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RESPONSE TO QUERY

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**Statement of Census Bureau Director Kenneth Prewitt
on Internment of Japanese Americans in World War II**

"With the start of Census 2000, attention again has focused on the role of the U.S. Census Bureau in the internment of Japanese Americans on the West coast of the United States at the beginning of World War II. This issue is highlighted in a paper to be delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Population Association of America in Los Angeles on March 25, 2000. Even though this incident occurred 58 years ago during a state of war, it has implications for the public perception of the confidentiality of data gathered in the current census.

"In the spring of 1942, the Census Bureau cooperated with the war effort by providing special tabulations of the Japanese American population for counties and county subdivisions, and for some cities at the block level. There is no evidence that individual census records were provided to the War Department.

"The internment of loyal Japanese Americans was a sad moment in our national history, and for the entire federal government. The cooperation of the Census Bureau in this effort is regrettable.

"The Census Bureau's legal obligation and ethical policies would never allow a repeat of what occurred in 1942.

"One positive consequence from that era is the deepened ethical sensitivity among statistical agencies regarding the misuse of data gathered in the public interest. In the intervening years even stronger safeguards have been put in place, not only in the United States, but around the world, to ensure against future misuses of data.

(more)

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"I want to assure the American public that the Census Bureau takes very seriously its pledge of confidentiality. Under current law (Title 13, USC), all Census Bureau employees are sworn to uphold the confidentiality of personal data, and violations are punishable by a five-year jail term and a \$5,000 fine. Your answers are kept confidential for a period of 72 years.

"In this first census of the century, it is vital that all U.S. households fill out their Census 2000 forms. As envisioned by the nation's forefathers and contained in Article One of the Constitution, the census is the foundation of our representative form of government."

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Census Bureau Aided Removal Of Japanese, Report Says

By STEVEN A. HOLMES

WASHINGTON, March 16 — Two scholars say in a new research paper that despite earlier denials, the Census Bureau was deeply involved in the roundup and internment of Japanese-Americans at the onset of American entry into World War II.

The academics say the bureau's involvement included identifying concentrations of people of Japanese ancestry in geographic units as small as city blocks, lending a senior Census Bureau official to work with the War Department on the relocation program and a willingness to disclose names and addresses of Japanese-Americans.

While it is common today for the Census Bureau to publish reports that would detail the number of people of a given race living in an area as small as a city block, such information was generally not available in the 1940's. But the authors of the paper contend that the Census Bureau provided such detailed information as well as age, sex, citizenship and country of birth to the War Department, now the Defense Department, on only one group, Japanese-Americans.

The paper, "After Pearl Harbor: The Proper Role of Population Data Systems in Time of War," was written by William Seltzer, a statistician and demographer at Fordham University, and Margo Anderson, a history professor at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee whose area of expertise is the census.

Mr. Seltzer and Professor Anderson plan to present the paper at the annual meeting of the Population Association of America next week in Los Angeles. Copies have been circulating in Washington, and one was made available to The New York Times.

The practices described in the paper did not appear to have violated laws governing the census, which prohibit the bureau from disclosing census information on individuals. But the authors indicated that despite the law, Census Bureau officials appeared to be willing to provide such data. What is not clear is whether they were asked to do so.

"We're by law required to keep confidential information by individuals," the paper quotes the bureau director, J. C. Capt, as saying at a meeting of the Census Advisory Committee in January 1942. But if the defense authorities found 200 Japanese-Americans missing and they wanted the names of the Japanese-Americans in that area, Mr. Capt said, "I would give them further means of checking individuals."

The Census Bureau often boasted that its conduct in the relocation of Japanese-Americans had been its finest hour because it resisted pressure to provide explicit data to the War and Justice Departments.

But bureau officials do not dispute the findings of the paper. They say, however, that the strengthening of the laws protecting the confidentiality of data on individuals and the environment today would make a repetition of those abuses unlikely.

Japanese-Americans have long suspected that the Census Bureau played a prominent role in the relocation of 120,000 residents of Japanese ancestry to detention camps.

"We've always suspected this," said Norman Mineta, a former California congressman who was removed with his family from San Jose and sent to a detention camp in Wyoming. "After all, they are the keeper of this kind of information."

On Dec. 9, 1941, two days after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Census Bureau produced a report titled "Japanese Population of the United States, Its Territories and Possessions." The next day the bureau issued a report on the Japanese population by citizenship and place of birth in selected cities across the country. The next day it published another report, this one on the Japanese population by counties in states on the West Coast.

Mr. Capt justified the speed with which the bureau produced these reports by saying at meeting of the Census Advisory Committee in January 1942: "We didn't want to wait for the declaration of war. On Monday morning we put our people to work on the Japanese thing."

Subsequent reports became even more detailed. In 1942, Tom Clark, a Justice Department official working with the War Department, was quoted in the paper as saying that Census Bureau officials would "lay out on tables [maps of] various city blocks where Japanese lived and they would tell me how many were living in each block."

The paper's disclosures come at a ticklish time for the Census Bureau because they coincide with the mailing this month of census forms to about 120 million households. Bureau officials say they fear that the scholars' paper may frighten people into not returning the forms.