The Voluntaryist

Whole Number 107 *"If one takes care of the means, the end will take care of itself."* **December 2000**

"Count Me Out!"

By Carl Watner

History detectives unite! What is the common element in these episodes in American history?

> ... On his march through Georgia, near the end of the Civil War, General William T. Sherman used a map annotated with county-by-county livestock and crop information "to help his troops 'live off the land';"
>
> ... During World War I, the Justice Department prosecuted men who did not register for the draft. Government records helped them determine the names and ages of evaders [Bohme and Pemberton, p. 1];
>
> ... During World War II, the Army used information regarding how many Japanese-Americans were living on the West coast, and how many lived in any given neighborhood; and then used that data to help round them up and intern them;
>
> ... In 1983, the IRS attempted to determine the names of those not filing federal income tax returns by comparing names in government records to the names in privately purchased mailing lists [Bovard].

Any guesses? How did General Sherman, the Justice Department, the Army, and the IRS get that information? If you guessed "the census," you were right!

Voluntaryism and the Census

The impetus for this article was James Scott's book, SEEING LIKE THE STATE (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). One of Scott's main themes is concerned with what he describes as "legibility." How much does the State know about its citizens and how visible are they and their activities to the State? Historically, how did the State "gradually get a handle on its subjects and their environment?" He answers this question in the following manner: "Much of early modern European statecraft," such as "the creation of permanent last names, the standardization of weights and measures, the establishment of cadastral [land] surveys and population registers, the invention of freehold tenure, the standardization of language and legal discourse, the design of cities, and the organization of transportation" permitted not only "a more finely tuned system of taxation and conscription but also greatly enhanced" the state's ability to intervene in society. [pp. 2-3] The use of survey maps, census returns, state-designated names, addresses, and identifiers all increased the state's capacity to rule. On the other hand, as Scott writes: "If we imagine a state that has no reliable means of enumerating and locating its population, gauging its wealth, and mapping its land, resources, and settlements, we are imagining a state whose interventions in that society are necessarily crude.... An illegible society, then, is a hindrance to any effective intervention by the state, ..." [pp. 77-78]

One of the most interesting sections of Scott's book deals with "The Creation of Surnames." He explains that "universal last names are a fairly recent historical phenomenon," and that until sometime during the 1300s few Europeans used permanent last names. [pp. 65-71] It is his contention that

> Some of the categories that we most take for granted and with which we now routinely apprehend the social world had their origin in state projects of standardization and legibility. Consider, for example, something as fundamental as permanent surnames.... Tax and tithe rolls, property rolls, conscription lists, censuses, and property deeds recognized in law were inconceivable without some means of fixing an individual's identity and linking him or her to a kin group. Campaigns to assign permanent patronyms have typically taken place... in the context of a state's exertions to put its fiscal system on a sounder and more lucrative footing. Fearing... that an effort to enumerate and register them could be a prelude to some new tax burden or conscription, ... population[s]... often resisted such campaigns. [pp. 64-65]

Most historians of English surnames and naming practices agree with Scott's interpretation. For example, C. M. Matthews (in his book ENGLISH SURNAMES [1967, p. 44]) points out that the English Poll Tax of 1381, not only precipitated the Peasant's Revolt, but gave added impetus to the use of hereditary surnames. People who had already paid their poll tax once did not want to have to pay it a second time because state officials could not accurately identify them or verify that they had previously paid.

It was Scott's mention of the census that made me curious about the history of governments' attempts at counting its people. Intuitively, it would seem that a State's ability to keep tabs on its population—to know how many potential soldiers it has available, to know how many factories may be con-

continued on page 2

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"Count Me Out!"

continued from page 1

verted to military uses, to know the amount of revenue it might possibly collect, all these and other aspects of the census—would be critical to those engaged in the exercise of State power. Historically, this is certainly true. One of government's earliest activities was enumerating its citizens and their resources. From the Biblical story of the sin of King David, when David's choice to number his people resulted in a pestilence that felled seventy thousand Hebrews, to the Roman censors who counted Joseph, Mary, and Jesus in Bethlehem; from the decennial censuses provided for in the United States Constitution of 1789, to the 21st Century penalties and punishments for those who refuse to cooperate with federal census-takers—history is replete with examples of making the citizen more knowable to the State. Thus the purpose of this article is to survey the efforts of the State to use the census to maintain its conquest and control over its subject population.

However, before that story is related, let me state my fundamental opposition to State censuses and the collection of information by the State. As longtime readers of this newsletter probably realize, my objection to State censuses is not so much directed at the collection of information, but rather at the coercive nature of the institution that gathers it. If some private organization chooses to solicit information from me, I may or may not respond. But regardless of my choice, I will suffer no criminal penalties if I refuse to cooperate. When the State collects information about the people and their affairs there are possible fines, penalties, or imprisonment for those who will not answer. As we shall see, this was true when the United States Congress passed its first census legislation in 1790, and is still true today. So even though I am spending a great deal of time and effort outlining the history of government censuses, I want to state that I am unalterably opposed to State censuses of any kind; that I advocate complete and total civil disobedience to State laws that provide for censuses; and that it is my belief that State collection of information about its people and their resources represents the complete antithesis of a free and voluntaryist society. So with that said, let us delve into the history of the census.

Early Censuses

The word 'census' is commonly defined as an official enumeration of people, houses, firms, or other important items in a country. "The term itself comes from the Latin 'censure' which means 'to tax'." Most early censuses involved the counting of males of military age, of heads of households and their valuables, or of landowners. Such inventories were primarily made for the purpose of determining who should be taxed, or conscripted into the military, or forced to labor for the state. Such pre-modern censuses tended to be inaccurate for the simple reason that the individuals involved were disposed to appear invisible to the state. It was not in an individual's interest to be counted or give correct information. Unlike contemporary population censuses, these early enumerations did not seek to count all the people in a given politically defined area. ["Census," p. 22]

Surveys of military-age population and wealth occurred in ancient Babylonia, Persia, Israel, China, and Rome. The Hebrews repeatedly counted the number of their fighting men after their exodus from Egypt. A census taken in 1017 B.C. was commanded by King David. Accounts are found in the 24th chapter of Samuel II, and in chapters 21, 23, and 27 of Chronicles I. "Satan stood up against Israel and provoked David to number Israel." In response to the "sin" committed by King David, the Lord gave him three choices: three years of famine, defeat in battle, or three days of pestilence. David chose the later, during which some 70,000 Hebrews fell dead of illness. Sir George H. Knibbs (1858-1929), who organized the first census in Australia, was of the opinion that the story of King David's census made many people feel "that the Lord's wrath was an indication of his displeasure with counting people." He believed that this attitude "had the effect of delaying the adoption of the census by Christian Europe for many years." [Alterman, p. 26]

The Roman censor was an important public official charged, not only with the guardianship of the public morals, but with the official registration of all citizens, the valuation of their property, and the collection of revenue. Augustus, the first Roman emperor (27 B.C.-14 A. D.), conducted a census to determine the military resources, population, and wealth of his empire. Later emperors recognized the public role of the censor and the census, but with the fall of Rome in the fifth century, there was no public authority with sufficient power to resume the practice until the emergence of modern nation-states in the 15th and 16th centuries. The main exception was the inquest of William the Conqueror of England, known as the Domesday Book, begun on Christmas Day of 1085. Its primary goal was to determine the extent and value of his newly conquered lands and to iden-

tify his tenants.

The modern, state-conducted population census did not emerge all at once. Efforts were made in New France (Quebec) and Acadia (Nova Scotia), where sixteen enumerations were made between 1665 and 1754. In 1749, the Swedish government obtained lists of parishioners, long kept by the clergy, in an effort to determine the populations of Sweder and Finland. In 1753, 'An Act for Taking and Registering an Annual Account of the Total Number of People...' in Great Britain was proposed in Parliament. William Thornton, who opposed the bill in the House of Commons, found nothing but ill in the proposal.

> He could find no advantage in knowing our numbers. 'Can it be pretended, that by knowledge of our number, or our wealth, either can be increased?' He thus inferred that the result of the project would be increased tyranny at home, ... It was 'totally subversive of the last remains of English liberty.' If it became law, he would oppose its execution, and if any official came to collect information regarding the 'number and circumstances of my family, I would refuse it; and, if he persisted in the affront, I would order my servants to give him the discipline of the horse pond....' If necessary he would spend his remaining days in some other country rather than be a spectator of the ruin he could not prevent. [Glass, pp. 19-20]

Thornton's opposition was successful, and it was not until late 1800 that a census bill was actually passed by Parliament. The enumeration took place on March 10, 1801, nearly a decade after the first federal census in the United States.

Census Guidelines

The United Nations has taken an instrumental part in conducting world population surveys by offering technical assistance in the planning and conduct of censuses, by its member nations. In the decade after World War II "at least 150 nations or areas took censuses collecting individual data on more than two billion persons," and "when China reported a census in 1953, the last large part of the world was removed from demographic darkness." ["Census," p. 22] The statement of a Nigerian statistician, pretty much sums up the unofficial attitude of United Nations bureaucrats: "Without an accurate census you cannot plan." [Scott, p. 24] According to the United Nations a population census must have six key features. They are:

> 1. National Sponsorship: Only a government has the resources to conduct a thorough census, and only a government has the power to compel its citizens to participate in the process.
> 2. Defined Territory: The geographic coverage must be defined precisely, and boundary changes from one census to the next must be clearly identified.
> 3. Universality: All persons residing within the defined territory must be counted with no duplications or omissions.
> 4. Simultaneity: The census must take place on a fixed date [(known as the census moment). The tally must be made in one of two ways—people must be counted according to their regular or legal residence or according to the place where they spend the night of the day enumerated.]. As nearly as possible, persons should be counted at the same, well-defined point in time. Individuals born after the reference date, or who die before that date are excluded from the count.
> 5. Individual Enumeration: Data should be collected separately for each individual.... [T]he individual person remains the basic unit of enumeration.
> 6. Publication: A census is not complete until results have been compiled and published. [Lavin, p. 6]

These United Nations guidelines offer one means of establishing a population count, but there is at least one other method that has been used in modern times. The population register has been used in China by the political authorities to both keep track of individual citizens, as well as a means of establishing a population count. Such a system must be "permanent, compulsory, and continuously updated." [Lavin, p. 4] A file is opened on each citizen as he or she is born. Important developments are recorded in the file as they occur. For example, when a person moved or married entries would be made; when he or she died, the name would be removed from the registry. Under such a system, a population count would simply consist of counting the number of current entries in the register. In the communist bloc countries, where such registers were popular, periodic censuses were still conducted in order to check their accuracy. While only a few nations maintain such universal population registers today (Taiwan, being one), many others have specialized directories for recording special events. In the United States, for example, such registers consist of birth and death records maintained by state departments of health and vital statistics, voting records (lists of those who are qualified and registered to vote in political elections), registers of motorists holding driver's licenses, and lists of retirees applying for and receiving Social Security benefits.

Censuses in the Early United States

The North American colonists were no strangers to censuses. "From the settlement of Jamestown, Virginia in 1607, to the first national census in 1790, there were at least thirty-eight counts of population in some American colony." [Alterman, pp. 164-165] Many of these numberings were instigated by the British Board of Trade, in order to obtain informa-

tion that would be of value to its administration of colonial affairs. Before 1790, there were eleven enumerations in New York, seven in Rhode Island, and four each in New Hampshire and Connecticut. A total of 27 of these 38 censuses were taken before the Continental Congress met in 1774. Only the people in Pennsylvania, Delaware, North Carolina, and Georgia had never been counted until the first federal census in 1790.

The census played a pivotal role in the history of the United States, from the very inception of the revolution against Great Britain. The reason was simple. There had to be some acceptable way for the members of the Continental Congress and the Congress of the Articles of Confederation to assess and collect revenue for the government. The original version of the Articles of Confederation, which was introduced as early as 1776, provided for a triennial enumeration of the population as the basis for apportioning the charges of war and other expenditures. During the Revolutionary War, when the American government issued bills of credit, it became the obligation of each colony to redeem its share in proportion to the number of its inhabitants of all ages, including mulattos and negroes. When the final version of the Articles of Confederation was adopted in 1781, the value of land was actually used as the basis of apportioning contributions from each state to the federal government. However, Congress was authorized to make requisitions for fighting men according to the white population of the several states. Consequently in November 1781, Congress considered a resolution urging the several states to make an enumeration of their white inhabitants, pursuant to the ninth article of the Articles. Although the resolution failed to pass, the Articles of Confederation "unquestionably contemplated a national census to include both a valuation of land and an enumeration of population." [Cummings, p. 670]

When the details of the federal Constitution were under discussion, in Philadelphia in 1787, delegates had to consider the fact that for years the Continental Congress had asked the states to conduct censuses for purposes of apportioning expenses and manpower. The states had either refused to comply, or, in those that did, there was no consistently-applied method of conducting the census and counting the people. The delegates were also faced with the difficult question of how to balance representation in the new government with responsibility for sharing in its expenses. A federally-conducted census was the linchpin as to how to link taxation and representation. As Margo Anderson, in her book THE AMERICAN CENSUS explained: "Such a coupling was one of the classic checks and balances of the Constitution. Large states would receive more House representation but would pay more taxes. And the coupling would guard against fraud in the taking of the census. Areas that might wish to overestimate their population to gain representation would pay the penalty by raising their tax burden. Likewise, areas that tried to evade taxes through undercounting their population would also lose representation in Congress. The census was intended to solve the [hitherto] intractable problem of defining the basis of representation and taxation—by balancing gains from representation against the penalties of taxation for a state or local area." [Anderson, p. 10]

The First Federal Census

When the legislation for conducting the census was discussed in the House and Senate of the first Congress, James Madison become the foremost advocate of expanding the census count beyond the simple constitutional stipulation to determine the number of free and enslaved persons in the country. Madison was a member of the committee responsible for drawing up the "enumeration bill." In it, he proposed "classifying the population into five categories—free white males, subdivided into those over and under the age of sixteen, free white females, free blacks, and slaves—and for identifying each working person by occupation." [Cohen, p. 159] The question was immediately raised as to whether or not this transcended Congress' "constitutional powers in authorizing purely statistical inquiries other than those for the single purpose of apportioning representatives and direct taxes." [North, p. 42] The only essential required by the Constitution, as we have seen, was to distinguish free persons from the slaves, since slaves were only to be counted as three-fifths of a person for purposes of representation. Further distinctions, such as "distinguishing free blacks from whites, females from males, and boys from men, as Madison proposed, had the effect of identifying and isolating the group that most mattered, the free white adult males—in other words, the workers, voters, and soldiers of the [new] nation." [Cohen, p. 159]

Madison's proposal for identifying each working person by occupation was opposed in the House by Samuel Livermore of New Hampshire. Livermore claimed that it would be difficult to assign to each person one single occupation. "His constituents, for example, often had two or three [occupations] depending on the season." He also noted that attempting to determine their occupation "would excite the jealousy of the people; they would suspect that the government was so particular, in order to learn of their ability to bear the burthen of direct or other taxes," and hence "they would refuse to cooperate" with the census takers. The House eventually passed Madison's proposal, but "the Senate approved only the five basic categories of sex and race as legitimate objects of inquiry." [Cohen, p. 160]

Since the compiling of statistical information by the federal government was limited largely to the population census, the task of "broad fact-finding missions" was "first taken up by private individuals" who published state and local gazetteers and regional

guidebooks. [Cohen, p. 151] Men of the new American republic, beginning in the early 1790s, made it a point to collect information about the new country, including details about population, wealth, trade, industry, occupations, and both civil and religious institutions. Prominent men, like Noah Webster of dictionary fame, and Timothy Dwight of Yale University, collected and edited statistical gazetteers, commercial reference works, statistical manuals, and almanacs to record and disseminate a wide potpourri of facts relating to American society and its new government. Works of this genre included A VIEW OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA (Philadelphia: 1794), A GEOGRAPHICAL, COMMERCIAL, AND PHILOSOPHICAL VIEW OF THE PRESENT SITUATION OF THE UNITED STATES (New York: 1795), and FACTS AND CALCULATIONS RESPECTING THE POPULATION AND TERRITORY OF THE UNITED STATES (Boston: 1799).

It was not until the census of 1840 that a concerted effort was made to expand the statistical scope of the census beyond Madison's basic enumeration. Joseph Worcester, editor of THE AMERICAN ALMANAC AND REPOSITORY OF USEFUL KNOWLEDGE (1831) agitated for an increased role of the federal government in collecting statistics in the 1840 census. "His own experience with the ALMANAC had made it clear to him that data collection on" the scale he envisioned "was beyond the capacities of individuals or even private associations." He recommended that the federal government make its decennial census an all-encompassing survey of America. [Cohen, p. 179]

Although the census was not expanded until fifty years after its beginning, it is clear that the Founding Fathers saw the census as an important tool of the federal government. The United States was the first country in the history of the world to mandate a census in its constitution. [Lavin, p. 24] Found in Article I, Section 2, Paragraph 3 is the requirement that "The actual Enumeration shall be made within three Years after the first Meeting of the Congress of the United States, and within every subsequent Term of ten Years, in such Manner as they shall by Law direct." The members of the first Congress considered this a serious part of their governing agenda. Not only would the federal censuses eventually determine how many of them would be chosen from each state, but they probably hoped that the first federal census would have "a unifying effect upon the country." [Alterman, p. 207] Certainly there must have been some residents of the United States who had never heard of the adoption of the new constitution or who, for whatever reasons, did not consider themselves citizens or subjects to be ruled by the new government. Many of the self-reliant and independent Americans on the frontier "did not [always] take kindly to [political] authority, which inevitably to them meant order, limitations on freedom of action, mutual obligations, and, worst of all, taxes." [Nelson, pp. 42-43] The census taker was probably the first representative of the new federal government that many of these "ungovernables" met.

Resistance to the First Census

The legislation implementing the federal census is found in THE PUBLIC STATUTES AT LARGE OF THE UNITED STATES, First Congress, Session II, Chapter 2. In Section 6 of "An Act providing for the enumeration of the Inhabitants of the United States," approved March 1, 1790, Congress made sure that those counting the American people for the very first time—as Americans—would have something with which to threaten possible recalcitrants:

> That each and every person more than sixteen years of age... shall be, and hereby is, obliged to render to such [marshal's] assistant [the actual census taker], a true account, if required, to the best of his or her knowledge, of all and every person... on pain of forfeiting twenty dollars, to be sued for and recovered by such assistant, the one half for his own use, and the other half for the use of the United States.

And, indeed, those census takers did meet with some resistance! "One difficulty encountered by the enumerators in certain sections of the country was the unwillingness of the people" to cooperate. [North, p. 45] Heretofore, some of the people had never been counted. Others were superstitious, remembering an early colonial enumeration in New York that had been followed by much sickness. "But a very much more potent factor in arousing opposition to the enumeration was the belief that the census was in some way connected with taxation." [North, p. 46] This is confirmed by at least one contemporary source. On July 28, 1791 George Washington wrote a letter to Gouverneur Morris regarding the census. In it he noted that

> the real number [of people] will greatly exceed the official return, because, from religious scruples, some would not give in their lists; from an apprehension that it was intended as the foundation of a tax, others concealed or diminished theirs; and from the indolence of the mass and want of activity in many of the deputy enumerators, numbers were omitted. [Bohme and Dailey, p. 424]

Federal enumerators, appointed by the marshals in each judicial district, began their work on August 2, 1790. They had a tremendous amount of territory to cover, and often met with difficult travel conditions, as well as suspicion from the populace. Nevertheless, the census schedules were completed on time—by October 1791—for every state but South Carolina. By an act passed on November 8, 1791, the time for completing the census in that state was extended from the end of April 1791 to March 1, 1792. The delay in South Carolina partially resulted from the fact that the fed-

eral marshal experienced difficulty in getting assistants at the lawful rate of pay. Another potent reason for the delay was that the enumeration met with some opposition from the people. On September 26, 1791, it was reported in the STATE GAZETTE of South Carolina, published in Charleston, that the grand jury of the Federal District for Charleston, made the following presentment a week earlier:

> That they have examined the several returns of the marshal of the said district, and find them accurate and correct for every part of the state, except that part of Charleston district.... We present on the information of Hezekia Roberts, one of the assistants to the marshal, William Reynolds of St. Helena island, in Beaufort district, for refusing to render an account of his family, pursuant to the directions of the aforesaid act. We present on the information of Jacob Fitzpatrick, another of the marshal's assistants, William Russell, Jacob Vanzant, Benjamin Ingram, Ragnal Williams, and James Hayes, all of Orangeburg..., for refusing to render an account of their respective families....

Subsequent issues of the paper do not indicate what disposition was made of these cases. Nor does a check of surviving federal archives indicate whether any of these resisters were punished.

Should There Even Be a Census?

In 1996, author, Michael Lavin in his book UNDERSTANDING THE CENSUS raised the question: "Can the government force people to answer the Census?" His answer is revealing:

> Under Title 13 [of the United States Code], all residents are obligated to answer Census questions completely and truthfully. This has been a feature of Census law since 1790. Failure to comply can result in fines and/or imprisonment. In practice, however, few people have been prosecuted for refusing to answer the Census. The success of each decennial census depends largely on public cooperation. [p. 11]

Actually, Mr. Lavin does not answer the question he raises. The government cannot force people to answer the Census; all it can do is punish them if they do not. That is what the government threatened to do in late 1791 to resisters to its first census; and that is all it could do to resisters in the Year 2000 Census. But what makes his question so interesting is that over the years the nature of the census and people's attitudes about it have changed.

Originally, early U.S. census schedules were posted publicly to enable residents to be sure that they were counted and to allow them to correct any erroneous information. Until 1840, each enumerator was to have a copy of his census schedule posted at two of the most important public places in his jurisdiction so that they could be inspected by the public. "From 1840 through 1870, census takers were instructed to keep their records confidential, but no legal restrictions were imposed. Beginning in 1880, and continuing to this day, all Census employees have taken an oath of confidentiality, and since 1890, penalties have been established for breaking that oath. In 1910, William Howard Taft issued the first Presidential Proclamation on Census confidentiality, a tradition which has been followed in every subsequent Census." [Lavin, p. 11] Taft's Proclamation stated that the Census was to be only used to generate statistical information. As President Taft declared

> The census has nothing to do with taxation, with army or jury service, with the compulsion of school attendance, with the regulation of immigration, or with the enforcement of any national, state, or local law or ordinance, nor can any person be harmed in any way furnishing the information required. There need be no fear that any disclosure will be made regarding any individual person or his affairs. ["Proclamation for Thirteenth Decennial Census," March 15, 1910 cited in Bohme and Pemberton, p. 8]

Yet there has never been a law that has prevented other agencies of the government from using census data to their advantage. One way is the "use of census information to detect illegal two-family dwellings." Many local jurisdictions responsible for building code enforcement takes census data applicable to their area and analyze it "to check compliance with zoning regulations." [Bovard]

Despite the fact that Social Security numbers are not recorded during the decennial censuses, and that the Freedom of Information Act does not apply to individual census records, some small "percentage of the U.S. population has always chosen to evade" the census-taker. [U.S. General Accounting Office, p. 32] Even the most ardent proponent of the census recognizes that some people will be missed—either because they refuse to be counted due to their conscientious objections or because of simple technical errors in collecting data. But the fact remains that a successful census is based upon the individual's willingness to respond—in short, any national census depends upon the willing cooperation of the public. It is imperative that the questions raised on the census schedules be acceptable to the majority of people; otherwise their failure to answer or their offering of false answers will invalidate the efforts of even the best-intentioned government.

Probably no other government collects and publishes as much information about its people as the American polity. "Every conceivable aspect of our society is measured and analyzed, but one of the most frequently examined is the demographic information—statistics on the number, distribution, and character of people." The federal and state governments use this information to allocate over $ 100 billion in

federal funds annually for community programs and services including education, housing, health care, job training, and welfare. "The unquestioned mother lode of United States demographic data is the decennial Census, known officially as the Census of Population and Housing. The reason for this is simple: no one except the federal government could attempt to collect information about every man, woman, and child in the country on a systematic basis." [Lavin, p. 3]

But hardly ever is the basic question raised: Should this information be collected at all? Is there any justification for knowing how many people are in our society? The only reason for our rulers to collect this information is that it aids them in exerting control and power over us. They count what is to be controlled and manipulated. In short, I object to the census because it represents one of the tools in the government's arsenal of conquest.

The census has always been and continues to be a political football in every country. The worst census story is that of Stalin's 1937 Census in the Soviet Union. The famine and Great Purges of the 1930s left the Soviet population greatly reduced. "Because population totals from the Soviet Union's 1937 Census would chillingly document the effect of this crushing oppression, Stalin suppressed the results and ordered census workers shot. Another census, containing significantly doctored data, was published in 1939." [Lavin, p. 5] Another census story involves the government of Turkey, which in December 1997 conducted its latest quinquennial census. The entire population of Turkey was counted manually in one day over a 14 hour period. "Citizens were required to stay at home and be counted under threat of punishment if found in public without special permission." [U.S.General Accounting Office, p. 24] Even in the United States the federal census has been used for political purposes. Draft boards often compare the number of males in certain age groups by census tract with its registration for the same area in order to detect how many men have not been registered. [Bohme and Pemberton, p. 13]

There is no question that the collection of data is an onerous and time-consuming task, but so are most jobs and services on the free market. How would population and other demographic statistics be gathered in a free society? First of all, that question assumes that some people think there is a need to collect them at all. So, assuming there is a sufficient demand for such information, it would be collected just like every other statistic is collected in a free society: by those willing to pay the price for the collection of the information—by those willing to voluntarily supply the information (either for a price or as a freebie)—and by those voluntarily doing the collection and compilation of the information. As we have seen, this was how the collection of demographic statistics started out in the early American republic. If some wished not to participate in the process, they would be no more penalized or criminalized than those who refused to buy General Motor products or Ford products. That is to say, they would not be punished at all, except as other participants in the market chose to shame or ostracize them for their non-participation. So until such time as the gathering of public statistics is organized in a free market fashion and while our coercive political governing institutions are responsible for the Census, I want nothing to do with the it or the census-taker. So please: Count Me Out!

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