

September 28, 1966

Mr. John W. Macy, Jr.
Chairman
United States Civil Service Commission
Washington, D. C. 20415

Dear Mr. Macy:

I very much appreciate your letter of September 8, especially as I find we are in close agreement on fundamental issues. As the enclosures illustrate, we reinvented confidential voluntary reporting.

Practically, what I fear is federal reinforcement of exaggerated race consciousness and the play this gives to "Black Power" and the white backlash. Very much depends on the style with which you do the enumeration. The head count is particularly odious.

I am particularly worried about compounding the anxieties of many people who are near the "color line" and confused about whether they will be forced into a differentiated minority affiliation by community attitudes - like the "assimilated Jew".

May I suggest a remedy: a positive statement of policy from the Commission. This should include an assertion that the government denies the existence of any objective method of racial classification; that skin color is abused as such a method for purposes of discrimination; that employees may wish to register their affiliation for statistical purposes; that their registration cannot be used as evidence of race, but only of vulnerability to discrimination by others; that while every employee must be tabulated to prevent abuses by supervisors, the employee can opt that he does not know or does not care about his affiliation. If race is such an unreliable concept, I believe it is very wrong to insist that everyone decide what his race is, and worse still for it to be possible to challenge his decision.

In our department we reinforce the voluntary affiliation concept by pointing out that the employee can change his "vote" at any time: he is not locked into any label.

Such a statement would not only undo any misunderstanding that the ethnic census can indeed generate; it would also be a strong positive step to reconciling federal policy with scientific fact about race.

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I am eager to columnize on this subject, and think you will agree to the benefit of open public discussions. It would be helpful if you could and would let me have copies of any of the forms or instructions that show how the present program is applied in practice. In addition I would be grateful to hear any further reaction you might have to my suggestion about a positive statement.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

Encl: Ethnic census questionnaire (our department)
WP column 7/31/66

P.S. If you get the Washington Post you may wish to notice some more that I have had to say on the subject (Oct. 2).