PLANS FOR THE 1970 CENSUS OF POPULATION AND HOUSING

David L. Kaplan
Bureau of the Census, Washington, D. C. 20233

Abstract.—The Nineteenth Decennial Census of the United States, covering both population and housing, will be conducted as of April 1, 1970. Planning, testing, and preparatory activities have been underway since early in the decade. Extensive discussions with users of census data led to relatively minor changes in subject content as compared to 1960, but a major increase in the amount of statistics to be tabulated, especially for small geographic areas. For about 60 to 65 percent of the population, the information will be collected through a new mail-out/mail-back system. The rest of the country will be covered by house-to-house canvass. Special efforts to alleviate the serious problem of underenumeration are being undertaken, particularly in the hard-to Enumerate portions of the big cities. The geographic program includes an “address coding guide” through which location identification in most urban areas can be made to specific side of block; this will permit tabulations for new types of small areas. Processing of the data will be performed with the Census Bureau's Fosdis equipment and advanced computers. Dissemination of the census results will be in the traditional type of printed reports but also, in substantially greater subject and area detail, through magnetic tape, special printouts, etc. To help users exploit the potentialities of the latter material, the Bureau has instituted a “data access” informational program. As in previous censuses, there will be a number of studies to evaluate the 1970 procedures and results.

In 1970—specifically, as of April 1, 1970—the United States will conduct its next Census of Population and Housing. This will be the Nineteenth Decennial Census, the latest in an unbroken string of censuses taken in every year ending in “0” since 1790. The basic legal requirement for the census was laid down with the establishment of the United States in 1789. The new nation’s Constitution stated that representation in the House of Representatives be apportioned among the separate States in accordance with the count of population, and that an enumeration to obtain these counts be made every ten years. From the very beginning, however, it was recognized that the census should obtain more population information than just a head count. Over the years, the subjects covered in the successive censuses have changed, of course, to reflect the changing needs for information.

Preparations for the 1970 census entered the “dress rehearsal” stage in the middle of 1967. Thus, almost 3 years before the scheduled date of enumeration, final decisions began to be reached. The goal of the Bureau of the Census was to develop overall plans and basic methods and materials for final testing in the context that they would be utilized unchanged in the 1970 census itself unless unanticipated problems or changed con-
ditions required revisions to be made. The enumeration of the three test censuses which made up the dress rehearsal program was performed in 1968. The need to be at the dress rehearsal stage so far in advance of the actual enumeration derives from the complexity of the operation which must be performed efficiently if the 1970 census results are to be produced expeditiously.

The dress rehearsal censuses, it should be noted, were the culmination of an extensive pretest program which began in 1961, i.e., when the processing of the 1960 census results was perhaps only half completed. A summary description of all the 1970 pretests appears in the Appendix.

The early testing work involved only comparatively small expenditures and was financed from regular appropriations of the Census Bureau. For example, only limited incremental costs were incurred in the first few tests because they were conducted as part of special censuses requested and financed by the local communities. However, for the major mail census feasibility tests in Louisville (1964) and Cleveland (1965), a large-scale expenditure was required. The fact that such an appropriations request was approved by the Congress so early in the decade was a new phenomenon in decennial census preparations and reflected a gratifying understanding of the vital need for extended lead-time in the planning of a modern census.

This initial interest in the plans for the census has continued to the proposed content, procedures, and output. In the Congress, the House Committee on Post Office and Civil Service and its Subcommittee on Census and Statistics have held hearings on various phases of the 1970 census over the past few years. Most recently, hearings have been held in connection with legislative proposals to limit sharply the questions which could be asked under the mandatory provisions of the census law (Title 13, United States Code). It appears now (September 1969) that any legislative action on the conduct of the decennial census will not have any substantive impact on the 1970 census, but rather will be focused on closer Congressional review of the subject content of future censuses.

**SUBJECT CONTENT**

The inquiries included on the 1970 questionnaires were selected after lengthy consultation and careful deliberation, and with special emphasis on the needs of the Federal Government. The Bureau invited suggestions from users everywhere. The Bureau also made direct effort to obtain suggestions and comments through intensive discussion with many individuals, organizations, and Federal agencies, and in a series of locally sponsored public meetings in 23 cities across the country. In addition, recommendations were obtained from the several advisory committees with which the Bureau consults periodically on various aspects of the Bureau's program.

These committees, which average about a dozen members and meet several times a year, are established by professional organizations such as the American Statistical Association; or by the Bureau itself, e.g., a committee of population specialists drawn largely from universities. They provide an organized and regular (though quite informal) channel of communication between the Bureau staff and professional experts in the relevant fields. The committee members receive no salary from the Bureau and recognize clearly that their role is advisory, not decision-making.

Within the executive branch of the government, close liaison has been maintained on all census matters with the interested agencies through the Federal Council on the 1970 Census. This is a group of about 40 agencies with a con-