

Ancestry Question on Census Form

The Piast Institute has been named co-chair for the National Coalition on the Census Ancestry Question. The other co-chairs are the Sons of Italy and the National Arab American Institute. The coalition was formed to lobby, preserve and extend ancestry research of the US Bureau of the Census. It is currently urging that the Census Bureau include the ancestry question on the short form for the 2010 census. This would, for the first time, ask every person in the United States the ancestry question rather than use a "one out of six" sample as was the case in the past. This, for the first time, will give a true picture of the exact number of Poles in the United States. The previous samples produced an undercount of at least 10%.

If the question is not placed on the short form, it will be relegated to the American Community Survey (ACS), as the long form will be abolished. The ACS will produce an even less accurate sample than the long form. The question will be going to Congress this fall so we need to get word to congressional representatives that this is an important issue for our community. The Piast Institute urges all readers to write their congressional representatives to support the inclusion of the ancestry question on the US Census Form for the 2010 census. If there are any questions, please call the Piast Institute at 313-664-0321.

To help the public understand the issue, the Coalition on Ancestry has prepared the following statement of principle.

Statement of Principle on Inclusion of Ancestry Question in the 2010 US Census

We are Americans of all ethnic backgrounds who support the inclusion of the ancestry question along with the race and Hispanic origin questions on the short form of the 2010 Census.

Questions that collect information on race and Hispanic origin, as well as sub-groups and the foreign born, are valuable and should be retained. Only the ancestry question, however, allows for self-identification regardless of race and nativity, resulting in a national self-view that cannot be and is not duplicated in any private endeavor. And since tracking the growth of population groups is a central goal of the census, the growth of ethnic communities cannot be measured without the ancestry question.

We believe that collecting data on

ancestry, in addition to race and Hispanic origin, of the full US population is essential to understand the demographics of our nation - both its history and its future - and the diversity of the American people. Our working group is committed to raising public awareness about the importance of ancestry data.

Including ancestry measurement in the 100% population survey in 2010 would benefit a wide spectrum of stakeholders:

1) Social scientists, journalists and other researchers rely on census data to study individual population groups, demographic trends, specifically patterns of acculturation, economic and educational mobility and citizenship.

2) Social service, educational, health and other local/state agencies depend on ancestry data for outreach and needs assessments of population groups in their community. Civil rights agencies have also required ancestry data to monitor discrimination based on national origin.

3) Businesses and corporations from manufacturers and retailers to the telecommunications and telemarketing industry depend on accurate and reliable ethnic data for market research and economic expansion. Private collection of such data would lack the objectivity, comparability and level of geographic detail provided by census methodologies.

4) Politicians target ethnic constituencies on numerous occasions to solicit their feedback on policy issues and government initiatives of concern to the communities and ancestral countries.

5) Many ethnic organizations depend wholly on ancestry data from the US Census to identify, locate and mobilize their constituencies to guarantee full participation in the civic life of the country.

We believe the inclusion of a question on ethnic origin for all Americans will not only encourage ethnic advocates to dedicate time and resources to promote a full count in 2010, but will motivate millions of respondents to feel a part of the census process and thereby increase response rate for the census short form.

We therefore urge the Bureau of the Census, in consultation with the Department of Commerce, the Office of Management and Budget and the US Congress, to approve a combination of questions that capture data on race, Hispanic origin and ancestry of all who reside in the U.S. by way of the short form of the 2010 Census.