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In TrendLetter: 1998 Joint Center National Opinion Poll Results

# FOCUS

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# Foreign Policy and Racial Progress

The U.S. Department of State has been criticized in the past for having a shaky equal employment opportunity record, especially with respect to the hiring and advancement of African Americans. These criticisms are still heard today. But, a closer examination of the State Department's current record reveals some very bright spots. One is the Department's prestigious Foreign Service Institute (FSI), which is now headed by a black women, Ambassador Ruth A. Davis. Another is FSI's distinguished Senior Seminar headed by another African American Ambassador, Aurelia E. Brazeal.

The FSI Senior Seminar is the executive development program for career foreign affairs and national security officials. Participants come from the Departments of State and Defense, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the U.S. Information Agency, the Central Intelligence Agency, the FBI, and the National Security Agency, and include officials from the Departments of Labor, Agriculture, and Commerce who have responsibilities in the area of foreign affairs.

The goal of the FSI Senior Seminar is to enhance the leadership and executive skills of career officials who are schooled in our country's values and ideals. They learn how domestic priorities shape foreign policy, and most important, they learn about the value of diversity and improving race relations.

Having served as an officer in the State Department many years ago, I was honored recently to be invited to address the 1998 Senior Seminar on the subject of race relations in the 21st Century. I shared with the audience my hypothesis that race relations will continue to improve in the next century, but the issues on the table will be very much like those we have been grappling with over the past 40 years—discrimination, political empowerment, economic and educational opportunity. However, there will be new twists and turns and less certainty about what can actually be achieved by government and the private sector. Although society has not eliminated poverty nor achieved complete racial justice, I believe our experiences of the past four decades can help us develop more tolerant attitudes and shape better policies in the future.

I suggested four keys to racial progress that can be summarized as follows:

1. The struggle for political empowerment by blacks and other minorities will continue. The methods used to achieve our social, economic, and political goals will follow new paths, depending on how the white majority responds to the rapidly emerging minority majority.
2. The political and public policy landscape confronting us will be harder to navigate due to major generational changes in the black community. The black population is no longer as politically and ideologically uniform as it used to be.
3. We must redesign the social safety net to pay special attention to the principles that undergirded the federal war on poverty, but apply them at the state and local levels.
4. Achieving racial justice in a multiracial society will continue to be complicated and will require skillful collaboration within and across all minority groups.

I concluded my remarks to the FSI Senior Seminar with these words: "The picture in front of us is very complex. There are many uncertainties, but there are many new and promising opportunities. Making the best of these opportunities is a responsibility that we all share."

Ambassadors Davis and Brazeal are living testimonies to the progress the State Department has made and the progress made by African Americans. More progress is needed all around. ■



PRESIDENT

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# Census 2000: Stand Up and Be Counted

## *Civil Rights and Community-Based Organizations Are Gearing Up to Promote Full Participation in the Next Census to Avoid an Undercount*

*by Wade Henderson*

The debate is heating up in Congress and throughout the country over the manner in which the upcoming 2000 Census should be conducted and how individuals, once counted, should be tabulated. Later this month, the Supreme Court will hear oral arguments in a case determining whether the Census Bureau is permitted to use the most up-to-date scientific sampling methods to ensure a more accurate count of children, people of color, and the rural and urban poor in the 2000 Census. Some of the damaging rulings the High Court has handed down in the past few years, however, remind us that people of color must not rely on the Court with its conservative majority to ensure that equal justice is obtained. Irrespective of how the next census is taken, people of color must stand up and be counted in 2000.

The decennial census receives little attention from Congress and the public in the years between each count, yet it is a linchpin for governmental and private-sector activities throughout the decade. Article I, Section 2, Clause 3 of the United States Constitution places the decennial census at the core of our democratic system of governance by calling for a count of the nation's populace every 10 years to apportion representation in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Census data also provide the statistical basis for government planners, policy advocates, and private industry to shape future domestic policy. The data are also used to carry out congressional, state, and local redistricting and to monitor and enforce compliance with civil rights statutes, including the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and employment, housing, lending, and education anti-discrimination laws. Census results also serve as the basis for the annual distribution of billions of dollars in federal, state, and local government funds.

### Undercounting People of Color

Counting every individual residing in the United States is a very difficult endeavor. Since the first census was taken in 1790, it has been widely recognized that each census misses a considerable number of people. The number of people missed by the census is referred to as the 'undercount.'

While the overall accuracy of the census had been increasing for several decades, the 1990 Census was the first one in five decades that was less accurate than the one before it. According to evaluations by the General Accounting Office, the 1990 Census missed 8.4 million people and double-counted 4.4 million others. That is the equivalent of disregarding the entire population of Ohio, or Michigan, or most of Illinois.

California led the nation with a net undercount of more than 837,000 people. Next was Texas with a net undercount of over 482,000, followed by New York with over 272,000 and Florida with over 259,000. The 'net' undercount is the difference between the number of people missed and the number of people counted twice. Because the people missed do not live in the same kinds of communities as the people who are counted twice, the mistakes do not cancel each other out.

While missing or miscounting so many people is a problem, certain groups, such as people of color, historically are missed more often than others, thereby compounding the consequences of the undercount. The original text of the Constitution sanctioned an undercount of people of color in the census by including only three-fifths of the enslaved population. (The Constitution precluded the enumeration of Native Americans.) Even after African Americans became citizens through the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment, evaluations show that people of color have been missed at higher rates than the population as a whole. This is also true of children and residents of low-income urban and rural communities. There are several reasons why people of color and the poor are consistently and disproportionately undercounted by the census, including the following:

- these groups suffer from a general lack of knowledge of the importance of census participation;
- mail and door-to-door collection methods have lower response rates in low-income areas;
- some population subgroups are more transient, making it more difficult to count members at one household;
- lower education levels, illiteracy, or difficulty with the English language affect the ability of many individuals to understand the census; and
- distrust or suspicion of government has led to the fear that the census may be used by immigration or law enforcement officials to deport or incarcerate certain individuals or may disqualify minorities from participation in social welfare programs.

For these and other reasons, the majority-white population is counted at higher rates, on average, than the nonwhite population. This *difference*, known as the differential undercount, has persisted over time and was *the highest ever recorded* in 1990. The 1990 Census missed an estimated 4.4

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Mr. Henderson is the executive director of the Washington, D.C.–based Leadership Conference on Civil Rights (LCCR). For more information on the census and other civil rights issues, visit the LCCR website at: www.civilrights.org.

## *Census 2000*

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percent of African Americans, 5 percent of Americans of Hispanic origin, 2.3 percent of Asians and Pacific Islanders, and over 12 percent of Native Americans living on reservations. By comparison, just 0.7 percent of non-Hispanic whites were missed. New York led the nation in the net number of African Americans missed, more than 185,000, followed by California (181,000), Texas (83,000), Florida (73,000), Georgia (68,000), and Illinois (62,000).

Equally disturbing, over two million children were missed in the 1990 Census. The Washington, D.C.–based Children's Defense Fund looked at the undercounts measured in the largest cities around the nation and found that if the rate of undercounts in the 2000 census are similar to those in 1990, the census will miss more than 6,400 children in Miami, more than 52,000 in Los Angeles, more than 18,000 in Philadelphia, and almost 4,700 children in Cincinnati. In fact, the number of children missed would fill 77 schools staffed by 2,177 teachers in Los Angeles, and 33 schools staffed by 1,067 teachers in Philadelphia.

The failure to accurately count a state's population seriously affects the federal funding these states receive. According to Dr. Michael Casserly of the Council of Great City Schools, every child not counted by the census means that some $650 in federal resources is lost each year by the school that must educate that child. For a classroom of 25 uncounted students, this equals $16,250 each year.

Over the past decade, states with larger than average undercounts were required to use their own funds to provide services for residents for which they did not receive funding. As a result of the inaccuracy of the 1990 Census, many individuals were denied an equal voice in their government, and federal spending that used population-based formulas—for schools, crime prevention, health care, and transportation—was distributed unequally.

### Everyone Should Count in 2000

The miscounts that plagued the 1990 Census need not occur again. To ensure the 2000 count is more accurate and cost-effective, Congress instructed the Census Bureau to redesign the census process. The Census Bureau, with the guidance of independent experts, including the National Academy of Sciences, developed a plan that would not only improve direct enumeration efforts, but also supplement those efforts with scientific sampling to ensure that the 2000 Census is as accurate as possible. The planned improvements include sending replacement questionnaires to nonresponding households, running national advertisements, designing an easier-to-understand form, and distributing forms in public places. Scientific sampling methods would not substitute for an aggressive effort to count everyone directly. Instead, sampling would help the Bureau *account* for all Americans, even those who historically have been hardest to reach through traditional counting methods.

Under the Census Bureau's plan, the overall accuracy of the 2000 Census would be greatly enhanced. The net national undercount would be reduced to about 0.6 percent compared to 1.9 percent if scientific sampling is not permitted. The Bureau's plan is estimated to cost between $4.0 and $4.2 billion. Without sampling, the Bureau estimates it will need between $800 million and $1 billion in *additional funding* for a census that misses 20 times more people than it should. Indeed, this is one of those rare policy areas where the effort to provide an improved service would actually cost less.

Unfortunately, critics of the Census Bureau's plan, primarily the Republican leadership in the House of Representatives, have tried on several occasions over the past three years to prevent the Census Bureau from carrying out its plan for the 2000 Census. President Clinton rebuked these attempts by standing firm and vetoing any legislation that would prevent the Bureau from using scientific sampling to increase the accuracy of the count.

Recently, however, two separate federal district courts concluded that current law (title 13, United States Code) barred the use of scientific sampling to produce the population counts used to reapportion Congress. These decisions are at odds with those of every other federal district and appellate court that has considered the meaning of the Census Act. The Supreme Court agreed to hear an appeal of one of the cases and is scheduled to hear oral arguments later this month.

Irrespective of what the Supreme Court rules, we must take matters into our own hands. We cannot rely on the Supreme Court to determine our political and economic fortunes.

### Partnerships for a Full Count

The 2000 Census is now less than 18 months away and a unified and determined response is needed by government at every level; by civic, business, religious, and educational organizations of all kinds; and by ordinary citizens in their communities, on their jobs, in their houses of worship, and in their schools. Although the census is planned at the national level, it is conducted at the neighborhood level in every community across the country.

State, local, and tribal governments know their local conditions and circumstances better than the Census Bureau ever will. These jurisdictions have the capacity to help develop and coordinate a partnership action plan that promotes and encourages widespread participation in Census 2000. Furthermore, many communities are forming "Complete Count Committees" (CCC) for the 2000 Census.

These CCCs are a key organizing ingredient for local census outreach and promotion efforts. The committees assist the Census Bureau by forming broad coalitions that promote the importance of the census within the community; encouraging partnerships with local businesses and media representatives; and providing space for testing and training census employees.

Businesses can also play an important role in local efforts to increase the count. They can place census messages on their products, display and distribute census

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# Is Managed Care Quality Care?

## *Low-Income and Minority Patients May Be Receiving Lower Quality Care, and Safety Net Institutions May Be Threatened, Due to Managed Care*

*by Deitra H. Lee and Jennifer C. Friday*

*The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, with support from the Commonwealth Fund of New York and the Kaiser Family Foundation, has been examining the issues surrounding managed care and its impact on minority and low-income populations. Under the direction of Dr. Bailus Walker, director of the Joint Center's Health Policy Program, and Dr. Jennifer C. Friday, senior fellow, the Joint Center convened a series of expert forums over the past two years on these issues, and is about to release four policy reports that synthesize the forum discussions and related research findings. Copies of the reports—"The Future of Urban Public Hospitals" and "Access to Health Care in a Managed Care Environment" both by Darrell Gaskin, "Medicaid, Managed Care, and Minority Populations: Issues in Quality of Care" by David Nerenz, and "Medicaid Managed Care: Opportunities and Challenges for Minority Americans" by Sara Rosenbaum and Peter Shin—may be obtained by contacting the Joint Center's Office of Communications and Marketing. This article is based on the salient findings of these four policy reports.*

Interest in the regulation of managed care, a prominent issue on the domestic agenda, is being driven by consumers, patient advocates, health care professionals, and public policymakers who have raised concerns about the quality of care being provided today and the viability of safety net institutions within the managed care environment. These concerns point up the need for agreed-on definitions and measures of quality as well as determinations of accountability and responsibility for managed care plans. Managed care, while designed to improve health care delivery, has created a number of problems for participants and providers, such as limiting the type of care that physicians can provide, limiting access to specialists, and limiting patients' freedom to choose providers.

The growth of managed care also threatens the viability of safety net institutions. These urban public hospitals, community clinics, and providers to the poor and underserved have experienced reductions in their patient populations and revenues due to the shift of the Medicaid population to managed care systems. This shift has raised concerns about access to and quality of care for Medicaid beneficiaries, the chronically ill, minorities, and the poor because the managed care system is designed to serve a healthier population whose demands for care are minimal.

Congress and state legislatures are now considering proposals designed to address these issues. Many states have already passed legislation to require the managed care industry to give patients more complete services, more information about the policies and finances of managed care providers, and more ways to complain if they—or their doctors—are dissatisfied with their care. In 1997, more than a thousand pieces of state legislation were introduced, some of which were unanimously adopted, while many others were passed by overwhelming majorities. Similarly, this year, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a Patients' Bill of Rights containing new safeguards for managed care patients. These safeguards included easing access to specialists, requiring that patients be permitted emergency room visits without prior approval, and making it easier for patients to protest improperly denied services. While the Senate failed to pass the legislation, it signals a desire by legislators, on behalf of the American people, to monitor managed care, remove barriers, and ensure high quality care.

### Aims and Origins

A managed system of health care is not a new idea. In the early 1970s, a group of economists and health specialists known as the Jackson Hole Group proposed that "managed competition" would be the most efficient way to reduce costs and provide universal health care. The group suggested that a government-regulated system of private managed care plans and fee-for-service insurance companies could compete to enroll large pools of workers and other groups. The competition for contracts would drive down the cost of care, and the savings then could be used to provide health care to the uninsured. The idea of promoting universal health care was not immediately embraced by policy makers, however, and it was not until 1992 that the issues of health care and health care costs reemerged on the national political agenda.

Managed care is now the dominant method of financing and delivering health care. No longer a tool to increase competition within the health care system, it differs significantly from the "managed competition" concept that the Jackson Hole Group proposed. The current focus of managed care is to provide health services that prevent the onset of costlier health problems. Two common features of managed care plans include strong incentives for participants to obtain health care from a selected pool of providers and hospitals by requiring that they pay higher premiums to see providers outside the plan, and reliance on preauthorization (referrals) and other techniques to control access to specialty care, use of diagnostic tests, and length of hospital stays. Another fea-

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Ms. Lee is a research analyst and Dr. Friday is a senior fellow at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.

## *Managed Care*

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ture of most managed care plans is the shared financial risk among doctors, other health care providers, and the health plans, through the use of per-person or capitated payment methods. All of these methods were designed as a means of containing health care costs and attempting to ensure that the care given was appropriate and necessary.

### Dramatic Expansion

Managed care enrollment has dramatically increased in the last decade. In 1991, 34 million people were enrolled in managed care, but by 1996 this figure had already increased approximately 53 percent to 52.5 million people. Contributing to this rapid growth is the participation of Medicaid beneficiaries: many states are now requiring that these beneficiaries enroll in managed care plans as a means to control Medicaid costs. By 1996, 13.3 million Medicaid beneficiaries were enrolled in managed care plans, accounting for a quarter of the total managed care population. Employees of businesses are also enrolling in growing numbers. Today, approximately 85 percent of all workers are now covered by some type of managed care plan, up 50 percent from 1994.

As the managed care industry has become the primary method of health care delivery, its original patient population—largely persons who were healthy, responded to prevention messages, and did not over-utilize services—has changed. The influx of Medicaid beneficiaries, persons with chronic illnesses, and other high-risk groups heightens concerns because these populations often have more health problems and unmet social needs than the average managed care patient. Many managed care organizations have underestimated the number of enabling services, such as case management, language translation, and outreach services, that these populations need. They are finding themselves either unprepared to work with these newer patient populations or unable to expend the resources (human and financial) their health care requires. As a result, a number of managed care organizations are now moving away from including Medicaid patients and other high-risk groups in their plans.

### Quality, Access, and Safety Net Concerns

One of the primary concerns raised by participants at the Joint Center forums is that the managed care approach to reducing costs is harming both quality and access to care. Participants noted that many plans place severe limitations on the services they provide, such as reducing the amount of time patients may spend in a hospital after surgery, not paying for second opinions, and limiting access to specialists. In addition, some organizations suffer from inadequate staffing, resulting in long waiting times for appointments and insufficient physician-patient contact.

There is no clear indication yet whether these limitations and inadequacies of managed care are resulting in poor health outcomes. However, it is clear that limited access to care and to appropriate providers cannot be expected to result in optimal health outcomes. In order to answer these important questions, fuller public disclosure of information from managed care organizations, more research to determine the health outcomes in this setting, and a standard way to measure quality within the managed care systems, will all be essential.

As managed care continues to grow, the financial viability of many safety net institutions, such as urban public hospitals and community clinics, that serve the poor and underserved is being diminished. Many of these health care providers have depended on Medicaid reimbursements for financial stability, and the shift of Medicaid beneficiaries to managed care has significantly eroded their patient and revenue base. In addition to serving a large Medicaid population, many of these safety-net providers care for uninsured people who depend on their charity for health care. The reduction in revenue could potentially affect these providers' ability to maintain sufficient staff, continue to provide key services, and ultimately provide appropriate care for their patients.

This negative impact on safety net institutions is greatest in urban areas where the population is largely minority or low-income and where many public hospitals and community health centers are located. For example, in Newark, New Jersey, where 26 percent of the city's 270,000 residents live in poverty, the Newark Community Health Centers Inc. had to eliminate two-thirds of its workers and half of its sites after losing thousands of Medicaid patients to managed care plans. Similarly, the People's Community Health Center in Baltimore, Maryland, which also serves a large minority and low-income population, lost 2,000 patients (about one-fourth of the total) in 1998, and cut its staff twice as its Medicaid income dropped from $30,000 to $2,000 a month. Nationwide, the number of Medicaid patients who visited community health clinics fell by 11 percent from 1995 to 1996.

### Policy Recommendations

The four reports that emerged from the Joint Center's health policy forums describe a number of policy options to improve managed care and, more generally, to move our nation toward a system that ensures quality health care for all Americans. Among the key recommendations:

- State Medicaid agencies should have a legitimate role to play as advocates for quality of care by (a) defining criteria and standards of quality, and (b) defining measures of quality. Since state Medicaid agencies act as a voice of the customer in defining what to purchase with Medicaid dollars, it is important that they have a role in helping to define the standards and measures of quality.
- Health plans and provider networks must include enough diversity of gender, race, ethnicity, language, and culture to allow Medicaid recipients to choose providers with whom they are comfortable. Patients who are more comfortable with physicians from a certain background should have access to those physicians, particularly if a shift to managed care requires any break in ongoing care patterns.
- Urban public hospitals should reduce and reorganize their work forces to reduce costs and improve quality. A reduction in costs coupled with an improvement in public perception would permit them to compete effectively for both public and private managed care patients. ■

# Tom Bradley–Political Pioneer

## *Remembering Los Angeles' First Black Mayor, Who Led the City as It Grew Into a Pacific Commercial Megacenter*

*by Mary K. Garber*

On September 29, Tom Bradley, mayor of Los Angeles for two decades, died of a heart attack. He was 80. During his five terms as mayor, Bradley presided over an economic boom that made the city a Pacific commercial megacenter. But Bradley's life, like his political career, was not without challenges. Born the son of a Texas sharecropper and the grandson of slaves, Bradley moved to Los Angeles with his family at the age of seven. Shortly after they arrived, his father abandoned them, leaving his mother to support seven children on her meager wages as a maid. Young Bradley earned money first as a paper boy and then as a publicity photographer for comedian Jimmy Durante.

In 1937, he was awarded a track scholarship by the University of California at Los Angeles. But he left the university in his junior year to join the Los Angeles police force. He served on the LAPD for 21 years, during which time he earned a law degree at night and became the first black lieutenant in the segregated force. In 1961, Bradley concluded that his career as a police officer had peaked, so he quit the force and took up the practice of law.

Two years later, he made his first run for elected office, winning a seat on the Los Angeles City Council. He was reelected twice, but envisioned the possibility of rising above the status of "black politician" to aspire to a post where he would represent all the people of Los Angeles. In 1969, he made his first bid to unseat Mayor Sam Yorty. While Bradley tried to downplay the issue of race, Yorty depicted Bradley as the candidate of blacks and the left-wing. Bradley suffered from low support from white voters and soft support from some quarters of the black community who saw him as too mild and too appeasing. Even though he lost his first race against Yorty, he remained confident that he would eventually win.

Four years later, Bradley beat Yorty. That victory was a milestone in black political progress. It was the first time an African American had been elected to lead such a large city and one with such a small black population. At the time, Los Angeles was the third largest city in the United States, with a black population of 18 percent. Bradley held the post of mayor from 1973 to 1993.

While his tenure as mayor of the city was historic, it was also fraught with difficulties. Prominent among them was the challenge of dealing with the aftermath of the devastating Watts riot of 1965. Bradley was also confronted with the challenge of new waves of immigrants from Asia and Latin America. Quiet, unassuming, and conciliatory, he set about building coalitions across racial and ethnic lines with the aim of turning Los Angeles into the financial and transportation hub of the Pacific rim. During his tenure, the city prospered, becoming the nation's second largest city.

Securing the right for the city to host the 1984 summer Olympics was one of Bradley's greatest triumphs. As these were the first privately financed games, many were convinced that they would be a financial fiasco. But the Games were a huge success, largely due to Bradley's tireless efforts.

Bradley's ability to transcend racial politics and his accomplishments as mayor led him to make a successful bid for the democratic nomination for governor of California in 1982. Many believed that if white Californians could bring themselves to vote for any black man for governor, that man was Tom Bradley. In his race against Republican state attorney general George Deukmejian, both candidates eschewed the issue of race. But racist literature appeared from other sources. Bradley lost by less than one percentage point. In 1986, Bradley faced off against Deukmejian again, but this time lost decisively. In 1988, the Joint Center published an analysis of Bradley's two campaigns for governor that established that race was indeed a factor in Bradley's losses (*Tom Bradley's Campaigns for Governor: The Dilemma of Race and Political Strategies*, by Thomas F. Pettigrew and Denise A. Alston).

In March 1991, a new racial crisis emerged as the world watched a videotape that showed white Los Angeles policemen brutally beating black motorist Rodney King. The attack demonstrated that racism still ruled the L.A. police force then led by chief Darryl Gates. After a jury decided that the policemen who assaulted King should go unpunished, riots erupted in the city, resulting in the death of 50 persons and billions of dollars in property damage. Gates failed to deploy the police to prevent the spread of unrest, but part of the blame was laid at Bradley's feet. Nevertheless, Bradley managed to use the riots as a means of instituting meaningful reforms in the police department. Since then, the number of reports of excessive force by the LAPD has decreased each year.

Overall, Bradley's accomplishments as a black political pioneer were monumental. He proved that competent black politicians could win election in overwhelmingly white jurisdictions and become respected leaders of all the citizens. But his races for governor showed that African Americans too often must meet higher standards than competence and integrity to succeed in politics. ■

Ms. Garber is a Washington, D.C.–based writer and editor.

## *Census 2000*

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materials in their places of business, or sponsor community events to promote the census and participation.

In 1990, for example, Giant Foods, Inc., put census articles in customer newsletters, cashiers wore census pins, census posters were displayed in stores, and census ads were printed on milk cartons. Southland Corporation partnered with the NAACP to develop promotional materials and provide space in 7-11 stores for questionnaire assistance and material distribution.

Similarly, the media—including print and electronic—can assist in promoting the 2000 Census. The media can feature stories on the importance of the census, donate advertising space or time, provide live coverage of census events, and enlist local media personalities to take part in census promotional activities.

In the end, those with the closest ties to the community, namely the local organizations and the individuals living in the community, will make the difference in ensuring an accurate count. Community leaders who are respected and influential at the local level are more likely to convince their constituencies that the census will benefit them and that they can "trust the government" with the information provided on the census form. People are more likely to have confidence in their local minister, rabbi, teacher, or community leader than in a Census Bureau official from Washington, D.C.

Specifically, community organizations—including education, civic, religious, and community-based service providers—and ordinary citizens can ensure an accurate count by:

- encouraging participation in the census among all individuals in the community;
- recruiting as many as 300,000 Census Bureau enumerators to follow up with people who fail to respond to census questionnaires;
- identifying locations to place census questionnaires where homeless people, those without permanent residences, and others will find them;
- establishing a presence in urban and rural communities that are "hard-to-enumerate;"
- providing the Census Bureau with a list of places (soup kitchens, shelters, food pantries) where people without a usual residence obtain services;
- reaching out to special populations, such as people of color, migrant farm workers, new immigrants, the elderly, and the physically challenged;
- helping translate promotional materials into languages represented in their areas, and assisting those not proficient in English in filling out forms;
- sponsoring community events promoting the census or including census information efforts in agency-sponsored community events such as parades, fairs, ethnic festivals, and other gatherings; and
- providing space and volunteers for questionnaire assistance centers.

The census will never produce a perfect result. But we must not accept an effort that reaches no further than those who are easiest to count or who want to be counted. As the constitutional basis for equal representation, the census must strive to achieve equality of outcome, using all reasonable and sound methods to reach that goal. While the U.S. Supreme Court will determine the fate of the Census Bureau's plan, ordinary citizens in communities all around the nation will ultimately determine the success of the 2000 Census. Play your part. Get involved in a coalition effort in your community to ensure everyone is counted in the 2000 Census. ■

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# TRENDLETTER

## POLITICAL REPORT

### 1998 National Opinion Poll Results

Results from the Joint Center's 1998 National Opinion Poll confirm the widely held perception that African Americans strongly support President Clinton despite his current travails. Also, for the first time in a Joint Center national opinion poll, a higher proportion of African Americans than whites reported that they were financially better off than they had been a year earlier. Furthermore, the poll documented a sharp decline in support for school vouchers. Overall, this year's poll results reveal an interesting mix of continuity and change since 1997, reflecting in part the volatile political environment.

The national survey of 1,606 adults—half from the general population and half solely African Americans— was conducted between September 5 and September 27, 1998. Designed by Joint Center senior research associate David Bositis, the survey's questions cover a broad range of topics including politics, education, social security, devolution, health care, the environment, and deregulation. This edition of *Political Report* provides highlights of the survey's findings in the areas of politics and education.

### Most Important National Problems

Blacks and whites continue to differ in what they view as the most important national problems. Among African Americans, the top ranked problems were crime, violence, and drugs (21.7 percent); employment (17.3 percent; another 8.4 percent identified the economy); and education (15.7 percent). The "moral crisis" was cited by 10.2 percent, while 7.6 percent cited health care. The top ranked problem among whites was the moral crisis (20.6 percent), closely followed by education (17.2 percent) and world affairs (16.9 percent).

### Support for School Vouchers Declines

The 1998 poll focused on three areas of education: school vouchers, quality of public schools, and education spending. The survey revealed that support among African Americans for school vouchers declined from the 1997 survey results. In the 1997 survey, a majority of blacks (57.3 percent) supported school vouchers, while this year, only 48.1 percent did. There was a similar decline among whites, with the majority being opposed in 1998 (50.2 percent opposed vs. 41.3 percent in favor) compared with an even split in 1997 (at 47 percent).

Respondents also were asked, if they were to receive a voucher for an amount insufficient to meet the costs of a desired private school, how much they could contribute themselves to have their child attend the school. On this question there was great uncertainty. First, 57.6 percent of the black respondents and 67.1 percent of the white respondents indicated either that they didn't know or that it didn't concern them. Among African Americans, the response most often given was that they could afford to contribute between $1,000 and $2,000 (17.8 percent); 7.6 percent of those responding said they could contribute nothing.

Near majorities of blacks in the top three income categories indicated that they could contribute at least $1,000, while 25.3 percent of those without high school diplomas responded that they could contribute nothing. The most often given response for whites was between $2,000 and $5,000 (11.3 percent); 9.7 percent said they could contribute nothing.

Large majorities of Americans among all groups think too little is being spent on education. Among African Americans surveyed, 76.4 percent indicated that they believe too little money is being spent on schools; 59.7 percent of whites indicated this view as did 62.4 percent of the general population.

### Political and Economic Climate

When asked if the country was going in the right direction, whites and blacks differed significantly. A majority of African Americans (51 percent) held this optimistic view, but 42.3 percent indicated the

country had gotten off on the wrong track. In contrast, a plurality of whites (48.5 percent) believed the country was off on the wrong track, while 43.3 percent believed the country was going in the right direction.

The stronger optimism expressed by African Americans no doubt reflects their perception that their economic condition has improved. For the first time in a Joint Center survey, when asked whether they are financially better or worse off than a year ago, blacks responded more favorably than did whites. A majority of blacks indicated that they were financially better off (51 percent), while only 9.2 percent indicated that they were worse off. In contrast, only 31.5 percent of whites said they were better off, and 17.6 percent indicated that they were worse off.

## Presidential and Congressional Job Ratings

President Clinton's job approval ratings were considerably better than Congress's among both blacks and whites. Among blacks, 85.0 percent gave the President excellent or good marks, while 12.8 percent rated his job performance as fair or poor. By contrast, slightly more whites rated Clinton's job performance as fair or poor (50.1 percent) than as excellent or good (48.3 percent). The President's job approval rating improved over the 1997 survey.

Most Americans gave Congress low marks. Among blacks, while 39.7 percent gave Congress an excellent or good performance rating, 51.7 percent rated Congress as fair or poor. Whites rated Congress even more unfavorably than blacks, with 32.6 percent rating its performance as excellent or good and 60.3 percent as fair or poor.

## Feelings Toward Public Figures

The respondents in the survey were asked to rate their favorable and unfavorable "feelings" toward prominent national leaders.

**Al Gore.** Vice President Al Gore was rated somewhat less favorably than Clinton among blacks, 67.1 percent of whom rated him favorably, while 12.7 percent rated him unfavorably (essentially unchanged from 1997). Among whites, however, Gore's favorable vs. unfavorable ratings were 46.5 vs. 33.3 percent, which were better than Clinton's. In 1997, Clinton's ratings among whites were better than Gore's.

**Newt Gingrich.** House Speaker Newt Gingrich continues to be the most unpopular major political figure in the country. Gingrich's unfavorable ratings exceeded his favorable ones by more than three-to-one among blacks (58.1 vs. 17.1 percent) and two-to-one among whites (54.2 vs. 28.8 percent).

**Clarence Thomas.** Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court Clarence Thomas was rated low among white and blacks. Interestingly, the black and white respondents to the survey did not differ markedly in their feelings about Thomas. Equal numbers of African Americans (32.3 vs. 32.6 percent) viewed Thomas favorably and unfavorably, while among whites slightly more viewed him favorably (33.7 vs. 27.8 percent).

In the general population, there is a 15.2-point gender gap on Thomas, with men viewing him more favorably than women. Not surprisingly, liberals do not like Thomas (28.4 favorable vs. 46.3 percent unfavorable), while Christian conservatives like him more than any other subgroup (54.1 percent favorable vs. 14.8 percent unfavorable).

**Colin Powell.** Retired General Colin Powell was rated favorably by strong margins among every subgroup in both the black and the general populations. On balance, Powell was the most favorably viewed figure in the survey. He fared only slightly better among whites (80.2 vs. 4.7 percent) than among blacks (76.1 vs. 9.7 percent).

**Governor George W. Bush.** Texas Governor George W. Bush, a possible GOP presidential candidate in the 2000 election, received mixed ratings from African Americans, but very strong positive ratings from whites (better than any other figure except Colin Powell). Equal numbers of African Americans rated Bush favorably and unfavorably (35.4 vs. 35.2 percent); his best subgroup was black conservatives. Whites rated Bush favorably by a margin of four-to-one (61.6 vs. 14.5 percent).

**Jesse Jackson.** The Rev. Jesse Jackson was rated highly among blacks but not as favorably as President Clinton. Whites rated Jackson more favorably than not. Among blacks, Jackson's favorable vs. unfavorable ratings were 77.5 vs. 13.3 percent (down from 86.6 vs. 8.1 percent in 1997). Among whites, his favorables only slightly exceeded his unfavorables (42.9 vs. 38.7 percent), although this was a significant improvement for him over 1997 (29.9 percent favorable vs. 50.0 percent unfavorable).

**Richard Gephardt.** The House Democratic leader was unknown to many of those surveyed. Among blacks, Gephardt's favorables were nevertheless more than twice his unfavorables (32.1 vs. 13.8 percent); among whites, his favorables also exceeded his unfavorables, but by a smaller margin (32.1 vs. 20.6 percent). ■

# ECONOMIC REPORT

*by Margaret C. Simms*

## Black Poverty Reaches a Record Low

The U.S. Bureau of the Census recently released income and poverty figures for 1997. The poverty rate for African Americans was surprisingly low, dropping to 26.5 percent. This is two percentage points below the previous year's measurement and lower than at any time since poverty rates were first estimated in 1959 (see graph). The actual number of blacks who were poor decreased by 600,000, from 9.7 million to 9.1 million. This reduction in poverty was shared by families of all types, including those maintained by married couples and those maintained by women householders. Among families with children, the poverty rate dropped below 34 percent for the first time while the rate for families with female householders dropped below the 50 percent mark, also a historic first. (See table on next page.)

Economic expansion played a role in this improvement in economic status. Between 1996 and 1997, the number of blacks employed increased by 457,000. Being employed made many with modest wages eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which the Clinton administration estimates lifted 4.3 million people, including 1.1 million African Americans, out of poverty in 1997. In other words, without the EITC, 10.2 million African Americans (29.7 percent) would have been in poverty in 1997 rather than 9.1 million.

In spite of this tremendous progress, African Americans still lag behind other groups. The poverty rate for non-Hispanic whites, at 8.6 percent, was only one-third the black rate, and the rate for Asian and Pacific Islanders was just over one-half that of blacks (14.0 percent). Among the groups for which rates are reported, only Hispanics had a higher reported poverty rate in 1997—although at 27.1 percent, their rate was statistically identical to that for African Americans. The rate for Hispanics also had dropped between 1996 and 1997. Together, blacks and Hispanics accounted for most of the decrease in poverty during the one-year interval.

Large racial disparities remain in median income as well as in the distribution of poverty. Median household income for African Americans was $25,050, 64 percent of the median for white households and 55 percent of the median for Asian and Pacific Islander households. Because median income for African American households increased 4.3 percent between 1996 and 1997 (compared to a 2.5 percent increase for white households) the black-white ratio narrowed by one percentage point.

**Poverty Thresholds by Family Size**

One person: $8,183
*(unrelated individual)*

Two people: $10,473

Three people: $12,802

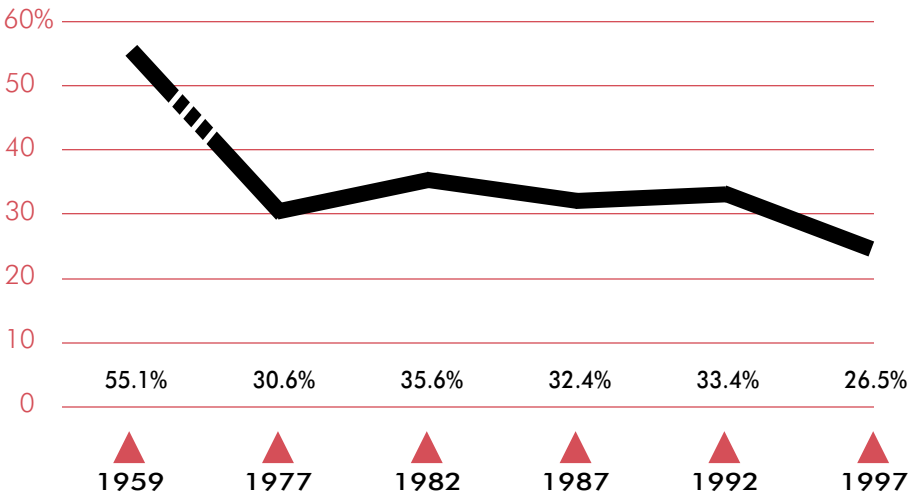
Four people: $16,400

Family units with money incomes falling below these thresholds are considered to be in poverty. All thresholds are weighted by family size up to nine household/family members.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

Poverty rates also vary considerably by age. Although children constitute only 25 percent of the U.S. population, they account for 40 percent of the poverty population. Black children, like their counterparts in other racial groups, are more likely to be in poverty than black adults. Black children are 46 percent of the black poverty population, though they are only 33 percent of the overall black population, and in 1997 their poverty rate was 37.2 percent,

**Poverty Status of Black Americans, Selected Years**




Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

compared to a rate of 21.1 percent for black adults.

But even black children benefitted from the declines in poverty rates over the past four years. The Clinton administration has made note of the fact that black child poverty is at its lowest recorded level, having dropped by 19 percent since 1993, when 46.1 percent of black children were poor, in comparison with a drop of 12 percent for all children. Even with this remarkable improvement, the poverty rate for black children is still over twice that for white children (16.1). (For additional details, see U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Poverty in the United States: 1997*, Current Population Report P60-201. The document is also available at http:/www.census.gov/hhes/www/povty97.html. For information on income, see *Money Income in the United States: 1997*, which can be found at http:/www.census.gov/hhes/www/income97.html.)

## Child Poverty at the State Level

Providing a contrast to the optimistic picture implied by the recent Census Bureau data is a report released over the summer by the National Center for Children in Poverty, based at Columbia University in New York. This report, *Young Child Poverty in the States—Wide Variation and Significant Change*, by Neil G. Bennett and Jiali Li, focuses on increases in child poverty over two time periods, 1979–1983 and 1992–1996. The authors found that eight states experienced large increases in poverty among children under the age of six, on the order of 20 percent, between the two time periods. A large proportion of the increase took place in three states with large African American populations: New York, California, and Texas. Only New Jersey and Vermont had decreases in child poverty during the period studied.

The study focuses on both the poverty rate and the number of young children in poverty. Using Census Bureau data, the authors found that New York, California, and Texas accounted for over 50 percent of the nearly 1.5 million additional children below the age of six in poverty throughout the United States. In each state, the young child poverty rate had increased by 5 to 6 percentage points (or 20 to 25 percent). Three factors were cited as contributors to the increase in child poverty: family structure, parental education, and parental employment. These findings are consistent with those of an earlier study by the Joint Center (*The Declining Economic Status of Black Children*, by Cynthia Rexroat, published in 1994.)

In the July release of their study, the National Center authors pointed out that the 1996 welfare reform legislation (Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996) has required states to provide an annual estimate of their child poverty rates as a means of assessing the impact of welfare reform. States are required to submit plans for corrective action if their child poverty rates increase by more than 5 percent or more and the increase can be attributed to their welfare reform efforts. The Center is hopeful that its study will be part of a body of information that will "encourage a 'race to the top' among the states to find the most effective strategies to prevent young child poverty." For further information or copies of the report, contact the National Center for Children in Poverty, 154 Haven Avenue, New York, NY 10032-1180. ■

**Poverty Rates for Black Families, by Family Type, Selected Years**

| | All Families | Married-Couple Families | With Male Householder, No Spouse | With Female Householder, No Spouse |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***With and without children under age 18:*** | | | | |
| 1997 | 23.6 | 8.0 | 19.6 | 39.8 |
| 1996 | 26.1 | 9.1 | 19.8 | 43.7 |
| 1992 | 31.1 | 13.0 | 24.8 | 50.2 |
| 1987 | 29.4 | 11.9 | 23.4 | 51.1 |
| 1982 | 33.0 | 15.6 | 25.6 | 56.2 |
| 1977 | 28.2 | 13.1 | 17.1 | 51.0 |
| ***With children under age 18:*** | | | | |
| 1997 | 30.5 | 9.0 | 25.6 | 46.9 |
| 1996 | 34.1 | 11.0 | 27.2 | 51.0 |
| 1992 | 39.1 | 15.4 | 33.5 | 57.4 |
| 1987 | 36.6 | 13.2 | 27.5 | 58.6 |
| 1982 | 40.7 | 17.2 | 32.7 | 63.7 |
| 1977 | 34.2 | 14.1 | 21.3 | 57.5 |

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Poverty in the United States: 1997*, Current Population Report P60-201 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1998). Table C-3.