What's Different About Census 2000?

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The U.S. Constitution requires Congress to make an "actual enumeration" of the American people every ten years, and for two centuries the exercise of this power has caused little controversy. This year's census taking, however, is seen by many as a bad April Fool's joke.

What's different about Census 2000 is not merely the 53 privacy- invading questions on the long form sent to one out of six American households. The big difference is the technological advances since Census 1990 that enable the government to store and exchange vast quantities of personal information on computers, all identified by your name, birth date and telephone number.

When viewed in the context of all the other private information that government and corporations are gathering and storing on their giant databases, Census 2000 is just one more way that Big Brother Government is asking nosy questions, prying into family secrets, and monitoring the daily activities of law-abiding citizens.

The Census Bureau spent more than $100 million on an ad campaign trying to convince us all to hurry up and fill out these forms. That the ads have been less than reassuring is indicated by the fact that census officials have received up to 600,000 phone calls on a single day.

The envelope that delivered the forms carries the ominous warning "Your response is required by law." U.S. Code, Title 13, sec. 221 states that citizens face a $100 fine for failing to answer the questions fully and a $500 penalty for giving false information.

The law is unclear about enforcement of the fines since the Census Bureau is not an enforcement agency. Enforcement will probably be up to Janet Reno.

Census 2000 asks very specific questions about race, ancestry and ethnic origin. The answers to these questions would have been very useful for policy making under Hitler's pre-World War II regime.

Even with 18 options about race including Samoan and Chamorro, it doesn't look like there is any box for Tiger Woods to check.

Do you speak a language other than English at home and, if so, which one? Many people believe that English should be declared our official U.S. language, but no one has ever before suggested that government inquire into the speaking of other languages inside the home.

Where did you live five years ago? What business is this of government?

Census 2000 wants to know if you have difficulty learning, remembering, concentrating, dressing, bathing, or getting around inside the home. What do you suppose is the purpose of those questions?

Some speculate that gathering this type of information is the start of going after lawful gun owners. Clinton's press secretary Joe Lockhart said on Meet the Press on March 19 that "mental records" should be checked for gun ownership.

How did you get to work last week, how many people rode in the vehicle with you, how many minutes did it take you, and what time did you leave home? Is this question designed to facilitate Al Gore's plan to eliminate the internal combustion engine?

Census 2000 demands that you report detailed information about your income in 1999, "even small amounts." Will this be cross- referenced with your income tax return or your Social Security payments to see if you perjured yourself?

A note enclosed with the Census form says that "no unauthorized person can see your form or find out what you tell us -- no other government agency, no court of law, NO ONE." But how do we know what the Clinton Administration may subsequently "authorize"?

We always thought that in America our home was our "castle," safe from the henchmen and interrogators

of any king or would-be dictator. But your home is not safe from Census 2000, which demands that you reveal how big your home is, when it was built, when you moved into it, how many rooms you have, how many bedrooms, what plumbing, kitchen, heating and telephone facilities you have, how many automobiles you own, and how much yard space you have. The local tax assessor would be very interested in your answers to those questions.

Census 2000 demands that you reveal the annual costs of your electricity, gas, other fuel, water and sewer. This question belies the promise that filling out the form "will take about 38 minutes to complete" because most people probably could not locate the answers to this one question within 38 minutes.

The intrusions into your home persist. If you rent, how much do you pay? If you have a mortgage, how much is your monthly payment? What are the real estate taxes on this property? What is the value of this property and what would you sell it for?

Finally comes a really personal question. Who else lives in your home and how are they related to you?

Not only the short form with eight simple questions, but the long form with 53 intrusive questions plus 33 questions for each additional person living in the same household, carry the same message at the top: "It is quick and easy." No wonder the American people believe the government lies to us.