salient in the context of the dramatic increase in racial and ethnic diversity in the United States. This paper formerly introduces racism into the lexicon of demography. Specifically, there are three objectives of this paper: 1) to critique the manner in which racism has been addressed in the area of racial and ethnic demography; 2) to provide a theoretical framework to facilitate the use of racism as a variable of demographic analysis--the population and structural change thesis; and 3) to provide examples as to how studies in racial and ethnic demography can be enhanced by the inclusion of racism as a variable of explanation. The paper concludes with a call for further research on the role that racism plays in racial and ethnic demography.

Toward A Critical Demography of Race and Ethnicity: Introduction of the “R” Word

Racism is a topic that has been conspicuously absent from the literature and research on racial and ethnic demography. This is particularly paradoxical given the fact that racism has been the most salient issue on the American landscape for the last thirty years (Omi and Winant 1992; Feagin and Vera 1995). Whether one examines the demographic impact of the Civil Rights Movement (Wilson 1980; Horton 1992a), the white backlash of the 1980s (Steinberg 1995), or the contemporary furor over illegal immigration (Bouvier 1992), racism is a central, if not the key, factor in understanding the causes and consequences of change in American diversity (Ture and Hamilton 1992; Omi and Winant 1994). However, the avoidance of the term *racism* is understandable when one considers that demography, and perhaps most importantly *demographers*, do not exist in a vacuum (Steinberg 1995). It is argued here that the primary problem is the general lack of theoretical development in demography that would facilitate the use of racism as a variable of explanation (Moore 1959; Ford and DeJong 1970; Keyfitz 1982; Farley and Allen 1987). Accordingly, the purpose of this paper is to introduce racism as an explanatory variable in the demography of race and ethnicity. Specifically, the paper has the following objectives: 1) to critique the manner in which racism has been addressed in the area of racial and ethnic demography; 2) to provide a theoretical framework to facilitate the use of racism as a variable in demographic analyses; and 3) to provide examples as to how this framework is to be employed.

Racism and the Demography of Race and Ethnicity

Racism Defined

The first step toward an understanding of the role of racism within the context of changing American diversity is to define the term. Again, nowhere does such a definition appear in the demography literature. Certainly, outside of demography definitions of racism are readily available (van den Berghe 1967; Wilson 1973; Ture and Hamilton 1992; Steinberg 1998). Yet, if racism is to be employed by demographers as a variable of explanation, it must be defined so as to be amenable to eventual operationalization and measurement. Hence, in this paper, racism is defined as *a multi-level and multi-dimensional system of dominant group oppression which scapegoats the race of one or more subordinate groups*. With this definition in hand, we now turn to a critical review of the literature on the demography of race and ethnicity.

Racism: Missing Link or Taboo Subject?

To reiterate, rarely has the *term* racism appeared in demographic research, let alone a detailed analysis of its effects on the various populations within the United States. A review of the leading journal in the field, *Demography*, reveals that the term has appeared twice in the journal's history. The first instance was in an article by Weisbord (1973) on whether birth control efforts for blacks were in fact acts of genocide. The second instance was in an article by Farley (1988) where he discounts the impact of racism on poverty for black Americans:

“Having reviewed several dimensions of economic status, we can evaluate the four explanations for persistent black poverty. *One can be dismissed rapidly, that is, the explanation of constant, or increasing white racism*. To be certain, racism

continues to exist, as we know from the ill-informed comments of sports officials and from incidents such as the one in Howard Beach. Honda is one of the most recent of many large firms to agree to multi-million dollar settlements following charges of employment discrimination. Nevertheless, I take the evidence of higher relative wages and better jobs for employed blacks, the declines in black-white residential segregation that took place in the 1970s in smaller- and middle-sized metropolises (Massey and Denton, 1987; Wilger 1988), and the apparent willingness of an increasing fraction of whites to vote for Reverend Jackson as indicative of declining racism. As a nation, we faced the dilemma posed by Gunnar Myrdal four decades ago, and *we are gradually becoming a less racist society.*” p.453 (italics are mine).

It is important to note that the aforementioned article was a presidential address rather than a detailed analysis of the issue of racism. Nevertheless, there is ample evidence to support the argument that the proclamation of America being a less racist society was premature at best (Farley et. al 1994). As Massey and Denton (1993) note:

“After persisting for more than fifty years, the black ghetto will not be dismantled by passing a few amendments to existing laws or by implementing a smattering of bureaucratic reforms. The ghetto is part and parcel of modern American society; it was manufactured by whites earlier in the century to isolate and control growing urban black populations, and *it is maintained today by a set of institutions, attitudes, and practices that are deeply embedded in the structure of American life.*” p.217 (italics are mine).

Whereas the concept racism has rarely appeared in the journal *Demography*, the subject of race has a long tradition therein. In the very first issue of the journal, Hamilton (1964) published his classic, “*The Negro Leaves the South.*” Employing census data from 1870-1960, Hamilton produced a comprehensive work that covered an entire range of issues from: 1) the population distribution across the near 100 year period; 2) rural and urban population differentials; to 3) the sociological implications of the Great Migration. Moreover, he provides an analysis of the occupational structure and educational distribution of the black migrants to the

urban north as well as patterns of segregation. In short, this study was the precursor of contemporary studies of racial and ethnic demography. It is interesting to note that in this very first issue, Hamilton makes a plea for racial tolerance that has been lost in contemporary demographic adherence to *apparent objectivity*:

“Perhaps for years to come we will have to learn to live adventuresomely and courageously in human relationships, as we are learning to do in the realms of international relations and interplanetary space. Whatever the dangers of racial adjustment are--be they real or imaginary--Americans of all races must learn to take them in their stride as part of the price for living in this great age. Perhaps the imaginary dangers will turn out to be much worse than the real ones!” P. 295.

Since that premier issue, there has been a broad range of topics in the journal relative to race and ethnicity. Studies on: fertility (Alvarez 1973; Bauman and Udry 1973; Smith et al. 1996); mortality (Jiobu 1972; Preston et al. 1996); residential segregation (Edwards 1970; Massey and Denton 1989; Frey and Farley 1996); inequality and stratification (Van Ardol, Jr. and Schuerman 1971; Farley and Hermalin 1972; Uhlenberg 1972; Bianchi 1980; Daymont 1980; Tienda and Glass 1985); and marriage and motherhood (Bumpass and McLanahan 1989; Preston et al. 1992; South and Lloyd 1992; Manning and Smock 1995) have resulted in making the specialty area highly diverse. However, to reiterate, none of these studies have focused explicitly on racism.

There is no doubt that by ignoring the issue of racism these papers were more palatable to (and hence publishable in) the journal (Kuhn 1970; Blalock 1984). Yet, as a result of this avoidance, the demography of race and ethnicity becomes stagnant awaiting the next decennial census so as to report the latest trends (Harrison and Bennett 1995).

Accordingly, most of the studies that address the demography of the euphemisms for

racism (i.e. discrimination, segregation and racial inequality) have appeared external to the journal, *Demography*. Preston (1974) employed 1962 data from the *Current Population Survey* to examine the impact of fertility patterns on future occupational achievement for blacks. Tolnay (1984) used 1900 census data to study family formation within the context of the southern agricultural economy. Rosenbaum (1994) utilized the *Housing and Vacancy Survey* collected by the U.S. Bureau of the Census to compare the housing constraints of blacks, Puerto Ricans and other Latinos relative to whites in New York City. Other contributions to racial and ethnic demography have focused on labor force issues in recent years (Tienda and Lii 1987; Snipp and Sandefar 1988; Lichter 1989).

However, no social scientist has had a greater impact on research on race in general, and racial and ethnic demography in particular, than William Julius Wilson (Steinberg 1995). His work is significant because it facilitated a shift away from structural explanations (racism) to human capital explanations (class) for persisting black disadvantage.¹ This is ironic given the structural nature of his analyses (Wilson 1980; 1987; 1996). Nevertheless, the race-class debate, even in its demographic form, occurred external to the journal, *Demography* (Hirschman and Wong 1986; Hout 1986; Horton 1992b; Tienda and Wilson 1992).

Why Demographers Ignore Racism

The reasons that racism has been a taboo subject in demography are paradoxically

¹ It is also important to note that Wilson attained a stature that made him arguably the most prominent sociologist in the United States. Thus, his work could not be ignored by demographers who specialized in race--most of which are sociologists themselves.

straightforward and complex. First, it is important to note that demography can be no different from the scholars that comprise the field (Blalock 1984; Steinberg 1995). Demography is not substantially different from the social sciences in general in terms of its own racial and ethnic composition--predominantly consisting of white, middle-aged males (Omi and Winant 1994; Steinberg 1995). Ironically, because of the conservative nature of demography (Hauser and Duncan 1959; Shryock et al. 1976), the field tends to attract relatively fewer members of the *disadvantaged* racial and ethnic minorities from the United States than sociology, psychology or even economics. Further evidence of this relative lack of diversity in demography is the absence of an organization of minority demographers comparable to the *Association of Black Sociologists, the National Association of Black Psychologists, and the National Economics Association*. For instance, a cross-referencing of data from the American Sociological Association's 1996 *Directory of Graduate Programs in Sociology* and the membership roster of the Association of Black Sociologists reveals that fewer than 1% of sociologists who list demography as a specialty area are black.² In short, blacks, and other minorities, lack the critical mass in demography to establish a national organization. Undoubtedly, this has a major

² At this writing, membership data from the Population Association of America are unavailable. Moreover, it is important to note that the PAA is an interdisciplinary organization. However, given that most of the demographers who specialize on race are likewise sociologists, a plausible argument could be made that blacks are likely to be more scarce in this organization. One indicator that this is in fact the case is the PAA's most recent call for papers for its 1997 annual meeting. There was only *one* section on race out of a total of 95 sessions. This is compared to 5 sessions on the demography of gender. It should be noted that there was one session on Asian Americans. Finally, it should be noted that one reason that the underrepresentation of blacks goes unnoticed in the PAA is the presence of a significant number of *African* rather than *African American* demographers. The former tend to study the demography of Africa rather than race.

impact on the nature of studies on racial and ethnic demography.

A second reason that demographers have ignored racism is the dependency of the field on the state. This dependency takes two forms. First, more so than any other discipline, demography depends upon the state to provide the raw data for its basic analyses (Shryock et al. 1976). In fact, demography as a field is almost inconceivable without census and vital statistics data (Namboodiri 1991; Smith 1992).³ Second, much (if not most) of demographic research tends to be funded by the state. Blalock (1984) makes a similar argument when he notes the influence of funding agents on social research in general:

“Social surveys are extremely expensive and beyond the means of virtually all individual investigators. They must therefore be financed by someone, and of course these outside parties may “call the shots” in terms of what is and is not investigated. One of the outcries on the part of radical and minority social scientists during the 1960s was that elites are seldom studied in this way. More often a so-called problem is defined in terms of some undesired *minority* behavior, such as poor school performance, above-average illegitimacy levels, or high crime and delinquency rates. The problem is thus defined to be one of changing the *minority* rather than the elites or social institutions.” P.22

This monopoly as a source for data and funding is problematic in terms of addressing the issue of racism because the state has historically been a major perpetrator and perpetuator of racism in American society (DuBois 1935; van den Berghe 1967; Ryan 1972; Wilson 1973; Massey and Denton 1993; Omi and Winant 1994). Racism played a major role in the very

³ An exception to this general rule of dependency on the state for data is the study of migration. Studies by DeJong and Gardner (1981) on migration decision-making have used survey data to supplement traditional data sources in order to develop innovative theoretical models. It should be noted however, that these models tend to be micro-level in nature and do not tend to address the issue of racism.

inception of the U.S. Census and continues to this very day (Anderson 1988). This obvious conflict of interest makes the study of racial and ethnic demography an area which focuses on trends, intergroup differences and multivariate descriptions while ignoring the root causes of racial and ethnic inequality (Farley 1978; Featherman and Hauser 1978; Frey 1978; Lieberman 1978; Sullivan 1978; Wilson and Taeuber 1978; Spanier and Glick 1980; Frey and Farley 1996; Smith and Morgan 1996; Preston et al. 1996).⁴ Ironically, it is precisely because of its historic role in the genesis of racism that the state is where demographers must begin in order to measure this phenomenon (Daniels 1990; Franklin and Moss, Jr. 1994; Wilson 1996).⁵

Measuring Racism: The Benefits to Demography

The primary argument that is advanced in this paper is that it is a mistake for demographers to persist in their support of what Feagin and Vera (1995) term the “*culture of denial*” relative to racism in America. To the contrary, demographers should not only embrace the concept of racism as a causal factor in the study of racial and ethnic demography, they should be the vanguard of efforts to operationalize and measure it (Blalock 1982). Such an approach has several benefits to the field of demography. First, including racism as a variable in explanatory models would allow for further growth and development of the specialty area. Because racism is multi-dimensional and multi-level in nature, it facilitates the inclusion of perspectives and disciplines, and more specifically scholars, that heretofore have been excluded

⁴Garkovich (1989) makes a similar argument in her critique of rural population research.

⁵Social scientists in general have been more aggressive in addressing the role of the state

from demographic research (Smith 1981; Jaynes and Williams 1989; Ture and Hamilton 1992; Feagin and Sikes 1994). Yet, as the United States enters the 21st century a markedly diverse society, new ideas are needed (Mills 1961; Horton 1992a). Such an infusion would only invigorate the field (Kuhn 1970; Ture and Hamilton 1992; Fredrickson 1995).

At present, because of its own racial and ethnic demography, the field of demography is primarily an apologist, albeit tacitly, for the existing racial order (Omi and Winant 1994; Steinberg 1995). This advances neither demography nor society. Ignoring the role of racism simply provides opportunities for reactionary, if not explicitly racist, commentaries that are presented as scholarly research (Hernstein and Murray 1994).

The second benefit to demography by measuring racism is that a distinction can be made between three concepts that are erroneously used interchangeably: *racism, race, and racial inequality*. The origins of using the latter two as measures for the former lie in a time when the *quantitative* study of race and ethnicity was in its infancy (Duncan 1968). However, in contemporary times demographers have more sophisticated statistical techniques to measure variables, like racism, that are latent and/or contextual in nature (Goodman 1978; Clogg 1979; Joreskog and Sorbom 1979; Agresti 1990; Hagenaaars 1990; Heinen 1996). The question is whether they have the *will* to do so (Ryan 1972; Steinberg 1995).

Finally, measuring racism has another benefit to the study of racial and ethnic demography. Claims and pronouncements of American society being increasingly or decreasingly racist can be proven or rejected (Farley 1988). Moreover, as mentioned above, racism, race, and racial inequality are distinct concepts. Therefore, it is conceivable that models

in the area of sex and gender inequality. For a review of this literature see Haney (1996).

could be developed that incorporated all three simultaneously. Such models would not only answer questions of the “declining significance of race,” but “the relative and absolute changes in racism and racial inequality” as well. The key to such an advancement is to provide a theoretical framework that would facilitate the use of the term *racism* in demographic research. It is to this task that this paper now turns.

The Population and Structural Change Thesis

The population and structural change thesis holds that changes in the relative sizes of the minority and majority populations interact with changes in the social structure to exacerbate racial and ethnic inequality (Horton 1995). In the case of the United States in contemporary times, these demographic changes have been dramatic increases in the minority populations at a time when the country is undergoing vast technological changes. These changes have broad implications across a range of social issues and life cycle circumstances (Horton and Burgess 1992). One consequence of population and structural change is racial and ethnic competition in the labor force. However, it is important to note that competition in contemporary times is different from that of times past. Wilson (1987) notes how the vast changes in the American industrial economy has disproportionately displaced black blue collar workers. However, in accordance with the population and structural change thesis, much of the *competition* between racial and ethnic minorities and whites has occurred among white collar workers. The technological change has affected the professional class of the labor force equally as much, if not more, than the blue collar segment. Hence, for the first time in American history, being white

and college educated is no longer a guarantee to a “good job” (Horton 1995).⁶ This situation is complicated by the fact that there have been dramatic increases in the size of the middle class segments of the minority labor force. Thus, for the first time in American history, minority middle class workers are a competitive threat to white middle class workers (Horton 1995). As a result, the latter turn to racism to eliminate the former from the playing field (Omi and Winant 1994). It is significant to note that cries of “reverse discrimination” and official state actions such as Proposition 209 in California serve the interests of the white middle class.

Racism in the Context of Population and Structural Change

The population and structural change thesis is a theoretical perspective that facilitates the incorporation of racism as a variable of analysis in racial and ethnic demography. There is ample historical evidence to support this argument. For instance, in the case of migration, racism played a role in the enslavement and importation of Africans, the removal of Native Americans from their lands, the repatriation of Mexicans during the Great Depression and the internment of Japanese citizens World War II (Daniels 1990). In the case of mortality, the conventional and germ warfare waged against the Native Americans, the tens of millions of African slaves “lost” in the middle passage and deaths from the brutality of slavery and lynching during the Jim Crow era certainly are relevant here. Finally, on the topic of fertility and family structure, the wholesale rape of black women, the breeding of slaves and the decimation of slave families must likewise be acknowledged (Franklin and Moss, Jr. 1994). In all of the above demographic

⁶It is important to note that the population and structural change thesis is dramatically different from competition theory although the two may share some superficial similarities (Blalock 1967; Olzak et al. 1996; Tomaskovic-Devey and Roscigno 1996). For a detailed

events, racism played a central role (Ture and Hamilton 1992). The common thread is the power that the white population had to exploit and control minority populations for its own gains (Fredrickson 1981).

Population and structural change is linked to racism because it is via the latter that majority populations respond to the former. Keeping in mind that racism is a multi-level and multi-dimensional *system* of dominant group oppression, interactions between changes in the population and the social structures function as a triggering mechanism to that system. In the case of blacks in contemporary times, the population and structural change thesis makes their current status in the social structure comprehensible. Blacks were brought here to do the *hard work* that whites were unwilling to do (Franklin and Moss, Jr. 1994). However, since the Emancipation, the greatest population problem for whites relative to race and ethnicity has been “how do we continue to maintain control over this large and increasing population?” The answer has been to utilize a racist system of oppression to eliminate blacks as serious competitors in every aspect of American life (Butler 1991; Massey and Denton 1993; Oliver and Shapiro 1995). Similar systemic responses have been employed against Asians and Latinos whenever their numbers became problematic for the prevailing racial order (Daniels 1990).

The system is society-wide and must be constantly updated to accommodate contemporary conditions. However, the objective remains unchanged--the exploitation of minority populations for the benefit of the majority. Accordingly, the dominant culture, institutions, and individual behavior and beliefs support this system--directly and indirectly (Van Ausdale and Feagin 1996). *Demographers* support that system by ignoring the impact that

critique of competition theory see Horton et al. (1996).

racism has on racial and ethnic differentials in fertility, mortality, migration, marriage markets, residential segregation, and stratification and inequality. In essence, American society has an implicit population policy that has racism as its primary engine. The population and structural change thesis is a theoretical perspective that allows demographers to explain in a more comprehensive fashion the manifestations of America's population policy. It also facilitates the one thing that demographers, despite their advanced methodological and statistical techniques, are reluctant to do--make predictions. If one places the contemporary changes in racial and ethnic composition in the context of America's population policy, then reasonable predictions can be made as to the future of consequences of these changes. The following are examples of the application of the population and structural change thesis to contemporary problems in racial and ethnic demography.

The Neo-Mulatto Movement in the United States

Many demographers have written on the dynamics of racial and ethnic identity in the United States (Alba 1990; Waters 1990). However, it is argued here that prior studies have failed to address the issue of the rising population of neo-mulattos and their efforts to be designated as a distinct racial group. Persons in this group identify themselves as "bi-racials." In September of 1996, members from this population demonstrated outside of the White House for an official designation on the upcoming decennial census. However, it is not a bi-racial identity that they are actually embracing. Instead, they are attempting to put distance between

themselves and their black identity. Thus, the term “neo-mulatto” is more appropriate.⁷ The issues here transcend the individual level “identity crises” that tend to emerge in various social and institutional settings. From a population perspective, a critical demographer has to ask the question: “What changes in the social structure have occurred that have facilitated the emergence of this population?” It is certainly not the aforementioned “decline” in racism in American society.

The population and structural change thesis explains the emergence of this group. To understand the significance of their presence, one must ask the somewhat impolite and unpalatable question, “Why is it that the black male and white female unions are no longer a threat to the racial order?” In times past, simply looking at a white women was a death sentence for a black man (Franklin and Moss, Jr. 1994). The argument presented here is that what has changed is the role of white women in American society. The influx of white women into the labor force since the mid-1970s was exceeded only by the Civil Rights Movement in its impact on this country. Not only have white women been the primary beneficiaries of civil rights legislation and affirmative action policies, but they have also gained significant economic and political power as a group. One latent function of this change in white women’s roles has been a *de-valuation* of white women as sex objects. Thus, *the white woman is no longer a primary symbol of the white man’s power*. Therefore, racism has not declined necessarily. Black men are

⁷ It is understood that all persons who claim to be “bi-racial” are not the product of black-white (or black and other) unions. However, it is the black ancestry that is most problematic for this population because of the “one-drop” rule and the position of blacks at the bottom of the racial order in American society. Thus these neo-mulattos have considerable incentive to distance themselves from the black population (Spickard 1989) .

engaging in unions with white women at a time when they are no longer the prized possessions of white men.

However, a more important issue is the socioeconomic status of the black population once the neo-mulattos have been statistically removed. Given the relatively high levels of socioeconomic status and political activism of this group, such a removal is inevitable. In all likelihood, residentially, socially, culturally--and perhaps emotionally--neo-mulattos were not a part of the black community anyway. The statistical removal only makes it official. Thus, the true question becomes, "How will the black population look once this change is made?"

The Nonwhite Immigration Problem

Much has been made of the changing diversity in America. Some demographers have estimated that by early into the 21st century, minorities may represent anywhere from one third to nearly one half of the total population. Again, the population and structural change thesis helps to temper these estimates. Utilizing racism as an explanatory variable, the thesis would predict that such a change is not likely to occur. Two other events are highly likely to be consequential to the persisting increase in nonwhite immigration: 1) a reestablishment of immigration barriers (i.e. laws and more aggressive border control) to Latinos and Asians; and 2) special allowances (both official and unofficial) for Europeans and European-descendant populations. To a certain extent, this policy already exists. In American culture, only nonwhite immigrants are considered "foreigners." Because of racism, white immigrants (and for that matter white tourists and visitors) have more rights and privileges (particularly access to

opportunities) than most disadvantaged minorities have *ever* experienced in this country. This is not likely to change in the foreseeable future. The dominant population would adjust its existing population policies to accommodate the increase in minorities. If demographers employ racism as a variable of explanation, it would bring clarity to some of the seemingly open-ended and ambiguous conclusions relative to the impact of future immigration. The population and structural change thesis makes this inclusion possible (i.e. palatable).

Racial Differentials in Wealth, Status and Power

Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation because he believed that it was the only way to save the Union (Franklin and Moss, Jr. 1994). He publicly stated so, and declared that if he thought that he could save the Union without freeing one slave, then slavery would still be the law of the land. His primary objective was preserving the existing social order. It is argued here that this objective continues to be the prevailing view of the dominant population and is supported by the existing the culture, social institutions and individual behavior of whites. Just as the Emancipation Proclamation was a policy of population control, so have been subsequent acts and laws that impact upon race and ethnicity in this society. Critics may attempt to dismiss this argument as cynicism. Such a dismissal would be self-serving at best. But it would not allow for the further development of racial and ethnic demography as a specialty area. A *critical* demography of race and ethnicity must examine the implications of growth in minority populations relative to wealth, status and power in American society. The population and structural change thesis allows for the incorporation of racism to explain changes in policies and programs that ostensibly benefit minority populations. Ultimately, power is

determined by access to military force. Short of armed revolution or repression, numbers will determine wealth, status and power in the United States. Hence, the population and structural change thesis would predict increased levels of racism directed toward minorities as their numbers increase. This is particularly the case with Latinos because this population would continue to grow if all immigration were immediately halted. Ironically, Asians, who generally support anti-affirmative action efforts, find themselves on the losing end of issues when their numbers threaten whites (e.g. enrollments at elite colleges and universities). It is maintained that both Latinos and Asians will find that there will not be a “declining significance of race” effect for them in the foreseeable future. The true question however, is whether *demographers* who study racial and ethnic demography will “not see it” as well. Employing racism via the population and structural change thesis would increase the likelihood that demographers wouldn’t miss this probable outcome.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to introduce racism into the lexicon of demography. There were three specific goals herein: 1) to critique the manner in which racism had been addressed in the area of racial and ethnic demography; 2) to provide a theoretical framework that would facilitate the use of racism as a variable of explanation; and 3) to provide examples of the types of issues to which this framework could be applied. It was noted that demographers had essentially avoided the issue of racism altogether. Part of the problem lies in the dependence upon the state for data and funding of demographic research. However, the dearth of

disadvantage minorities among the ranks of demographers, it was argued, has had a dramatic effect on the development of the specialty area. The inclusion of racism as a variable of explanation would only enhance the area of racial and ethnic demography. Rather than ignoring racism, it should be operationalized and measured so as to document the changes thereof relative to the racial differentials that characterize the studies in this area. Demographers have the techniques to do so. The question is a matter of interest and/or courage.

Demography historically has been a very conservative discipline. By nature, its adherents are reluctant to deviate from the status quo. In fact, there is still some residual embarrassment in the field because, with all of their models, methodologies and techniques, demographers failed to predict the baby boom. It is argued here that demographers are likely to repeat this error by ignoring the issue of racism relative to American diversity. In fact, the greatest challenge for demography is not “what the numbers will look like” in the 21st century. Instead, it is whether demographers will have the courage to embrace the “*r*” word.

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