

The Afro-Latino Coalition
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Bob Sivinski, Chair
Interagency Technical Working Group on Race and Ethnicity Standards
1650 17th St. NW, Washington, DC 20500
Statistical_Directives@omb.eop.gov

Dear Mr. Bob Sivinski:

Re: Changes to Directive No. 15: Standards for Maintaining, Collecting, and Presenting Federal Data on Race & Ethnicity

The Afro-Latino Coalition, is a network of over 40 organizations and over 200 scholars dedicated to illuminating the particular racial experiences of Afro-Latinos across the United States. As such, the Afro-Latino Coalition opposes proposal No. 1 of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) planned revisions to Directive No.15: Standards for Maintaining, Collecting, and Presenting Federal Data on Race & Ethnicity published in the Federal Register, which calls for the government agencies to “collect race and ethnicity information using one combined question.” While we agree that there is a need to revise the Standards for Maintaining, Collecting, and Presenting Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity, our Coalition disagrees with the combined question as currently proposed, given the danger it poses to an accurate count of Afro-Latinos. For reference, we define Afro-Latinos as “People of African descent in Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean, and by extension those of African descent in the United States whose origins are in Latin America and the Caribbean. This also includes Portuguese- (Brazilian) and Kreyòl- (Haitian) speakers, as well as English speakers.”

Need for Afro-Latino Data to Enforce Civil Rights Laws

The preponderance of peer-reviewed research across different disciplines and policy arenas demonstrates that Afro-Latinos and others with dark skin are subjected to racial stigma and racial discrimination in housing, employment, law enforcement, education and health care caress. The initial OMB proposal to combine race and ethnicity erases how Black/AfroLatinos experience anti-Black racism at the same time that they experience discrimination based on their ethnic background. We need

a “both/and” approach that allows for intersectional inquiry and praxis with a federal data infrastructure that can measure the existence of both racial and ethnic inequities as analytically distinct and yet simultaneous amongst Latinos. As the [Pew Research Center](#), the Urban Institute, the University of California Latino Policy & Politics Institute and other researchers have long noted, there are distinct social outcomes based on labor market access, housing segregation, educational attainment and prison sentencing that vary for Latinos if they are dark-skinned and especially if they are visibly Black/Afro-Latino. This is not an insignificant population, given the fact that approximately [90 percent of the enslaved Africans who survived the Middle Passage voyage were taken to Latin America and the Caribbean](#).

Afro-Latinos are Both Racially Black and Ethnically Latino - We need accurate Data for Both

While we acknowledge that the OMB proposal is not specifically naming Latinos as a Race, proposing to insert “Latino” as a category commensurate with “Black” not only situates Blackness as foreign to Latino identity it also encourages a view of the Black category as only pertaining to non-Latinos. This would impede the legal system’s ability to statistically detect and sanction an employer who systematically rejects qualified Afro-Latino applicants while simultaneously hiring white Latinos. Without racially specific Latino census data to compare to the business’s hiring pattern, an employer’s racism would be swept away with the defense “I do hire Latinos.”

In fact, research has persistently demonstrated that despite the fact that Afro-Latinos demonstrate higher levels of education than white Latinos, it is white Latinos who have higher earnings, lower poverty status, lower unemployment rates and possess more assets. These powerful and disturbing economic and labor market disparities have been able to be documented thanks to the current separate race and ethnicity questions; a statistical viability now under threat.

Latino Discrimination Against Afro-Latinos Necessitates Effective Data Collection

As methodically documented in the book “[Racial Innocence: Unmasking Latino Anti-Black Bias and the Struggle for Equality](#),” too often, Latino decision-makers deny Afro-Latinos access to jobs, homes, public accommodations and fair treatment in schools and the criminal justice system. Whiteness and Blackness make a real difference in the lives of Latinos, and we need statistical data that helps to measure that for social justice intervention. The present government proposal will likely impede the pursuit of racial equality and should be rejected.

Testing to Date and Mark-All-That-Apply Do Not Ensure Accurate Data Collection for Afro-Latinos

The option to Mark All That Apply does not adequately attend to how listing Latino as commensurate with Black, situates Blackness as foreign to Latino identity and Blackness as only pertaining to non-Latinos. Indeed, [Pew Research has documented](#) how Afro-Latinos are more fully counted with questions that do not have them worry that the Black category is only meant for non-Latinos. Moreover, the 2015 National Content Test (NCT) and 2010 Alternative Questionnaire Experiment (AQE) testing of the combined question did not adequately conduct a targeted and purposeful oversample of Afro-Latinos in the strata in which they predominate and it did not include a follow up for nonresponses in ways that can ensure Afro-Latinos are fully counted. Indeed, Campbell and Rogalin's prior analysis of Current Population Survey data, indicated that Latinos are less likely to provide a racial response in an ethno-racial combined question, than when two separate questions on ethnicity and race are provided.

OMB Should Do No Harm

We are thus calling for the OMB to halt the proposal with the combined question and do further testing that will involve more Afro-Latino populations as tested and to have meaningful engagement with Afro-Latino organizations and scholars that can help ensure the Black Latino count does not arbitrarily decrease further. Testing should be conducted on both the single question format and the separate question format, to ensure we have comparative data.

Testing multiple formats would have provided better insights about the best methods for collecting data on Black Latinos. Moreover, it would have provided useful information when considering other aspects of the proposal, such as the Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) ethnicity. Had the MENA ethnicity been tested as an ethnic category in a two-question format, and not only as akin to a racial category, in the single question format, the results of the testing would have illuminated the differences between an ethnicity and a race for other populations as well.

Alternatives to Consider for Inclusion of Black/Afro-Latinos: Data that illuminates Those who are Visually Racialized as Black and Subjected to Anti-Blackness

However, any form that nevertheless includes nationality as examples for racial categories as Census 2020 did, should instruct respondents and government agencies in the stem question to select BOTH a race AND an ethnicity, rather than a "race or ethnicity." The nationality pull outs should not only be

modified to include Latin American nations under all the race boxes because Latinos can be of any race, but also specifically modify the “**Black or African American**” category. **The category should at a minimum be modified to “Black or African American or Afro/Black Latino,”** to thereby invite Black Latinos to identify with the addition of pull out nationalities that should also include nations traditionally considered to be part of Latin America, such as the Dominican Republic, Colombia, Cuba, Panama etc. Even more inclusive would be to rename the category to “Black, African American, Afro/Black Latino, Afro-Caribbean, African Immigrant.”

The OMB definition for Black as persons with African ancestry must make clear that those from Latin American national origins are also included. If Black Latino populations are properly tabulated and reported, it will be immensely powerful in trying to identify the racial disparities they experience distinctly from non-Black Latinos and thus strengthen civil rights enforcement.

Importantly, when members of our Coalition conducted [a survey to understand the racial experience for Latinos](#), the results showed that there is a necessity to ensure that Black Latinos have ease of access to self-identify on the data collection forms:

“Results of our pilot survey show that the best way to account for Black Latinx population is to make sure that they find a place to check themselves. Afro-Latinxs, already faced with rejection, questioning, and doubts about their racial experiences, should not be forced to go through extra steps to find themselves and write themselves in a Census. This would only be accentuating the violence of invisibility already bestowed on our lives. We have to make it clear and easy for us to express our racial realities. If the Census is serious about Black Latinos, make sure we can find ourselves swiftly and clearly in the Census.”

As the OMB’s own proposal notes, it is important that we as a nation are requiring the collection of detailed race and ethnicity categories by default to all federal agencies, ensuring that agencies report how Black Latinos are specifically impacted by anti-Black racism, poverty, differential access to U.S. institutions and generational wealth disparities. The same applies for **Afro-Brazilians** who have been excluded from the OMB definition of Hispanic/Latino that applies only to those of “Spanish culture or origin” despite Brazil’s central location in Latin America. The [2020 ACS coding error](#) was able to reveal that more than two-thirds of Brazilians in the U.S. still described themselves as Hispanic/Latino in opposition to the OMB limited definition. It is time that the OMB definition of Hispanic/Latino be updated to include Brazilians who identify themselves as such, and cease back coding Brazilians out of their selection of the Hispanic/Latino origin designation.

We also want to ensure that specific **guidance is provided as to how these numbers are tabulated, coded, and reported in both the long form questionnaire and the short form questionnaires.** In the past users of the minimum categories format have not been required to report individuals who are Black and Latino, because they already categorically reduce Latino into a racial category. Since this proposal is about updating the standards, the minimum categories should contain modified categories that allow Afro-Latinos to be represented and not statistically erased for civil rights enforcement, such as instituting a modified category “Black or African American or Afro/Black Latino,” to replace “Black or African American.”

With a single question format, OMB should thus require, rather than simply encourage, agencies to collect data for BOTH race AND ethnicity, so that Black Latinos are not deracinated and reported as solely ethnic Latinos. **Clear protocols for tabulating and presenting responses that include both a Black race and Latino ethnicity** must be provided, so that Afro-Latinos reporting race and ethnicity are not erroneously tabulated as two-or-more races or multiracial. Absent a renaming of the Black category as “Black or African American or Afro/Black Latino,” OMB should **mandate that the minimum category for Black include detailed check boxes inclusive of Afro-Latinos and Latin American national origins.**

Moreover, OMB forms should also include **explanatory messaging** for respondents about the importance of data for civil rights use at the point of data collection, in addition to clarifying that when we are asking about race we are asking about visual racial status (perceived race/street race) and that when we are asking about ethnicity we are asking about cultural background, which is not to be confused with race.

Any alternative format must provide an accurate and effective way to categorize the nation’s growing Black Hispanic/Afro-Latino populations in ways that the existing two separate questions that ask for one’s race and ethnicity presently do.

In short, our Coalition demands that OMB ensure that Black Latino perspectives are considered when it comes to terminology and definitions of race, ethnicity, nationality and ancestry. When we use a category such as race (phenotype/perceived socially ascribed race/visual racial status/street race/) to stand in for ethnicity (cultural background) we are creating false conceptualizations of visual racial status and racialized experience. Moreover, the idea that Latino could be a race or that someone may be racialized as Latino ignores the presence of both Black and White Latinos who are racialized as such. The consequences for perpetuating such an idea will not only lead to an erasure of our racial statuses that matter for our structural conditions and everyday experiences, but it leads to overall societal miseducation.

Conclusion

Our Coalition understands the needs for improving the way we as a nation collect data on Race and Ethnicity for all Americans. We want to be a part of the solution to these questions for Latinos and others. We know that far too often Black Latinos are often undercounted and thus one of our main goals is to ensure that we have accurate data that can correctly give us analysis into the lived experience of Afro-Latinos. These experiences will allow us to ensure that our nation is ensuring our communities safety and well-being in addition to repairing the impact of anti-Black bias that Black Latinos face, from within the Latino community and without. We would like to ensure that the OMB not abandon the United States' own obligations as a signatory to the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent to adhere to its declared principles of justice, recognition, and development by helping people of African-Descent, which includes Afro-Latinos, to be counted accurately.

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The Afro-Latino Coalition Network of Organizations and Groups

ADM Insights and Strategy

Afro-Colombian Global Initiative

afrolatin@ forum

AfroLatin@ Project

AfroLatinas

AfroLatine Theology Project (ALTP)

Afro-Latino Global Initiative

Afro-Latino Institute

AfroLatinx from NYC

AfroLatinx Song & Opera Project

AfroLatinx Travel

AfroMundo

AfroResistance

Ain't I Latina

Black Latina Movement

Black Latinas Know Collective

Blactina Media

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Centro de Información Censal (CIC)

Chombita Chronicles

Corredor Afro

Creative Justice Initiative

DC Afro Latino Caucus

Encuentro Diáspora Afro

Fordham University School of Law: Center on Race, Law and Justice

Global Black

IamNegrx

Instituto de Investigaciones Interdisciplinarias

International Society of Black Latinos (ISBL)

LatiNegras

Maria E. Sánchez Center for Latino Studies, Brooklyn College (CUNY)

Museum Hue

National Conference of Black Political Scientists

Prospera Institute

Puentes Collective

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